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And They Entered as Ladies: When Race, Class and Black Femininity Clashed at Central High
School

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in History

by

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Abstract

“And They Entered as Ladies: When Race, Class and Black Femininity Clashed at Central High School,” explores the intersectionality of race, gender and class status as middle-class black women led the integration movement and were the focal point of white backlash during the 1957 Little Rock Central High School crisis. Six of the nine black students chosen to integrate Central High School were carefully selected girls from middle-class homes, whose mothers and female family members played active parts in keeping their daughters enrolled at Central, while Daisy Gatson Bates orchestrated the integration of the capital’s school system. Nevertheless, these women have generally been examined through the lens of black male activism or as catalysts for white women’s gendered and social fears. The marginalization of these women’s experiences at Central High ignores their uniquely gendered *and* racialized challenges that factored profoundly in the violent defense of white supremacy that targeted middle-class black femininity, and women who bore every credential for the title of Southern ‘lady’--except for skin color. These women, their motivations and experiences in a pivotal moment in civil rights history must be examined with the same gravity that has been afforded to the singular racial component of the Little Rock school crisis, as well as to the gender and class explorations that have been afforded to segregationist, moderate, and liberal white participants. My work will expand our understanding of the social crisis in the Arkansas capitol, center the voices of black Arkansan women in the historical record, and provide a springboard for understanding how black women have organized for social justice, been marginalized in those same movements, and transcended intersectional discrimination across the nation.

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Acknowledgements

Deciding to earn a doctorate is something akin to deciding you want to sail around the world, but instead of using a boat, you think you will be able wing it with a really top-of-the-line inner tube and instead of provisions, you will just eat what you are able to catch with the Swiss Army knife you erroneously think is as good as a harpoon (in your mind, Hemingway admires your moxie). The chances of you capsizing to your death, gouging a hole in your watercraft while you stab at sustenance (and then meeting your death), or poking your eye out with your Swiss Army knife (because you should never have had a bladed-object to begin with and WHAT HO, another death scenario!) are all astonishingly high. And the truth of earning a doctorate is that at least thirty percent of the time, a doctoral student fully believes she is riding an inner tube in choppy, shark-infested waters. There is simply no way she could earn a doctorate purely on her own (considerable) moxie; how considerate of the Universe to surround her with people willing to help guide the inner tube.

First, this process would have been impossible without the generous funding of my presence on this campus, and then around the country to archives near and far, by the African and African American Studies Program, the Department of History, the Graduate School and the J.W. Fulbright College of Arts and Sciences. Thank you all for believing my work and efforts were worthy. I am incredibly grateful for Dr. Pearl K. Dowe and Dr. Steven Rosales who agreed to serve on my committee, and who have made time over the past three years to listen to and critique my work. However, I could never have earned this degree or completed the first leg of my book without the mentorship of Calvin White, Jr. As a scholar and an intellectual, he helped me understand the whole scope of my beloved South. It is not hyperbole to say that he gave me

new eyes for seeing the parts of our history that had been hidden from a white girl raised in Arkansas and Louisiana. As a friend, he continues to remind me that there is no limit to what kids from the Arkansas piney woods and delta can do. This project is as much his as mine (unless a reviewer finds big, gaping theoretical holes in my work. Then Dr. White clearly fell down on his job and everything is all his fault.) I also could not have earned any of this without the support of Dr. Jim Gigantino who never failed to read, critique, listen, or yell when he thought any of those verbs would make me a better historian, writer and teacher. He further was always available for any questions about the job market (of which I have had several) or the dry, wry joke (of which he had several). I do not know if he ever thought I was a gamble, but I sincerely appreciate him rolling those dice.

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Introduction

In 1954, the United States Supreme Court ruled that “separate but equal”, enshrined in the 1896 case *Plessy vs. Ferguson*, violated the Fourteenth Amendment of the Constitution. *Brown vs. the Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas* symbolized the rejection of Jim Crow in the nation’s public schools. Nevertheless, Southern states resisted the federal mandate and after three years of segregationist opposition in Arkansas, the Little Rock Board of Education had prepared only a token integration program slated to begin in the city’s high schools in 1957 and that would trickle into elementary schools over the next six years.¹ Glacial pacing defied the Supreme Court’s 1955 amendment to the original *Brown vs. Board* ruling. Known as *Brown II*, the caveat stated that schools must accept students on a “racially nondiscriminatory basis *with all deliberate speed*.”² Pressure from Little Rock’s black community, spearheaded by Daisy Bates who served as the branch president of the state chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), combined with the federal mandate that demanded the capitol complete desegregation. Those efforts plunged the city into the international spotlight on September 4, 1957 as nine black students attempted to integrate Central High School.

Reactions from white students and adults culminated in a litany of harassment and intimidation directed at the black teenagers, and the city’s black community in general. ‘Little Rock’ became synonymous with ‘massive resistance’ from white Southerners determined to live and die by Jim Crow. Yet the integration crisis reveals something more complex than easy racism. At the center of the conflict stood middle-class black women who propelled the efforts

¹ “Desegregation of Central High School,” *The Encyclopedia of Arkansas History and Culture*. <http://encyclopediaofarkansas.net/encyclopedia/entry-detail.aspx?search=1&entryID=718> (accessed July 12, 2010).

² *Brown v. Board of Education*, 349 US 294 (1955). The emphasis within this quotation is mine.

to integrate Little Rock Central High School. Unlike white women, black women across class lines historically occupied public spaces and shared public, political roles with men as a matter of necessity. On that basis, black women's substantial presence in the integration movement is not surprising. However, what is remarkable is how little black women's presence at Little Rock Central High School is understood in the context of organizing against segregation, resisting white intransigence and existing as the primary reason for the whitelash against integration.³ Six teenage girls counted among the nine selected students to desegregate Little Rock's most prestigious high school. Hand-picked from Dunbar Junior High School and Horace Mann High School, these girls were exceptional students who hailed from what this research argues to be solidly middle-class, imminently respectable families.⁴ These young ladies were strongly influenced by mothers, grandmothers, aunts, sisters, girlfriends, and women in their communities who impressed particular social mores and values upon them that separated 'common' people from the 'better' sort. Two-thirds of the group who are now known to history as the 'Little Rock Nine' were black girls of certain class standing. Moreover, these selected six were hardly the only girls on the original rosters of potential black students for Central High School. For a year

³ *Whitelash* is term created by activist and attorney Anthony Kapel "Van" Jones to assess the Presidential victory of Donald J. Trump in 2016 after Barack H. Obama's two-term Presidency. Though Jones later qualified his use of the term, *whitelash* is wholly applicable to describe the massive resistance at Little Rock Central High School in 1957, and I use it accordingly throughout my work. See Josiah Ryan, "This Was a 'Whitelash': Van Jones' Take on the Election Results," <http://www.cnn.com/2016/11/09/politics/van-jones-results-disappointment-cnnv/> [accessed January 17, 2017] and Kristine Marsh, "Van Jones Walks Back Election Night 'White-Lash' Rant on The View," <http://www.newsbusters.org/blogs/nb/kristine-marsh/2016/12/01/van-jones-walks-back-election-night-white-lash-rant-view> [accessed January 17, 2017].

⁴ None of the black students selected to attend Little Rock Central High School in 1957 were randomly chosen. As this research will prove, black and white officials involved in the integration process purposefully chose, for reasons that will be analyzed in detail, students whose family histories, personal and academic achievements, and characters were beyond reproach.

and a half before September 4, 1957, girls constituted half of the plaintiffs in Little Rock's landmark court case *Cooper v. Aaron* that established firm dates for the desegregation of Central. Most famously, Daisy Bates stood at the helm of integration. Her NAACP affiliation, career as an editor of the state's largest black newspaper, and community leadership commanded respect across class lines in black Little Rock—as well as garnered the attentions of working-class white women who claimed no comparable accomplishments to these middle-class black girls and women, except what C.L.R. James called the “aristocracy of the skin.”⁵ The presence of and reaction to middle-class black *ladies* proves that gender and class—as much as race—threatened Jim Crow by challenging white women's claim of ownership as to who could be a lady. In demanding their civil rights to attend any public school in the city, black girls and women asserted that they, too, were worthy of legal and social protection. Further, the meticulous attention to these girls' and women's class status reveals a strategy designed to prove that black womanhood and femininity were every bit as virtuous, fine and precious as deified white womanhood that Jim Crow claimed to defend.

Middle-class black womanhood clashed against working-class white womanhood in Little Rock. Unlike previous work that has focused only on race, or on class tensions among whites, or on white women, this study asserts that the triple threat of gender, class and race presented by middle-class black femininity propelled white backlash, rather than skin color alone. This work argues that the crisis was not merely racial, but that it was intersectional. Coined by Dr. Kimberlé Crenshaw, the term ‘intersectionality’ refers specifically to the ways that black women have experienced combined forms of marginalization through racism and

⁵ C.L.R. James, *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), 120, 139.

sexism, and provides the framework to examine the (white) self-fulfilled prophecy of chaos at Central High School through the specific clashes of how black femininity and black class structure existed independently of white standards. Black-controlled constructions directly challenged white supremacy and especially those who only clung to Jim Crow's coattails. More than mere racial hierarchy, middle-class black womanhood specifically challenged working-class white women whose social status guaranteed no privileges. Ultra-conservative and without the sociopolitical capital that upper-class white women (the South's traditional 'ladies') used to enter public spaces, working-class white women nevertheless stood at the forefront of the Central High School whitelash to unleash a torrent of abuse aimed at black girls because of the intersecting specters of race, class, and sex.

One of the chief ways that black girls and women endure intersectional discrimination is through erasure. In the Little Rock story, the specific gendered and racial abuse that girls and women suffered has been erased. Most monographs have focused exclusively on the racialization of black men and women's experiences during the 1957-1958 school year. Race obviously matters; the unintentional insidiousness of studying only race means that black girls' and women's engagement of racism at Little Rock has been lumped into how black boys and men endured white supremacy. Gendered studies of Central High School have emerged in recent years, but these focus on whitelash from segregationists or moderates' activism. Historians have examined elite white liberal women's reactions to integration and the "lost year," as well as panic among working-class white women and girls terrified by the loss of status that only their race offered.⁶

⁶ Kimberlé Crenshaw, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory, and Antiracist Politics," University of Chicago Legal Forum, 1989, 139–67; Sondra Hercher Gordy, *Finding the Lost*

Yet, examinations that center black girls and women in 1957 are scant. A wealth of study is dedicated to the activism of Daisy Bates, but most of this work focuses her political experience without consideration of her essential self as a black woman who belonged to Little Rock's black middle class. Extensive attention has been paid to Elizabeth Eckford, the most famous student of the Little Rock Nine, and much of that work has focused her gender. Still, the question of intersectionality in Eckford's specific case has been overlooked. Melba Pattillo Beals and Carlotta Walls LaNier have each authored memoirs of their experiences at Central High School, and these first-person narratives are wonderfully clear windows into black femininity and emerging black womanhood through class lenses as they collided with whiteness.⁷

Yet, no single work examines these girls and women as specifically black, middle-class girls and women. No study has scrutinized how black femininity was constructed, or how black middle-class standards and respectability politics affected these girls and women, especially in the context Central High School. There is no deep-dive examination of the families of these girls

Year: What Happened When Little Rock Closed Its Public Schools (Fayetteville, Arkansas: University of Arkansas Press, 2009); Sara Alderman Murphy, *Breaking the Silence: Little Rock's Women's Emergency Committee to Reopen Our Schools* (Fayetteville, Arkansas: University of Arkansas Press, 1997); Lorraine Gates, "Power from the Pedestal: The Women's Emergency Committee and the Little Rock School Crisis," *The Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 55 (Spring 1996): 26-57; Graeme Cope, "'A Thorn in the Side?' The Mothers League of Central High School and the Little Rock Desegregation Crisis of 1957," *The Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 57 (Summer 1998): 160-190; Phoebe Godfrey, "Bayonets, Brainwashing and Bathrooms: The Discourse of Race, Gender, and Sexuality of Little Rock's Central High," *The Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 62 (Spring 2003): 42-67.

⁷ Grif Stockley, *Daisy Bates: Civil Rights Crusader from Arkansas* (Oxford, Mississippi: University of Mississippi Press, 2007); John A. Kirk, "Daisy Bates, the NAACP and the Little Rock School Crisis: A Gendered Perspective," in *Beyond Little Rock: The Origins and Legacies of the Central High School Crisis* (Fayetteville, Arkansas: The University of Arkansas Press, 2007), 70-94; Kirk, *Redefining the Color Line: Black Activism in Little Rock, 1940-1970* (Gainesville, Florida: University of Florida Press, 2003); Melba Pattillo Beals, *Warriors Don't Cry: A Searing Memoir of the Battle to Integrate Central High School* (New York: Pocket Books, 1994); Carlotta Walls LaNier, *A Mighty Long Way: My Journey to Justice at Little Rock Central High School* (New York: One World Ballentine Books, 2009).

and the women who influenced them, or the communities who reared them. As the historiography is sorely missing this investigation, so too is it missing a study of the intersectional discriminations that faced these girls and women during the fight to integrate Little Rock's public schools and the actual process of doing so. Who were these girls and women who defied Jim Crow convention, challenged whiteness and specifically threatened working-class white women, and represented the sort of black middle-class femininity wherein they would be demarcated as Southern 'ladies' in every conceivable sense—except that whiteness tried to exclusively claim that word?

This research confronts the assumption that middle-class black women who fought school segregation in Little Rock acted only as representatives of a race. Instead, these ladies, and the girls who integrated Central High School, belonged to a certain social construct that existed outside the binds of whiteness. Black middle-class women and girls used this construct to undermine the entire ideology of white supremacy.

The story of Central High School cannot be understood until the gendered perspectives of middle-class black ladies are analyzed as thoroughly as the well-covered racial perspectives and the reactions of white counterparts. This research examines the roles of middle-class black girls and activist women who integrated Central High School as arbiters of black respectability and femininity, and who challenged the presumption that 'ladies' were only white women of similar standing. The status that such women occupied not only threatened racial order, but social order—understanding this gendered component of the crisis will offer a new dimension to the larger study of Little Rock in 1957, and the American South during the civil rights movement. While I do not overlook the extensive body of research that reviews the role of race, this work

centers the intersectionality of gender, class, and color to showcase how all three factors ultimately affected Arkansas' capitol city.

Middle-class, an adjective that is employed throughout my study, refers to these women's economic and social standing within Little Rock's black community. Class concepts have generally been examined through the lens of whiteness. For example, working-class white segregationist women usually were not well-educated; were housewives or wage-earners in gender-appropriate jobs such as typists, sales clerks, and beauticians, while their husbands also worked as wage-earners; and did not participate in leisure or social clubs enjoyed by upper-class white women.⁸ However, scholars have begun to show that white class standards are not applicable to social differentiation within black communities. Though middle-class blackness hinged on observing strict Victorian gender roles; acquiring a liberal arts education; and belonging to a Baptist, Methodist or African Methodist Episcopal church, Jim Crow discrimination demanded that a 'respectable' black woman may perform domestic labor to help support her family, while her neighbor may work as a schoolteacher or in another profession more typically associated with class advantage.⁹ The umbrella of middle-class blackness celebrated (and continues to include) a wide swath of economic and work statuses while emphasizing the social respectability standards of behavior, church affiliation and education that separated 'common' people from the 'better sort.' Correcting this problem in the case of middle-class black ladies who led the battle against segregation will allow scholars a much richer

⁸ Cope, "A Thorn in the Side?" *The Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 57 (Summer 1998): 160-190.

⁹ Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1993); Glenda E. Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow: Women and the Politics of White Supremacy in North Carolina, 1896-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996).

understanding of how intersectionality spurred the fracas at Central High School and presented the “devil in the shape of a [black] woman” to working-class white women whose own social status was guaranteed exclusively by color and no other factor.¹⁰

All black women have been marginalized in historical records. A clear understanding of Southern social class, and particularly the class of black women who threatened white supremacy in Little Rock, is essential to understanding the intersectionality of gender, class, and race that propelled the Central High School crisis. This is also evident in the larger history of black women’s activism. In the context of Little Rock, the gendered nature of violence perpetrated against the six black girls inside of the school remains largely invisible despite its obviousness. Likewise, the harassment of the girls, Daisy Bates, and middle-class black women who supported them in the city reflects the denial of black womanhood as worthy of protection. Since enslavement, white supremacy argued that black women’s worth lie in labor and reproduction while simultaneously stripping them of the accepted feminine qualities that created gendered spheres for white men and women. Black womanhood existed outside the white-prescribed norms for womanhood that emphasized chastity and required white male protection. Further, black women generally lacked access to the educational or economic advancements that narrowed or equalized social barriers. As a result, devalued black femininity pedestaled white womanhood as the standard of female beauty, behavior, and excellence. In white Southern social constructs, the ‘better sort’ of black woman did not exist in any context. Understanding how white presumptions were falsified by the presence of Daisy Bates and six black teenage

¹⁰ Carol F. Karlsen, *The Devil in the Shape of a Woman: Witchcraft in Colonial New England* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1987).

girls during the integration of Central High School paints a vastly more complex picture of the protests that until now have largely been simplified to only racial meanings.

This research examines essential works that discuss black women in class structures and activism. Sociologist Andrew Billingsley, and historians Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, Glenda E. Gilmore, and Tera E. Hunter have created frameworks in their scholarship that shape my definition for and use of *middle-class* as a descriptor of the black female activists at Little Rock.¹¹ Their contributions investigate the spiritual, social and economic forces that created a caste structure for black Southerners independent of white constructs that distorted the “reality, complexity and diversity among black families.”¹² Higginbotham, Gilmore and Hunter particularly delve into the class dynamics that separated black women. While women’s participation in the Baptist church centers Higginbotham’s work, she identifies that educational attainment, social deportment and expectations featured prominently in the construction of black femininity, what kinds of women belonged to the church and who led social uplift efforts within black communities. Likewise, Gilmore focuses the elite ‘clubwomen’ of black North Carolina communities whose station offered them more economic and social advantages that enabled reform and uplift efforts geared toward improving the black masses of the state. Contrary to

¹¹ Andrew Billingsley, *Climbing Jacob’s Ladder: The Enduring Legacy of African American Families* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1992); Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent: The Women’s Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1993); Glenda E. Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow: Women and the Politics of White Supremacy in North Carolina, 1896-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996); Tera E. Hunter, *To ‘Joy My Freedom: Southern Black Women’s Lives and Labors after the Civil War* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1997). See also Anthea Butler, *Women of Church of God in Christ: Making a Sanctified World* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007); Calvin White, Jr. *The Rise to Respectability: Race, Religion and the Church of God in Christ* (Fayetteville, Arkansas: The University of Arkansas Press, 2012).

¹² Billingsley, *Climbing Jacob’s Ladder*, 20-21.

Higginbotham and Gilmore, Hunter offers an examination of working-class black women in the city of Atlanta, and how they structured femininity around economic and physical independence, and social deportment that defied Victorian respectability standards and deference to white bodies. Each of their studies is essential to this research and it is from these works that I define black middle-class femininity at Little Rock.

Understanding how middle-class black womanhood fit into and navigated the post-Civil War and Jim Crow South is also necessary for recognizing the ways in which white Southerners interpreted black femininity, as well as how black women combated labor and sexual stereotypes to demand respect in public spaces. Essays written by Black feminist Ida B. Wells-Barnett at the height of lynch terrorism at the turn of the twentieth century, were the first to challenge the myth of white female purity and the supposed-chivalry of Jim Crow that pivoted on demonized black sexuality and black bodies. Historians Deborah Gray White, Crystal Feimster and Kate Côté Gillin each analyze black women's political participation and resistance of the subservient or hypersexualized roles assigned to them Jim Crow culture, as well as retribution they faced for defiance.¹³ All of these works showcase that middle-class women black historically challenged white assumptions and violence; in public and private forums, they organized into profoundly

¹³ Ida B. Wells-Barnett, *Southern Horrors: Lynch Law in All Its Phases* (Cleveland, Ohio: The Floating Press, 2013); Deborah Gray White, *Too Heavy a Load: Black Women in Defense of Themselves, 1894-1994* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1999); Crystal Feimster, *Southern Horrors: Women and the Politics of Rape and Lynching* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2009); Kate Côté Gillin, *Shrill Hurrahs: Women, Gender and Racial Violence in South Carolina, 1865-1900* (Columbia, South Carolina: The University of South Carolina Press, 2013). See also Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, *The Revolt against Chivalry: Jessie Daniel Ames and the Women's Campaign against Lynching* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993); E. Patrick Johnson, *Appropriating Blackness: Performance and the Politics of Authenticity* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2003); Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Sexual Politics: African Americans, Gender and the New Racism* (New York: Routledge, 2004).

conscientious clubs that centered racial uplift and the decimation of Jim Crow custom through the parameters of black-articulated, middle-class standards. This study acknowledges those frameworks and showcases how middle-class black womanhood in Little Rock continued to reject racist stereotypes and whiteness as the standard bearer for respectability and femininity.

Imagery also factored significantly in the manifestations of what constituted beauty and feminine refinement, and who controlled those qualities, in the minds of white and black Southerners. Political scientist Julia S. Jordan-Zachery, and historians Tiffany M. Gill and Blain Roberts' work on visibility, beauty standards and notions of femininity underpin my contention that the simple presence of a poised Daisy Bates, who led equally composed and objectively lovely middle-class black girls to Central High School, provoked outrage among segregationists. This dissertation argues that working-class white women especially balked at middle-class black femininity that challenged white women's exclusive ability to determine physical attractiveness and redefined what beauty meant in the lexicon of the Jim Crow South.¹⁴

Tacit and overt resistance of white citizens to integration have been well discussed by historians Elizabeth Jacoway and Karen Anderson in their examinations of Central High School. However, studies of working-class white women who rejected sharing coveted space with middle-class black women are especially poignant, as evidenced in historian Graeme Cope's study, "A Thorn in the Side? The Mothers' League of Central High School and the Little Rock Desegregation Crisis of 1957," as well as historian Phoebe Godfrey's article, "Bayonets, Brainwashing, and Bathrooms: The Discourse of Race, Gender and Sexuality in the

¹⁴ Julia S. Jordan-Zachery, *Black Cultural Images and Social Policy* (New York: Routledge, 2009); Tiffany M. Gill, *Beauty Shop Politics: African American Women's Activism in the Beauty Industry* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2010); Blain Roberts, *Pageants, Parlors and Pretty Women: Race and Beauty in the Twentieth-Century South* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2014).

Desegregation of Little Rock's Central High.”¹⁵ An examination of the working-class white women who feared losing the privileges that only race afforded them, reveals telling clues about the status and respectability of the black ladies who led the integration battle in Little Rock. Daisy Bates and the six teenage girls in her charge presented a threat to working-class women's claim to protection. Moreover, they reflected a challenge to traditional Southern social mores that were reflected across the nation as teenagers began rebelling against the status quo that included challenging conventional sexual standards as a prelude to the Cultural Revolution of the 1960s.¹⁶

Gender, class and racial overlaps reveal the intersectional heart of the Central High School crisis, yet historians have traditionally looked at black women in the integration battle and throughout the larger civil rights movement as extensions of black men by examining only the racial component of activism. Narrowed investigations not only marginalize significant voices and experiences in and beyond Central High School, but also strip femininity from black women by ignoring specifically gendered aggressions that are intrinsically tied to, but not defined only by blackness. A dearth of intersectional analysis further prevents understanding other social shifts that center black womanhood, such as the Womanist movement of the 1960s and 1970s that countered middle-class, white-centric feminism, and that was doubly demonized

¹⁵ Elizabeth Jacoway, *Turn Away Thy Son: Little Rock the Crisis that Shocked the Nation* (New York: Free Press, 2007); Karen Anderson, *Little Rock: Race and Resistance at Central High School* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2013); Graeme Cope, “‘A Thorn in the Side?’ The Mothers’ League of Central High School and the Little Rock Desegregation Crisis of 1957,” *The Arkansas Historical Quarterly* Vol. 57, No. 2 (Summer 1998), 160-190; Phoebe Godfrey, “Bayonets, Brainwashing, and Bathrooms: The Discourse of Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Desegregation of Little Rock's Central High,” *The Arkansas Historical Quarterly* Vol. 62, No. 1 (Spring 2003), 42-67.

¹⁶ Pete Daniel, *Lost Revolutions: The South in the 1950s* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2000); Susan H. Cahn, *Sexual Reckonings: Southern Girls in a Troubling Age* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2012).

by white conservatives who committed to preserving the white patriarchal values that characterized ‘traditional’ America.¹⁷

Yet, no study of the intersectionality of Central High School would be correct without a reexamination of the thoughts and words of the middle-class black girls and women who turned what the school that the *Arkansas Gazette* called “the finest high school in the United States” into a civil rights battle ground.¹⁸ Nor could the effects of intersectionality be gauged without looking through the lenses of key white actors who factored into how black girls and women navigated Little Rock in 1957. Daisy Bates’ memoir, *The Long Shadow of Little Rock* is integral to my research for the invaluable perspective of one of the most powerful women in Arkansas of any color, and who First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt acknowledged “bore a double burden,” conspicuously on display in 1957, of existing as a “member of an ‘inferior’ race, but also as the ‘inferior’ sex of that race.”¹⁹ The Daisy Bates Papers housed in Special Collections at the University of Arkansas and at the Wisconsin Historical Society at the University of Wisconsin, afford a wealth of insight into Bates’ personal and public personas that allow a construction of how race, gender and class combined to shade every facet of her life, as well as the crusade with which her name became synonymous. Bates’ remembrances are also an important window into understanding the girls who integrated Central High School, their families, and the city’s

¹⁷ Akasha T. Hull, et al, *All the Women Are White, All the Blacks Are Men, but Some of Us Are Brave: Black Women’s Studies* (New York: The Feminist Press at the City University of New York, 1982); Joseph Crespino, *In Search of Another Country: Mississippi and the Conservative Counterrevolution* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007); Allan J. Lichtman, *White Protestant Nation: The Rise of the American Conservative Movement* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 2008).

¹⁸ “Little Rock Welcomes You,” *The Arkansas Gazette—Centennial Edition*, June 15, 1936.

¹⁹ Daisy Bates, *The Long Shadow of Little Rock* (Fayetteville, Arkansas: University of Arkansas Press, 1986), xii.

community, as well as examining white patriarchy and supremacy embodied by the Little Rock School Board, Virgil Blossom, and white protesters.

Interviews given to national media immediately after 1957 and toward the end of Bates' life that belong to the Wisconsin Historical Society and the Southern Oral History Program at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill also offer insight into the intersectional quality of the integration battle. Bates' fiery editorial rhetoric against segregation in *The Arkansas State Press*, the effort she jointly operated with her husband and the largest black newspaper in the state, consistently reveals the specific struggles that all black women faced to demand respectability and just treatment from the Jim Crow South, as well as resist abuse from white oppressors. The preservation of the paper's annals at the Arkansas History Commission and State Archives offer a springboard for showcasing the complexity of black womanhood in it always controlled the parameters of the integrationists' plans for Central High School.

White newspapers, government officials' documents and musings, and memoirs from Central High School administrators and Little Rock School Board officials also offer interesting glimpses into Bates, the teenage girls who integrated the school, and black womanhood in Little Rock as a whole. The moderate *Arkansas Gazette* and conservative *Arkansas Democrat* (rival newspapers and the widest-read white publications in the state) offer excellent perspectives of the entire crisis and its key players, including girls and women, from disparate vantage points. The Orval E. Faubus Papers housed in Special Collections at the University of Arkansas also provide glimpses into how black femininity and womanhood navigated the political goals of the cynical Governor, as well as how Faubus tried to counter national and international attacks that he instigated violence against innocent citizens who included women and girls. Virgil T. Blossom served as superintendent of Little Rock's public schools. His memoir, *It Has Happened*

Here, reveals some of the typical prejudices of an empowered, upper-class white man in mid-twentieth century America. His writings also showcase a man certainly unused to thinking about black womanhood who suddenly found himself doing just that, who reached surprising conclusions about the abilities of black girls and women, and the shortcomings of his own attitudes. Similarly, Elizabeth Huckaby's remembrances of the crisis recall her interactions with the nine black students while she served as girls' vice-principal. Her encounters with, and attempts to counsel and protect, the six black girls during the volatile school year, as well as the whitelash she personally endured from working-class white girls and their mothers, are illuminating glimpses into how gender, race and class interacted with one another. To this end, the Virgil T. Blossom Papers and the Elizabeth Paisley Huckaby Papers that are archived in Special Collections at the University of Arkansas are troves of additional insight that help to form a fuller picture of black womanhood and femininity as it functioned in Little Rock and in this specific event.²⁰

Equally important are the points of view of the six teenage girls, as well as their adult remembrances of 1957. What did it mean to Minnijean Brown, Elizabeth Eckford, Thelma Mothershed, Melba Pattillo, Gloria Ray, and Carlotta Walls to be subjected to gendered, classist and racialized abuse meted out not only by white men and boys, but by white women and girls? Melba Pattillo Beals, Carlotta Walls LaNier, and Terrence Roberts have each written memoirs in the years since they attended Central High School, and their recollections have begun to answer such questions. Journalist David Margolick has specifically investigated the intersection of race and gender at Central High School in his examination of Elizabeth Eckford and Hazel Bryan's

²⁰ Virgil T. Blossom, *It Has Happened Here* (New York: Harper Publishing, 1959); Elizabeth P. Huckaby, *Crisis at Central High, Little Rock, 1957-1958* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1980).

relationship during and after 1957. Historian John Kirk, in collaboration with Minnijean Brown-Trickey, further offers important insight regarding the roles of race and gender at Central High School.²¹ Census collections provided by the United States Census Bureau and FBI reports housed in Special Collections at the University of Arkansas and at the Wisconsin Historical Society that were recorded in tandem as the Central High School drama unfolded, offer clinical information on these girls, their families and their communities that my dissertation analyzes to reveal how the social discrepancies that singled them out as exceptional and landed them as the center of a whitelash that they countered with their exceptionality. When possible, my work examines original interviews with these women, as well as with family members, other former students and participants in the story of the Central High School crisis.

My first chapter, “When and Where I Enter: The Emergence of Middle-Class Black Southern Ladies, 1864-1913” establishes the unique history that necessitated black class structures and gender conventions develop along disparate criteria than did white counterparts. This initial section also discusses the lasting Victorian respectability mores that affected all classes and colors of Americans; the roles of the black church and higher education in class divisions chapter; and how each of these created the parameters for meeting tenants of black femininity and defining black ladies. Chapter Two, “Portrait of a (Invented) Lady: The Making of ‘Mrs. Bates’”, centers Daisy Lee Gatson’s mysterious birth circumstances and early life with

²¹ Melba Pattillo Beals, *Warriors Don’t Cry: A Searing Memoir of the Battle to Integrate Little Rock’s Central High School* (New York: Washington Square Press, 1994); Carlotta Walls LaNier and Lisa Frazier Page, *A Mighty Long Way: My Journey to Justice at Little Rock Central High School* (New York: One World Books, 2009); Terrence Roberts, *Lessons from Little Rock* (Little Rock, Arkansas: Butler Center for Arkansas Studies, 2013); David Margolick, *Elizabeth and Hazel: Two Women of Little Rock* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2011); John A. Kirk, *Beyond Little Rock: The Origins and Legacies of the Central High Crisis* (Fayetteville, Arkansas: The University of Arkansas Press, 2007).

her foster family in south Arkansas against restrictive respectability politics that black Southerners used to police communities in the early twentieth century. I investigate her relationship and marriage to LC Bates, their life in Memphis and eventual decision to settle in Little Rock, Arkansas where their joint effort, *The Arkansas State Press*, became the state's most-widely read black newspaper and launched the new 'Mrs. Bates' into the public sphere.

Chapter Three, "Hidden Ladies of Little Rock", establishes the personal and social identities of the six young ladies selected to attend Central High School. This chapter heavily relies on census data, interviews, and memoirs to reconstruct mid-twentieth century black Little Rock, and the middle-class communities and family histories into which these girls were born. I consider the roles the women in their communities played in their personal and political lives, as well as how they understood (or did not know of) Daisy Bates as she came into her public own in the years before *Cooper v. Aaron*. Chapter Four "Removing the White Veil from Respectable Black Womanhood," examines that specific case that led to September 4, 1957 at Central High School. This section studies the influence of middle-class black activism and civil rights movements across Arkansas 1945 and culminates in the 1956 court case, *Cooper v. Aaron*, that featured thirty-one black families—half of whom had *daughters*—suing the state to adhere to the demands of *Brown v. the Board of Education*. Confrontation from middle-class black girls and mothers, led by Daisy Bates as President of the state chapter of the NAACP and a cadre of activist lawyers, challenged reticent and sexist white supremacist Little Rock for integration to begin at Central High School. Chapter Five, "A Matter for the Mothers to Settle," investigates the whitelash that brewed since *Cooper v. Aaron* and that focused specifically on the girls and women who led the battle for integration in 1957. This section studies the gendered, classist and racialized counter from segregationists that compares the class status, presentation and

accomplishments of Minnijean Brown, Elizabeth Eckford, Thelma Mothershed, Melba Pattillo, Gloria Ray, and Carlotta Walls to the significant proportion of working-class white female students at Central High School whom Graeme Cope has called “marginal youngsters.”²² Chapter Six, “Of Battlefields and Pedestals,” showcases how middle-class black femininity threatened and navigated adult working-class white women and girls’ resentment inside of Central High School. The six young ladies selected to attend Central High School, and the women in their lives and their communities, represented the epitome of middle-class black values that transcended racial lines. To working-class white women, middle-class black womanhood represented the depreciation of their own femininity and place within Southern social order. In effect, the entirety of Central High School became a battleground wherever black and white girls and women shared space. Those areas witnessed a contest of who claimed the privileges of exalted feminine status and its pedestal.

Finally, my afterward briefly analyzes Little Rock after 1957 and how intersectional issues in the lives of middle-class black women affected the rise of the Womanist movement that countered mainstream white, middle-class feminism in the 1960s, as well as how the presence of activist black women propelled the backlash of the ‘silent majority’ to reaffirm the social, gender and racial norms that represented traditional whiteness in the United States. I contend that the visibility of respectable and politically astute black ladies challenged white womanhood—the defense upon which Jim Crow rested—and that working-class white women recognized that most acutely. Claims to and denial of privilege based upon sex, class and race prove that Little

²² Graeme Cope, “‘Marginal Youngsters’ and ‘Hoodlums of Both Sexes’? Student Segregationists during the Little Rock School Crisis,” *The Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 63 (Winter 2004), 380-403.

Rock Central High School was not just ‘black’ activism facing down ‘massive resistance.’ To fully understand Little Rock is to understand it is an intersection.



Illustration 1
Center: Elizabeth Eckford (front); Hazel Bryan (back)
L to R: unidentified white girls and women
Photo Courtesy of Will Counts, Arkansas Democrat

Chapter One: When and Where They Entered: The Emergence of Middle-Class Black Southern Ladies, 1865-1913

Will Counts had the advantage over other photographers who had gathered to capture the historic integration of Little Rock Central High School on the morning of September 4, 1957. Unlike his peers who used Speed Graphic press cameras that required loading fresh film after each shot, twenty-six year-old Counts snapped images on a thirty-five millimeter Nikon S2 that afforded him thirty-six exposures before ever needing to reload.²³ The *Arkansas Democrat* photographer and Little Rock native stealthily weaved throughout the seething mob of white segregationists who crowded onto Park Street in front of the cathedral-façade of Little Rock Central High and between other cameramen who struggled to *shoot and reload, shoot and reload*, in the fracas of white protesters and the arriving black students who became known as the ‘Little Rock Nine.’ Counts’ investment in state-of-the-art technology allowed him the shutter-speed of Bass Reeves as he snapped photos that are recognized as some of the most important in modern American history.

In these photos stands an image of a black girl who walked in front of a gang of five white girls and women as she attempted to enter the school. Elizabeth Eckford’s softly permed dark hair glistened in the morning light while sunglasses covered her eyes, her lips tightly pursed in a Herculean effort to keep from crying as she clutched her books and stared resolutely forward. Eckford’s starched and buttoned shirtwaist reflected the tastes and style of most American teenage girls in the 1950s as the top tapered on her slender figure before billowing into a fashionable full skirt that still reflected the modesty of a shy, reserved young girl. The stainless

²³ Will Campbell, Ernest Dumas, Robert S. McCord and Will Counts, *A Life Is More than a Moment: The Desegregation of Little Rock’s Central High* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1999).

white cotton of the shirtwaist highlighted Eckford's warm brown skin as the bottom portion of her pleated skirt swished in navy-and-white gingham fabric that ironically appeared as a black-and-white pattern in photographs. Her pretty, homemade dress that she sewed with her sister, Anna, probably made her feel confident and secure on her first day at a formerly all-white high school. Her ensemble was actually a creation of necessity; she and Anna ran out of white cotton and had to finish the dress in a fabric they already had at home.²⁴ Perhaps Eckford decided that her white-and-gingham dress was actually perfect, a fashion choice that reflected her creativity and ingenuity. Maybe as she dressed for that day, she believed those two qualities only proved she belonged at her new school—an integration effort that was not the state's first but was already the most publicized and politicized before a black student entered the building. Certainly Elizabeth did not envision being barred from entering Central High School that morning by the Arkansas National Guard, or the vociferous screams of Hazel Bryan, the white teenage girl pictured just behind her in Counts' iconic photo, or of the "baying mob" on Park Street.²⁵ She could not have imagined that her homemade dress, so carefully sewn and selected, would be "spit-drenched" from white women at her back and in her face who insulted her, and threatened the kind of violence that is primarily, erroneously associated with men.²⁶ She could not have dreamed of the scene that unfolded around her because heretofore, no instance in Elizabeth

²⁴ David Margolick, *Elizabeth and Hazel: Two Women of Little Rock* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), 1.

²⁵ Anne Cadwallader, *Holy Cross: The Untold Story* (Belfast: The Brehon Press, 2004), 297.

²⁶ Daisy Bates, *The Long Shadow of Little Rock* (Fayetteville, Arkansas: University of Arkansas Press, 1986), 70; Rus Brand, *Forty Minutes of Hell: The Extraordinary Life of Nolan Richardson* (New York: HarperCollins, 2010), 169; Pete Daniel, *Lost Revolutions: The South in the 1950s* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 262; Elizabeth Jacoway, *Behold, Our Works were Good: A Handbook of Arkansas Women's History* (Little Rock, Arkansas: August House Publishers, 1988), 23.

Eckford's life merited anything but respect. Born to a dining car maintenance worker and a schoolteacher, Eckford lived in the city with both of her parents and her siblings in a "modern six-room bungalow," and conducted herself with the manners, dignity and self-control befitting a well-brought up, pious, middle-class young *lady* in Little Rock's black community.²⁷

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Anna Julia Cooper, a graduate of Oberlin College who founded the Colored Women's League in 1892, wanted to redeem the image of the white South's image of black women as "whores" and "natural liars...who daily thief from white people."²⁸ In an 1893 speech, she argued that:

"The colored woman feels that woman's cause is one and universal; and that not till the image of God, whether in parian or ebony, is sacred and inviolable; not till race, color, sex, and condition are seen as the accidents, and not the substance of life; not till the universal title of humanity to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness is conceded to be inalienable to all; not till then is woman's lesson taught and woman's cause won—not the white woman's, nor the black woman's, nor the red woman's, but the cause of every man and of every woman who has writhed silently under a mighty wrong. Woman's wrongs are thus indissolubly linked with all undefended woe, and the acquirement of her "rights" will mean the final triumph of all right over might, the supremacy of the moral forces of reason, and justice, and love in the government of the nations of earth."²⁹

Elizabeth Eckford's poise and status are evident in her classic image, a beacon of middle-class black propriety and emerging black womanhood that Anna Julia Cooper believed were absolutely linked to the rising fortunes of black women. Everything about Eckford's presentation was wholly intentional. Daisy Bates, the president of the state chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) who spearheaded the city's desegregation plan together with Superintendent Virgil Blossom and the Little Rock

²⁷ Bates, *The Long Shadow of Little Rock*, 71, 130-32. The emphasis on the word *lady* is my own.

²⁸ Feimster, *Southern Horrors*, 110.

²⁹ Anna Julia Cooper, "Woman's Cause Is One and Universal." Speech, World's Congress of Representative Women, Chicago, Illinois (May 18, 1893).

School Board, selected the top twenty-five percent of the original list of eighty black students that Bates sent Blossom for consideration for the integration process. Wanting only token integration, he and the school board requested that Bates cut the list to the students whom Bates believed could handle the emotional and psychological rigors of the process. Acutely aware that the chosen students should leave as favorable an impression as possible, she selected thirty-two of the most eligible candidates. Blossom further reduced that number by convincing fifteen of the black students that they were not suited for Central High, while another seven backed out of the plan as tensions mounted in Little Rock. Minnijean Brown, Elizabeth Eckford, Ernest Green, Thelma Mothershed, Melba Pattillo, Gloria Ray, Terrence Roberts, Jefferson Thomas, and Carlotta Walls became the students known as the ‘Little Rock Nine.’ This finalized roster included twice as many girls as boys, all of whom Daisy Bates determined to be able to endure the pressures of integration with grace and dignity, and who shined as examples of black academic and social excellence. These teenagers embodied the pride of Little Rock’s middle-class black community and could prove themselves as assets to Central High School, as well.³⁰

Terse resistance veiled as gradualism that Bates and the students faced from the school and city administration left little reason for black citizens to expect that their white neighbors would easily accept school integration. What is less clear is whether Mrs. Bates or the teenage girls who comprised sixty-six percent of the famous ‘Nine’ realized the deep-rooted class and gendered anger that subtly anchored segregationists’ rage while overarching racism noisily pervaded the crisis. Those fears have been hidden in plain sight, inside of Counts’ famous shot of Eckford that has been over-examined for more than fifty years in the singular context of black

³⁰ Jane Hill, a fifteen-year-old tenth grader, was also selected to attend Central High School and will be discussed in detail in Chapter Five.

versus white. Three white teenage girls stalked, jeered and screamed at Eckford from behind and to her right; two older white women glared and marched on the younger girl's left side. All of the white girls and women reflected age-appropriate fashions and neat hair of the era. Except that the girls and women engaged in a segregationist spectacle, nothing in Counts' photo suggests that the white females or Eckford differed spectacularly. In actuality, the commonalities of femininity and questions of class were precisely the point.

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Confederate defeat and the beginning of Reconstruction heralded a momentous shift in the lives of Southern black women. Four million men and women freed from chattel slavery celebrated the official demise of the American institution with the ratification of the Thirteenth Amendment in 1865. Three years later, freed people rejoiced in the passage of the Fourteenth Amendment that recognized their rights to due process and equal protection under the law. At the dawn of the 1870s, black male suffrage formally ushered Southern black families into the national body politic. Like other American women, black females continued to be barred from voting but the legislation undertaken in the postwar nation afforded them the freedom of movement and labor, and control over their bodies that had formerly been determined by the dictates and whims of white Southerners.

Under the parameters of Anglophone culture in the British colonies and then in the southern United States, black women occupied a strange no-woman's-land. African social norms and concepts of womanhood that traversed the Middle Passage deviated from European standards wherein rigid Christian patriarchy and gendered spheres centered men in public life. Sociologist Cheryl Townsend Gilkes argues that regardless of intense patriarchic systems that permeated hundreds of African societies, those in Western and Central African that influenced the British and American slave trades functioned because women were deeply connected to

community politics and economics.³¹ Unlike European women, African women were “instrumental in the economic marketplace” because they controlled certain industries and trade. These societies also charged women with the responsibility of farming; “more than a mother... [African women] planted crops and raised them.”³² The conflation of manual farm work as a primary function of nurturing women appeared wildly alien to Europeans, for whom the root of the denotation ‘husbandman’ meant ‘farmer.’ Such cultural binaries served as initial markers for Europeans that African women differed irrevocably, existing as females while defying womanhood, as they understood the concept.

African femininity further mystified Europeans in the realm of motherhood. Historian Jennifer Morgan has asserted that European men observed the birthing practices of African mothers that did not predicate spiritual atonement for supposed-original sin. African mothers usually endured labor as they stood or walked to keep muscles supple until their babies crowned, during which women squatted to utilize gravity in the efforts to deliver their children.³³ Generally assisted by a midwife and a few women, African women did not practice the European custom of lying down during the process. Modern healthcare professionals now acknowledge that the supine-recumbent position (lying on the back) places additional stress and difficulty on women in labor. Until the 1970s in Europe and the United States, however, little choice existed for Western mothers; thinking of the previous three hundred years insisted that labor suffering

³¹ Cheryl Townsend Gilkes, *If It Wasn't for the Women: Black Women's Experience and Womanist Culture in Church and Community* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2001), 99.

³² La Frances Rodgers-Rose, *The Black Family* (Beverly Hills, California: Sage Publications, 1980), 16.

³³ Helaine Selin, *Encyclopaedia of the History of Science, Technology, and Medicine in Non-Western Cultures* 2nd Edition (Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2008), 92; Lavender T. and Mlay R. “Position in the Second Stage of Labour for Women without Epidural Anaesthesia,” RHL Commentary (last revised: 15 December 2006). *The WHO Reproductive Health Library*; Geneva: World Health Organization [accessed August 8, 2015].

fulfilled the biblical promise for women to “bring forth children...in sorrow.”³⁴ African women’s ‘easy’ birth in the eyes of Europeans meant they “did not descend from Eve.”³⁵ Moreover, the seemingly binary gender roles that new African mothers fulfilled bewildered foreigners to the continent, dumbfounded by the abilities of women to swaddle infants on their backs and breastfeed babies over their shoulders as they worked outside.³⁶ African women existed entirely outside of European social and spiritual norms that played fundamental roles in determining their conceptions of masculinity and femininity.

This fundamental confusion at African gender norms allowed white colonial society that pivoted upon enslaved labor to masculinize black women who worked as farmers, bore and cared for children differently than European women because “for them to function as slaves, the Black woman had to be annulled as a *woman*...the sheer force of things rendered her equal to her man.”³⁷ Historian Leslie Schwalm asserts that in American South, “field work was slave women’s work...the all-season backbone of the field labor force,” as evidenced in business ledgers by the numbers of black women sold as field hand at auctions, where traders forced captive women into public nudity so that potential buyers could determine general health and fitness in the same manner as they regarded livestock. After sale, enslaved women on farms and plantations often worked in pulled-up skirts to endure Southern heat, while punishments meted out to all enslaved people meant being whipped in partial or full nudity.³⁸ Labor conditions

³⁴ Genesis, 3:16, King James Bible.

³⁵ Jennifer Morgan, *Laboring Women: Reproduction and Gender in New World Slavery* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 8, 40-41.

³⁶ Morgan, *Laboring Women*, 41.

³⁷ Angela Y. Davis, “Reflections on the Black Woman’s Role in the Community of Slaves,” *Black Scholar* 3 (December 1971): 2-15.

³⁸ Leslie A. Schwalm, *A Hard Fight for We: Women’s Transition from Slavery to Freedom in South Carolina* (Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1997), 19, 45; Deborah Gray White, *Ar’n’t I a Woman?: Female Slaves in the Plantation South* (New York: W.W.

meant that black women lived in degrees of constant physical exposure and in danger of sexual assault from white men in a fashion that juxtaposed them to white women as the example of anti-femininity. Black women's exploitation in the slave South formed the cornerstone of the racist American assumption that "being feminine *meant* being white," which Daisy Bates, fellow female activists and a cadre of black teenage girls rejected at Central High School.³⁹

Exposure of black female bodies as a normal facet of colonial and Southern culture that conformed (and thus, privileged) white female bodies along European and Christian cultural norms crystallized racist perceptions of black femininity and sexuality into American philosophy and law. Intellectuals such as Thomas Jefferson asserted that men of all races longed for presumed-superior white women and compared black women's desirability to bestiality.⁴⁰ Yet, white men prized black women of their labor force during childbearing years for the most fundamental characteristic of womanhood while creating laws and cultural mores that emphasized their supposed masculinity and "savagery."⁴¹ Black female reproductive systems represented troves of potential labor. Reducing black femininity to sex and childbearing enabled white people to scorn enslaved teenaged girls and fertile young women whose perceived status beyond (white) Christian social and sexual norms allowed them to be paired with suitable

Norton & Company, 1999); Walter Johnson, *Soul by Soul: Life Inside the Antebellum Slave Market* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1999); Stephanie Smallwood, *Saltwater Slavery: A Middle Passage from Africa to American Diaspora* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2008).

³⁹ Gloria T. Hull, Patricia B. Scott and Barbara Smith, *But Some of Us Are Brave: All the Women Were White, All the Blacks Were Men: Black Women's Studies* (New York: The Feminist Press at the City University of New York, 1982), 5.

⁴⁰ Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia* (New York: Penguin Publishing Group, 1998), 145. Paradoxically, Jefferson maintained a large and famous household of children with an enslaved woman, Sally Hemings whose mother had also born children of other Jefferson relations.

⁴¹ Morgan, *Laboring Women*, 26.

enslaved men for reproduction, or to be preyed upon by white men for pregnancy or (ironically) for the latter's pleasure. Demands placed upon black female bodies for labor and childbirth rooted pseudo-scientific observations of black female hypersexuality. Celebrated ethnologist Louis Agassiz wrote that "...as soon as the sexual desires are awakening in the young [white] men of the South, they find it easy to gratify themselves by the readiness with which they are met by colored house servants."⁴²

In actuality, black women assigned to housework recognized the constant peril created by their proximity to white men. Enslaved women regarded among the work force as single or in a relationship, lived under a system wherein enslaved men could not legitimately challenge white owners for sexual insults, nor did they enjoy any of the protections of white women who suffered such outrages. Feminist scholar Angela Davis affirms that black women were "the equal of black men in their oppression" and that in "...exploitation that knew no sex distinctions, the groundwork was created not only for black women to assert their equality but to express it through acts of resistance."⁴³ Black women readily resisted white men's unwanted advances through passive means, such as feigning illness, or through aggressive refusal and fighting back, despite the obvious dangers of that choice. Negotiating intimacy and sexual exploitation represented one of the few ways by which enslaved women might gain a degree of autonomy or privilege for themselves or their families.⁴⁴ Women who faced such decisions in a world where they benefited from no legal advantages, who were confined to farms and plantations more than

⁴² Letter from Louis Agassiz, in Harriet A. Washington, *Medical Apartheid: The Dark History of Medical Experimentation on Black Americans from Colonial Times to the Present* (New York: Doubleday, 2006), 46.

⁴³ Angela Y. Davis, *Women, Race and Class* (New York: Vintage Books, 1983), 23.

⁴⁴ Schwalm, *A Hard Fight for We*, 30-31, 45; Annette-Gordon Reed, *The Hemingses of Monticello: An American Family* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2008).

men, and who generally outlived males, turned to one another for spiritual, physical, emotional and psychological support. Black women's interdependence defined female relationships beyond the gaze of white people helped them "endure the agony and depression that flowed from sexual harassment and exploitation."⁴⁵

Enslaved women's decisions to engage in sexual relationships reflects a pragmatic navigation of skewed power structures, yet their white contemporaries viewed such relationships as evidence of black women's shamelessness that negated male weakness and rape as an impossible crime perpetrated upon a black woman. Characterizations of these women, especially those who could produce children, as "loose" or "licentious" not only justified their sexual exploitation by white men but also categorized them as available prostitutes.⁴⁶ White-created caricatures of black female sexuality during enslavement and perpetuated throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries led white Southern historians and journalists to remark that sexual assault of black women by black men was "almost unheard of" because of purported "sexual laxness" of black women. Moreover, they could not be 'raped' by white men because "the colored woman has no finer feeling or virtue to be outraged!"⁴⁷ Legal protection or social regard did not exist for sex workers, and especially not for enslaved women who suffered the triple stigma of lesser race, lesser sex, lesser class. Images of black females as masculine, aggressive non-women coalesced in white society that the yields of negotiated intimacy or rapes—black children—never "belonged" to enslaved mothers under conditions of captivity

⁴⁵ White, *Ar'n't I a Woman?*, 131-32, 140.

⁴⁶ E. Frances White, *Dark Continent of Our Bodies: Black Feminism and the Politics of Respectability* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2001), 34.

⁴⁷ Philip A. Bruce, *The Plantation Negro as a Freeman: Observations on His Character, Condition and Prospects in Virginia* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1889), 85; Ida B. Wells, "A Red Record," in *The Selected Works of Ida B. Wells-Barnett* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 211.

where offspring could not belong to women denounced as only “insatiable breeders,” beasts of burden and property.⁴⁸

Strangely, this categorization never stopped white owners from charging black women with the rearing of white children. Deemed unfit to claim their own offspring, essential black womanhood was paradoxically recognized as entirely fit to service white families as midwives and nursemaids, and to breastfeed, coddle, attend and nurture elite white children into adulthood in the role of a domestic caretaker that has come to be identified as “Mammy” in historical records, academic discussions, and cultural understanding.⁴⁹ Yet unlike the image of a happy, older and asexual black female caretaker popularized in *Gone with the Wind* and in a litany of Western advertising campaigns, the reality of “Mammy” hinged on forcing young, nursing black women to care for white children while extended family or neighbors looked after black infants who subsisted on sugar water in the absence of their mothers.⁵⁰ At the expense of black children and families, black womanhood and femininity could be and was manipulated and appropriated to benefit white men and women. This phenomenon led famed activist Nannie Helen Burroughs to muse in 1939 that black women had “nurse[d] more babies” and “mammie[d] more Nordics” only to enjoy “less protection and appreciation, than do the women in any other civilized group in the world.”⁵¹

⁴⁸ Hortense J. Spillers, *Black, White and in Color: Essays in American Literature and Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 217; Melissa V. Harris-Perry, *Sister Citizen: Shame, Stereotypes, and Black Women in America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), 71.

⁴⁹ Susan K. Cahn, *Sexual Reckonings: Southern Girls in a Troubling Age* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2007), 13.

⁵⁰ Harris-Perry, *Sister Citizen*, 72.

⁵¹ “Nannie Burroughs Makes Stirring Statement on Threshold of 1939.” *The Pittsburg Courier* (Saturday, January 14, 1939).

Where white consumption of black women's emotional labor was not a necessity, however, black females continued to be denied the status of *woman* by white society. Thus, total commodification of black female bodies that stripped those women of protections and privileges afforded to white females who were absolutely recognized as women under Southern statutes, enabled white slave owners to fragment black women into useable parts, whereby white people disregarded a black woman's mind and emotions to separate her essential self "from her back and hands, divided from her womb and vagina."⁵² Exclusion of black women from Southern womanhood and abuse of their physical, sexual and emotional labor fostered an image of enslaved women as carnal workhorses devoid of any semblance of femininity that became the exclusive province of white women and that led Zora Neale Hurston to write that, "de nigger woman is de mule uh de world so fur as Ah can see."⁵³ Yet as historians have conclusively shown, the relationships that black women forged with one another in bondage laid the foundation for them to shape an understanding of femininity and womanhood that existed in a black counterculture to the standard white model. The "female slave network" derived emotional strength from one another, but also relied upon bondswomen for a sense of shared community, spirituality, economy, medical assistance, and child care. Black women's culture pedestaled "hard work, perseverance, and self-reliance...tenacity, resistance...that spelled out new standards of womanhood."⁵⁴ The middle-class values, carriage and appearances of Daisy

⁵² Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Sexual Politics: African Americans, Gender and the New Racism* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 55, 58.

⁵³ Zora Neale Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (New York: Harper Perennial Modern Classics), 20.

⁵⁴ Dylan Penningroth, *Claims of Kinfolk: African American Property and Community in the Nineteenth-Century South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003); White, *Ar'n't I a Woman?*, 119, 141; Davis, *Women, Race and Class*, 29.

Bates and the teenaged girls who integrated Central High School in 1957, found root in enslaved women's legacy of femininity.

In the heady days of Reconstruction, freed women immediately exercised that legacy as they desperately wanted to refute the roles and images thrust upon them during enslavement in the postwar South. One way they asserted their independence involved re-cobbling families separated by sale and by legally marrying their partners—a right denied to enslaved people that served to remind white people of black women's lack of Christian morality and femininity, and of their essential “wanton” nature.⁵⁵ Marriage particularly resonated as a two-fold act of emotional commitment to a chosen partner and of ultimate defiance to centuries of unfettered white male access to black women's bodies. Symbolically and literally, black women attempted to distance themselves from white Southerners as much as possible after the war.

One method of doing so included refusing to live in or navigating time spent in white homes as domestic workers. Until 1965, more than three-quarters of Southern black women worked as maids, cooks, and nannies to white families.⁵⁶ During enslavement, women in these roles lived in plantation houses to serve the immediate beckon of owner's families that included the sexual whims of white men. Emancipation afforded black women physical determination that attempted to prevent such degradation and abuse, and to live among their own families—luxuries not afforded to black mothers coerced into rearing white children. Freed domestics wielded the right to earn an independent living and tried to set the parameters for their employment by rejecting unfavorable written and oral labor contracts, and by protesting unfair working conditions such as fourteen to sixteen-hour workdays that were “physically and

⁵⁵ Schwalm, *A Hard Fight for We*, 151, 155; Harris-Perry, *Sister Citizen*, 55; Collins, *Black Sexual Politics*, 55.

⁵⁶ Gilkes, *If It Wasn't for the Women*, 3; Harris-Perry, *Sister Citizen*, 59.

emotionally challenging, hard on the body and on the mind.”⁵⁷ Beyond refusing to “answer bells,” black women in domestic service navigated the postwar South through direct resistance to shape the terms of their work that included stoppages, strikes, and quitting. Indirect resistance to white oppression included working as washerwomen and laundresses from the safety of their own homes, to methods honed in enslavement included feigning illness, taking food or “pan-toting,” and stealing breaks from white houses.⁵⁸ Asserting control over their bodies and their labor represented one step for black women’s determination to redefine womanhood and femininity independent of white dictates that had been based on tilted power relationships, sexual exploitation and racist justification.

Black women not only looked inward; they sought to define their new independence from within their communities. Enslavement stole the opportunity for education, political inclusion, and every conceivable kind of advancement from captive people. Nevertheless, cultural institutions flourished in bondage. Of these, the black church stood as most powerful entity in the lives of its congregants. In the antebellum South, scores of white Christian slave owners maintained plantation churches in which they allowed bonds people a space to release emotional frustrations to God and one another that instilled community bonds and replenished hope that pain might end in jubilation. ‘Empathetic’ planters sometimes provided a space for enslaved people to bring complaints about owners themselves, though most encouraged captive men and

⁵⁷ Negro Nurse, “More Slavery at the South,” *Independent*, January 25, 1912; Interview with Mary Rhine (retired domestic), in E. Patrick Johnson, *Appropriating Blackness: Performance and the Politics of Authenticity* (Duke, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2003), 121.

⁵⁸ Negro Nurse, “More Slavery at the South”; Schwalm, *A Hard Fight for We*, 188, 232; Harris-Perry, *Sister Citizen*, 74; Tera E. Hunter, *To ‘Joy My Freedom: Southern Black Women’s Lives and Labors after the Civil War* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press), 4, 60-61.

women to “obey your earthly masters with deep respect and fear,” and to seek reward in the afterlife.⁵⁹ Planter reservations swirled around enslaved people’s participation in church for its subversive potential that frequently revealed itself in violent slave rebellions throughout the history of the American practice. Infamously, the Stono Uprising of 1739 in South Carolina resulted in the prohibition of enslaved people gathering in public. Attempts such as the Denmark Vesey Conspiracy and Nat Turner’s Rebellion in the early decades of the nineteenth century underscored the need for caution on the part of white owners; most Christian planters continued to permit enslaved people their spiritual outlet under white supervision. On plantations and farms of those who chose not to allow church meetings, enslaved people met under the cover of night.⁶⁰

Even in bondage, the black church provided more than a spiritual and emotional coping mechanism for its congregants. Church offered a community meeting space to enslaved people to candidly discuss matters, mundane and profound, amongst themselves. At church, they devised ways to negotiate with owners for conditions or privileges that made their daily existence easier to bear. Enslaved men and women at church also strained or strengthened relationships between each other that reflected the politics of life in the slaves’ quarters, a hidden world that existed in plain sight of white people. Church also afforded black parents an opportunity to instill social and cultural mores in their children that reflected their own ancestry

⁵⁹ Albert J. Raboteau, *Slave Religion: The “Invisible Institution” in the Antebellum South* Updated Edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); Erskine Clarke, *Dwelling Place: A Plantation Epic* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005); Ephesians, 6:5.

⁶⁰ Peter Wood, *Black Majority: Negroes in South Carolina from 1670 to the Stono Rebellion* (New York: Alfred. A Knopf, 1971); Douglas R. Edgerton, *He Shall Go Out Free: The Lives of Denmark Vesey* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowan and Littlefield Publishers, 2004); Herbert Aptheker, *Nat Turner’s Slave Rebellion: Including the 1831 “Confessions”* (Mineola, New York: Dover Publications, 2004).

and values that they held as African people.⁶¹ For black women and their families in the postwar world, the church represented a “nation within a nation,” and transformed from the most significant body in enslaved people’s lives, into the strongest institution of racial self-help for freed people that provided clothing and food to needy families, establishing orphanages and homes for the elderly, and a host of social welfare services.⁶²

A public service that freed women most valued for themselves and their families was education. At the end of the war, ninety-eight percent of the freed population lived as functioning illiterates. As did their descendants a century later, freed women understood the profound importance of education to real independence, as well as their daily lives among hostile white Southerners. These women took advantage of learning opportunities as the Freedmen’s Bureau worked with white and black northern missionaries, philanthropists and teachers to establish some 4,300 schools across the South between 1865 and 1870. By itself, the American Missionary Association (AMA) placed over 5,000 teachers in the South during Reconstruction. In a single year, 90,000 black Southerners enrolled in free schools—original institutions in a region that had historically discouraged public education on the grounds of class disparities between planters and poor whites, while criminalizing enslaved people’s education. Sheer

⁶¹ Raboteau, *Slave Religion*, 66-72; 90-92; Eugene Genovese, *Roll Jordan Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (New York: Vintage Books, 1976); Philip Morgan, *Slave Counterpoint: Black Culture in the Eighteenth-Century Chesapeake and Lowcountry* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1998); Ira Berlin, *Generations of Captivity: A History of African-American Slaves* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2003).

⁶² E. Franklin Frazier, *The Negro Church in America* (Liverpool: University of Liverpool, 1963), 35; Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent: The Women’s Movement in the Black Baptist Church* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1993), 1-2, 7. See also Anthea D. Butler, *Women in the Church of God in Christ: Making a Sanctified World* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007); John M. Giggie, *After Redemption: Jim Crow and the Transformation of African American Religion in the Delta, 1875-1915* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007); Calvin White, Jr. *The Rise to Respectability: Race, Religion and the Church of God in Christ* (Fayetteville, Arkansas: The University of Arkansas Press, 2007).

volumes of new students evidenced the premium that freed people placed on education, what advances they believed literacy offered, and led W.E.B. Dubois to observe that “public education for all, at public expense, was, in the South, a Negro idea,” and one on which black Southerners had spent more than one million dollars in the first five years after the Civil War.⁶³ Attaining education did not merely mean defying mandates set by white Southerners to keep black people ignorant, manipulated and at the mercy of incomprehensible work agreements and bondage-like drudgery in the postwar world. Education represented a privilege of citizenship guaranteed to all Americans and in which freed people could now participate. On this basic premise, Daisy Bates and the black teenage girls selected to integrate Little Rock Central High School exercised the extents of citizenship that was rooted in Reconstruction’s promise. By the end of 1870, more than 250,000 black pupils—adults and minors—attended schools that had been established on federal property, land leased by consenting white owners or in the basements of black churches that were the backbone and bedrock of black communities.⁶⁴ Working within the twin mantels of church and education underscored black women’s defiance of white authority, as well as their insistence upon their own definitions of womanhood and femininity in the wake of emancipation that prized women’s roles as hard workers who prioritized family, community and learning.

Black women stood at the heart of a total education effort of the black South, playing a fundamental role not only in supporting education for their children and communities, but in attaining education for themselves and training as teachers. Historian Kate Côté Gillin has noted

⁶³ W.E.B. Dubois, *Black Reconstruction in America 1860-1880* (New York: The Free Press, 1962), 638; V.P. Franklin and Carter Julian Savage, *Cultural Capital and Black Education: African American Communities and the Funding of Black Schooling, 1865 to the Present* (Charlotte, North Carolina: Information Age Publishing, 2004).

⁶⁴ Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent*, 5; James D. Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988).

that women shouldered the responsibility of educating ‘the race.’ White and black female missionaries from the North found in freed women, students willing to sacrifice the time and expenses necessary to learn and become teachers themselves. Fifteen black colleges had been established for teacher training by 1868, with a litany of liberal arts colleges and universities founded and dedicated to classical education for black men and women.⁶⁵ Out of the efforts of the Freedmen’s Bureau, the AMA, and individual efforts of black women arose the first members of the black professional class in the South. With the passage of the Fifteenth Amendment and the election of black legislators such as United States Senator Hiram Revels and Blanche K. Bruce of Mississippi, freed people proved the power of community and education to racial uplift, and used their newfound status to dispel the myths of black savagery and worthlessness outside of menial labor under which black women had been especially victimized. The professional class of black Southerners, comprised of teachers, doctors, lawyers, and politicians trained in free schools, church basements and liberal arts colleges determined to empower black Southerners and for black women, redefine their femininity.

These efforts represented no small feat in the postwar South. Former planter aristocracy and poor white Southerners alike loathed the seismic changes that Confederate defeat had wrought. ‘Freedpeople,’ and any adjacent political recognition or privileges appeared so alien and terrifying that white Southerners immediately lashed out in the form of ‘Black Codes’ to prevent true independence for black men and women. Originating in Mississippi and eventually adopted in some form by every ex-Confederate state, the Black Codes included penalties for

⁶⁵ Kate Côté Gillin, *Shrill Hurrahs: Women, Gender and Racial Violence in South Carolina, 1865-1900* (Columbia, South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 2013), ##!; Darlene Clarke Hines and Kathleen Thompson, *A Shining Thread of Hope: The History of Black Women in America* (New York: Broadway Books, 1998), 160.

“vagrancy,” defined as unlawful assembly, speaking obscenities, no lawful employment, and breaking contracts with white employers. Any white man could arrest any black person for perpetrating supposed crimes.⁶⁶ Within Arkansas, the Codes restricted interracial marriage, black men from voting and serving on juries and in militias, and explicitly forbade black children from attending school with white children.⁶⁷ Black Codes reasserted white dominance over a freed population insistent on enjoying their freedom and exercising all of the privileges of citizenship they had earned and that Reconstruction Congresses had guaranteed. White anger particularly targeted schools and black women. An increasingly literate and political black populace served as a constant reminder that no ‘codes’ could truly resurrect the traditions of the Old South. Moreover, the swelling ranks of educated, professional black women inside the South, as well as the domestics and sharecroppers who continually protested and resisted labor conditions that advantaged white landowners, proved that “continued black docility” to white Southerners was a lie. Resistance served as a key characteristic of black femininity since enslavement and manifested itself against white terror as black women of all ranks and occupations continued to support black men’s votes and publicly protested injustice themselves; and as they continued educating black children and adults despite the constant destruction of schoolhouses, attacks against black churches, and violence perpetrated against teachers

⁶⁶ Charles J. Ogletree, Jr. and Austin Sarat, *From Lynch Mobs to the Killing State: Race and the Death Penalty in America* (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 68; Charles J. Ogletree, Jr. *With All Deliberate Speed: Reflection on the First Half-Century of Brown vs. the Board of Education* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 2004), 98-99; Jack M. Bloom, *Class, Race and the Civil Rights Movement* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), 28.

⁶⁷ Theodore Brantner Wilson, *The Black Codes of the South* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1965), 114-15.

throughout the Reconstruction era.⁶⁸ Definitions of femininity included the radical dependence that schools, churches and communities placed on upon black women.

The centering of black women as integral to political organization and mobilization stood in stark contrast to white concepts of femininity or “true womanhood” that constructed the ideal female as chaste, delicate, an excellent wife and mother confined to the home, and above all, dependent upon a man.⁶⁹ Unlike white society, enslavement delineated that distinctions between men and women were not absolute. While the Fifteenth Amendment excluded all women from voting, black families tended to view a man’s vote as a collective ballot, allowing black women a level political influence in their homes, on their men and in their communities, that were generally absent among white counterparts. In Reconstruction South Carolina, white women noted political exceptionality of black women as “the head and fount” of Republican opposition to white Democrats, who attended “polls to see that the men voted right” in the face of white threats, and themselves attempted to cast ballots.⁷⁰ Black women not only exercised authority within black spaces; necessity demanded that they work outside the home where they were marginalized in a white-dominated society that defined womanhood by middle-class Victorian standards that placed females squarely in the domestic sphere. Prolific civil rights activist and suffragette, Fannie Barrier Williams argued that, “In our development as a race, the colored woman and colored man started even...have suffered the same misfortunes...the colored man

⁶⁸ Mckay Jenkins, *The South in Black and White: Sex, Race, and Literature in the 1940s* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 12-17; Gillin, *Shrill Hurrahs*, ##!

⁶⁹ Judith S. Jordan-Zachery, *Black Women, Cultural Images and Social Policy* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 32.

⁷⁰ Gillin, *Shrill Hurrahs*, 48; Ann D. Gordon, Bettye Collier-Thomas, et al, *African American Women and the Vote, 1837-1965* (Amherst, Massachusetts: University of Massachusetts Press, 1997), 82-83.

can scarcely say to his wife, “I am better than you are.”⁷¹ Ergo, black women engaged public spaces as part of their emerging redefinition of their own sense of womanhood and femininity that was not incumbent upon and outright rejected the approval of the white Southern gaze. Even more so than freed black men, independent black women presented the greatest threat to white Southern memory of total racial domination before the war. To combat the their challenges to paternalistic lenses, white supremacists invented caricatures to define “good” and “bad” black women, bringing into existence the mythologized ‘Mammy’ who aggressively cared for and protected *white* people (especially “frail” white women) and countered the promiscuous ‘Jezebels’ and surly, “uppity” ‘Sapphires’ who rejected all male and white authority.⁷² Daisy Bates, her supporters, and the six teenage girls selected to attend Central High School, all struggled against segregationists’ attempts to identify them by the latter stereotypes that as they enacted a long tradition of black women directly confronting injustice in and upon public spaces.

Mobilized and determined black women who openly resisted attempts by white people to subjugate them in the post-war South earned the wrath of a recalcitrant white population that demonized them, like they had in bondage, as a binary opposite of supposed-white virtue. In the context of Reconstruction, however, black female bodies represented another kind of menace. Black women sought to reestablish their families, legitimize their relationships and their children through state-sanctioned marriages, control their labor, and politically assert themselves, regardless of (or perhaps, to delight in), white Southern outrage. Education proved one reason that black women effectively accomplished such feats, and that so many women moved beyond manual labor into teaching positions that offered a wellspring of instruction for black students

⁷¹ Fannie Barrier Williams, “The Woman’s Part in a Man’s Business,” *Voice of the Negro* 1, No. 2 (1904): 544.

⁷² Jenkins, *The South in Black and White*, 12-17; Jordan-Zachery, *Black Women*, 36-41.

into other professions that not only disproved social Darwinist theories that degraded black intellectualism, but also offered economic independence beyond white paternalism. Reconstruction witnessed the emergence of the Southern black middle class at the center of which stood black women. White Southerners viewed the education of black people as a particularly vile repudiation of dead caste systems. That black women created the foundation for learning certainly stung even more and fueled white intransigence that insisted their former labor force were “ignorant and ungrateful children.”⁷³ Journalist Lorraine Bethel has unassembled what black feminist scholar Moya Bailey has coined *misogynoir*, that white supremacists use against black women. Bethel states that, “the codification of Blackness and femaleness by whites and males is seen in terms of “thinking like a woman” and “acting like a nigger, [so that] the most pejorative concept in the white and male worldview would be a nigger woman.”⁷⁴ Her assessment definitely applied to the revulsion with which white Southerners regarded physically, economically and emotionally independent *educated* black women who transcended the parameters set for their race and sex by white oppression.

In response to the humiliation of military defeat and destruction of understood social order, thousands of white Southern men rushed to join the Ku Klux Klan under the guise of protecting their families from the “arrogance of Negroes.”⁷⁵ Founded at Pulaski, Tennessee in 1867 as a fraternal organization for disillusioned Confederate veterans, Klansmen swiftly grew notorious for terrorizing white Republicans, Union families and Northerners in the South; white

⁷³ Ogletree, *With All Deliberate Speed*, 98, 102.

⁷⁴ Lorraine Bethel, in *But Some of Us Are Brave*, xxiv; Moya Bailey, “They Aren’t Talking About Me,” *Crunk Feminist Collective*, March 18, 2010, <http://www.crunkfeministcollective.com/2010/03/14/they-arent-talking-about-me/> [accessed August 1, 2015]. Bailey created the term *misogynoir* to reference the specifically racist misogyny directed at black women.

⁷⁵ *Arkansas Gazette*, January 6, 1869.

and black schoolteachers and missionaries invested in black welfare; and black Southerners. An 1869 issue of the *Arkansas Gazette* celebrated the entrance of the Klan into the state as one that would move society “in the right direction.”⁷⁶ Gendered sentiments drove white Arkansan, and white Southern support for the Klan that stemmed from disgraced white masculinity, and manifested itself as violence against black female bodies. Until Reconstruction ended in 1877, Klansmen rained brutality, in the form of whipping, beating, rape and murder upon black women who refused to work for white families or show deference to white authority.⁷⁷ To reassert patriarchic and sexual dominance over the South, white men attempted to subjugate freedwomen on the myth of black women’s immorality that had made them vulnerable for white men’s taking during enslavement.⁷⁸

This particular defense of violence against black women was cruelly ironic. For the women who were transcending the boundaries of race and gender created by white Southerners to foster the first generations of the black middle class, a defensive strategy formed that was predicated upon the respectability of black families. Rooted in nineteenth-century Victorian values, church-going women of the African Methodist Episcopal (AME), Baptist, and Methodist denominations promoted social standards and mores familiar to middle-class and elite white Southerners that might also protect black Southerners from white terrorization. “Politics of respectability” lauded property ownership, education, cleanliness, temperance, thrift, staid Christianity and impeccable manners. This theory also emphasized sexual purity and strictly

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Allen W. Trelease, *White Terror: The Ku Klux Klan Conspiracy and Southern Reconstruction* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1971), 319, 322; Gillin, *Shrill Hurrahs*, ##!

⁷⁸ Harry Ashmore, *An Epitaph for Dixie* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1957), 55.

defined masculinity and femininity, as practical for Southern black men and women whose abilities to practice segregated sexual spheres revolved around the legacy of enslavement and economic necessities of a hostile postwar South.⁷⁹ Yet, the evolution of the black middle class and the characteristics that defined it reveal the disparities and schisms between post-emancipation black communities. No monolithic, hive mentality ever existed among black people, who even during enslavement cultivated communal hierarchies based upon types of labor, relationships to each other and to white people, limited property ownership, and privileges. During Reconstruction, these discrepancies manifested fully into a Marxian class structure where the overwhelming majority of black freed people formed a sharecropping or domestic working-proletariat while a slim minority gained skills for transition into specialized work that created greater economic opportunities and privileges.⁸⁰ Sociologist Andrew Billingsley has correctly argued that black “relationships of appropriation,” similar to the “fictive kin” networks that existed in bondage and created connections when blood ties were severed through separation, render black and white familial comparisons irrelevant.⁸¹ His approach is applicable to white gender norms, where enslavement forced a counterculture so that concepts of masculinity and especially *femininity* deviated from white standards. Billingsley’s theory also makes false dichotomies of white and black class comparisons. Historic economic discrimination against black people meant that white middle-class incomes generally trumped black ones and that the

⁷⁹ Collins, *Black Sexual Politics*, 71; see also Glenda E. Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow: Women and the Politics of White Supremacy in North Carolina, 1896-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996).

⁸⁰ Karl Marx and Fredrick Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* (New York: Penguin Books, 1988).

⁸¹ Andrew Billingsley, *Climbing Jacob’s Ladder: The Enduring Legacy of African American Families* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1992), 20-21, 31; Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1982), 33, 63-64; Smallwood, *Saltwater Slavery*, 101, 195.

majority of black women, regardless of class, worked outside the home. An estimated seventy-three percent of elite and middle-class black women were employed at the turn of the twentieth century, where such a figure never applied to white women of similar standing.⁸² Nevertheless, black Southerners who strived to embody the ‘better sort’ exercised significant markers of Victoriana America social standards, and with the caveat that they cannot be compared a counterpart, the black bourgeois will be therefore referred to as ‘middle class.’⁸³ Thousands of black women engaged the cultural mores that identified them as respectable, middle-class women in the years after the Civil War, particularly adherence to sexual purity. Respectability functioned as a weapon that restored black femininity and rebutted white myths; theoretically, it might also protect black women from petty insults and egregious offenses.

However, the entire concept of black respectability ran counter to white Southern racial constructions predicated upon conditions of whiteness and blackness. English professor and feminist author Patricia Meyer Spacks has written that it is “inconvenient...for white women...to think of Black women as *women*, perhaps because ‘woman’ is a name they are claiming for themselves.”⁸⁴ Spacks’ musing captures the premium and exclusivity of race and the word *lady*

⁸² Deborah Gray White, *Too Heavy a Load: Black Women in Dense of Themselves, 1894-1994*, (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1999), 88-89.

⁸³ Julie Winch, *A Gentleman of Color: The Life of James Forten* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 148, 161, 252; see also, E. Franklin Frazier, *Black Bourgeoisie* (New York: Free Press Paperbacks, 1997); William B. Gatewood, *Aristocrats of Color: The Black Elite, 1880-1920* (Fayetteville, Arkansas: The University of Arkansas Press, 2000); Theodore Koditschek, Sudiatat Keita Cha-Jua, and Helen A. Neville, *Race Struggles* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2009); Jacqueline Moore, *Leading the Race: The Transformation of the Black Elite in the Nation’s Capital, 1880-1920* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1999); Julie Winch, *The Elite of Our People: Joseph Willson’s Sketches of Black Upper-Class Life in Antebellum Philadelphia* (University Park, Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000).

⁸⁴ Patricia Meyer Spacks, *The Female Imagination*, in Hull, Scott, and Smith, *But Some of Us Are Brave*, 44.

in the South. Respectable womanhood meant that the women in question were unequivocally white, as the legacy of the slave system continued to foster in white minds that black females were immoral “non-women” juxtaposed to white women’s assumed (and heavily policed) virtuous status.⁸⁵ Historian Jacqueline Jones has exposed the ridicule and anger directed at black families, where women rejected fieldwork or husbands refused to let their wives live in white homes that exposed them to sexual predators and kept them from tending their own families. Elite white women especially resented black married women as “evil” and “unnatural” for trying to “play the lady.”⁸⁶ Black married women who refused the dictates of elite white women presented three challenges. First and foremost, black women who placed their responsibilities to their own homes and families over potential work disrupted racial and gender power relationships that were hardwired into Southern labor routines. Second, the possibility of respectable, middle-class black womanhood where black wives and mothers tended exclusively to their families meant that the term *lady* might apply to dark-skinned women who, just a handful of years previous, represented the lowest level of the feudal society that had defined the antebellum South. Third, the legacy of enslavement ensured that middle-class or elite black and white women’s social trajectories never fully matched. *Black* femininity developed necessarily differently than *white* femininity. Because the concept of ‘femininity’ in colonial and nineteenth century-America was dominated by Euro-centric standards of womanhood, *white* femininity excluded enslaved women. The reconstruction of Southern womanhood after the Civil War also erased black women. Etiquette built around white hospitality made possible by black labor and on the fantasy of an enduring Southern belle demanded that white women not appear too

⁸⁵ Jordan-Zachery, *Black Women*, 27-33.

⁸⁶ Jacqueline Jones, *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow: Black Women, Work and the Family from Slavery to Present* (New York: Random House, 1985), 58-68.

intelligent, handy, outspoken or strong. For a white woman to be any of those things erased the need for white male protection and challenged the bedrock of white paternalism.⁸⁷ *Black* femininity did not want or try to emulate *white* femininity or whiteness. Enslavement fostered a culture where group survival often pivoted upon black female leadership that became part of the legacy of respectable black womanhood. Regardless of class standing in the postwar world, black women's roles in their homes and communities included the public sphere, with no shame or insult attached to that inclusion. *Black* femininity balanced the necessary public voice and labor of black womanhood alongside the protection of black womanhood and adherence to social and gender mores that are the bedrock of the 'politics of respectability.' *Black* femininity and *black* womanhood emulated certain Victoriana cultural standards but resolutely did not perform *white* femininity or whiteness. Rather, *black* femininity and womanhood meant *refusal to perform* for the benefit of whiteness or white womanhood. Respectability politics were created by blackness and dignified black womanhood accordingly.

The existence of black femininity that neither required nor performed for white approval flummoxed elite white women. Poor white women also balked at dignified black womanhood. Before the war, non-elite white people existed on the fringes of Southern society where degraded economic status suggested degraded moral status to their social betters. If poor white women entered sex work or became victims of assault, few people in either poor or elite white communities regarded their choices or misfortunes as tragedies against the idealized womanhood

⁸⁷ David Goldfield, *Still Fighting the Civil War: The American South and Southern History* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 2002), 24-25, 104; LeeAnn Whites, "Stand By Your Man," in Christi Anne Farnham, *Women of the American South, A Multicultural Reader* (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 140-142. See also Rebecca A. Sharpless, *Cooking in Other Women's Kitchens: Domestic Workers in the South, 1865-1960* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010).

that elite ladies represented. In the antebellum South, non-elite white women were considered to a great degree “unrapeable,” underscoring the class tensions and uneasy relationships that existed between planters, poor whites, enslaved people and the small populations of elite freed people in cities such as New Orleans and Charleston, since the colonial era.⁸⁸ Reconstruction and general white fear in an upended society made strange bedfellows of two classes of white citizens who gazed contemptuously upon the other. Historian C. L. R. James called their unification, “the aristocracy of the skin;” their alliance had the power to make poor white women’s degradation respectable. White men especially insisted on policing lower-status white women’s behaviors to ensure they were “remade” into “ladies.” Individual men and the Klan engaged in tarring, feathering, whipping, sexually mutilating and raping poor and working-class white women who committed sexual and racial transgressions against whiteness. White society also lynched lower-class white women for violent crimes.⁸⁹ Violent patriarchal control over all women re-established a bit of the world order that had existed before the war. Despite the injustices leveled at them, however, poor and working-class white women embraced the opportunity for ‘protection’ alongside upper class white women. In most instances, working-class white women jealously guarded their new status that separated them from the suspicion of poverty and entirely

⁸⁸ Victoria E. Bynum, *Unruly Women: The Politics of Social and Sexual Control in the Old South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992), 117-18, 129. See also Jacqueline Dowd Hall, “‘The Mind That Burns in Each Body’: Women, Rape and Racial Violence,” in Ann Barr Snitow, et al *Powers of Desires: The Politics of Sexuality* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1983), 328-49; Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, “Private Eyes, Public Women: Images of Class and Sex in the Urban South, Atlanta, Georgia, 1913-1915,” in Ava Baron, *Work Engendered: Toward a New History of American Labor* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1991), 243-72; Stephanie McCurry, *Masters of Small Worlds: Yeoman Households, Gender Relations, and the Political Culture of the Antebellum South Carolina Low Country* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

⁸⁹ Crystal Feimster, *Southern Horrors: The Politics of Rape and Lynching* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2009), 174, 180; Gillin, *Shrill Hurrahs*, 1-2.

from black Southerners.⁹⁰ Rage at the audacity of middle-class black women to compete against any white woman for protection and privilege transcended the decades to reveal itself at Central High School, as Daisy Bates became the most famous woman in Arkansas (in the era, the world), and the six teenage black girls who attended Central High School were praised by national syndicates for their beauty, poise and grace in the face of massive resistance.

Original resistance from Klansman, recalcitrant Confederate veterans, and a general white population bewildered by the radical changes of Reconstruction worked to undermine black advancement, from individual black women's rejection of white oppression to federal legislation such as the Civil Rights Act of 1875. By 1877, disillusioned Congressmen and an apathetic Northern public consented to the South's bargain to end Reconstruction efforts but gain a Republican president in Rutherford B. Hayes. Still, Southern states battled an onslaught of lawsuits throughout the 1880s, brought by black people who argued that white Southerners perpetually interfered with their Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendment rights. Black women removed only one generation from enslavement, and who counted themselves among the respectable class, acted especially vehemently against injustice. Railways and streetcars became intense battlegrounds where middle-class black women protested to be seated in ladies'-only cars on sex-segregated transportation. Historian Barbara Y. Welke convincingly argues that gender played as much of a role as race did in creating 'separate but equal' public spaces that would culminate in official Jim Crow policy. At Memphis in 1880, a railway ejected Jane Brown, a middle-class black woman, from the ladies' car and cited that Brown was a "notorious

⁹⁰ C.L.R. James, *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution* (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), 120, 139; Laura F. Edwards, *Scarlett Doesn't Live Here Anymore: Southern Women in the Civil War Era* (Urbana-Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 157-160.

courtesan.” In the same year, another middle-class black woman sued the Memphis and Charleston Railroad when the company refused her ticket for the ladies’ car and accused her of being a sex worker.⁹¹ Each woman endured slander, defamation and discrimination because the word *lady*, in any context, indicated white females *only*. After the passage of the 1891 Separate Coach Act in Arkansas, white women agreed that the “worst” black people were middle-class women who “insisted on imposing themselves on the white people.”⁹² Funnily enough, white women lamented even when they placed themselves in black-designated social spaces. In the 1901 suit, *Southern Railway v. Wood*, a white woman sued the Georgia rail line when the inexpensive ticket she purchased did not privilege her to sit in the first-class ladies’ car, but in the second-tier smoking car “with only a black female.”⁹³ Court records never referenced the black woman sitting in the smoking car as a *lady*, regardless of her actual class status and despite the fact that the white woman’s purchase of a cheaper rail ticket probably reflected her own lower status compared to elite white women. Nevertheless, middle-class black women demanded acknowledgement of their status, respectability and femininity on par with the reverence and privilege reserved for all white women.

Black women in the emerging middle class considered themselves no imposition on white society, or white women, at all. Respectability politics and the dictates of black femininity did not try to mimic whiteness. The tenants of black womanhood were created beyond the parameters of white womanhood. The twin pillars of church and education had provided spaces

⁹¹ Barbara Y. Welke, “When All the Women Were White, and All the Blacks Were Men: Gender, Class, Race, and the Road to Plessy, 1855-1914,” in John David Smith’s *When Did Southern Segregation Begin?* (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 2002), 143.

⁹² Edward L. Ayers, “The Promise of the New South: Life After Reconstruction,” in John David Smith’s *When Did Southern Segregation Begin?* (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 2002), 91.

⁹³ Welke, “When All the Women Were White and All the Blacks Were Men,” 146-48.

that not only empowered black female intellect, but also offered thousands of women positions as teachers who turned even more pupils into skilled workers and professionals. In a postwar agricultural society underpinned by rigid, racialized gender concepts, white landowners preferred to hire black male workers than contend with or pay black women who often refused field labor or negotiated the terms of other work to advantage themselves or their families. In part because of their greater opportunities to attend school, black women formed the powerful base of black education that at once uplifted all black people as well as themselves individually. In particular, higher education for black women always seriously concerned entire black communities because women who attained college educations “disseminated middle-class morals and values amongst the masses,” that helped shed the humiliations of enslavement and offer protection from whiteness and prevailing white ideology that black people were shiftless, incompetent and deviant.⁹⁴ Private liberal arts colleges founded by both white and black philanthropy and dedicated to black uplift, enrolled hundreds of female students. Most were founded under the umbrellas of the AME and Baptist denominations. Graduates of schools such as Fisk University, Philander Smith University and Spelman College continued the legacy of women who first became literate in Freedmen’s schools and churches. It is a testament to the worth black families and particularly women placed upon such institutions, as struggling families strived to “give their daughters the advantages” of schools such as Spelman, a women-only college that transformed students into nurses, teachers, social workers and other professionals but also stressed the refinement, decorum, chastity and piety that became *ladies*.⁹⁵

⁹⁴ Hull, Scott, and Smith, *But Some of Us Are Brave*, xxv; Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent*, 20.

⁹⁵ H. E. Giles, “Spelman Seminary,” in *The Baptist Home Mission Monthly*, Volumes 23-24 (New York: The American Baptist Home Mission Society, 1901), 316, <https://books.google.com/books?id=EU3PAAAAMAAJ&pg=PA133&lpg=PA133&dq=anthony>

The emergence of black Greek organizations on college campuses emphasized such respectability politics. Beginning with the formation of Alpha Kappa Alpha (AKA) at Howard University in 1908, black sororities played an instrumental role in molding young women into the *ladies* who became the link between their families and social uplift. Sororities, like fraternities, emphasized the need to address material poverty and intellectual want amongst scores of black communities that were often the same ones from which first-generation college girls hailed. Sororities were also vehicles to fight intersectional discrimination that faced black coeds and black women in general. Despite the historic and contemporary importance of black women in the public sphere, traditional Victoriana gender norms stressed sexual stratification that prized paternalistic authority. Therefore, sororities existed for community self-help while also addressing the “double bind of race and gender” that included what historian Deborah Whaley has dubbed “counterpublic-sphere efforts” that continue to range from benevolent reform to radical political intervention.⁹⁶ Organizing in the name of black womanhood, socioeconomic conditions for black people and overall black empowerment, however, existed alongside a sort of social rebirth of soros. Translated into Greek, AKA stands for *Askosis Kai Axiosis*, meaning “*by culture and by merit.*” Founded by Ethel Octavia Hedgeman Lyle, this first black sorority prepared young women to become professionals to pay “an everlasting debt to raise [black people] up and make them better.” AKA also sought to turn its sisters into *ladies*.

+binga+baptist+home+mission+monthly&source=bl&ots=ZnapZx6yTG&sig=ACvKO3FGKDxnLi3PcosDIANsZbw&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0CBQQ6AEwAGoVChMI-pXn2YCnxwIVVxeSCh1tdgKY#v=onepage&q=mothers%20&f=false [accessed August 5, 2015].

⁹⁶ Tamara L. Brown, Gregory S. Parks, and Clarenda M. Phillips, *African American Fraternities and Sororities: The Legacy and the Vision* (Lexington, Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 2005), 168; Deborah Elizabeth Whaley, *Disciplining Women: Alpha Kappa Alpha, Black Counterpublics, and the Cultural Politics of Black Sororities* (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 2010), 30.

From its inception, the sorority stressed the “excellence of its members” that translated into academic and professional achievement, and upright womanhood. Training classes instilled or reinforced proper etiquette and social graces. Charm, benevolence, and *virtue* were prized characteristics of the young girls who represented “the highest—more education, more enlightenment, and more of almost everything that the great mass of Negroes ever had” and who in the twenty-first century, refer to their sisters as the “phirst and phinest.”⁹⁷ Fastidious attention to manners, personal appearance and taste separated “colored women of education and culture” from “their most depraved sisters,” noted Mary Church Terrell, a celebrated Delta Sigma Theta.⁹⁸ Founded by former AKAs who wanted to their sorority to participate more aggressively in the women’s suffrage movement, twenty-two young ladies formed Delta Sigma Theta at Howard University in 1913. This new organization included an intense social justice agenda within the trappings of respectable black femininity. The consummate Delta, Terrell also co-founded the National Association for Colored Women (NACW) while she worked as a leading suffragette. In particular, she personified middle-class and elite black femininity that desired to “lift as we climb” by “coming into close touch with the masses of our women”—but not too

⁹⁷ Stephanie Y. Evans, “The Vision of Virtuous Women: The Twenty Pearls of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority,” in Gregory S. Parks, *Black Greek-Letter Organizations in the 21st Century: Our Fight Has Just Begun* (Lexington, Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 2008), 41; Lawrence C. Ross, *The Divine Nine: The History of African American Fraternities and Sororities* (New York: Dafina Books, 2000), 167; History of Alpha Kappa Alpha, Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc. <http://aka1908.com/about/history>; Interview with DeShaun Artis (Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc.—Kappa Kappa Chapter) and Ayana Gray (Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc.—Kappa Iota Chapter). Conducted by Misti Nicole Harper via Facebook, March 21, 2017. “Phirst and Phinest” honors the Greek relationship and marriage between AKA founder Ethel Octavia Hedgeman Lyle and her husband, George Lyle, who founded the Beta chapter of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc. at Howard University.

⁹⁸ Mary Church Terrell, “The Progress of Colored Women,” presented at the National American Woman Suffrage Association (Washington, DC, 1898).

close.⁹⁹ Intricately intertwined with general Victorian zeal for social reform was the equally zealous (and lasting) belief that class reflected morality. Sorors ideally exemplified unimpeachable virtue. Stringent adherence to social mores, in addition to church, education and activism, defined the young Deltas—and later, the Betas and the Rhos of Zeta Phi Beta and Sigma Gamma Rho, respectively—as black *ladies* set apart from the common masses. With their education, moral grace, and social polish, the black middle class lauded such women and underlined their belief that “*mothers* [gave] caste to society.” This argument did echo sentiments of colonial intellectuals and white women who had argued for women’s access to higher education on the grounds that it was mothers who first taught children to be good citizens.¹⁰⁰ Uneducated black women suffered even greater disadvantages than in an increasingly hostile South that resented black independence and especially, black women’s rejection of white subjugation. Middle-class black families assumed that uneducated women could not meet the demands of racial uplift theory that argued women “left an indelible imprint on the character of

⁹⁹ Ibid; Ross, *The Divine Nine*, 215-17; Jessica Harris, “Women of Vision, Catalysts for Change: The Founders of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority,” in Parks, *Black Greek-Letter Organizations*, 75-94; Paula Giddings, *In Search of Sisterhood: Delta Sigma Theta and the Challenge of the Black Sorority Movement* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2009); Interview with Jasmine Spears (Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc.—Lambda Theta Chapter). Conducted by Misti Nicole Harper via Facebook, March 21, 2017.

¹⁰⁰ Anthony Binga, “The Social Condition of the Freedman of the South,” *The Baptist Home Monthly*, 2 (March 1880): 24, in Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent*, 23; Simeon Doggett, “A Discourse on Education,” 1797, in *Essays on Education in the Early Republic*, ed. Frederick Rudolph (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1965); Judith Sargent Murray to Miss Mary Fallan, 9 June 1788, Letterbook, 3:119; Judith Stevens to Anna_____, 23 June 1785, Letterbook, 2:340; Judith Stevens to Miss Gardiner, 8 September 1785, Letterbook, 3:11; Judith Sargent Murray to Winthrop Sargent, [September 1803], Letterbook, 12:878, in Sheila L. Kemp, *Judith Sargent Murray: A Brief History with Documents* (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 1998), 88. Emphasis within the quote is my own.

society, whether they worked as wives and mothers in their own homes, or indirectly influenced other homes through work as teacher” or in other professions.¹⁰¹

Resentment against increasingly visible, intellectual and mobilized middle-class black women manifested particularly amongst upper-class Southern white women. Anger boiled over especially among white women who agitated for the vote at the turn of the century. Suffragette leaders argued that the “question of white supremacy” and the “negro question” could only be decided “by giving the right of the ballot to the dedicated, intelligent white women of the South,” which effectively barred all black women from political participation.¹⁰² Elite and middle-class leadership within the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA) made concerted efforts to ban black women from white feminist movements. Working-class white women needed the assurance that black women could not threaten their social position even more so than liberal Southern females. Looming integration made this need even more profound amongst working-class segregationist women in 1957.

Intense separation contributed to working-class and poor women’s sexual, social and political fears of black society, and specifically of rival black femininity. These factors fostered a breeding ground ripe for the racial hysteria and accompanying atrocities that swept the South in the years after the war. During slavery, elite and non-elite white society lived in a pathological fear of uprisings that historian Allen Trelease has dubbed “black terror.”¹⁰³ Interviews with

¹⁰¹ *Tenth Annual Report of the Woman’s American Baptist Home Mission Society Held in the First Baptist Church, Worcester, Massachusetts, May 2, 1888* (Boston: C. H. Simonds, 1888), 18, in Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent*, 24.

¹⁰² Marjorie Julian Spruill, “Race, Reform and Reaction at the Turn of the Century: Southern Suffragists, the NAWSA, and the ‘Southern Strategy’ in Context” in Jean H. Baker, *Votes for Women: The Struggle for Suffrage Revisited* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 107-108.

¹⁰³ Trelease, xxi.

former slaves yielded evidence masters grew crueler and violent responses from slaves increased as war became inevitable.¹⁰⁴ In the postwar years, black terror manifested itself amongst white society as black Southerners tried to assert their independence and resist white abuse. In southeastern Arkansas, black and white men rioted over black men's rejection of the 1867 Black Codes that prevented them from voting.¹⁰⁵ Howard County, in southwestern Arkansas, witnessed the arrests of forty-three black men and the hanging of another when they tried to citizens' arrest a white man for the rape of a black girl in 1883.¹⁰⁶ Armed black males willing to challenge white authority recalled the infamous uprisings of Saint Domingue, Denmark Vesey, and Nat Turner.¹⁰⁷ That black men took up arms in defense of black womanhood rattled white men and women for whom the concept of protected black femininity appeared absurd. Ida B. Wells-Barnett, one of the most prolific black female reformers and suffragists, wrote in 1895 at the beginning of her anti-lynching campaign that, "True chivalry respect[ed] *all* womanhood," and not merely pedestaled white femininity.¹⁰⁸ Wells-Barnett's grief and indignation of the astronomical numbers of lynched black men matched her outrage of white sexual abuse of black female bodies, and was undoubtedly buttressed by her own middle-class status and demands to

¹⁰⁴ Bynum, 113-115.

¹⁰⁵ Grif Stockley, *Race Relations in the Natural State* (Little Rock: Butler Center for Arkansas Studies, 2007), 72.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid, 69-70.

¹⁰⁷ James, *The Black Jacobins*, Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995); Douglas Edgerton, *He Shall Go Out Free: The Lives of Denmark Vesey* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2004); David Robertson, *Denmark Vesey: The Buried History of America's Largest Slave Rebellion and the Man who Led It* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1999); *The Confessions of Nat Turner and Related Documents* (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 1996); and Kenneth S. Greenberg, *Nat Turner: A Slave Rebellion in History and Memory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).

¹⁰⁸ Ida B. Wells-Barnett, "A Red Record," in *On Lynchings* (Amherst, New York: Humanity Books, 2002), 38.

be recognized as a lady. Additional insult for Wells-Barnett lay in the fact that the overwhelming majority of lynched black men suffered so because of accusations of raping white women. Whipping, beating, flaying, genital mutilation and finally, death at the hands of white mobs served as attempts to re-subjugate black people of all classes, but especially those deemed too successful, too willful, too independent. White defenses of lynching generally argued that black men were “too intimate with some white woman,” so that vigilante murder wrapped itself in presumptions of gentlemanly valor and heroism that also firmly held racial status quo in check.¹⁰⁹ Smarting from the gross racial injustices perpetrated by white Southerners, as well as the sexualized presumptions that black women were never victimized by rape and assault, Wells-Barnett lashed back in an essay that such accusations were so numerous that “nobody in the South believe[d] the old thread bare lie that negro men rape[d] white women” and that there were in fact, many white Southern women who “love[d] Afro-American’s company.”¹¹⁰ Her words surely resonated with all black women who suffered indignities, sexual and otherwise. Certainly, though, middle-class black womanhood appreciated Wells-Barnett’s demands that their status, respectability and femininity be acknowledged and defended on par with that of all white women who enjoyed protection and privilege even when they transgressed white social mores by engaging in consensual interracial relationships.

Mary Church Terrell similarly dispelled claims that whiteness granted piety, as “virtuous” middle-class black womanhood stood in stark contrast to European suffragettes who reveled in liberal sexual mores.¹¹¹ Addie Hunton, who served as a suffragette and as an

¹⁰⁹ Catherine Clinton and Nina Silber, *Battle Scars: Gender and Sexuality in the American Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 152, 194-195.

¹¹⁰ Jacqueline Jones Royster, *Southern Horrors and Other Writings: The Anti-Lynching Campaign of Ida B. Wells, 1892-1900* (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 1997), 52, 58.

¹¹¹ Feimster, *Southern Horrors*, 110.

organizer for NACW, echoed Wells over a decade later when she declared that Southern white women's virtue was predicated upon an "unmentionable history" that violated "the souls and bodies of Negro women."¹¹² Nevertheless, rape and violence against black women and girls consistently resulted in the protection of white men who committed such crimes, while white newspapers reported "constant" affronts to white womanhood by black men and dismissed accusations from black women and girls as outright lies or as examples of black female lasciviousness that tempted white men.¹¹³ Brutality in Arkansas, and similar injustices across the South, ensured that misplaced terror shaded white reality in the last decades of the nineteenth century, continued to do so in the twentieth, and undoubtedly influenced the sexualized backlash against the six black teenage girls and Daisy Bates in 1957.

Women such as Hunton, Terrell, and Wells-Barnett pointed out the hypocrisy of assumed white virtue or plainly demanded that white men and women take responsibility for creating and sustaining the stereotypes used to abuse and murder black men and women of all class statuses. Yet black middle-class sensibilities permeated their activities and arguments, as evidenced by Hunton's and Terrell's work in NACW, and Wells-Barnett's efforts as a founding member of the decidedly middle-class NAACP in 1906. 'Clubwomen' organized into a myriad of uplift societies throughout the last decades of the nineteenth century and into the twentieth. Dedicated to educating the black masses and combating injustice, these clubs also addressed and condemned working-class social behaviors through a quietly acknowledged, ironically paternalistic lens for the sake of respectability politics. Terrell affirmed that black women had "more to do than other women...we must go into our communities and improve them...we must

¹¹² Addie Hunton, "Negro Womanhood Defended," *Voice of the Negro* 1, No. 7 (March 1904): 280-82.

¹¹³ Feimster, *Southern Horrors*, 91-93.

go into our nation and change it.”¹¹⁴ Clubwomen recognized the intersectional problems of class, race, and gender that they believed compelled them to fight for equality and justice by appealing to the Victorian social mores that white society prized. Pervading stereotypes of black women as inherently immoral forced middle-class women to cleave to a narrow definition of respectability and femininity.

One of the foremost clubwomen of the era, Anna Julia Cooper committed to racial and feminine uplift with a shrewdly middle-class mold. While she and other of her standing sympathized with the disadvantages of working-class black women that prevented them from the educational, economic and social opportunities, they also scolded the working-class drinking, dancing and other ‘common’ revelry; they viewed the emotiveness with abject horror. Cooper and her contemporaries compared loud, impassioned black people to monkeys without even “semi-civilized solemnity.”¹¹⁵ Middle-class conceit and revulsion at working-class expressions of community are perhaps more understandable when they are examined against the backdrop of emerging social Darwinism pseudo-science that argued the human race developed through survival-of-the-fittest in which the most advanced humans dominated their inferiors.¹¹⁶ This thinking that dominated Euro-American scientific thought from the 1890s until the 1920s, affirmed to white people that Anglo-Saxons were the most evolved humans. Darker people, particularly Africans, remained nearly animals whose behavior must be policed and whose place

¹¹⁴ Mary Church Terrell, Speech at Mount Zion African Methodist Episcopal Church, Charleston, South Carolina (1916), in White, *Too Heavy a Load*, 22. Emphasis within Terrell’s quote is my own.

¹¹⁵ White, *Too Heavy a Load*, 72.

¹¹⁶ Robert C. Bannister, *Social Darwinism: Science and Myth in Anglo-American Social Thought* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1979); Mike Hawkins, *Social Darwinism in European and American Thought, 1860-1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Richard Hofstadter, *Social Darwinism in American Thought* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992).

must be maintained to avoid the natural danger they presented to civilized society.¹¹⁷ All black Southerners recognized that social Darwinism justified separation and oppression among white society that was rapidly leaping toward *de jure* Jim Crow. Black women of the ‘better sort’ attempted to circumvent the worst excesses of state-sponsored racism to coax white people into recognizing them as fellow moral stewardesses in the ‘cult of true womanhood’ that emphasized middle-class and elite (white) women as the arbiters of staid Christian morality in their homes and the public domain. Even women such as the fiery Wells harkened back to middle-class respectability standards as a means of protection for black women and a defense of black femininity against white demonization that insisted all black women were “spiteful,” “promiscuous,” “conniving,” and “dangerous.”¹¹⁸ In 1957, Daisy Bates and the six specially selected teenage girls who integrated Central High School did not seek white approval or perform for the white gaze. What they did do was personify the respectability politics based on *black* class structures, that clubwomen used to assert themselves as educated, polished, and upright *ladies* who were worthy of the title and its adjacent privileges. The vetting process that determined each girl’s faith, the status of her family, and content of her character in 1957 recalled exactly the kind of intersectional measures that middle-class black women undertook as a means of racial and gendered protection at the end of the nineteenth century. Ironically, the United States Supreme Court enshrined second-class citizen status for black Southerners through the myth of ‘separate but equal’ that was the heart of the landmark 1896 case, *Plessy v. Ferguson*. Codified *de jure* racial hierarchy officially ruled the Old Confederacy after Homer

¹¹⁷ Michael W. Fitzgerald, *Splendid Failure: Postwar Reconstruction in the American South* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, Publisher, 2007), 49; Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow*, 62-64; Trelease, xliii.

¹¹⁸ Feimster, *Southern Horrors*, 160-66.

Plessy lost his lawsuit to ride in any of New Orleans' street cars, not merely the ones designated for black passengers. Middle-class blackness demanded its dignity in a South that grew increasingly hostile and dangerous to challenges presented by people who could not be forced back into an actual legal state of servitude. Black women who strived to better the conditions of their communities and to present themselves as respectable ladies recognized the perils of the nascent 'New South,' and it was into these hazards that Daisy Lee Gatson was born.

Chapter Two: Portrait of a (Invented) Lady: The Making of “Mrs. Bates”

The village of Huttig was founded as a sawmill town in 1904 in Union County, merely two miles from the Louisiana state line in south-central Arkansas. A census taken in 2000 recorded 731 residents--not the state's smallest population, but one that resembles hundreds of other dying towns that dot the timberland region. A trained eye can discern how a century's worth of oil booms and busts all around Huttig ruined the soil and neighboring local economies that disappeared as wells dried; defunct sawmills inside of the community stand as quiet testaments to the thriving lumber industry that promised opportunities to white families in this part of the state during the early decades of the twentieth century. Faulknerian exhaustion emanates from the ground where Jim Crow defined every facet of life in Huttig until the 1960s, and where as recently as 2011, the town's first black mayor endured harassment and terrorism from white citizens.¹¹⁹ In that sense, Daisy Bates might recognize remnants of the community into which she was born and about which she stated were “painful...to write.”¹²⁰

Her memoirs record that Main Street neatly divided “cordial” Huttig into “‘White Town’ and ‘Negra Town’” but that she did not fully understand the social implications of being black until she tried to order meat in a public market, whereupon the butcher informed her that “Niggers had to wait ‘til [he waited] on the white people.”¹²¹ Bates' recollection is actually unremarkable considering that all black Southerners in the early decades of the twentieth century had double-consciousness thrust upon them in childhood; her story resonates because Bates

¹¹⁹ David Koon, “Trouble in Huttig,” *The Arkansas Times*, November 30, 2011.

¹²⁰ “Little Rock Story Told in New Book by Heroine,” *The Carolina Times*, Saturday, June 2, 1962 (Daisy Bates Papers, Mss 523 Box 3, Folder One, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, Wisconsin).

¹²¹ Daisy Bates, *The Long Shadow of Little Rock* (Fayetteville, Arkansas: University of Arkansas Press, 1987), 7-8.

became one of the most famous figures of the American civil rights movement. Her memory of the butcher also seared into her mind that she deserved to be recognized as a respectable *lady*.

Bates noted that she was seven years old the first time she experienced the raw racism of Jim Crow. Her precise birthdate is shrouded in mystery, as is much of her early life in Huttig. In a 1955 police investigation, Bates' husband stated that she was born on November 11, 1914.¹²² However, her recollection of her age when she visited the butcher shop places her birthdate at least one year earlier than filed by the Arkansas State Police. Daisy Lee Gatson appears in town census records for the first time in 1920. If her estimation of her age in her memoir is correct, that is the year Daisy Bates (néé, Gatson) walked to the market and officially entered public blackness. Census records list her as the foster child of Susie and Orlee Smith who reared her until she was an older teenager and whom she referenced as her family all of her life. No birth certificate exists for Bates, and her parentage is a matter of intense debate. According to archivists at the State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Bates' niece and Gatson family historian, Melenda Gatson Hunter, arrived in Madison in 2001 with copies of Bates' delayed birth certificate that was issued by the Arkansas State Board of Health on August 10, 1962, as well as the marriage license of Hezekiah C. Gatson and M. B. Boyette. Hunter argues that her research reveals that the young couple married in 1915 in Farmerville, Louisiana were her aunt's parents. It is certainly possible, given that Farmerville lies in Union Parish, just across the state line from Huttig, and that it is wholly plausible that her parents could have been teenagers (seventeen and fifteen, respectively) at the time of Daisy Bates' estimated birth in 1913. Moreover, a large family of Gatsons lived in Union Parish, and there is record for thirteen-year-old "Hezichia [*sic*]

¹²² LC and Daisy Bates' Personal History, (Orval E. Faubus Papers, MS F271, 301, Box 497, Folder 11, Special Collection, University of Arkansas, Fayetteville, Arkansas).

Gatson” in the 1910 federal census. This young man is listed as the son of Luke Gatson, a self-employed black farmer, and Millie Gatson—a “mulatto” immigrant born in Germany, to Turkish parents. As will be discussed, Daisy Bates’ birth father’s racial status has been perpetually questioned. It is entirely possible that mixed-race “Hezichia” is actually the man listed on Hunter’s marriage certificate.¹²³

Yet at the height of her fame as a civil rights activist, Bates claimed her parents as “John Gatson” and “Millie Riley” as per the names on her delayed birth certificate.¹²⁴ This certificate is a curious document. Its release just before the unveiling of *The Long Shadow of Little Rock* in September 1962 reveals Bates’ self-educated understanding of public relations and marketing. Her birth certificate also highlights a clear preoccupation with the respectability standards that defined middle-class standing in the black community, as well as approval from admiring white progressives. Though the certificate did not list Gatson and Riley as married, being able to cite her birth parents while still referencing the Smiths as guardians who instilled in her the tenants of hard work and racial dignity allowed Bates a point of origin that mitigated awkward gaps and truths in her personal history over which social conventions labeled her ‘illegitimate.’

Sensitivity to the conditions and potential social meanings that surrounded her birth may have led Bates to craft more than one story to explain her early circumstances. In the autobiography she first published in 1962, Bates recounted that Orlee Smith revealed to her that

¹²³ Stockley, *Daisy Bates*, 18; Marriage License of H.C. Gatson and M.B. Boyette, (Daisy Bates Papers, Mss 523 Box 3, Folder One, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, Wisconsin); Thirteenth Census of the United States: 1910 Population, Ward 6, Precinct 2, Union Parish, Louisiana. Department of Commerce and Labor—Bureau of the Census https://www.ancestryheritagequest.com/interactive/7884/31111_4330002-00405?pid=173071933&backurl=http://search.ancestryheritagequest.com/cgi-bin/sse.dll?db%3D1910USCenIndex%26indiv%3Dtry%26h%3D173071933&treeid=&personid=&hintid=&usePUB=true&usePUBJs=true (accessed July 18, 2016).

¹²⁴ Delayed Birth Certificate for Daisy Gatson Bates, *Ibid.*

her biological mother had been brutally raped and murdered by three white men in Huttig. According to Bates' memoir, her beloved foster father told her of the "timeworn lust of the white man for the Negro woman that strikes at the heart of every Negro man in the South."¹²⁵ While this story is entirely plausible in the context of black women's sexual exploitation in the South, the horrific death of Ms. Riley is a point of controversy and contention. In his admirable exploration of Daisy Bates' life and work, historian Grif Stockley notes that the now-defunct *Huttig News* does not corroborate Riley's murder in the era in which she would have died. It is possible that Minnie Harris, another black woman whose killing was confirmed by newspaper records, is actually Bates' mother.¹²⁶ However, the existence and community acknowledgement of Ms. Harris renders unlikely that she gave birth to a daughter who would not know her name or whose name would not be recounted in the reminiscences of Smith relatives about Daisy Bates' lineage. This logic may also be applied to Miss M. B. Boyette, who married Hezekiah Gatson in Farmerville, Louisiana. As of this writing, no evidence suggests that a Miss Boyette or Mrs. Gatson fitting the description of Bates' mother suffered a violent and tragic death in the Huttig area. As the report of Minnie Harris' death also highlights, it is doubtful that the murder of Ms. Riley or Mrs. M.B. Boyette Gatson would have been ignored. Though white-owned newspapers did not acknowledge the rape of black women and girls as sexual assault, historian Crystal Feimster has proven that black women's deaths were published in white newspapers even when they did not engender sympathy amongst the papers' audiences.¹²⁷ For certain, black-owned Arkansas newspapers covered instances of rape and sexual misconduct as crimes, and as matters of principle to highlight abuses of black communities by white society. The *Arkansas Weekly*

¹²⁵ Bates, *The Long Shadow of Little Rock*, 15.

¹²⁶ Stockley, *Daisy Bates*, 16-17.

¹²⁷ Feimster, *Southern Horrors*, 93, 121-23.

Mansion, published in Little Rock, revealed that the possible sexual assault of a young black girl sparked one of the state's most infamous race riots in southwestern Howard County in 1883.¹²⁸ That Millie Riley or Mrs. M.B. Boyette Gatson's murder would have gone entirely unsubstantiated is improbable.

The missing information is even more suspect in remembrances of her looks and personality. Described as "very pretty," with "dark brown" skin and "long black hair," Daisy's mother was attractive enough to merit frightening attention.¹²⁹ Moreover, when Bates learned of the murder, Orlee Smith added that her mother was "not the kind to submit, so they took her."¹³⁰ Bates' memory of this moment underscores black women's historic resistance to white men's abuses and highlights this woman's tenacity, bravery and self-respect as *Daisy's* birthright that she put to brilliant display as an adult. Nevertheless, the beauty of Daisy's mother and Smith's revelation of her defiance perpetuate the question of her ambiguity in the social record. The woman painted in this portrait was not the sort to quietly disappear—indeed, childhood friends of Bates' recounted that Huttig's black *and* white communities took note when this woman vanished.¹³¹ The provocative possibility remains that Bates-the-activist may have fabricated the grisly story of her biological mother's death. Such a decision would have served a two-fold purpose. The violation and death of a beautiful young person would recall fresh public memories of the wrenching lynching of fourteen-year-old Emmett Till in Mississippi just seven summers earlier; the abuses of the nine black teenagers at Little Rock Central High School in 1957; and the more recent efforts of the non-violent sit-in movements and Freedom Rides of the

¹²⁸ *Arkansas Weekly Mansion*, September 8, 1883.

¹²⁹ Bates, *The Long Shadow of Little Rock*, 12.

¹³⁰ *Ibid*, 15.

¹³¹ *Ibid*, 12.

early 1960s that were organized by teenagers and college students.¹³² Daisy Bates also understood the value of injured femininity. A beautiful young woman and mother sexually assaulted and murdered might resonate deeply American sensibilities that girls and women, regardless of color, deserved protection under the law. She may have calculated that white and black audiences alike would respond to this intensely personal, painful story. The former, recently indignant at the horrifying realities of white supremacy pouring into their living rooms via television, could potentially be shocked and galvanized into social action. The *latter* intimately knew the reality of white men's sexual and violent impulses. Clifton Broughton, a nephew of Susie Smith who would have been a surrogate cousin to Bates, tacitly admits that Riley's death may have been an invention. To Grif Stockley, Broughton affirmed that "Daisy didn't know who her people were."¹³³ In a 1962 interview with a Durham newspaper, Bates offered a seemingly innocuous statement about her memoir that is tantalizing with fifty-four years of hindsight: "I tried to take in the *whole scope* of the struggle in this country at that time."¹³⁴

¹³² For a primer on Emmett Till, the early sit-in movement and the Freedom Riders, see Stephen J. Whitfield, *A Death in the Delta: The Story of Emmett Till* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1988); Devery S. Anderson, *Emmett Till: The Murder that Shocked the World and Propelled the Civil Rights Movement* (Oxford, Mississippi: The University Press of Mississippi, 2015); Timothy B. Tyson, *The Blood of Emmett Till* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2017); Anne Moody, *Coming of Age in Mississippi: The Classic Autobiography of Growing Up Poor and Black in the Rural South* (New York: Bantam Dell, 1968); Raymond Arsenault, *Freedom Riders; 1961 and the Struggle for Racial Justice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006); John Lewis, Andrew Aydin and Nate Powell, *MARCH* (Marietta, Georgia: Top Shelf Productions, 2013); John Lewis, *Walking with the Wind: A Memoir of the Movement* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1998).

¹³³ Stockley, *Daisy Bates*, 18.

¹³⁴ "Little Rock Story Told in New Book by Heroine," *The Carolina Times*, Saturday, June 2, 1962 (Daisy Bates Papers, Mss 523 Box 3, Folder One, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, Wisconsin).

Perhaps she did only mean that in writing her experiences, she worked to convey a sense of the enormity of what Little Rock came to mean in the context of civil rights. Yet, if her childhood recollections are even marginally accurate and not misremembered through the prisms of pragmatism and time, Bates understood the intersectional challenges to black womanhood when little white girls played in relative innocence to the profundity of Jim Crow to race, sex and class. How black women moved and navigated social spaces certainly constituted part of the whole scope of struggle even as those highly specific engagements were incorporated into black men's experiences or ignored completely. In her adulthood, Bates rarely offered candid or blithe remarks about anything pertaining to her role as a pivotal civil rights icon or who she was as a black Southern woman. Her calculation in the image she presented (or wanted to present) to the public manifested in every word she uttered; it is practically unthinkable that she interviewed for a newspaper on the eve of her book's publication without awareness of how her earliest life would be assayed. Therefore, the veracity of Bates' claims about her personal history matter less than the significance of the sudden documentation of her birth and her explanation for her mother's absence in her life. What is incontrovertible is that nothing at the beginning of her life marked Daisy Gatson Bates as 'respectable.'

That children bear no responsibility for their birth or familial circumstance is a quite modern idea. In the world of the Jim Crow South, white children born out of wedlock received little empathy, none of which was extended to a young black girl of similar parentage. Regardless of whether her biological mother died for being considered "the rightful prey of white gentlemen of the South...protected by neither public sentiment nor law," Bates was certainly the daughter of an unmarried woman, or a married woman who still bore a child out of wedlock, in an era of unmitigated racism and classism. Clubwomen in particular were desperate to eradicate

the pervading images of licentious black women and sought to police working-class and poor black women's behavior to achieve that end.¹³⁵ Her physical appearance and relatives' remarks about her looks potentially complicated Bates' social standing in Huttig even further. A light-skinned child, she recalled hearing that her biological father was "as light as some white folks," and Clifton Broughton has stated that he thinks "her daddy may have been white."¹³⁶ Evidence yielded from the 1910 federal census of Union Parish, Louisiana notes that Hezichia [*sic*] Gatson's parents were indeed an interracial couple, and at least one of their children may have been light-skinned enough to pass.¹³⁷ That census is a strong piece of evidence buttressing Melenda Gatson Hunter's claims that Hezekiah C. Gatson and M.B. Boyette are Bates' biological parents. If Hezichia/Hezekiah Gatson was her father, his heritage followed his daughter during the most volatile days of the Little Rock crisis when she received hate mail

¹³⁵ Mary Church Terrell, "Lynching from a Negro's Point of View," in George Harvey, *The North American Review*, Vol. CLXXVII (New York: Franklin Square, 1904), 865.

¹³⁶ Bates, *The Long Shadow of Little Rock*, 12; Stockley, *Daisy Bates*, 18.

¹³⁷ A very basic definition of *passing* is the phenomenon of people of people born to black parents or interracial parents, who are light skinned enough to pass as the offspring of white parents. The history of *passing* is intertwined with white privilege and white supremacist preference for lighter-skinned enslaved people; usage of the term is generally part of conversations surrounding post-*Plessy v. Ferguson* racial relations and the "one-drop" rule established by the Racial Integrity Act of 1924 of Virginia. The social and emotional complexities of *passing* are the subjects of biographies and personal narratives including Bliss Broyard's *One Drop: My Father's Hidden Life—A Story of Race and Family Secrets* (New York: Bay Back Books, 2007) and Allyson Hobbs' *A Chosen Exile: A History of Racial Passing in American Life* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2016). Fiction accounts include Nella Larsen's seminal *Passing* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1986), George Schuyler's *Black No More: Being an Account of the Strange and Wonderful Workings of Science in the Land of the Free, A.D. 1933-1940* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1989); and in the assorted works of Kate Chopin and Jean Toomer. Historical treatments of *passing* include Annette Gordon-Reed, *The Hemingses of Monticello: An American Family* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2009); Daniel J. Sharfstein, *Three American Families and the Secret Journey from Black to White* (New York: Penguin Books, 2011), and Michelle Gordon Jackson, *Light, Bright and Damn Near White: Black Leaders Created by the One-Drop Rule* (Atlanta: Jacksonscribe Publishing Company, 2013). These selections represent a fraction of the breadth of interdisciplinary work on this subject.

specifically questioning her race. One man who identified himself as “Florida Cracker” remarked that he did not know if she was “white—or colored and white,” while another writer from Kentucky groused that “anyone can see you have white blood in your veins, and no doubt the whites snub you.”¹³⁸ If that and the story of her mother’s rape and murder are accurate, Bates lived as an uncomfortable reminder of white men’s sexual hypocrisy in a town of fewer than 230 citizens of any color.¹³⁹ Even more difficult, she shared a roof with the Smiths, whom she loved but who never gave her their name and from whom Bates always differentiated herself by describing family members as her adopted mother, father, and kin. The Smiths were, in fact, her foster family. It is highly improbable that she survived childhood without any acquaintance making a reference to that fact.

Finally, Daisy Lee Gatson was born an illegitimate female, or she was born to a couple who married only after her birth. All black girls and women suffered under the misogynoir that victimized females with Jim Crow racism and sexism, and was further complicated by historical stereotypes that served to define ‘virtuous’ whiteness by ‘degraded’ blackness from infant girls’ first breath. In the forward of Bates’ memoir, Eleanor Roosevelt mused that black women bore a “double burden” wherein they were not only “considered members of an ‘inferior’ race, but as the ‘inferior’ sex of that race.”¹⁴⁰ Few people, black or white, would have expected an orphaned girl of color to exceed the dubious circumstances of her birth or local, sexualized memory of her single mother. Elite black society organized charity for and condescended to such women while

¹³⁸ Letters to Daisy Bates, 1957 (Mss 523, Box 1, Folder Two, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, Wisconsin).

¹³⁹ Census record of Lapilo Township, Union County, Arkansas, February 17, 1920, US Department of Commerce, Census Office, Fourteenth Census of the United States: 1920: Population, 228.

¹⁴⁰ Bates, *The Long Shadow of Little Rock*, xii.

keeping them at arms' length. White society at every social rung reveled in the near-impossibility of children like Daisy Lee Gatson to move beyond their born status as their existence bolstered the foundations of white supremacy. As an adult in the public spotlight, Bates implicitly understood the importance of controlling her personal narrative. Other notable contemporaries certainly shared an affinity for shaping their own history, including Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis. In her life, the former First Lady dictated the world's most exclusive social circles during her life by claiming to be the descendant of French aristocrats, instead of Irish house servants and compulsive gamblers. Bates shared "Jackie's" appreciation for self-invention that mattered infinitely more to the successes of an orphaned and illegitimate Southern black girl born into white America's Gilded Age.

Her preoccupation with respectability and transcending Jim Crow definitely began in childhood, instilled by the examples of her foster parents as much as by her initiation to racism. Orlee Smith contributed financial support to the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) headquarters in New York.¹⁴¹ The organization founded in 1909 by black and white activists relentlessly and publicly advocated for civil rights on a national scale and the end of Jim Crow abuses in the South. NAACP members also presented (or strived to present) themselves as standard bearers for black middle-class respectability. Throughout her life, Bates insisted that her foster father reared her to be a lady, and in funding the nation's most prolific racial justice society, Orlee Smith affirmed his family's status as the 'better sort' who emulated the uplift and worked toward the advancement of black people.¹⁴² In an era during

¹⁴¹ Stockley, *Daisy Bates*, 53.

¹⁴² Ibid, 20, 54, 192; "Daisy Bates: Arkansas Fighter," *Jet Magazine*, October 17, 1957. For varied examinations of the NAACP and classism, see Amy and Marcus Garvey, *Philosophy and Opinions of Marcus Garvey: Or, Africa for the African* (London: Cass Publishers, 1967); Charles Kellog Flint, *NAACP: A History of the National Association for the Advancement of*

which association with the NAACP presented great personal risks to Southern black men, Orlee Smith's donations showcase defiance and quite courage in the face of white terrorism. Bates certainly remembered his bravery when she began working for the organization in Little Rock and eventually ascended as the president of the state chapter in 1952 as the civil rights movement began gaining momentum. Orlee Smith's example strengthened her own innate nerve.

However, in most aspects, "Mother" oversaw the instruction of her foster daughter. Susie Smith provided religious guidance and social dictates that solidified the Smiths' reputation within Huttig's black community as a decent Christian family. Other markers, including Orlee Smith's job as a mill worker, suggest that the Smith family occupied middle-class status among their friends and neighbors. Susie Smith did not have to work outside her home or in the employment of white people. As neither she nor her husband boasted the education or skills that made such an arrangement more common in black families, that privilege serves as a poignant status marker that Bates internalized as a symbol of womanhood and propriety. Susie Smith behaved like a lady. Sternly devout and dignified, she emulated Booker T. Washington's fanaticism with spatial and personal neatness that encompassed her home and her family that included young Daisy Lee Gatson. The mores of the Smiths' church denomination also demanded rapt attention to physical hygiene and purity of bodies and spaces. Susie and Orlee Smith belonged to the Sanctified Church, commonly known as the Church of God in Christ (COGIC). Emotive, evangelical and fundamental in its worship style and beliefs, COGIC

Colored People, 1909-1920 (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1967); Daniel U. Levine, et al, "Differences between Black Youth who Support the Black Panthers and the NAACP," *The Journal of Negro Education* Vol. 42, No. 1 (Winter, 1973), 19-32; H. Viscount Nelson, "The Philadelphia NAACP: Race Versus Class Consciousness during the Thirties," *Journal of Black Studies* Vol. 5, No. 3, (March 1975), 255-76; Bernard Eisenberg, "Only for the Bourgeois: James Weldon Johnson and the NAACP, 1916-1930," *Phylon* Vol. 43, No. 2, (2nd Quarter, 1982), 110-24.

churches appealed to the masses of working-class, impoverished black Southerners whose spiritual praise neither resembled the reserved worship forms of AME or Baptists congregations, or aspired (by want or ability) to perform the middle- and elite class markers that generally separated working-class black people. In this way, the Smiths are an interesting couple in that their marriage and household shared middle-class characteristics, but they still identified with COGIC. In her memoir, Bates attributed the spotlessness of their family church that stood just behind the Smith home, to her mother and the “Sisters” who gave the congregation pride in their worship space despite its humble exterior. For COGIC women, cleanliness represented spiritual purity that linked congregants to Jesus, as well as projected the decency of a community who did not have the tangible markers or access to liberal arts education that established them as the ‘better sort.’ One adage repeated in working-class Southern homes for more than a hundred years, regardless of race, is “*Just because we’re poor, don’t mean we’re nasty.*”¹⁴³ This phrase not only reminds Southern children to wash properly and look neat. It instills the lesson that certain graces transcend economic means, and this was (and is) the social bedrock of COGIC.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴³ The author, daughter of a Louisiana mill worker and an Arkansas cook, was reared on this adage by three generations of older female family members, and has listened to and seen the saying affirmed and reaffirmed in black and white working-class households throughout the South.

¹⁴⁴ Booker T. Washington, *Up from Slavery* (Ossining, New York: Seahorse Publishing, 2013); Judith Bloom Frandin and Dennis B. Frandin, *The Power of One: Daisy Bates and the Little Rock Nine* (New York: Clarion Books, 2004), 11-12. For investigation of the history and cultural mores of the Church of God in Christ, see Cheryl Townsend Gilkes, “‘Together and in Harness’: Women’s Traditions in the Sanctified Church,” *Signs* Vol. 10, No. 4 (Summer 1985), 678-699; Anthea Butler, *Women of the Church of God in Christ: Making a Sanctified World* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press 2007); Calvin White, Jr. “In the Beginning, There Stood Two: Arkansas Roots of the Black Holiness Movement,” *The Arkansas Historical Quarterly* Vol. 68, No. 1 (Spring 2009), 1-22; Calvin White, Jr. *The Rise to Respectability: Race, Religion, and the Church of God in Christ* (Fayetteville, Arkansas: University of Arkansas Press, 2012); Elton H. Weaver III, “‘Working with Our Own Hands’: Church of God in Christ Women in Tennessee, Early 1900s-1950s,” in Beverley Greene Bond and Sarah Wilkerson Freeman, *Tennessee Women: Their Life and Times* (Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 2015).

Emulating the ethos of the “women’s era” of the early twentieth century, Smith and COGIC women who maintained their sanctuary and their homes reflected Nannie Helen Burroughs’s motto of “Bible, Bath and Broom” that offered moral grounding and racial advancement amid the confines of Jim Crow. “Worthwhile” black women strived for impeccable surfaces that mirrored intangible chastity, temperance, and refinement. Cleanliness created armor against and defied the white gaze that attempted to dismiss ladylike qualities manifest in black women.¹⁴⁵

Conscientious deportment further allowed black women to control their image rather than be dictated to by white imagination. As a fine COGIC lady, Susie Smith resolutely discouraged her foster daughter from games and behaviors that all evangelical Christians deemed immoral, and therefore, disreputable. Irritated by her husband’s fondness for Saturday night gambling but outraged when Daisy emulated her foster father’s habit by playing “for keeps” marbles, Smith once yelled, “You see what you’re doing to your *daughter*?”¹⁴⁶ In a single outburst, her anger reveals the complexity of black womanhood that Bates intrinsically recognized as a child and that she carried into adulthood and activism. All sincere and practicing Southern evangelical Christians eschew worldly vice. As an unyielding COGIC mother, Susie Smith admonished gambling and a host of activities that her congregation and millions of Christian fundamentalists deemed hedonistic. Rejecting such indulgences not only preserved the souls of her family. In the context of blackness, Smith used the mantle of her faith to protect them from stereotypes of depravity that made black Southerners especially vulnerable to white policing and terrorism. Layered within that shield were Smith’s attempts to guard her foster daughter from accusations

¹⁴⁵ Ibid, 7; Butler, *Women of the Church of God in Christ*, 14, 20, 77, 81; White, *The Rise to Respectability*, 83-89; Victoria W. Wolcott, “‘Bible, Bath and Broom’: Nannie Helen Burroughs’s National Training School and African-American Racial Uplift,” *The Journal of Women’s History*, Vol. 9, Number 1 (Spring 1997): 93-95.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid, 27. Emphasis in the quotation is my own.

of licentiousness and impropriety that haunted black women whose corruption was generally assumed by white society. As they had during enslavement, Southern whites that maintained Jim Crow attempted to govern black entertainment, amusement, and joy. Black parents could not appreciate a myriad of recreation without exposing themselves and their children to character or physical retribution that often asserted itself as white violence on black female bodies. Even if Bates embellished the story of her biological mother's death, Susie Smith understood the perils that mere existence presented to black women and shamed her husband for playing into white stereotypes and skirting the black (and COGIC) respectability standards that might protect their foster daughter while simultaneously disproving white beliefs about black womanhood. That her husband wanted his foster daughter to behave with the propriety becoming a young lady but teased his wife about how good Daisy was at marbles offers an interesting window into a personal family dynamic and into intersectionality of black gender roles. Bates recounted Orlee Smith as a gentle, fun, and loving father throughout her life. Her affection for him shined, whereas her respect for Susie Smith originated from her foster mother's more severe personality. Susie's natural seriousness was almost certainly intensified by the boundaries placed on respectable womanhood that were compounded by race. Black women did not have the luxury of blithe indulgences in which men could partake without fear of permanent damage to their reputations. Male privilege, however limited, afforded Orlee Smith a laxity with the tenants of respectability that his wife and black women in general could never enjoy. 'Sexist' as a common descriptor of discrimination against women did not yet exist, but Susie Smith was keenly aware of the parameters set based upon her sex and race, and so she maintained vigilance over Daisy Lee Gatson's behavior. "Mother's" example demanded an irreproachable image that Bates valued as an adult and effectively employed during integration at Central High School.

As she internalized the tenets of respectable black womanhood, Bates also discerned the possibility of her femininity. A self-described “tomboy,” Bates’ lissome figure complimented her looks that garnered her lifelong attention and admiring recollections after her death. Cousins and childhood friends remarked that she greatly resembled her mother. Portraits and photographs taken in Bates’ adulthood showcase her legacy from Millie Riley, or Mrs. M.B. Boyette Gatson. Wide, dark eyes framed by long black lashes and overset with a heavy brow shine from a soft, round face whose apple cheeks and bowed lips that could reveal a perfect smile, all under a halo of gleaming black curls. Candid images of a middle-aged Bates during the most terrible and exhausting days of the Little Rock crisis still captured a luminous beauty that in her youth must have excited and terrified her because of the potential to attract unwelcomed attention from men or resentment from women.



Illustration 2
Daisy Gatson Bates
Photo Courtesy of The Arkansas State Press

In an important way, though, Bates differed from her mother. Her light skin contrasted with the memory of Millie Riley or Mrs. M.B. Boyette Gatson's dark-skinned loveliness. Bates' lightness inherited from her father prompted people to remember that she "looked almost like a white person."¹⁴⁷ If Bates navigated Huttig's white community as a constant reminder of those men's sexual transgressions, she also occupied an uncomfortable spot within black spaces. Skin color is an ancient standard by which non-laboring upper classes have separated themselves from working people who live most of their lives in the elements. In the race-based hierarchy of the enslaved South, white slave owners valued lighter-skinned bonds people over darker counterparts because of the former's perceived similarities to whiteness. This preference sometimes afforded privileges to lighter-skinned people that ranged the gamut of better food and working conditions, to freedom, and that helped spur the evolution of colorism that affected black communities.¹⁴⁸ Singularly black identity was reinforced in the early twentieth century, as social Darwinism and other pseudo-sciences advanced white supremacist thought. In 1918, sociologist Edward Byron Reuter outlined racial categories and declared interracial people "a problem" who complicated the mythical white superiority. Ratification of the Racial Integrity Act of 1924 crystalized racist science. The Virginia law infamously known as the "one-drop rule" was adopted throughout the South and affirmed that "a person of mixed white and Negro

¹⁴⁷ Ibid, 20, 26; Stockley, *Daisy Bates*, 20, 301.

¹⁴⁸ Margaret L. Hunter, "'If You're Light, You're Alright': Light Skin Color as Social Capital for Women of Color," *Gender and Society* Vol. 16, No. 2 (April 2002), 176-77. For historical dissections of colorism, see Kathy Russell-Cole, Midge Wilson and Ronald E. Hall, "The Emergence of Modern Colorism in the Americas," in *The Color Complex: The Politics of Skin Color in a New Millennium* Revised Edition (New York: Anchor Books, 2013), 3-25; Gordon-Reed, *The Hemingses of Monticello*; Jackson, *Light, Bright and Damn Near White*; Sybil Klein, *Creole: The History and Legacy of Louisiana's Free People of Color* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2000).

blood should be returned as Negro, no matter how small the percentage of Negro blood.”¹⁴⁹ Regardless of the definitive legal status of people with African ancestry, innumerable accounts and personal anecdotes reveal colorism as a complex intraracial issue wherein darker-skinned people perceived light-skinned privilege. Darker children in Depression-era New Orleans children noted differences between them and lighter-skinned Creole friends who could, and sometimes chose, to pass as white in public spaces.¹⁵⁰ Political scientists Jennifer L. Hochschild and Vesla Weaver have compared the differences of income, disorder and violence, and incarceration between light and dark-skinned black people in the twenty-first century United States, and they have convincingly argued that color plays a vital role in state punishment and intraracial perception.¹⁵¹

White supremacy and colorism also affected beauty standards when Daisy Lee Gatson was coming of age in Huttig. The title of literature professor Audrey Elise Kerr’s brilliant study, *The Paper Bag Test*, directly references a standard and practice by which color-conscious black people measured skin tones and perceived attractiveness. Sororities openly ‘tested’ pledges and rejected girls who failed. As late as the 1980s, coeds at predominantly-white Rutgers University insisted that AKAs still selected members based on perceived lightness, and that colorism persisted even worse at historically black campuses. Other degrading ‘tests’ included the ‘ruler test’ and the ‘shadow test.’ For the former, girls submitted to having a lock of hair extended the

¹⁴⁹ Edward Byron Reuter, *The Mulatto in the United States*, in Audrey Elise Kerr, *The Paper Bag Principle: Class, Colorism, and Rumor and the Case of Black Washington, D.C.* (Knoxville, Tennessee: University of Tennessee Press, 2006), 4-5; Jennifer L. Hochschild and Vesla Weaver, “The Skin Color Paradox and the American Racial Order,” *Social Forces* Vol. 86, No. 2 (December 2007), 655.

¹⁵⁰ Tyina L. Steptoe, *Houston Bound: Culture and Color in a Jim Crow City* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2016), 120-21.

¹⁵¹ Hochschild and Weaver, “The Skin Color Paradox and the American Racial Order,” 661.

length of the ruler. Pledges with hair that remained straight or did not spring back into tight natural curl texture ‘passed.’ ‘Shadow tests’ involved sorority sisters holding a light over pledges’ heads and judging the straightness of their noses and the fullness of their lips.¹⁵²

Indeed, the earliest photos of the first classes of AKA, Delta, Zeta and Rho sorors are populated by very light-skinned girls.

Pedestaling of Euro-centric features hardly began and ended with sororities. Racist beauty standards dominated (and dominate) popular culture, celebrity and advertising. Journalist Shannon M. Houston wrote in 2016 that “‘progress and visibility for blacks has almost always meant “‘progress’ and visibility for light-skinned blacks *first* (see everyone from Langston Hughes, to Halle Berry, to Beyoncé, to Barack Obama).”¹⁵³ In the early decades of the twentieth century, some black women exerted incredible effort to attain the lightest possible skin that made dear commodities of lightening powders and dangerous bleaching creams whose popularity continued until the 1970s. Black-owned beauty suppliers, including the dark-skinned Madam CJ Walker and Beckwith Manufacturing Company of Cleveland, Ohio, created such products for their clientele, while black-owned magazines proudly advertised products such as Black and White Bleaching Cream that promised “lighter, brighter skin!”¹⁵⁴ “*Light, bright, damn near white*” women lived in a complex paradox. Perceived advantages for light-skinned women were

¹⁵² Kerr, *The Paper Bag Test*, 25, 49-51; Interview with Ayana Gray (Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc.—Kappa Iota Chapter). Conducted by Misti Nicole Harper via Facebook, March 21, 2017.

¹⁵³ Shannon M. Houston, “All the Women Are Light-Skinned: Colorism Comes to Survivor’s Remorse,” *Paste Magazine*, August 15, 2016 <https://www.pastemagazine.com/articles/2016/08/all-the-women-are-light-skinned-colorism-comes-to.html> [accessed August 15, 2016].

¹⁵⁴ Blain Roberts, *Pageants, Parlors, and Pretty Women: Race and Beauty in the Twentieth-Century South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014), 78; *Ebony*, July 1960, 106; *Ebony*, September 1961, 79; *Ebony*, October 1966, 105.

so pervasive that the phrase ‘colorstruck’ was coined to describe black boys and men who were attracted to light-skinned women. Zora Neale Hurston’s play of the same name explores the pain and anger of darker-skinned women who understandably resented such perceived privileges. Other artists such as singers (and dark-skinned women) Bessie Smith and Nina Simone famously rejected colorism as an indicator of their attractiveness or worth.¹⁵⁵ Young Daisy Lee Gatson lived within uncompromising white supremacy and absorbed the images and insinuations that existed around her. It is fairly impossible to imagine that she did not consider her skin color as either an advantage or disadvantage—at least as a young girl. By adulthood, Daisy Bates was a definitively black and proud woman, no matter what racists wanted to make of her skin color, and she might have echoed Washington, DC Representative Eleanor Holmes Norton’s sentiments that “as a light skin Black woman...I am Black. That people who are my color in this country will always be treated as Black...”¹⁵⁶ What is fair to argue, however, is that colorism existed in public and private attitudes. Moreover, as a female child, Daisy probably did not avoid people in her black social circles at least mentioning the fact of her skin. It is not difficult to imagine such a girl, in such an era, wondering how her appearance might benefit her.

Bates understood from her youth that at least the beauty of her physical appearance offered her some advantages, as well as the potential to be recognized for her innate qualities. Associates, acquaintances and confidants recognized the force of her personality all of her life.

¹⁵⁵ *Colorstruck* (1929), in Jean Lee Cole and Charles Mitchell, *Zora Neale Hurston: Collected Plays* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2008); Lynsey Eidell, “7 Moments that Prove Bessie Is the Original Boss-Lady,” *Glamour*, May 18, 2015; Meeta Jha, *The Global Beauty Industry: Colorism, Racism and the National Body*, (London: Routledge, 2016), 33-34; *Light, Bright, Damn Near White*. Directed by CC Stinson. Austin, Texas: CCSquared Productions, 2006.

¹⁵⁶ Hochschild and Weaver, “The Skin Color Paradox and the American Racial Order,” 644.

Gloster B. Current, national director of NAACP branches, worked with Bates from her earliest involvement with the organization in the 1940s and was impressed by both her aggressiveness and her charm. “Vivacious,” charismatic, and fun loving, Bates attracted friends from the time she was a little girl in Huttig.¹⁵⁷ She was also imbued with a confidence and an iron will that empowered her to assertion. In retelling her account of her mother’s death, Bates recalled her despondency when she learned what happened to her mother, and her subsequent hatred for white people that culminated in slapping a white playmate. It is not difficult to imagine that a sad, enraged child would act out in that way or why she would. It is certain is that Daisy Lee Gatson knew the potentially dangerous consequences for a young black girl who hit a young white girl in the Jim Crow South. In fact, Bates knew of a young black boy who had refused to move off a Huttig sidewalk for a white girl, and whose father had beaten him for the insult under the threat of the white girl’s father.¹⁵⁸ If the incident occurred as Bates remembered, her actions underscore a self-assurance that enabled her to stand up when she believe she and others were wronged, and exercise that facet of her personality as a form of respectable black womanhood that refused to be denigrated by white supremacy.

The story also tacitly showcases recklessness within Bates that threatened the propriety that the Smiths tried to instill in their orphaned and perhaps-illegitimate ward. Daisy Lee Gatson met Lucious Christopher (LC) Bates in 1928 when he sold an insurance policy to Orlee Smith in 1928. The twenty-four-year old traveling salesman struck up a friendship with Smith that allowed him to visit the family and their fifteen-year-old foster daughter for three years. In an interview with *Ebony* in 1958, LC remembered his then-wife as “nothing but a kid” who “looked

¹⁵⁷ Stockley, *Daisy Bates*, 27, 54.

¹⁵⁸ Bates, *The Long Shadow of Little Rock*, 17-19.

a little better” when she “got a little older.”¹⁵⁹ In fact, LC immediately noticed Daisy. Radiantly beautiful and magnetic with all the energy of a teenage girl, it was probably as impossible to ignore her in her family’s modest home as it was later impossible to ignore her presence in the nation’s most elite political circles.

Daisy Lee Gatson found LC Bates as equally fascinating. Tall, gangly and bespectacled, Bates was not conventionally handsome, but he was a uniquely advantaged black Southern man. Unlike millions of black men his age, Bates never “picked or chopped cotton.” Born in Mississippi to Morris and Laura Bates—a Baptist preacher and a homemaker, respectively—LC was reared in a black middle-class household that spared him the difficult life of a sharecropper. Instead, he pursued writing while attending high school at Alcorn College before leaving the state to attend Wilberforce University where his father paid for his tuition. In Ohio, the quixotic Bates decided to “break [his] father’s heart” by leaving school to chase a print career. His very first job landed him at the *Intestate Reporter* in Helena, Arkansas, the heart of the Delta that had been rocked by horrifying race riots in 1919. As a Mississippi native, Bates intimately understood the dangers of the Delta. Still, it is fair to wonder if he got comfortable in a Midwestern state where legal segregation did not exist. Did LC experience a renewed shock in Helena after his year on one of the most esteemed historically black college campuses? Or did he simply recall exactly how much he always loathed Jim Crow and white supremacy? His swift exit to Kansas City and its thriving black community may be a clue as to how he felt about trying to work in oppressive eastern Arkansas. The *Kansas City Call*, by contrast, boasted one of the largest black readerships in the nation and featured future NAACP president Roy Wilkins as a chief reporter. Convinced during his tenure at the *Call* that he could create and sustain his own

¹⁵⁹ Lerone Bennett, Jr. “First Lady of Little Rock,” *Ebony*, September 1958, 17, 21.

newspaper, Bates left Kansas City for Pueblo, Colorado in 1923, where his *Western Ideal* quickly crashed and burned.¹⁶⁰ Little matter; he had written and had been the proprietor of his own paper, however successful. Travel and his experiences as a journalist awakened him to a world and life without the rigid confines of despised Jim Crow. As a reporter, Bates wrote assiduously to attack the foundations of that system and its arbiters. When he returned to the South, he fought injustice by withholding his patronage from segregated businesses and wielding his fierce intellect that whites pretended did not exist in black people. Ambitious, clever, and proud, LC Bates presented himself as a passionate man whom infuriated would-be oppressors by his refusal to yield and who excited black people with his confidence and tenacity. Everything about his carriage and personality attracted the young, bold Daisy Lee Gatson.

In her memoirs, Bates alluded to her future-husband's infatuation as she carefully emphasized LC's attention to her entire family over the three-year period and his friendship with her foster father. Noting that he treated all of them to outings and gifts, and occasionally brought her jewelry on his visits to their home, Bates painted a portrait of respectful courtship with LC acting as the smitten beau while her parents approved. Yet the beginnings of their life-altering relationship merited only two pages of her memoir before Bates affirmed that LC proposed marriage after her foster father succumbed to cancer in 1930, leading her general readership and biography critics to assume she married sometime shortly thereafter.¹⁶¹ Bates did not record Susie Smith's reaction to the proposal, or Orlee Smith's feelings in the years before his death about the budding romance between his teenaged foster daughter and a man who was nine years

¹⁶⁰ Stockley, 22-23; Jason Roe, "Wilkins Rising," *The Kansas City Public Library*, <http://www.kclibrary.org/blog/week-kansas-city-history/wilkins-rising> [accessed December 29, 2015].

¹⁶¹ Bates, *The Long Shadow of Little Rock*, 30-33.

her senior. No recollection of a wedding ceremony exists. The omission of such a profound milestone is striking in reminisces of a woman whose essence became defined by childhood trauma.

Yet, if the adult Bates understood the power of enhancing the past, she also recognized the rationality of cloaking it. Her brevity about the beginnings of her relationship in her memoirs and her personal papers are meant to hide the uncomfortable reality that when she met LC Bates, he had been married for six years. In April 1922, LC married Kassandra Crawford in Council Bluff, Iowa. A Nebraska native, the first Mrs. Bates maintained the Memphis home that she occasionally shared with her traveling husband who (for a time) elected to work in sales as a more stable economic alternative to writing. There, Kassandra reared Oscar Flakes, her son from a previous a marriage, and Loretta Ann Bunn. In later years, Bunn asserted that Kassandra and LC reared her from infancy but never formally adopted her—a claim that her foster mother corroborated.¹⁶² Assuming the veracity of Bunn’s family history, LC pursued Daisy while a wife and two children waited for him to come home.

Bates insisted throughout her life that she married LC only after Orlee Smith died, yet surviving family members state that she actually left home with the married man before her foster father’s passing. Moreover, her silence about the reactions to her relationship lend credence to accounts of recall Susie Smith’s fury and her “falling out” with eighteen-year-old Daisy’s decision to live with LC.¹⁶³ Her foster daughter’s dalliance with a married man directly contradicted the strict adherence to sexual morality that separated the ‘better sort’ of black ladies

¹⁶² Detective William W. Reed, City of Youngstown, Ohio Department of Police to Captain Alan R. Templeton, Arkansas State Police report, February 5, 1958 (Orval E. Faubus Papers, MS F271, 301, Box 497, Folder 11, Special Collection, University of Arkansas, Fayetteville, Arkansas).

¹⁶³ Stockley, *Daisy Bates*, 24.

from ‘common’ women. Daisy’s affair ostracized her from the middle-class black respectability that had defined the Smith home and carried the added insult of playing into white stereotypes of promiscuous black sexuality. On a personal level, Susie Smith must have felt betrayed by LC Bates, who was nine years Daisy’s senior. She may have believed that her foster daughter was hardly his first extramarital relationship. Smith might even have considered she and her late husband were duped in a long con by a sexual predator who ignored the potential, disastrous consequences of his conquest. Through Daisy’s eyes, the educated and sophisticated LC Bates almost certainly represented the most exciting chances she had ever been offered—black propriety and white supremacy be damned. If Bates ever felt she could have been entirely candid with anyone in her adulthood, she may have admitted that the corset of respectability politics in Huttig and in her foster home threatened to suffocate her. LC’s political ideals, wanderlust and libertine sexuality placed him squarely outside of upstanding middle-class blackness from which he also hailed. In an interview shortly before his death in 1980, LC Bates mused, “Every person is his own God because that person directs his own destiny.”¹⁶⁴ A humanist all of his life and especially when he met Daisy Lee Gatson, LC far more resembled the kind of thinker who might have thrived in Harlem than the ‘upright’ people to whom he was born and who reared Daisy. For his part, he appeared to be genuinely in love with her for the rest of his life and probably struggled to reconcile that love against social and personal circumstance. Smith’s grief and anger are as understandable as the romantic impulses of a young girl from a simultaneously dull and violent mill town, and as young man frustrated by the unyielding confines of Jim Crow.

¹⁶⁴ Irene Wassell, “LC Bates, Editor of the Arkansas State Press,” (Master’s Thesis, University of Arkansas at Little Rock, 1983), 76.



Illustration 3
Lucious Christopher (LC) Bates and Daisy Gatson Bates
Photo Courtesy of The Wisconsin Historical Society

Yet private turmoil hardly mattered in the minds of people who placed incredible value on personal integrity and honor that rebuked white supremacy and reaffirmed black worth within their communities. Daisy Lee Gatson left Huttig in 1930 to live as LC Bates' mistress in Memphis for the next twelve years. Though the bluff city dwarfed her south Arkansas village by more than 200,000 times, she lived in the same town with Kassandra Crawford Bates and her children, as well as Morris and Laura Bates. It is highly improbable that either LC's first wife or his parents knew nothing at all of his long-running affair with the woman who was listed in a 1934 city directory as "Daisy Bates, housewife."¹⁶⁵ His parents' knowledge of his mistress is even more likely as Laura Bates lived at least some of her latter years with the couple in Little Rock as late as the 1960s.¹⁶⁶ In a 1958 interview about her life with LC, Kassandra (who continued to be called "Mrs. L.C. Bates") confirmed to police that she and LC separated at St. Louis in 1939. That she and her children would have altogether left Memphis because of Daisy's presence in her husband's life seems imminently logical.

Undoubtedly hurt by infidelity, Kassandra Crawford Bates may well have been socially humiliated by the predicament. For more than a decade, neither LC nor Daisy felt any need to adhere to the demands of respectable middle-class blackness that would have included a divorce, another marriage, and a distinct mea culpa to anyone or community offended by their relationship. In light of his first wife's allegations of when they began to end their marriage, it is fair to argue that LC and Daisy only cared about perceived propriety or social mores once they decided to relocate to Little Rock, Arkansas and start a newspaper. At thirty years old, Daisy

¹⁶⁵ United States Census Bureau, "Population of the 100 Largest Urban Places: 1930," (June 15, 1998), <https://www.census.gov/population/www/documentation/twps0027/tab16.txt> [accessed December 30, 2015]; Stockley, *Daisy Bates*, 24.

¹⁶⁶ L.C. Bates, Letter to Mother (Daisy Bates Papers, Mss 523 Box 3, Folder One, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, Wisconsin).

could not live as a wide-eyed ingénue in thrall to a married older man. Particularly, their extramarital affair could not continue when LC dreamed that his newspaper would serve as an activist mouthpiece that fought Jim Crow and worked to improve black communities by highlighting the respectability mores that underscored their worth to themselves. In 1942, LC sat on the cusp of forty years old and to achieve the first basic goal of any business—to *sell* their product—the couple understood that they needed the personal support of their clientele even in a city like Little Rock that the rest of the South regarded as “liberal,” but that LC wrote, “...IS, but mostly *ain’t*.”¹⁶⁷

His quip resounded. Before 1957, the Arkansas capitol strived for recognition as a modern and sophisticated Southern city that boasted its comparatively genial race relations. Post-Emancipation Little Rock found itself fertile ground for number of nascent black enterprises. The *Arkansas Gazette* served as the state’s vanguard and wrote thusly of the inaugural edition of the *Arkansas Freedman*:

“The *Arkansas Freedman* made its appearance on Saturday morning, somewhat in advance of the time promised in its prospectus. Tabbs Gross (a Negro lawyer) is the editor and proprietor. The *Freeman* makes quite a handsome appearance mechanically, and in the expression of its sentiments does credit to both the head and heart of its conductor. He demonstrates that he understands correctly the true relationship which exists between the white and colored people of the country and what is best for the interests of each class of our population. In politics he plants himself upon the Republican platform but declines to indorse radicalism...So long as the *Freeman* shall remain true to the programme which its first number has foreshadowed, it will be worthy of success. We commend it to the patronage of all men of all colors.”¹⁶⁸

In addition to publications, a plethora of black businesses flourished after the establishment of the Mosaic Templars in 1882. This organization served as the “greatest impetus to Negro business,” and its efforts fostered “comparable affluence [for] Little Rock blacks at the

¹⁶⁷ *Arkansas State Press*, Vol. 12, No. 17, August 29, 1952.

¹⁶⁸ *Arkansas Gazette*, August 22, 1869.

turn of the twentieth century.”¹⁶⁹ In 1907, the total value of black-owned property in the city totaled \$2,500,000. Holdings and investments on Ninth Street, the heart of black Little Rock, accounted for more than one million dollars of that property. In conjunction with the postwar boon in black education, leaders harnessed the resources the city afforded to nurture thriving black industry and intellectualism that created the standard for black communities across Arkansas. Though Jim Crow permeated all facets of life in Little Rock, this legacy enabled prolific educator and writer Samuel Shinkle Taylor to write in 1930 that, “Theoretically, at least, Little Rock and North Little Rock offered good opportunities to Negroes in professions.”¹⁷⁰

One of two black interviewers for the Arkansas Federal Writers’ Project, and a gifted journalist, Taylor’s keen perceptions also led him to note that, “the Little Rock Negro has his social strata.”¹⁷¹ Those who benefitted the most in black Little Rock tended to belong to a tiny minority of elite families, several of whose roots in the city stretched back to the state’s territorial history and who were sometimes connected to the most prominent white families by blood kinships that exist in all former slave societies. The results produced a heavily stratified community where more advantaged black citizens intermarried with one another, and accommodated or manipulated white supremacy to maintain a certain amount of power within their own caste and created a “class distinction, perhaps to greater extent than among white

¹⁶⁹ Samuel S. Taylor, *Survey of Negroes in Little Rock and North Little Rock, Compiled by the Writers’ Program of the WPA in the State of Arkansas* (Little Rock, Arkansas: Urban League of Greater Little Rock, Arkansas, 1941), 21-22.

¹⁷⁰ Taylor, *Survey of Negroes*, 33-34.

¹⁷¹ Samuel S. Taylor, “The Negroes of Little Rock—Digest,” in John A. Kirk, *Redefining the Color Line: Black Activism in Little Rock, Arkansas, 1940-1970* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2002), 14.

people.”¹⁷² Little Rock was a comparatively moderate Southern capital; indeed, younger black professionals began moving into the city and outlying areas in the 1930s and effectively challenging Jim Crow order on a small scale. Nevertheless, established leaders inside the city’s black community exercised a particularly conservative control that was still palpable in the 1940s. To that pragmatic end, LC decided to divorce his first wife sometime in 1941 or 1942. Interestingly, Kassandra Crawford Bates insisted in 1958 that no court ever served her divorce papers and she did not know whether or not the divorce actually happened. Regardless, Daisy married LC on March 4, 1942 in Fordyce, Arkansas. The newlyweds celebrated their marriage by purchasing the *Twin City Press* and rechristening it as the *Arkansas State Press* that would become the most widely read, black-owned newspaper in Arkansas.¹⁷³

What must marriage have signified to Daisy Bates as an adult woman? It is easy enough to draw conclusions about the meaning of starting a relationship with LC and leaving Huttig as an eighteen-year-old. For over ten years, though, Daisy Lee Gatson moved through Memphis without the pressures of respectability politics except for those that she may have grappled with internally. No work record exists for her during the 1930s; by all available accounts, Daisy enjoyed being a mistress in the fullest sense of what that title means. LC supported her in a second home where she lived full-time, paid for her living expenses, and provided an allowance that enabled her to shop, patronize beauty parlors and indulge her hobbies. This is particularly remarkable because LC Bates could afford two households in Tennessee, during the Great

¹⁷² George P. Rawick, *The American Slave: A Composite Autobiography*, vol. 10b, *Arkansas Slave Narratives*, Charlotte Stephens (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1972), 226-33, in Kirk, *Redefining the Color Line*, 14.

¹⁷³ Wassell, “LC Bates,” 10-12; Arkansas State Police report, February 5, 1958 (Faubus Papers, MS F271, 301, Box 497, Folder 11, Special Collection, University of Arkansas, Fayetteville, Arkansas).

Depression, when most Southerners of any color or class struggled to keep body and soul together in one home. Most important, though, is that the overwhelming majority of black Southern women worked in low paying domestic jobs of varying dubious conditions for white households. It is valid and necessary to remember that LC funded Daisy's existence during this period, but it is a mistake to not consider how she internalized having economic security and freedom of movement in a major urban area without the legal and personal confines of being someone's wife. During periods when LC was working or with Kassandra, Daisy alone controlled the terms of anywhere she chose to go—irrespective of patriarchal authority or black respectability. She could not have helped but notice her strange kind of privilege, and the general anonymity must have been exhilarating. For a person as independent and naturally willful, Daisy had to have appreciated at least some parts of her bohemian relationship and life, and she surely thought about Jim Crow restrictions entirely from the perspective of a publicly single black woman.

How did her experiences in Memphis shape her lifelong resentment of white supremacy and her emerging political ideas in the years before black American embraced the 'Double V' campaign? Black schools in the segregated South stressed and celebrated blackness and black achievements even before Carter G. Woodson revolutionized American education with his seminal 1933 work, *The Mis-Education of the Negro*. What formal education that would have offered critical and historical depth Daisy Gaston Bates possessed on such issues is a matter of debate. In 1914, the *Huttig News* reported the closing of the local elementary school for black children that had serviced grades one through four. A year later, the white-controlled Huttig school board approved a \$12,000 bond for a "suitable [black] high school building."¹⁷⁴ At the

¹⁷⁴ *Huttig News*, February 20, 1915.

turn of the twentieth century, the South still struggled to catch up to Northern and Midwestern states' public education opportunities for white children that had been historically neglected by class-conscious planter gentry. The legacy of Freedmen's schools and internal community efforts through black churches and by black teachers filled gaps by indifferent or hostile white communities who allotted funding for black education on the laughable policy of 'separate-but-equal,' but it is impossible to estimate the breadth of Daisy's early education. Her spotty school record clearly bothered her throughout her life. In a 1976 interview, Daisy insisted that she graduated from high school. However, her entry into the Arkansas Black Hall of Fame in the organization's inaugural class stated that her education only included elementary school at Huttig.¹⁷⁵ Whatever she may have felt about the restrictions or sacrifices of respectability politics, Daisy recognized education not only as a weapon for marginalized people against injustice, but also as a mechanism for personal equity.

Certainly, she benefitted intellectually from the company of her lover-turned-husband, and she definitely honed her own capacity for speaking and politics at the *State Press*. Still, Daisy's real political education began in Memphis. Long one of the most celebrated urban areas of the South, a person can become intoxicated by the scents of the Mississippi River and food, the music that pours out of every kind of club and church, and the violent throngs of humanity that make up the city. A country girl from south Arkansas must have been excited and infuriated by the paradox of freedom and restriction she found. There, Daisy had the money and the time to shop, but only from black-owned stores or suffer the humiliation of ordering clothes from white-owned shops where she was not allowed on the sales floor. At beauty shops, she paid to

¹⁷⁵ Daisy Bates, interview by Elizabeth Jacoway, October 11, 1976, 2, Southern Oral History Program, Library of University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

have her hair fixed and nails done while listening to other black women who spanned the gamut of professionals to domestics, discussing the hazards of working in segregationist Memphis. Since the turn of the twentieth century, black-operated salons enabled women to use grooming, hair care and cosmetics as weapons against white supremacist interpretations of black womanhood. Moreover, beauty shops served as bastions of femininity where women and girls got to be together, enjoy meeting each other or partake in familiar company, and speak freely from male or white intrusion. Historian Julia Kirk Blackwelder has called beauty shops “one of the few institutions as segregated as the church,” that empowered black women as entrepreneurs who instilled personal and social confidence in their clientele. Spending a day having their hair done meant that for black women, “lots more got taken care of than hair.”¹⁷⁶ Emotionally, the beauty parlor was a place to create relationships between women, and for women to perform black femininity through hair rituals, skin treatments and nail polish.

Beauty shops also doubled as political salons. When she died in 1963, the *New York Post* called Lucille Greene Randolph “entitled to the honor of being called the one time second most dangerous Negro in America” behind her husband, Asa Philip Randolph. A graduate of Howard University who was also a protégé of Madam C. J. Walker, Lucille shared Asa’s views that the black working-class offered the best hope for overall black progress. Beauty shops were symbols of working-class black women’s economic independence, mobility and commitment to

¹⁷⁶ Julia Kirk Blackwelder, *Styling Jim Crow: African American Beauty Training during Segregation* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2003), 140, 144; Evelyn Newman Phillips, “Doing More than Heads: African American Women, Healing, Resisting, and Uplifting Others in St. Petersburg, Florida,” *Frontiers: A Journal of Women’s Studies*, Vol. 22, No. 2 (2001), 26-29; Willie M. Coleman, “Among the Things that Used to Be,” in Barbara Smith, *Home Girls: A Black Feminist Anthology* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1983), 213; Jennifer Scanlon, “‘If My Husband Calls, I’m Not Here’: The Beauty Parlor as Real and Representational Female Space,” *Feminist Studies*, Vol. 33, No. 2 (Summer 2007), 309.

lifting up other black women through this particular trade. For Lucille Greene Randolph and scores of radical women like her, this translated to political action that started with the beauty culturalist and enveloped the woman in her chair. As the United States supported the Allies and later fought in the First World War, Lucille vocally supported Bolshevism. Though she and her husband's politics deterred black middle-class and elite patrons from her salon, Lucille Greene Randolph nevertheless used her beauty shop to promote the couple's socialist newspaper, *The Messenger*, and to educate her clients on how to resist and challenge white supremacist government.¹⁷⁷ Lucille Greene Randolph and her lifelong work are high profile-examples of the ways that black beauty shops, regardless of the celebrity of the owner, subverted and resisted white supremacy as a matter of fact. Historically the sites of social justice conversation for black women, beauty shops in the civil rights movement became spaces where women learned of and organized protests, voter registration drives, marches and other forms of resistance. Black beauty parlors reflected the sentiments of clubwoman Mary Burnett Talbert who addressed a convention for the National Association of Colored Women in 1916. Talbert—an Oberlin College graduate, a Shorter College faculty member, and the first black woman to serve as assistant principle of Little Rock High School—argued that “no Negro woman can afford to be an indifferent spectator of the...uplift problems that are agitated around her.”¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁷ Obituary for Lucille Greene Randolph, *The New York Post*, April 1963, in Tiffany M. McGill, “‘I Had My Own Business...So I Didn’t Have to Worry’: Beauty Salons, Beauty Culturists, and the Politics of African-American Female Entrepreneurship,” in Philip Scranton, *Beauty Business: Commerce, Gender, and Culture in Modern America* (London: Routledge, 2001), 180-81; Cornelius L. Bynum, A. *Philip Randolph and the Struggle for Civil Rights* (Urbana-Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2010), 59-60.

¹⁷⁸ Mary Burnett Talbert, to the convention for the National Association of Colored Women at Baltimore, Maryland, 1916, in Lillian S. Williams, “And Still I Rise: Black Women and Reform, Buffalo, New York, 1900-1940,” *Afro-Americans in New York Life and History*, Vol. 14, No. 2 (1990), 7-33; Lillian S. William, “Mary Morris Burnett Talbert,” in Darlene Clark

Thirty years later, another woman who would transplant to Little Rock personified Talbert's address as she sat in the chairs of Memphis' beauty culturists. Daisy Bates took pride in her beauty as a matter of personal business. Friends commented that "everything [about her looks] was right—her hair, her nails, her clothes."¹⁷⁹ It is also fair to argue that Daisy's beauty became political and that frequent trips to beauty parlors played a significant role in educating her in grassroots activism and her emerging ideology. At the beauty shop, she observed and listened to black women talk about their individual experiences navigating and resisting oppression. She heard women from every class talk about passive and active forms of resistance, and learned what had worked for them or what had not. Beauticians permed Daisy's hair and manicured her hands—rituals she adored that enhanced her natural prettiness—as she absorbed the lessons all around her.

Fresh from the parlor, scores of white and black men would have noticed the twenty-something beauty who defiantly looked anyone in the eye even as she may have paid all other manner of Jim Crow-expected deference. Across city streets, Daisy may have mulled over the conversations she listened to from women who sat under hair dryers or beauticians who pinned curls. Perhaps after a day at the beauty shop, she was even more cognizant of her vulnerability as a black woman in a Jim Crow city. Appreciated or unwanted, sexual attention (especially from white men) spelled potential threats. If her claims about her birth mother are accurate, it is practically impossible to imagine that Daisy did not constantly remember Orlee Smith's story in relation to her own position. Nevertheless, her time in Memphis allowed her the means and ability to move in the world as a beautiful and thoughtful woman, without the social pressures of

Hine, et al, *Black Women in America: An Historical Encyclopedia* (Brooklyn: Carlson Publishing, 1993), 1137-1139.

¹⁷⁹ Stockley, *Daisy Bates*, 43.

community, kin and marriage. Daisy grew into adulthood acutely aware of the profound intersectional barriers placed upon black women of all statuses. Ironically, she analyzed them from a position of relative freedom as a married man's mistress. When she married LC in 1942, each of them recognized the political reasons why they made their relationship legitimate. Yet is fairly impossible to imagine that Daisy did not quietly mourn the autonomy she lost in the process, or resent that she had to put back on the trappings of middle-class respectability even as she clearly believed that wearing those mantels were the best way for black women to successfully fight Jim Crow in actual courts and in the court of public opinion.

"This Paper Stands for Honesty, Justice, and Fair Play, and It Stands behind What It Stand For," boasted the inaugural headline of the *State Press*.¹⁸⁰ Its pages resounded unapologetically as an aggressive mouthpiece for civil rights at the nascent stage of the modern movement in the early days of the Second World War. In 1941, lawyer and activist William Harold Flowers wrote to Governor Homer Adkins and directed his "attention to the growing unrest on the part of the Negro race...they no longer willing to remain on their knees begging for the rights, privileges and immunities of Negro citizenship."¹⁸¹ An attorney from Pine Bluff and prolific figure in Arkansas' social justice struggles, Flowers laid much of the groundwork for LC Bates to counter the traditionally cautious character of black Little Rock through his newspaper. In 1940, Flowers spearheaded the Committee on Negro Organizations that orchestrated voter registration drives to create a mass black political presence for Arkansas. His efforts raised the percentage of eligible black Arkansan voters from less than two percent to over seventeen percent by 1947. He also forced the national NAACP office to pay attention to Arkansas and

¹⁸⁰ *Arkansas State Press*, May 9, 1941.

¹⁸¹ Kirk, *Redefining the Color Line*, 29.

growing resistance there, where in the past the organization had written the state off as a place where meaningful activism went to die. Historian John A. Kirk has prodigiously examined Flowers' activism in landmark cases wherein he demanded and got black jurists' appointments for trials that featured black defendants, and in educational desegregation and inequity. Flowers' counsel to Silas Hunt, who integrated the University of Arkansas campus as a law student, and his suit for equitable school facilities for black children in DeWitt, Arkansas, blazed the path that repealed *Plessy v. Ferguson*. Almost singlehandedly, William Harold Flowers turned Arkansas into a leader on civil rights issues, and for his effort he was elected president of the NAACP state conference of branches.¹⁸² Daisy and LC Bates had a radical friend and figure to feature in the *State Press*. Daisy especially had a mentor to introduce her to methods of using and wielding established bureaucratic power, and legislative means of challenging and beating Jim Crow.

Despite the aggressive boldness of its owners and supporters, the *State Press* as a newspaper also offered constant allusions to black respectability that earned the approval of middle class and elite black citizens who may otherwise have balked at outsiders such as Flowers and the Bateses loudly challenging the status quo. Every edition featured photographs and articles that showcased positive images of black children and parents, achievements in higher education, and social events that reinforced class concepts but also celebrated individual and community excellence. The newspaper especially emphasized black femininity and womanhood that exalted the kind of middle-class standards that Daisy Bates strived to emulate as the wife of a politically minded business owner in a Southern capital city. Co-eds, prodigious talents,

¹⁸² John A. Kirk, "'He Founded a Movement': W. H. Flowers, the Committee on Negro Organizations and Black Activism in Arkansas, 1940-1957," in Brian Ward and Tony Badger, *The Making of Martin Luther King and the Civil Rights Movement in America* (New York: New York University Press, 1996); 29-41; Kirk; "The Little Rock Crisis and Postwar Black Activism in Arkansas," *The Arkansas Historical Quarterly* Vol. 56, No. 3 (Autumn, 1997), 273-293.

fiancées, professionals and wives of respected and influential men smiled each week from the pages of the *State Press* into the homes of thousands of black (and white) readers in Little Rock. Local girls who attended Paul Laurence Dunbar High School and excelled in their studies enjoyed featured photographs and complimentary blurbs or full articles about being admitted to schools such as Arkansas AM&N and Fisk University, as did older girls and women who graduated college or earned advanced degrees. Portrait photos of these women generally captured them sitting in highly stylized poses that were popular in the era but that also captured the dignity of accomplishment and showcased neat hair, soft smiles, tasteful dress—everything that bespoke ladylike respectability and uncommon success. Sororities such as AKA and Sigma Gamma Rho earned front-page status when they celebrated new membership, organized charity events and hosted fundraisers for black children and provided for scholarships that benefitted young black women who aspired to college and professional schools.¹⁸³ Impeccably dressed for such occasions in white evening gowns, pearls and heels, with fashionable hairstyles and formidable poise, such images evoked grace and chastity that definitely poked at white presumptions about black womanhood.

Artistic and cerebral women alike shared space in the *State Press*, as the paper's proprietors took pleasure in printing such announcements as, "Philippa Duke Schuyler, brilliant young pianist, will appear in recital," and "Miss Frankie L. Snodgrass, daughter of Mrs. Beatrice McGill and the late Frank A. Snodgrass of North Little Rock...receive[d] the Master of Education degree at the University of Arkansas..."¹⁸⁴ Such achievements of black girls and women were never recognized in the society and leisure pages of white publications such as the

¹⁸³ *Arkansas State Press*, February 10, 1956; February 24, 1956; June 8, 1956.

¹⁸⁴ *Arkansas State Press*, February 3, 1956; April 20, 1956.

Arkansas Democrat or the *Arkansas Gazette*, regardless of respective class statuses because white supremacy pivoted on the assumption of blanket degraded blackness and particularly on the notion that white femininity could only be measured against black womanhood in absolutes that stripped the latter of any quality that deserved valuing or protection. Only recently in American culture has it become commonplace to refer to ‘humankind,’ ‘he/she,’ and ‘him/her’ in public discussion. Most of the nation’s history has lumped women into phrases such as ‘mankind’ and referring to all Americans regardless of sex by use of ‘he’ and ‘him.’ Just in specific instances have writers deigned to differentiate between men and women, and when scholars scrutinize the experiences of non-white American women, this becomes an even more profound problem. Demographic census data recorded for Arkansas (and elsewhere) refers to ‘the Negro’ or ‘Negroes’ exclusively as ‘he’ and ‘him,’ and most studies of women’s experiences default to *white* women as the standard for American females. In her excellent comparison of how colonial runaway enslaved people were describe, historian Sharon Block argues that black women been associated with a “totalizing identity, rather than an individual one” for more than two centuries.¹⁸⁵ Generally, black women have typically disappeared from or are included in the social record in ways that reinforced stereotypes of licentiousness, immorality, general un-femininity, or revealed gross labor exploitation that their white counterparts rarely suffered. One 1930 census for Little Rock recorded that nearly 5,000 black women “represented nearly forty percent” of the total 12,331 female workers in the city—even though black women comprised only a quarter of the female population. Of those 5,000 women, eighty-six percent of them labored as domestics for wages that generally ranged between two and

¹⁸⁵ Sharon Block, “Early American Bodies: Creating Sex, Race and Beauty,” in Jennifer Brier, Jim Downs and Jennifer L. Morgan, *Connexions: Histories of Race and Sex in North America* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2016), 95.

five dollars per week, in a city where the average furnished apartment rented for at least eight dollars a month.¹⁸⁶ While black business, enterprise, and educational opportunities (relatively) abounded for those who could access them, the overwhelming majority of black Little Rock toiled in low skilled, poorly paid jobs that did little to alleviate grinding poverty or high crime rates in black neighborhoods that found themselves abused by all-white police forces who beat black men and women “unmercifully...at the slightest provocation.”¹⁸⁷ Here, as in other cities, black women appeared in public record when they were arrested for “gambling, drunkenness, liquor law violations, and prostitution.”¹⁸⁸ It is important to note that *prostitution* in this context is a loaded charge that radiates under the weight of intersectional discriminations that black women faced. Black women in public after dark risked being charged with that particular crime for the sake that they dared to be outside. Black women enjoying time off from the workday, away from responsibilities of home and looking to unwind by dancing, singing and drinking libations countered Jim Crow and white expectations that black female bodies existed to *provide* enjoyment—never to seek it out. If police officers detained or arrested a black woman for partying, the possibility existed that she might be charged with prostitution because whiteness assumed that black women were hypersexual. Moreover, it was of little concern to white civic leaders that most reputable public spaces barred black citizens. Established pool halls and bars sometimes served as gathering places for black “best men” and “best women” who generally eschewed such sins as liquor and dancing. In instances where sexual business *was* transacted, white people either patronizingly or contemptuously discussed black sex workers and rarely

¹⁸⁶ Taylor, *A Survey of Negroes*, 12-13.

¹⁸⁷ Bates, *The Long Shadow of Little Rock*, 34.

¹⁸⁸ Kirk, *Redefining the Color Line*, 18.

consider that near-slave wages paid to black women created a climate where prostitution often bridged the economic gap between survival or starvation.¹⁸⁹

To that end, LC and Daisy Bates used the *State Press* to challenge white supremacy and make gains for the black community, such as supporting their friend Flowers' drive increase black voter participation, drawing attention to pay discrepancies for black teachers in Little Rock's public schools and the addition of black police officers to attend black neighborhoods in efforts to circumvent white police brutality.¹⁹⁰ The paper also directly contradicted Jim Crow presumptions of black femininity by centering and valuing black womanhood in traditional, exalted standards of middle-class respectability.¹⁹¹ Local brides-to-be, and the out-of-town-born fiancées of local men glowed within the publication that acknowledged the woman's parents, education, and accomplishments that underlined these young women as *ladies*—directly contradicting a racially-stratified city that pretended no black female, regardless of class, could embody the title.¹⁹² Showcasing black women as respectable wives, mothers, and professionals not only battled prejudice, but also solidified the Bateses as imminently respectable outsiders

¹⁸⁹ For more information on working-class black women's control of their labor and sexuality, see Tera E. Hunter, "Wholesome and Hurtful Amusements," in *To 'Joy My Freedom: Southern Black Women's Lives and Labors after the Civil War* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1997). For more information on how black middle-class and elite "Best Men" and "Best Women" tried to control the social amusements and economic endeavors of the masses, see Glenda E. Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow: Women and the Politics of White Supremacy in North Carolina, 1896-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996).

¹⁹⁰ Ibid, 47-49; Bates, *The Long Shadow of Little Rock*, 36-39.

¹⁹¹ Kirk, *Redefining the Color Line*, 27-29; 35-40. For more information regarding how black newspapers and periodicals historically centered black Americans as full citizens inside and out of the parameters of respectability politics, see Benjamin Fagan, "'Americans as They Really Are': The 'Colored American' and the Illustration of National Identity," *American Periodicals* Vol. 21, No. 2 (2011), 97-119; Fagan, *The Black Newspaper and the Chosen Nation* (Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 2016).

¹⁹² *Arkansas State Press*, February 3, 1956; March 16, 1956.

who cavalierly exposed injustice but did so through the right prisms. The *State Press* represented the culmination of LC's desire to be a newspaperman, a political and intellectual spearhead, and without doubt the paper was definitively his baby, as Daisy Bates admitted her initial reservations that "such a project required possibly more money and effort than the two of us had to give."¹⁹³ Nevertheless, it is implausible to think that she did not offer her husband a fair amount of input regarding who all should be represented in their venture. Friends and employees noted that Bates never acted "wifey" about the *State Press*. In the context of black femininity and black womanhood, she occupied the historic roles of being a partner to her husband and an unapologetically public black lady. Bates helped her husband do the hard work of running and hustling a business to gain advertisers and an audience—no small feat considering that Bates never mentioned working as a young girl in Huttig, never held a job while she was LC's mistress, and had little education or skills of which to speak.¹⁹⁴ What Bates did have was an energetic, cheerful personality that drew in strangers and belied an emerging social and political maturity that probably began forming in Memphis, and that fed off of her inherent resentment of white supremacy and her insecurity of her personal history. In marrying LC, Bates admitted that she understood their indiscretions would hurt them politically and personally. At the *State Press*, she actively worked to rewrite her own narrative from that of a modestly educated, romantic teenage seductress to a hardworking, respectable married lady. Her growing attention to community issues under mentorship from her husband and Flowers helped to polish her own sense of how black femininity and womanhood should be represented to the whole of Little Rock. Given the transformation that was taking place within Bates, it is unlikely that LC

¹⁹³ Bates, *The Long Shadow of Little Rock*, 33.

¹⁹⁴ Stockley, *Daisy Bates*, 28, 58.

chose to pedestal illustrious black femininity as a mainstay of their paper entirely of his own accord. Given his quieter personality and penchant for staying in the background, as later events underscored, it is plausible that his wife may have conceived of a kind of society section with a deeper purpose all on her own.

What is incontrovertible is that Daisy Bates put her innate abilities to use and honed them even further as a protégée at the paper and in her pursuit to shore up her bonafides as “Mrs. Bates.” In her memoirs, Bates stated that shortly after they founded the *State Press*, she “enrolled at Shorter College, taking courses in Business Administration and Public Relations, and other subjects related to the newspaper field.”¹⁹⁵ Professional training assisted her efforts at the office to launch an “all-out campaign against police brutality” in the paper’s earliest days that was fostered largely by the 1942 murder of Private Albert Glover on West Ninth Street at the hands of a white police officer. Affirming the crime as “one of the most bestial murder in the annals of Little Rock” and calling for the prosecution of the white officer, Bates acted as an integral facet of ensuring that “certain changes came to Little Rock” that helped account for the city’s “liberal” reputation in the years after World War II.¹⁹⁶ In her work with her husband to make the *State Press* a catalyst for progress, she earned the title of ‘city editor’ for the publication in 1945. Moreover, she refashioned herself into a role that the most respectable middle-class and elite black women had powerfully wielded since Reconstruction: clubwoman. Bates joined a litany of activist associations, including the Flowers-founded Committee on Negro Organizations (CNO), the Urban League of Greater Little Rock, the Arkansas Council on Human Relations and the Young Women’s Christian Association (YWCA). Her visibility

¹⁹⁵ Bates, *The Long Shadow of Little Rock*, 38.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid, 34-38; *Arkansas State Press*, March 27, 1942; John Kirk, “Ninth Street Matters,” *Arkansas Times*, March 17, 2016.

through the newspaper, combined with her deepening role in social justice issues within the capitol city, buttressed her self-confidence and gained the respect of the black community who recognized her as a conscientious crusader and formidable advocate in the vein of women such as Anna Julia Cooper, Mary Church Terrell, and Nannie Helen Burroughs—albeit with the decided “New Negro” edge that was the legacy of the Great War era and the tumultuous period in which she was born.

Two chief elements that prevented Bates from ostracism at the hands of black Little Rock’s cautious core of elites who often bristled at *State Press* comments that equity would be gained through court systems or voting, and not by accommodationist “begging,” was her intrinsic understanding of the middle-class mores and values that respectable black ladies exhibited and her natural gifts for politics. Susie and Orlee Smith had, after all, reared their foster daughter to be a *lady*. Mrs. Bates presented herself as respectable beyond reproach in Little Rock. The beautiful young wife of an influential businessman and leading intellectual, Bates offered the public all the qualities (or a version of all the qualities) that shined in the girls and women who were selected to grace the pages of the newspaper. Gloriously feminine and formidably charming, she so represented the epitome of taste, grace, and refinement that Bates was invited to participate in local events such fundraisers and fashion shows as something of a celebrity. Her meticulous attention to her appearance served her well in Little Rock, as Bates was not only admired for her looks—her obvious pride in her appearance and her abilities to spend money on herself at beauty shops and at clothing boutiques were demarcations of respectability that may have softened Little Rock society’s more critical examinations of an unyieldingly activist couple wherein existed a big age gap, and neither of whom had local ties of which to speak. Impeccable grooming not only earned Bates admiration; black Little Rock also considered her appearance as

a “weapon in the battle to defeat racist depictions of blacks.”¹⁹⁷ This point is no small detail in the minds of Southerners, irrespective of race, that viewed (and continue to view) beauty as power. This conception is complicated by the fact that beauty standards have been dominated by Euro-centric, white norms that have racialized who is considered beautiful or what aesthetics are considered worthy of emulating. In a Jim Crow context femininity and the contested term ‘*lady*’ existed in white minds as everything that black womanhood was not, so that the historian Blain Roberts has written that “black and white Southern women were in conversation with each other in embodying their respective notions of beauty,” and that it is nigh “impossible to understand one without the other.”¹⁹⁸ While it is so that what are considered American beauty norms must be understood through lens of white supremacy, the conversation derails between black and white women on the total meaning of beauty. Celebrations of beauty in black communities were, and are, unique extensions of racial uplift and pride in blackness that whiteness has historically sought to marginalize. Feminine beauty could be weaponized to advantage blackness and manipulate whiteness, as well. Bates recognized this from her youth and expended considerable effort throughout her adulthood to display her physical gifts to full effect. Overwhelmingly, the emphasis she put on her beauty worked. Not only was Bates lauded for her public voice; her appearance earned her the honor of serving as a chaperone for the 1952 Miss Spirit of Cotton pageant that culminated in a fifteen-city tour across the United States.¹⁹⁹ In effect, Bates’ looks, the poise and elegance associated with her aesthetic, and her social clout determined to the pageant committee that she was a sufficient moral steward to travel with and protect the

¹⁹⁷ Maxine Leeds Craig, *Ain’t I a Beauty Queen?: Black Women, Beauty, and the Politics of Race* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 35.

¹⁹⁸ Roberts, *Pageants, Parlors, and Pretty Women*, 7.

¹⁹⁹ Stockley, *Daisy Bates*, 61.

vulnerability of black Southern beauty queens. The entire enterprise absolutely challenged every white stereotype about black womanhood, femininity, virtue, ability, and rectitude—indeed, what it meant for females to have black skin at all.

Fame garnered by her role as pageant chaperone allowed the *Chicago Defender* declared Bates as a “dynamic figure in the civic and social life of Little Rock.” That paper—one of the most respected and widely-read black publications in American history—also noted her recent appointment as “vice-president of the [Arkansas branch] of the NAACP.”²⁰⁰ Orlee Smith had belonged to the organization at great personal risk during his lifetime in Huttig; since their arrival in Little Rock, the Bateses had been active in the fledgling state branch that had begun gaining traction through the organization and dogged attentiveness of their lawyer friend, William Harold Flowers. However, the second Mrs. Bates had proven herself such a political force through her role as city editor of the *Arkansas State Press* and as a beacon of community respectability that she earned the office of president of the organization of state branches in 1952. The association largely attracted class-conscious members and suffered a reputation for superciliousness and contempt for the ‘lower sort’ of black Americans even as the organization secured civil rights victories. Despite the respectability politics that dictated the all facets of the NAACP, an illegitimate orphan from Huttig with a dubious past and few credentials to recommend her ascended to the top of operations as the beautiful face of respectable defiance in Arkansas. A devilish work ethic in Little Rock as a co-owner of the state’s mouthpiece of courageous social convictions and a carefully guarded history propelled Daisy Bates to the forefront of movement activity in Arkansas. Her reinvention as a black lady would make the difference in participation, perception, sympathy and backlash as she prepared to use her role to

²⁰⁰ *Chicago Defender*, March 15, 1952.

continue challenging Jim Crow in Little Rock, and in drawing support to confront white supremacy in the contentious realm of school integration.



Illustration 4, Top: Minnijean Brown

Illustration 5, Bottom: Elizabeth Eckford

Photos Courtesy of New York Hotel and Motel Trades Council, AFL-CIO

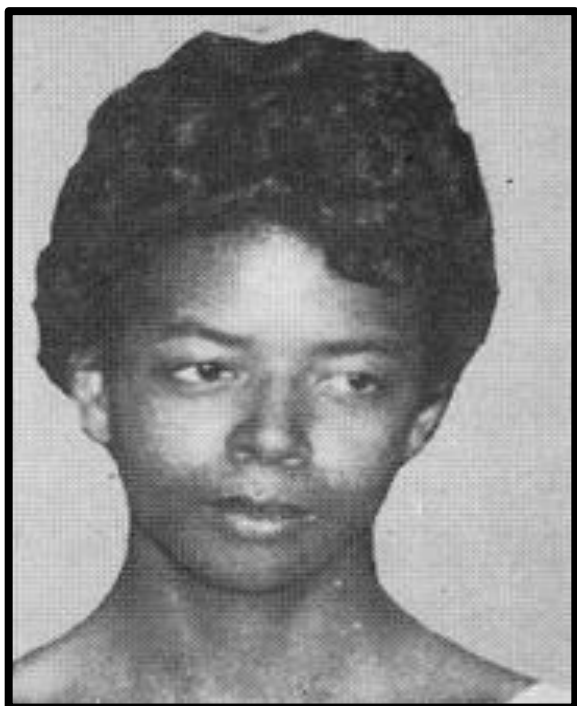




Illustration 6, Top: Thelma Mothershed

Photo Courtesy of The WMRA Blog

Illustration 7, Bottom: Melba Pattillo

Photo Courtesy of Code 9! Crisis in Little Rock





Illustration 8, Top: Gloria Ray
Photo Courtesy of The Wisconsin Historical Society
Illustration 9, Bottom: Carlotta Walls
Photo Courtesy of The Arkansas State Press



Chapter Three: Hidden Ladies of Little Rock

Daisy Bates celebrated her election as president of the Arkansas chapter of the NAACP and as she began to emerge as a notable figure in the quest for black civil rights, she earned the attention of nationally-recognized activists in cities such as Chicago and New York. At home in Little Rock, black and white citizens observed Bates' ascendancy with more than a bit of interest. The *State Press* served as Arkansas' most influential mouthpiece for black politics and civic advancement with a wide readership that exceeded the 20,000 subscribers that LC and Daisy had amassed by 1942, stretching deep into the southern section of the capitol city where most of black Little Rock resided. LC Bates perpetually claimed that half of the *State Press* readers were white. It was hardly a preposterous claim, given that white advertisers for the former *Twin City Press* immediately withdrew their funding once they realized what kind of paper the Bates couple intended to publish after they assumed control of that press, and the harassment that LC and Daisy endured for their views in the years before the events at Central High School unfolded. A United States census recorded for 1950 counted 102,213 citizens in the capital; more than ten percent of Little Rock read the *State Press* in a city where white people comprised more than three-quarters of the population. Yet, the paper specifically appealed to *black* Little Rock that comprised just over twenty-four percent of the city's total citizenry and the portion of the Bates' audience that would have hate-read the paper in far fewer numbers.²⁰¹ Economic status, class status and purpose for reading varied among the black people who received or picked up copies of the *State Press*. The tiny core of black elites in Little Rock historically eschewed overt activism that courted white reprisal, or shunned it outright as they

²⁰¹ Stockley, *Daisy Bates*, 287; "Census of Population and Housing, 1950-2010: Arkansas." United States Census Bureau <http://www.census.gov/prod/www/decennial.html> (accessed July 18, 2016).

tended to snub newcomers or upstarts. Aggressive out-of-towners LC and Daisy never counted that old guard among their chief supporters—not that they wanted them. Rather, the *State Press* appealed to an audience who shared its proprietors' rejection of passivity and timidity in discussing and facing daily and national injustices. The overwhelming majority of black Little Rock possessed neither the means nor the inclination to provoke Jim Crow on an individual level—the risk to self and family posed too great a threat for what millions of black Southerners understandably viewed as too abstract a reward, as young Daisy Lee Gatson had learned in the painful recollections of her own beloved foster father who had navigated life in South Arkansas.²⁰² There is no doubt, however, that those who could not appreciate the efforts of those who could and this was evident in the black support for the Bates' publication and for Daisy's growing influence through the paper. Men and women listened avidly to and participated in robust discourse on making Little Rock a more equitable community for its black citizens. It is also fair to argue that some families would have had more than a policy interest in their attention to Daisy's well-publicized activities. In 1952, six particular families were rearing daughters, and all of them were invested in offering the best possible opportunities to their girls with eyes focused on honing the integrity and grace that defined respectable black womanhood.

Bates' image and activism, as well as the opinions of the *State Press*, reflected the growing sentiment among black Southerners to refuse Jim Crow degradation within the unwavering commitment to black middle-class propriety and respectability politics that identified the 'better sort' from common men and women. Standards that denoted who was who in the black South did not hinge solely on the economic and adjacent social statuses that have typically defined elites, middle and working classes amongst white counterparts. A dearth of

²⁰² Bates, *The Long Shadow of Little Rock*, 29-30.

inherited status or access to wealth meant that intangible markers such as education, deportment and personal integrity separated the best black men and women from the ‘wrong’ sort.

Employment, marital status, and adherence to proper gender roles ensured which individuals or families deserved consideration. Community belonging, in clubs and at church, further proved the worth and class of who might constitute ladies and gentlemen amongst black Southerners. In these ways, black Southerners defined middle-class status that existed independently of and beyond the confines of white class structures. In Little Rock, these structural concepts were exemplified in little girls called Minnijean, Elizabeth, Carlotta, Gloria, Thelma, and Melba.

Imogene and Willie Bob Brown personified the traditional gender roles in their marriage that ground black respectability and provided the foundation for what demarcated middle-class standing within black communities. At the age of forty-seven, Willie Bob Brown married Imogene Brooks, some fifteen years his junior, in Saline County, Arkansas.²⁰³ The couple moved to Little Rock where Willie Bob worked several jobs, as an independent stone mason to concrete finisher to landscape gardener, to support his household that established and reestablished itself at several addresses across the south side of the city where black and white incomes reflected the struggles of working-class and impoverished people. The family eventually settled in a “small unpretentious” two-story duplex apartment at 1117 Ringo Street, approximately one mile from Little Rock Central High School.²⁰⁴ Minnijean Brown-Trickey has

²⁰³ Willie Bob Brown is referenced by several names in a spectrum of sources. In his work *Redefining the Color Line*, John A. Kirk has called him “Willie Bobbie,” while the National Parks Service notes him as “Willie.” Further, Max Brantley of the *Arkansas Times* has used “Robert Brown.” My own research from US Census records yields the name “Willie Bob” and is therefore the title that I apply.

²⁰⁴ “Arkansas, County Marriages, 1837-1957,” *FamilySearch*, <https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:N936-S5T>, (accessed December 2016); US City Directories 1822-1995, “Little Rock, Arkansas City Directory 1953,” <http://interactive.ancestry.com/2469/14555945?pid=910415493&backurl=//search.ancestry.com/>

adamantly stated that her family “was not middle class. [We] were working class.”²⁰⁵ By purely economic standards, this is unequivocally so. To gauge Mr. Brown’s occupational status and the fact that he habitually rented homes for his family as opposed to owning property within the confines of white class standards further underlines that the Browns lacked the markers to categorize them into mainstream middle-class standing. However, as previously discussed, the conditions of black class structure exist outside the tangible, materialistic bounds that define white caste systems, and whiteness itself. Because of the vastly different yardsticks and mechanisms used to measure class standing in either community, it is wrong to compare black and white middle classes to one another. It is fair to argue that based upon the circumstances that historically dictate class standing amongst black communities, the Brown family was “stable” and “relatively affluent.”²⁰⁶

This is particularly evident by the fact that Willie Bob Brown often served as the sole breadwinner for his family. Throughout periods of their marriage, Imogene was able to stay at home tending to the couple’s four children, of whom Minnijean was the oldest.²⁰⁷ Thanks to the ‘baby boom’ of the postwar era, it was not uncommon for American families to boast at least three children and in this way, the Brown family looked like millions of families across the nation. Moreover, as the eldest child, Minnijean not only enjoyed interaction and affection with

/cgi-bin/sse.dll?indiv%3Dtry%26dbid%3D2469%26h%3D910415493&treeid=&personid=&hintid=&usePUB=true&usePUBJs=true (accessed January 3, 2017); Darla Spike, “Minnijean Brown Trickey, Member of the ‘Little Rock Nine’ Shares Her Experiences at USAO Symposium,” *The Oklahoman*, October 8, 2010, <http://newsok.com/article/3502553> [accessed January 9, 2017]; “Thumbnail Sketch of Minnie Jean Brown,” (Daisy Bates Papers, Reel 6 AP93-1382 Restricted, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, Wisconsin).

²⁰⁵ Interview with Minnijean Brown-Trickey, February 3, 2016.

²⁰⁶ Jacoway, *Turn Away Thy Son*, 103; Kirk, *Redefining the Color Line*, 108.

²⁰⁷ Bates, *The Long Shadow of Little Rock*, 117.

her parents, but she watched her mother and father parent her younger sister Phyllis, and her brothers, Bobby and Dwight. She witnessed her parents performing the traditional gender roles within their household and to their children that at once reflected the conservative norms of the 1950s. However, when black men and women assumed these roles, they consciously contradicted white-created stereotypes of black manhood and womanhood, of black parenting, and used black respectability mores to separate themselves as ‘best men’ and ‘best women.’

Further, from her vantage point as the eldest child, Minnijean observed her black Southern households in which her father sometimes provided for his nuclear family on a single income as an independent contractor who found or accepted opportunity as it presented itself. In this way, too, Willie Bob Brown established his family as ‘uncommon’. Whatever economic hurdles the Browns faced, it is a telling indicator of how their patriarch valued his skills, time, labor—his worth, as a black craftsman and as a black man—that he dictated the terms and conditions of his employment. Beholden to no manager or another sort of ‘boss,’ he alone decided for whom and what he would or would not work. While he probably accepted jobs where he worked for white people in Little Rock, Willie Bob Brown chose whether or not he worked for a white employer. From the gaze of the twenty-first century where ‘indie’ labor and production are lauded where they can exist, it is easy to miss the profundity of a Southern black husband and father who navigated Jim Crow while still carefully protecting his autonomy as a worker and his determination to safeguard his own dignity by deferring ultimately to himself. Willie Bob Brown’s choices bespoke an intangible quality that denoted the middle-class status of a community who defined such markers beyond net worth.

Her father’s self-respect provided Minnijean a constant example of black confidence that defied Jim Crow’s insistence on subordination. So, too, did her mother’s example to her

children. Born in 1916, Imogene Brooks hailed from Morrilton in rural Conway County, roughly fifty miles north of the state capital. As it did to so many Arkansans, Little Rock represented better opportunity for Brooks, who decided with her husband to rear their family in the single city that most closely resembled metropolitan living. By establishing their family in the capital instead of a smaller town, Willie Bob exponentially increased his hiring base. Greater opportunities for her husband to enjoy steady work meant that during periods of their marriage, Imogene could stay home to rear their four children. Despite the financial constraints of relying solely on an independent contractor's income, a stay-at-home wife and mother signaled to neighbors and acquaintances that the Browns possessed a measure of stability and more important, gendered respectability. Imogene reared young Minnijean and her younger siblings with the luxury of time to monitor their physical development, hone their manners and social graces, impart parental wisdom, and partake in the fun and joy of childhood—to be a total *mother* to her own children in the era when American society placed a premium on the popular image and consumption of motherhood, and that was historically denied to black women.²⁰⁸ Minnijean later recalled that Imogene's reassuring presence “kept the home fires burning in a way that let me know we could survive no matter what.”²⁰⁹ Her mother tended not only to her children's emotional needs, but also their spiritual ones. Imogene's children dutifully attended the Union African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church that stood just a half-mile from their

²⁰⁸ See Beverly Birns and Dale F. Hay, *The Different Faces of Motherhood* (New York: Plenum Press, 1988); Ruth Feldstein, *Motherhood in Black and White: Race and Sex in American Liberalism, 1930-1965* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2000); Sharpless, *Cooking in Other Women's Kitchens*.

²⁰⁹ Max Brantley, “Another Hero Passes,” *Arkansas Times*, Wednesday, December 3, 2008, <http://www.arktimes.com/ArkansasBlog/archives/2008/12/03/another-hero-passes> [accessed December 29, 2016].

home on Ringo Street where their mother maintained lifelong membership until her death in 2008.²¹⁰

That the Brown family belonged to an AME church offers a telling clue about their class status and the invisible, yet understood demarcations notations that socially divided black people in Little Rock. A national institution since just after the Revolutionary War, the AME had existed in Arkansas since 1863. Like its counterparts across the country, AME congregations in Little Rock prided themselves on the respectability of their membership that lay in reserved deportment; family foundations; the tireless community work of church women for the uplift of the city's black citizens; and the advancement of skills and higher education for adults and children alike.²¹¹ Founded in 1906, Union AME stood as the merger of two of the oldest congregations in Little Rock and in the mid-twentieth century, proudly boasted the second-largest AME congregation in the city. Union AME quenched its congregants' religious thirst and also took an "active role in community and volunteer service" that was a part of its historical legacy.²¹² The church also proudly maintained a busy Sunday school and a "very active youth department for young people" that undoubtedly appealed to Imogene Brooks Brown as a respectable, staid Christian mother.²¹³ The Brown family's affiliation with Union AME indicates the intangible markers that separated the 'best' men and women from 'common' people. From

²¹⁰ Obituary: Celebration of the Life of Dwight Brooks Brown, August 26, 2016, <http://obits.dignitymemorial.com/dignity-memorial/obituary.aspx?n=Dwight-Brown&lc=9738&pid=181254862&uuid=3930cd9b-b59c-4c50-903c-10b6fe87451e> [accessed December 29, 2016].

²¹¹ See Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow*; Misti Nicole Harper, "African Methodist Episcopal Church," *The Encyclopedia of Arkansas History and Culture*, <http://www.encyclopediaofarkansas.net/encyclopedia/entry-detail.aspx?search=1&entryID=5358> [accessed December 2, 2016].

²¹² Interview with Claudia Smith, Union AME Church Secretary, January 9, 2017.

²¹³ Ibid.

infancy, Minnijean watched her parents cultivate a personal and public dynamic that provided a clear example of the propriety that bespoke the ‘better sort’ of households *and* middle-class black womanhood.

On the occasions that Imogene did work outside of her home, that labor reflected a key difference between white and black conceptions of class in that a working mother did not reduce a family’s social standing. Moreover, her particular work married the personal to the political that was also part and parcel to constructions of respectable middle-class black womanhood. Imogene Brooks Brown worked for the Arkansas Children’s Hospital where she was hired as the institution’s first black nurse.²¹⁴ Her hire underlines a litany of intersecting issues that highlight what examples young Minnijean absorbed throughout her childhood to make her a ‘qualified’ candidate for acceptance at Central High School in 1957, in the eyes of Virgil Blossom and the Little Rock School Board. In a hospital that centered children’s medical needs, Imogene’s presence among a white staff destroyed racial barriers while simultaneously acknowledging her talents in the utterly feminine profession of nursing that quietly attested to her womanhood as a mother. Nursing, a position widely understood as an extension of noble motherhood, is markedly different than historically exploited domestics who worked as nannies to white children in private homes and endured the ‘Mammy’ stereotypes that white Southern imaginations projected onto black women. Those stereotypes existed as caricatures of human beings—docile, ever-jolly, sexless women who lived solely to serve a class of white women who could not (or would not) tend to the mundanities of child-rearing. On the contrary, the reverence for motherhood cannot be overstated.

²¹⁴ Ibid; Kirk, *Redefining the Color Line*, 108.

In Western culture, motherhood has historically been the highest calling to which a woman can aspire and has been pedestaled as holy. Ironically in the Jim Crow South, where ‘Mammy’ shouldered a significant burden from white women’s lives, part of the mysticism of white womanhood hinged on those women’s identities as mothers—idolized caretakers of the South who nurtured the most vulnerable Southerners, thereby underscoring their own decency, tenderness and fragility as ladies. Imogene Brooks Brown hurdled a hiring process to even be considered a suitable addition to the nursing staff of Arkansas Children’s Hospital—everything about her personal and public record had to be exemplary. Further, to employ her as a nurse who cared for children meant tacitly admitting that she possessed the cherished qualities of Southern motherhood that denoted the most respectable ladies. Minnijean Brown grew up in a home wherein her parents placed a premium on personal dignity, traditional gender roles, and quiet defiance that personified middle-class black respectability, and especially middle-class black womanhood that marked her as a young lady. Willie Bob, and particularly Imogene’s, example instilled in Minnijean the virtues of deportment, courage and confidence that enabled her to pass Virgil Blossom’s capricious requirements for the black students who attended Central High School and that white girls and women gawked and recoiled at as salient threats to their own claims to the title of lady.

“Strict and old-fashioned” described the Eckford household in which the girl who would become the most famous of the nine students who integrated Central High School grew up. One of six children, Elizabeth Eckford credited her family for shaping her values. The Eckfords nevertheless embodied the qualities that made them respectable folks in and amongst black Little Rock. Elizabeth’s mother hailed from Pettus, Arkansas, thirty-five miles east of Little Rock in Lonoke County in an area where black and white families alike scratched out livings as

sharecroppers in an exclusively agricultural economy. A bright, talented child and pious Methodist, Birdie McCulley left her home for the state capital at some point in the 1930s to attend Paul Laurence Dunbar High School, at the time the premier high school for black Arkansans. At Little Rock, Birdie lived with a teacher who “cleaned up” her country grammar and refined her manners to reflect the poise of a well-educated and thoughtful young black lady. This kind of education did, and does, exist in elite white circles as finishing school for young ladies who make their debuts into society as the personifications of the best qualities their class has to offer. While Birdie McCulley’s time as a guest in the home of her teacher and her one-on-one lessons in heightened social grace probably do not compare to the stylized rituals of cotillion, it is nonetheless important to note the mother of Elizabeth Eckford graduated Paul Laurence Dunbar High School with a reinforced understanding of the importance of propriety that extends beyond basic social grace into caste demarcation. These supplemental lessons buttressed Birdie McCulley’s innate sense of decorum that was itself steeled by her faith, and that complimented her impeccable appearance that practical education afforded her as an accomplished dressmaker. Little wonder that the polished young lady left behind a sharecropper shack on the Arkansas prairie or that she turned the head of Oscar Eckford, Jr. whom she married in 1939.²¹⁵

Through her marriage, Birdie McCulley aligned herself with a family respected throughout black Little Rock for their work ethic, intellect and bearing within as well as outside of the community. A Mississippi native, Oscar Eckford, Sr. enlisted in the United States Army in 1918 to serve during the First World War. Upon Allied victory and his own discharge in 1919, Eckford, Sr. ventured to Forrest City, Arkansas to marry a local girl, Irene Davis. In the

²¹⁵ Margolick, *Elizabeth and Hazel*, 6.

twenty-first century, the town that lies just forty-five miles from Memphis prettily refers to itself as the “Jewel of the Delta” and proudly, without irony, declares that it is “moving forward, one step at a time.”²¹⁶ Irene Davis Eckford probably never described Forrest City or the Arkansas Delta in any kind of progressive adjectives, or envisioned herself as a part of the community’s beauty or political ideals. Described as “mulatto” in the earliest census in which she appears, the new Mrs. Eckford came of age in a town named for former Confederate general and Ku Klux Klan founder Nathan Bedford Forrest.²¹⁷ It is not difficult to imagine the kind of social ostracism and contempt that a mixed-race girl would have encountered and endured in a provincial turn-of-the-century Jim Crow community, nor is it hard to understand why the war veteran and his bride moved westward to Little Rock—a city that boasted a relatively thriving black middle-class with opportunities for economic stability, educational opportunities, and respect for the ‘better sort.’

The young Eckford family epitomized exactly that sort. Establishing their home on 2410 Center Street in the south side of the city, Eckford, Sr. worked as a butcher to support his wife and children, Oscar, Jr. and Catherine. Irene Eckford’s occupation reads “none” in census data, revealing that her husband’s income allowed her to the coveted ability to stay at home, rearing her children and caring for her own house and family in an age when working in any capacity was the norm for black women even of middle-class status. As an older man, Eckford, Sr. owned his own grocery store and café that black *and* white Little Rock patronized. Elizabeth Eckford recalled that her grandfather’s commanding, serious presence compelled even some

²¹⁶ “City of Forrest City.” <http://www.cityofforrestcityar.com/> [accessed June 29, 2016].

²¹⁷ Fourteenth Census of the United States, 1920. (NARA microfilm publication T625, 2076 rolls). Records of the Bureau of the Census, Record Group 29. National Archives, Washington, D.C.

white customers to refer to him as “Mr.” in a place and space where such courtesy toward black men from white Southerners was practically moot.²¹⁸

The values imparted by the senior Eckford family set a precedent for Oscar, Jr. and his wife, Birdie. While not as enterprising as his business-minded father (Elizabeth also recalled that the older man “loved money”), Oscar, Jr. worked hard to support his family in their modest home on West 18th Street. When he was in Little Rock, he performed odd jobs for white families in town. However, he primarily earned money as an employee of the Missouri Pacific Railroad, where he waited tables and stocked train cars for the railway, to care for Birdie and six children that included three daughters—Anna, Elizabeth and Catherine. His income did not enable Birdie to be the homemaker that her mother-in-law had been. Still, she possessed valuable skills as a seamstress and as a laundress, the latter of which garnered her a job as the laundry operator at the Arkansas School for the Deaf where she could watch over her handicapped son who attended that institution. Birdie was also an example to her daughters as she taught them to expertly sew, as well as made sure that they minded their (exemplary) manners, faithfully attended church at Allen Temple African Methodist Episcopal Church, and studied diligently. Elizabeth, a naturally gifted intellectual, earned the nickname “professor girl.”²¹⁹

Her innate intelligence and wit, combined with her family’s reputation and the grace (as well as reserve) learned from her mother, marked Elizabeth as quiet and dignified young girl who possessed all the lauded characteristics of prized Southern womanhood in a decidedly black

²¹⁸ United States of America, Bureau of the Census. *Fifteenth Census of the United States, 1930*. Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 1930; Margolick, *Elizabeth and Hazel*, 6.

²¹⁹ Ibid, 10; Margolick, “Through a Lens, Darkly,” *Vanity Fair*, September 24, 2007, 3. <http://www.vanityfair.com/politics/features/2007/09/littlerock200709?currentPage=1> (accessed June 29, 2016).

context. Like Minnijean Brown, because she did possess all of the markers of a well-brought up young *lady*, Elizabeth impressed Virgil Blossom twofold. Consciously, he selected Elizabeth Eckford because she seemed among the best of a selection of students whom he only wanted for token presence anyway. Unconsciously, Blossom created criteria for acceptance to Central High School that *only young ladies* could have achieved. Unpolished, slow-witted, so-called backward girls from coarse or vulgar families were eliminated on the spot. Unwittingly, Virgil Blossom selected exactly the kind of young girls—*ladies*, by every Southern standard except skin color—who stunned and enraged the sensitivities of working-class white girls and women connected to Central High School, whose skin remained their lone claim to such status.

Among the many status markers that solidly middle-class and especially elite white Southern white families use and have used to separate themselves within their social hierarchy, is their ability to trace their family lineage. Ancestry is a weapon to wield by descendants of any particular line, or a weapon that may be wielded *against* descendants—a fact of which class-conscious people of any color are often painfully aware. It is an interesting idea that Daisy Bates, who reinvented herself to join Little Rock's black middle class, and working-class white women who only shared racial caste with social superiors, probably suffered the same anxieties about what realities may or may not have existed in their family trees, that they could or could not prove. That kind of angst did not exist at 1500 South Valentine Street in Little Rock, where the Walls household could discuss the history of their family for several generations on either side in the six-room brick home that Juanita Cullins Walls and Cartelyou Walls purchased from her grandfather, Aaron Holloway, for three thousand dollars in 1945. Mrs. Walls sold the home after the entire family relocated to Colorado in the wake of terrorism that befell the Walls after the integration of Central High School. Still, the house stands, and the despite graffiti that has

been spray painted on the west side of the home and the plywood that covers each of the windows, it is a dignified structure covered in burnt orange and red bricks that Cartelyou, a skilled brick mason, laid himself. Graceful Arkansas oaks rise behind the house on a green lot where Carlotta Walls' father meticulously placed a small brick fence around the family homestead. The house and its own history are a testament to the kind of black middle-class propriety that the Walls family personified and the virtues that Cartelyou and Juanita instilled in their oldest daughter, who would be the youngest girl and member of the Little Rock Nine.²²⁰

²²⁰ Fifteenth Census of the United States, 1930 for Januata [*sic*] Robinson.
http://interactive.ancestry.com/6224/4532448_00794?pid=1105929980&backurl=http://search.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/sse.dll?db%3D1930usfedcen%26indiv%3Dtry%26h%3D1105929980&treeid=&personid=&hintid=&usePUB=true&usePUBJs=true [accessed January 7, 2017]; LaNier, *A Mighty Long Way*, 4.



*Illustration 10: Walls Family Home, front façade. 1500 South Valentine Street, Little Rock, Arkansas
Photo Courtesy of Google Maps*



*Illustration 11: Walls Family Home, corner view. 1500 South Valentine & West 15th Streets, Little Rock, Arkansas
Photo Courtesy of Google Maps*

As a couple, Carlotta's parents reflected a love story and shared an impressive list of accomplishments that underscored them as an all-American couple. High school sweethearts, the pair eloped on February 3, 1942. Just eighteen when he was drafted into the United States Army on December 7 of that year, Cartelyou served his nation with the 447th Anti-Aircraft Coast Artillery in the Philippines until December 1945.²²¹ A vital young man and war veteran, he learned and mastered masonry under direction of his wife's father, Med Cullins, who worked as the master contractor on a project for Little Rock Central High School in the 1940s. There is a special irony of the segregated school that later on (and only through force) tolerated young Carlotta Walls' blackness, femaleness, and status, was nationally recognized as a jewel of architecture because of black talent and craftsmanship. That talent ran within both sides of Juanita Cullins' family, as her grandfather Aaron Holloway represented one of Arkansas' first black building contractors and whose reputation was respected throughout the state. The entire Cullins-Holloway family valued their talents, honing skills, and more importantly, their educations. Carlotta Walls LaNier has recalled reading the transcripts of her great-great-grandfather, Hiram Holloway, who described the illegality of education for enslaved people in the antebellum South to WPA interviewers in the 1930s. A self-described "tri-racial free person of color", Hiram placed profound value on literacy and personal initiative when he bemoaned that during the Depression, young black people—most of whom were descendants of enslaved people— "[didn't] read enough...they don't know history...looks to me like their parents didn't teach them right—or somethin'."²²²

²²¹ Ibid, 12-13; "Thumbnail Sketch of Carlotta Walls," (Daisy Bates Papers, Reel 6 AP93-1382 Restricted, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, Wisconsin).

²²² Ibid, 5.

Hiram Holloway's judgement on the young people he observed and his subsequent assumptions about their families offers a clear window through which to see the emphasis that he put on education (or attempts to gain education) as a marker of self-respect that translated into total respectability that reflected on one's kin. Porter Walls shared those same values. Carlotta Walls LaNier's paternal grandfather claimed little more than a third-grade education, but he worked at Arkansas Tent and Awning to support his own family and save money for his own interests. The elder Walls combined his limited schooling with a native knack for business, eventually opening two restaurants and a pool hall that he managed with his sisters and his children, and that earned the Walls family a comfortable living and the respect of neighbors *and* white people who knew Porter Walls' reputation as a serious, dignified, respectable businessman of the community. It is easy to observe how the senior Holloway and Walls imprinted the principles of middle-class blackness onto their sons, and who in turn imparted those values to young Carlotta. Moreover, the women of the Cullins-Holloway-Walls family emulated those standards. They devotedly attended Whites Memorial Methodist Church that Aaron Holloway built and where he sat as a trustee.²²³ From the church pews, the women of the congregation's leading family emulated and dictated the poise and benevolence befitting good Christian ladies. "Grandmother Cullins"—Beatrice Cullins, who was actually Carlotta's step-grandmother—served as a particularly poignant figure who led her granddaughter to muse later that she was "nurtured by a cadre of well-educated and loving women."²²⁴

That fact evidenced itself most prominently in her mother, Juanita Cullins Walls. Like Birdie McCulley, Juanita graduated from Paul Laurence Dunbar High School. Fiercely

²²³ Ibid, 6, 11-14.

²²⁴ Ibid, 10.

intelligent and resolutely dignified, the new Mrs. Walls earned a position as a seamstress and sales clerk at M. M. Cohn, Arkansas' premier department store, to earn extra money that would support her and baby Carlotta, born just after her young husband left the United States for service in the South Pacific. Her appointment at this particular shop is remarkable. Originally established in Arkadelphia in 1874, Polish immigrant Mark Mathais Cohn extended his second shop to Little Rock in 1886. By 1943, the sixty-nine-year-old department store had earned a formidable reputation throughout the region based upon its "uniform courtesy and genial treatment of visitors and customers"—not to mention that the "closest thing" to the luxury apparel and goods sold in Little Rock at M.M. Cohn's was "at Neiman-Marcus in Dallas."²²⁵ In this shop, Juanita tailored clothing for and waited on the capital city's most elite white citizens. The ability of the Cohn family to hire black sales associates without public backlash reveals a good deal about the complicated character of Little Rock. Like most Southern cities of notable size, the Arkansas capital was not a Protestant, Christian monolith—nor was its ethnic demographic exclusively 'white and black.' Little Rock did, and does, count a small but vibrant Jewish population whose prominence in the community historically intersects with support for black citizens' civil rights.²²⁶ While the demographics of Little Rock were not unique, the capacity—and the willingness—of the Jewish community to openly flout Jim Crow norms with

²²⁵ John Henry, "M.M. Cohn Was Arkansas' High-Fashion Store," *Arkansas Business*, April 29, 2002, <http://0-bi.galegroup.com.library.uark.edu/essentials/article/GALE%7CA86064681/1667de1bdce1e68d2e0a4ffb673c2ddc?u=faye28748> [accessed January 10, 2017].

²²⁶ For more information on the connected history of black and Jewish Arkansans, see Carolyn Gray LeMaster, *A Corner of the Tapestry: A History of the Jewish Experience in Arkansas, 1820s—1990s* (Fayetteville, Arkansas: University of Arkansas Press, 1994); James L. Moses, "The Law of Life Is the Law of Service: Rabbi Ira Sanders and the Quest for Racial and Social Justice in Arkansas, 1926-1963," *Southern Jewish History* 10 (2007), 159-203; Anthony B. Newkirk, "Lee and Grace Lorch in Little Rock, 1955-1958," *Pulaski County Historical Review* 64 (Fall 2016), 96-111.

relatively few anti-Semitic reprisals speaks to the city's reputation as one of the South's most liberal of the era. M.M. Cohn hired Mrs. Walls to face white customers at a time and in a region where most white people demanded that black workers either perform white-approved, submissive jobs reminiscent of enslavement or stay wholly out of public visibility. At the same time, Carlotta Walls LaNier remembers the subtle racist indignities that her mother and other black people endured at the department store. Mrs. Walls waited on white customers but could not touch the cash register. Black customers could enter M.M. Cohn to shop! They were not permitted to try on apparel or return ill-fitting merchandise. This reality muddies the relationship between two of the city's marginalized communities and in the mid-twentieth century, belied Little Rock's progressive reputation.

Outside of the comparative conditions that enabled Juanita Cullins Walls' hire, other factors that reflected her status from Jim Crow's gaze and within her own community must be considered. Undoubtedly, Mrs. Walls' refinement made her attractive to a managerial staff that prioritized luxury and gracious service, and that wanted to hire a black woman. Much like Virgil Blossom would insist in 1956, however, M.M. Cohn certainly selected an employee who passed white-determined criteria for the 'right' sort of black sales associate. It is fair to argue that Mrs. Walls' hire at this department store served to underscore her status as part of Little Rock's black middle class—even in the event that that fact did not register with white Little Rock. It is also reasonable to consider that Mrs. Walls' physical appearance, that white employers and customers definitely noticed, assisted her in getting the job. Hiram Holloway told WPA writers that his mother was a "full-blooded Cherokee" and that his father was a "dark Spaniard," which revealed that the Holloways were a mixed-race family.²²⁷ Carlotta Walls LaNier remembers that Aaron

²²⁷ LaNier, *A Mighty Long Way*, 5.

Holloway “looked like a Spaniard,” and that her great-grandfather suspected that some of his scattered siblings “passed as white.”²²⁸ In recalling her parents’ love story, LaNier remarks that her mother was a “fair-skinned beauty.”²²⁹ In the color-obsessed South, it is impossible to imagine that whomever hired Mrs. Walls as a sales associate did not consider that she was a sharp-witted, refined, light-skinned black woman whose presence on the floors of M.M. Cohn might have been less likely to cause white shoppers to fall victim to stereotypes associated with a darker-skinned employee. Likewise, given the previous discussion of the painful phenomenon of colorism, it is not irrational to consider that the Cullins-Holloways had achieved some economic and social opportunities that helped contribute to their reputation throughout the state as a hard-working, sober, intelligent, decent family in part because, and despite proudly identifying themselves as “colored,” several of the family members including Aaron, Juanita, and her daughter Carlotta, were racially ambiguous.²³⁰

As an adult, Carlotta Walls LaNier has candidly discussed that her skin color afforded her no advantages during the Central High School crisis, and regardless of how colorism affected her family before 1957, it is certain that premiums placed on education, Christian virtue, a woman’s grace, traditional gender roles and work ethic that were impressed upon her and her two younger sisters were distinct expressions of middle-class black respectability that offered the foundation for black women to be recognized as ladies. When Cartelyou Walls returned as a decorated

²²⁸ Ibid, 6.

²²⁹ Ibid, 12.

²³⁰ Ibid, 6. For more information on the concept of colorism, see Cedric Herring, *Skin Deep: How Race and Complexion Matter in the “Color-Blind” Era* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004); Stephanie Rose Bird, *Light, Bright and Damned Near White: Biracial and Triracial Culture in America* (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger, 2009); Lori Tharps, *Same Family, Different Colors: Confronting Colorism in America’s Diverse Families* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2016).

soldier from the war, his wife enrolled in Philander Smith University, a haven for black higher education. In a choice that reflected the gender norms of black *and* white America, Juanita Cullins Walls decided not to finish her degree because of the demands that motherhood placed on wives as the primary caregiver to children. Like millions of black women, she occasionally worked outside of her home to help her family through lean financial times, and she translated her course work in to a secretarial position for the city's public housing office. Unlike millions of black women, her daughter recalls that she only worked *occasionally*. As in the Brown family, Cartelyou Walls' income often enabled his wife to stay at home managing their household and tending to Carlotta and their younger daughters, Loujuana and Anyeta, whom the family called "Tina." The Walls girls were not only reared by parents whose lineage ran deep and proud through Central Arkansas; they observed their mother and other women in their family treated as pedestaled and guarded *ladies* by the men of their family and their community, worthy of protection and respect.²³¹ As the reality of Jim Crow actualized during Carlotta's childhood, each of her parents reminded her of her elevation in the years before she helped integrate Central High School: "...we must...never, ever bring ourselves down to their level... *You are a Walls*."²³² The refinement and prestige instilled into young Carlotta Walls would have been impossible for Virgil Blossom to miss in his determination to select only the 'right sort' of black students even as he inadvertently revealed a class of ladies who bested working-class white women in every social medium excepting race.

²³¹ Interview with Carlotta Walls LaNier, February 11, 2016; "Thumbnail Sketch of Carlotta Walls," Madison; Jacoway, *Turn Away Thy Son*, 103; Kirk, *Redefining the Color Line*, 108.

²³² LaNier, *A Mighty Long Way*, 17; "Thumbnail Sketch of Carlotta Walls," Madison.

Of the young girls selected to attend Little Rock Central High School, perhaps Gloria Ray represented the most definitively middle-class daughter as her parents' financial and social status bordered on 'elite.' A Missouri native, Harvey Cincinnatus Ray was born to Kate and George Ray in Bunceton, northwest of Jefferson City in the central part of that state. Each of his parents' birth dates are recorded for 1859 in Missouri, two full years before the beginning of the Civil War. Assuming that data is accurate, either or both of Harvey C. Ray's parents may have been born into enslavement. Certainly, his parents came of age in the tumultuous Reconstruction years as a black couple in a state that had fought to preserve the Union but had also maintained pro-slavery, anti-black attitudes. The hurdles that faced the Ray family make their son's accomplishments remarkable. As young man Harvey C. Ray acquired the means to travel to Alabama, where he studied agriculture at Tuskegee University under the direction of famed botanist, George Washington Carver. By the time that the First World War demanded Ray register for the draft in 1917, he listed his address at 2111 South Cross Street in Little Rock, and his employer as the United States Department of Agriculture for whom he worked as a district agent in Arkansas. An innovator as well as a scientist, Ray founded the Arkansas Agricultural Extension Service for Negroes.²³³ Ray attained the kind of position and status that earned him respect from black and white people alike, and the kind of security that allowed him to build a two-story, colonial-style home, just blocks away from Broadway and the beating heart of black

²³³ Interview with Gloria Ray Karlmark (February 2, 2016). Conducted by Misti Nicole Harper via email; Compiled service record, Harvey C. Ray, Arkansas Draft Registration Card 1163, No. 23, compiled for 1917-1918, http://interactive.ancestry.com/6482/005150452_02753/24301694?backurl=http://person.ancestry.com/tree/8365900/person/630148209/facts [accessed January 7, 2017]; "Gloria Cecelia Ray Karlmark," *The Encyclopedia for Arkansas History and Culture*, March 30, 2016, <http://www.encyclopediaofarkansas.net/encyclopedia/entry-detail.aspx?entryID=726> [accessed April 2, 2016]; Jacoway, *Turn Away Thy Son*, 103.

Little Rock. Red-orange brickwork decorates the columns and wrap-around wall of the deep front porch that rises eight feet from the ground atop a hill so steep that Ray engineered a concrete staircase to assist visitors. Peeling paint recalls the crisp white wash that was once meticulously applied to the wooden-framed home with its second-story row of colonial windows that face the south side of the city. A chimney rises alongside the oaks and pines that shade the property and lend an air of graciousness. Though vacant for decades, the Ray House still stands as a quiet testament to the family and the young lady who once lived there—and to the meaning of middle-class black respectability in Little Rock.



*Illustration 12: Ray Family Home, front façade. 2111 South Cross Street, Little Rock, Arkansas
Photo Courtesy of Google Maps*

Ray's career as an agricultural agent afforded him social mobility and economic stability throughout the Great Depression, but it did not prevent him from experiencing hardship. His terminally ill-first wife, Mary Ray, died in 1934 and left behind her husband and their infant daughter, Marylee. Given his career and the gender conventions that characterized his community and the nation at large, Ray sought a second wife out of necessity for his daughter and household, as much as for his own emotional comfort. His status, security and imminent respectability undoubtedly made attractive qualities to thirty-two-year-old Julia A. Miller of Bolivar, Mississippi, who came to know Harvey Ray when she was hired as a home demonstration agent to care for the ailing Mary Ray.²³⁴

Though orphaned at age three, Julia Miller was fortunate enough to be the niece of a Mississippi banker's wife. This connection facilitated a boarding school education that served as the springboard for her eventual graduation from Philander Smith College. The second Mrs. Ray exactly represented the 'better sort' of woman who could rear children with all the virtues that personified the black middle class. A sociologist with two degrees, Julia Miller Ray served as a field worker for the Department of Welfare in Little Rock.²³⁵ A "serious-minded, pleasant

²³⁴ Interview with Gloria Ray Karlmark.

²³⁵ Ibid; "Thumbnail Sketch of Gloria Ray," Madison; Arkansas Marriage Index, 1933-1939, http://interactive.ancestry.com/8780/ARMAR_0002-0898?pid=1477704&backurl=http://search.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/sse.dll?indiv%3D1%26db%3DARMarriageindex%26h%3D1477704%26tid%3D%26pid%3D%26usePUB%3Dtrue%26_phsrc%3DYWW29%26_phstart%3DsuccessSource%26usePUBJs%3Dtrue%26rhSource%3D2442&treeid=&personid=&hintid=&usePUB=true&_phsrc=YWW296&_phstart=successSource&usePUBJs=true [accessed December 18, 2016]; 1910 United States Federal Census for Julia Miller, http://interactive.ancestry.com/7884/31111_4330316-00280/185719670?backurl=http://person.ancestry.com/tree/8365900/person/-960557427/facts/citation/2980518384/edit/record [accessed December 18, 2016]; Bates, *The Long Shadow of Little Rock*, 139; Kimberly Mitchell, "Arkansas' Most Endangered Places—Part 3," *Only in Arkansas*, July 11, 2016, <http://onlyinark.com/culture/arkansas-most-endangered-places-part-3/#>.

person” whom her daughter recalls was a “feminist” before the word was colloquial, Mrs. Ray offered her community an example of accomplished black womanhood that translated formidable education into a professional career that complimented her husband’s.²³⁶ Independent and self-possessed, Julia Ray reared her daughter to “make decisions,” “to learn and dare to stand alone.”²³⁷ Nevertheless, more traditional women also influenced the Ray family. Julia Miller Ray grew close to Mrs. Fannie Mae Boone, another home demonstration agent who worked for Harvey Ray and who lived with the couple when she worked out of Little Rock. “Decades older” than her mother, Boone lived in the household as something of a surrogate grandmother, and is the person whom Gloria Ray Karlmark remembers taught her the “practical things” that a “good wife for a husband” would know, which also meant how to behave “properly.”²³⁸ Julia and Mrs. Boone represented a spectrum of dignified black womanhood who posed as excellent models of refined Christian motherhood to Marylee and to the children of Harvey and Julia’s union—Harvey, Jr. in August 1935 and Gloria Cecilia into September 1942. Observed by their neighbors, the Ray children devoutly attended Sunday school at the Methodist Episcopal church with their mother. They observed Lent, and it can be ascertained that with their congregation and as individuals, they pondered a spiritual and intellectual relationship with God.²³⁹ Julia also paid particular attention to her children’s appearances and social interactions. In church and elsewhere, prim Gloria Ray’s “meticulous

²³⁶ Interview with Gloria Ray Karlmark. Karlmark’s use of the term *feminist* must be understood in the context of how black womanhood operated in partnership with black manhood as a byproduct of gender dynamic-realities for black families during enslavement and after emancipation. Black feminism is also differentiated from mainstream white feminism that has historically exercised total segregation or token representation without full inclusion.

²³⁷ Ibid.

²³⁸ Ibid.

²³⁹ Beals, *Warriors Don’t Cry*, 35.

attire” drew the attention of her peers, and she employed manners that bespoke of traditional, “no nonsense” mothering. As an adult, Gloria Ray Karlmark has recalled that she “was not allowed to date or wear makeup or high heels” as fifteen-year-old girl in 1957.²⁴⁰ The image of a dutiful young Southern girl in a church pew under the watchful gaze of her equally-meticulously-dressed-and-composed mother evokes images of the most traditional kind rearing that capitulates in a Southern lady. Gloria Ray Karlmark has affirmed that she does not regard femininity as a question of class, yet inside of the framework of black femininity and respectability politics in 1957, both Julia Miller Ray and young Gloria Ray ascribed to social mores and standards that identified them as ladies in every sense of the term.²⁴¹ Her father’s good name, her mother’s grace, and each of her parents’ accomplishments arguably leaves no doubt that Gloria hailed from the kind of family that the *State Press* loved to celebrate in its pages, and that she was being raised as the sort of young lady whose photo in such a paper might have denoted a litany of academic, social or personal milestones. The indulged “baby” of a doting father and protective mother, “impish” Gloria Ray radiated the charms of middle-class comfort and pampered, carefree girlhood underpinned by a fierce work ethic, staid and reflective Christianity, and propriety that ultimately set her apart from and above the baying mobs of white working-class women and girls at Central High School.²⁴²

Education, church and community were the pillars that supported black respectability and class structure, and foundational to all three was opportunity. Taking advantage of advantages that presented themselves, sometimes meant that individuals or families traveled in search of

²⁴⁰ Interview with Gloria Ray Karlmark.

²⁴¹ Interview with Gloria Ray Karlmark (November 11, 2015). Conducted by Misti Nicole Harper via email.

²⁴² Ibid; “Thumbnail Sketch of Gloria Ray,” Madison; Bates, *The Long Shadow of Little Rock*, 139; Jacoway, *Turn Away Thy Son*, 103; Kirk, *Redefining the Color Line*, 111.

what might improve their circumstances. This was so for millions of black families that left the South in a northward mass exodus in the early decades of the 1900s that became known as the Great Migration. It was also true for those who scoured within the South for better lives. The Mothershed family joined the ranks of those who searched for greater prosperity away from home. Arlevis Mothershed was fifteen in 1930 when a census taker recorded that he, and the rest of his Arkansas-born family, lived on a plot of land at the Atlanta and Ravanna Road in Cass County, Texas. The census taker recorded that Arlevis' parents, Charley and Ollie, were each fully literate and that Charley worked on his "own account" on the family's home farm. In an era where rural black families commonly labored as sharecroppers for a white land owner, the Mothershed family did not. Nor was Cass County the first time that the Mothershed patriarch owned land. A 1910 census taken for Sulphur Township, Arkansas described Charley as a "general farmer" who paid a mortgage on a house and farm. For reasons not yet determined, between 1910 and 1920, the southwest Arkansas native determined to relocate his large family roughly ten miles westward across the Texas state line, and to new farmland that he purchased. In a census taken in 1940, the Mothershed address listed as "Colored Section, Northwest of Bloomburg City Limits," but that their physical residence was the same home and farm that the now-deceased Charley had owned in 1930. Impressively, the Mothershed family continued to own their property and support themselves throughout the years of the Great Depression when millions of Southern and Midwestern farming families—regardless of color—had lost their land and sought other means of survival.²⁴³

²⁴³ 1910 United States Federal Census for Charley Mothershed, <http://search.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/sse.dll?indiv=1&db=1910USCenIndex&h=647636&tid=&pid=&usePUB=true&usePUBJs=true&rhSource=6061> [accessed January 10, 2017]; 1930 United States Federal Census for Arliva [sic] Mothershed, <http://search.ancestry.com/cgi->

These census records paint an interesting portrait of a black Southern family whose head of household controlled his own labor and who possessed the means to keep and pass along the land he had worked. Comments about the education of Charley and Ollie, ownership and stability of residence also offer a window to recognize what kind of people they were and what kind of children they intended to rear. No information indicates how much education Charley received, while Ollie completed fifth grade. Nevertheless, each of them clearly valued education. By 1940, all five of the youngest children who ranged from six to sixteen-years-old were enrolled in age-appropriate grades of school. Five of the seven oldest children (of the twelve-total offspring of the Mothershed union) had completed at least one year of high school. Two children had attended at least one year of college, and one of those children had become a teacher. Arlevis Mothershed completed two years of college and taught elementary school children in Bloomburg. During the summer, he worked other jobs to pay rent and support his wife, Hosanna Claire, and two daughters, Lois and Grace. Though he did not own his home as his father had, Arlevis' total income allowed his wife to stay at home with their children. An educator and hardworking family man, he also dedicated himself to his country in an era where Jim Crow dictated that his family live in the 'colored' section of any community. Like millions of men, Arlevis enlisted in the United States Army during World War II. He hailed from a family that valued and protected their own labor and Arlevis' own occupation guaranteed him a

bin/sse.dll?db=1930usfedcen&indiv=try&h=65057635 [accessed January 10, 2017]; 1940 United States Federal Census for Ollie Mothershed, <http://search.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/sse.dll?indiv=1&db=1940usfedcen&h=160144502&tid=&pid=&usePUB=true&usePUBJs=true&rhSource=6224> [accessed January 10, 2017]. In census records, Arlevis' name is recorded as "Arlevia" or "Arliva." Interviews with his daughter, Thelma Mothershed Wair, record that his name is spelled "Arlevis" and is the spelling employed in this monograph.

certain status in his community. Further, his work ethic and sacrifices cemented him as a person of integrity and was the image of middle-class black respectability.²⁴⁴

As was his wife. Born in Lonoke, Arkansas, Hosanna Claire Moore Mothershed had also completed at least a year of college. Her parents, George and Caroline Armstrong Moore, migrated from North Carolina to the Arkansas prairie where George Moore farmed on his own property. Man and wife were each fully literate, though neither of Caroline Armstrong's own parents could read or write. An 1880 census reveals the illiteracy of Hosanna Claire Moore's grandparents who were each born in Edgecomb, North Carolina between 1857 and 1862. The probability that Haywood and Agnis Armstrong were born into enslavement is high and attaining any level of education even in Reconstruction North Carolina would have been fraught with peril.²⁴⁵ In light of the social and political circumstances of that era, it is all the more incredible that merely two generations later, Hosanna Claire Moore Mothershed lived more than a thousand miles from her parents' birthplace, had attained some college education and was supported by

²⁴⁴ World War II Army Enlistment Records, 1938-1946 for Arlevia L. Mothershed, http://search.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/sse.dll?indiv=1&db=WWIIenlist&h=7882722&tid=&pid=&usePUB=true&_phsrc=YWW358&_phstart=successSource&usePUBJs=true&rhSource=3693 [accessed January 10, 2017]; 1940 United States Federal Census for Arlevia L. Mothershed, http://search.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/sse.dll?indiv=1&db=1940usfedcen&h=160144493&tid=&pid=&usePUB=true&_phsrc=YW358&_phstart=successSource&usePUBJs=true&rhSource=8939 [accessed January 10, 2017].

²⁴⁵ Schools established through the Freedmen's Bureau during Reconstruction offered newly freed people and children born postwar an opportunity for education that had not existed in the antebellum South. Nevertheless, most white Southerners fiercely opposed efforts for black education and after the fall of Reconstruction, chose to remember the Freedmen's schools as institutions that would have been "viewed with cordiality and favor" had it not been for "unwarranted outside interference" [from the Federal government] that encouraged "indiscreet criticisms of Southern life." For an entire Dunning-school interpretation of black education in Reconstruction North Carolina, see Edgar Wallace Knight, *Public School Education in North Carolina* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1916). For a nuanced interpretation of the same era, see Ward McAfee, *Religion, Race and Reconstruction: The Public School in the Politics of the 1870s* (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 1998).

her husband while she cared for her daughters, who eventually numbered three, with the birth of Thelma Jean Mothershed in November 1940.²⁴⁶

The Mothershed family reflected the promises of Reconstruction in the South, while the fact of segregation and gross inequity of mid-twentieth century America underscored that era's failings. Still, the mobility and achievements of the Mothershed clan underscore what historian Eric Foner has identified as the remarkable, unprecedented success of black Southerners in the aftermath of Emancipation to take advantage of the limited window that was Reconstruction.²⁴⁷ Black participation in politics soared as the Fourteenth Amendment guaranteed due process before the law, and as the Fifteenth Amendment enfranchised black men—who shared their vote with partners and wives who demanded political representation in their familial relationships even if women were legally disenfranchised throughout the nineteenth century.²⁴⁸ Interracial democracy resulted in more than 2,000 black men serving in political offices that ranged from

²⁴⁶ 1880 United States Census for Haywood, Agnis and Caroline Armstrong, <http://search.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/sse.dll?indiv=1&db=1880usfedcen&h=19474825&tid=&pid=&usePUB=true&usePUBJs=true&rhSource=7602> [accessed January 10, 2017]; 1930 United States Census for George Moore, <http://search.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/sse.dll?db=1930usfedcen&indiv=try&h=86844548>; 1940 United States Census for Hosanna C. Mothershed, http://search.ancestryheritagequest.com/cgi-bin/sse.dll?_phsrc=YWW343&_phstart=successSource&usePUBJs=true&indiv=1&db=1940usfedcen&gss=angs-d&new=1&rank=1&gsfn=Claire&gsfn_x=0&gsln=Mothershed&gsln_x=0&msrpn__ftp=Little%20Rock,%20Pulaski,%20Arkansas,%20USA&msrpn=29109&msrpn_PInfo=8-%7C0%7C1652393%7C0%7C2%7C0%7C6%7C0%7C2444%7C29109%7C0%7C0%7C&_83004003-n_xcl=m&MSAV=1&uidh=iov&pcat=35&fh=3&h=160144494&recoff=&ml_rpos=4 [accessed January 10, 2017].

²⁴⁷ Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution, 1863-1877* (New York: Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2014); "Civil War Historian Eric Foner on the Radical Possibilities of Reconstruction, *Democracy Now! Independent Global News*, March 11, 2015 https://www.democracynow.org/2015/3/11/civil_war_historian_eric_foner_on [accessed May 17, 2017]; Eric Foner, "Why Reconstruction Matters," *The New York Times*, March 28, 2015 <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/03/29/opinion/sunday/why-reconstruction-matters.html> [accessed May 17, 2017].

²⁴⁸ Gillin, "Black Politics and Violence," in *Shrill Hurrahs*.

local positions to seats in the United States Congress. Freedmen's schools educated hundreds of thousands of black children and adults so that by 1877, more than 250,000 black Southerners were literate where less than one percent of that population had been at the beginning of the Civil War. Social services expanded that ensured black health, which in turn ensured black people's abilities to work, provide and care for families, and leave areas where opportunity was nil. As historian and intellectual W.E.B. DuBois noted, "during Reconstruction times...there was not a single reform movement...a single experiment for betterment in which Negroes were not found in varying numbers."²⁴⁹ Because of the legacy of Reconstruction, Hosanna Claire Moore and Arlevis Mothershed could emulate their ancestors as they chose to live and rear their own children where better opportunity and advantage presented themselves.

In 1943, the Mothershed household moved back to Arkansas and established itself at 313 South Chester Street in Little Rock. A Firestone auto center now stands at the address, and that area of Downtown Little Rock is now heavily commercialized. Still, several grand, colonial-style homes that predate the interstate disturbances of the 1960s stand on Chester Street, just opposite of where Thelma Mothershed would have lived as a little girl in a Southern city where middle-class black citizens were mobilizing. Those homes (now converted to law offices) offer a telling clue about the kind of residential neighborhood that the area must have been. The move indicates other changes for the family. All records after 1943 show that Arlevis no longer taught school but worked as a psychiatric attendant at Veterans Hospital across the Arkansas River in North Little Rock.²⁵⁰ Yet returning to Arkansas did not affect Hosanna Claire's ability to remain

²⁴⁹ W.E.B. Dubois, *Black Reconstruction in America: Toward a History of the Part Which Black Folk Played in the Attempt to Reconstruct Democracy in America, 1860-1880* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Transaction Publishers, 2013), 366.

²⁵⁰ Little Rock, Arkansas City Directory 1953, http://search.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/sse.dll?indiv=1&db=USDirectories&h=910460295&tid=&pid=&usePUB=true&_phsrc=YW

a homemaker for her husband and children, who eventually totaled five with the addition of two younger brothers, Gilbert and Michael. She reared all of her children in line with the traditional gender norms that characterized middle-class Americans, down to the hobbies and interests that her daughters pursued that included sewing, crafting, cooking and music. The conventional femininity of the activities that the Mothershed girls enjoyed emphasized that class status of their family and, perhaps, necessity—Thelma had been born with a cardiac condition that has made her especially frail and physically diminutive throughout her life. Despite the ailments that may have contributed to the delicacy of her upbringing, Thelma also gleaned from her parents the value that they placed on their blackness and observed the ways that they emulated the dignity and distinction of the ‘better sort’ in their own decorum and in the encouragement of their daughters to act like young ladies in a specifically black and public context. Throughout the 1940s, respectable middle-class black ladies in Little Rock had repeatedly organized to fight racial injustices ranging from teacher pay to police brutality. The oldest Mothershed daughter, Lois, served as a poignant example of the resolute attitudes of young black women of certain standing, and to her younger siblings when she moved to Enid, Oklahoma to integrate Phillips University as a music student. Grace Mothershed underlined her family’s legacy of seizing opportunity and emulating the ‘right’ kind of black womanhood when she moved to Fayetteville to attend the University of Arkansas as a nursing major. Young Thelma observed a family history rich in guarding their talents, taking and creating advantages, learning as much as possible and upholding an unassailable image of propriety and gentility that defined lady.

W358&_phstart=successSource&usePUBJs=true&rhSource=2469 [accessed January 10, 2017]; “Thumbnail Sketch of Thelma Mothershed,” Madison; Bates, *The Long Shadow of Little Rock*, 134; Kirk, *Redefining the Color Line*, 109.

The image and the reality of middle-class blackness always carried the burden to responsibility to remain an example of and ally to uplift of the entire community. Unlike the dictates of white class structure that was predicated solely on capitalistic status and defense of white supremacy, middle-class blackness prized carving space for blackness where it did not (or was told it should not) exist. In this way, the Pattillo family of 1121 South Cross Street, resembled the Mothersheds and their neighbors, the Rays. Melba Pattillo Beals has authored two memoirs since leaving Little Rock, and she records the anxiety of helplessness and intimidation wrought from Jim Crow, that affected black Little Rock before integration more acutely than from the other women who entered Central High School with her.²⁵¹ Despite the instances of racial humiliation that pockmarked her childhood before 1957, Beals acknowledges without hesitation that her family was “considered middle-class folk.”²⁵² She attributes this primarily to her mother’s profession as a high school English teacher and the fact that Lois Peyton Pattillo had earned her graduate degree from the University of Arkansas in 1954. Mrs. Pattillo’s position and education certainly contributed to her family’s status as respectable and middle class. It is also an interesting coincidence that young Melba watched her mother graduate Arkansas’ flagship institution in the same year that the United States Supreme Court overturned segregation in public schools in the landmark case, *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas*. Just six years before Mrs. Pattillo’s achievement, Silas Hunt had integrated the University of Arkansas campus. Melba’s mother was still one of only a handful of token black students when she earned her doctorate, exemplifying the achievement *and* the challenging public presence that were synonymous with the ‘better sort’ of black womanhood in the context of black class structure

²⁵¹ Beals, *Warriors Don’t Cry*, 4-8.

²⁵² Ibid, 13.

and community uplift. More than merely her mother's education and occupation contributed to the status of the Pattillo family.



*Illustration 13: Pattillo Family Home, front façade. 1121 South Cross Street, Little Rock, Arkansas
Photo Courtesy of Google Maps*



Illustration 14: Pattillo Family Home, side view. South Cross and West 12th Streets, Little Rock, Arkansas
Photo Courtesy of Google Maps

Each side of Melba’s lineage revealed the values of creating opportunity, work ethic, education, and personal improvement through a combination of the first three attributes. Her father, Howell William Pattillo, Jr., worked as a hostler’s helper for the Missouri Pacific Railroad—by choice. As an assistant hostler, he tended to the horses transported by owners who used the railroad. He enjoyed working with animals as his job mean movement and physical labor, to a better-paying professional position that might be offered if he finished his last year of college—but those jobs might require confinement to a building.²⁵³ Pattillo, Jr. had arrived in Little Rock from rural Carthage in Dallas County, Arkansas. Two generations of Pattillos had lived and worked the land in south-central part of the state. Howell William Pattillo, Sr. had owned his own home and was listed as a “farmer” and “proprietor” in a 1910 census. When he

²⁵³ Ibid, 11.

completed his draft registration card eight years later, he worked as a mail carrier in the same community. No occupation was listed for his wife, Fannie Stephens Pattillo, but both people were fully literate and it is reasonable to assume that Howell, Sr. could afford for his wife to stay home tending to their three daughters and young son.²⁵⁴ Education, property ownership, and a government occupation that almost certainly meant Howell, Sr. interacted with a white public that had to accept him in that role suggest an elevated status that built on the enterprise of the first generation of Arkansas Pattillos. His father, Louis Pattillo, Jr., was born in Dallas County between 1857 and 1858 to parents who had migrated from North Carolina and Tennessee. When Howell, Sr. was three, Louis was listed as a farm hand with no indication of property ownership or that he hired his own labor. However, his wife Sarah Morrison Pattillo, worked at “keeping house.” Her occupational status that shows Louis Pattillo, Jr. either made enough money so that his wife did not have to do the field work or domestic labor as did most black women, or that he insisted on emulating the traditional gender roles wherein he performed conventional male labor outside the home while Sarah stayed in a woman’s sphere. Either way, the couple prescribed to one of the tenants of middle-class black respectability in that particular choice.

This is especially interesting in the case of Melba Pattillo Beals’ great-grandmother, Sarah Morrison Pattillo. She first appeared in records in June 1860 as a free person along with her parents and siblings Spartanburg County, in the South Carolina Upcountry. Her father,

²⁵⁴ 1910 United States Census for Howell Pattillo, <http://search.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/sse.dll?db=1910USCenIndex&indiv=try&h=482299> [accessed January 12, 2017]; Compiled service record, Howell William Pattillo, Arkansas Draft Registration Card, no. 544, compiled for 1917-1918, http://interactive.ancestry.com/6482/005150432_03579?pid=25055613&backurl=http://search.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/sse.dll?indiv%3D1%26db%3DWW1draft%26h%3D25055613%26tid%3D%26pid%3D%26usePUB%3Dtrue%26usePUBJs%3Dtrue%26rhSource%3D7884&treeid=&personid=&hintid=&usePUB=true&usePUBJs=true [accessed January 12, 2017].

James, worked as a farm laborer while her mother, Huldry did not list an occupation. Each of her parents were literate, and her older brother and sister attended school. Data does not indicate if the Morrison family of Spartanburg were free-born or recently freed. In the same month, a census taker recorded the human property of a Charleston slave owner, R. S. Morrison, whose roster included another three-year-old girl called ‘Sarah.’ The possibility exists that two children listed in the census data are the same person, and if so, Melba Pattillo Beals’ great-grandmother was born with the challenge of overcoming the most gargantuan hurdle in American history. Even if the two children *were not* the same little girls, the woman who became Melba Pattillo Beals’ great-grandmother began her life in the most devout slave state in the Union on the eve of the Civil War. Nevertheless, she lived in a household where her parents enjoyed some education and ensured that their older children learned as well, before uprooting the family to make the long trek to Arkansas where Sarah would eventually be a wife, homemaker, and mother. The foundations for Sarah’s status as a respectable black *lady* were laid for her through the tenacity of her parents and for generations of their descendants.²⁵⁵

As were the underpinnings for young Melba’s status on the Peyton side of her family. Her mother, Lois, was born to India and Charles Peyton in St. Louis where her father worked as a foundry laborer and her mother cooked for a white family to support their own. Though the

²⁵⁵ 1880 United States Census for Lewis Pattillo, Jr., <http://search.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/sse.dll?db=1880usfedcen&indiv=try&h=4665909>; 1860 United States Census for Sarah Morrison, <http://search.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/sse.dll?indiv=1&db=1860usfedcenancestry&h=18849537&tid=&pid=&usePUB=true&usePUBJs=true&rhSource=7668> [accessed January 17, 2017]; 1860 United States Census-Slave Schedules for R. S. Morrison, <http://search.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/sse.dll?indiv=1&db=1860slaveschedules&h=758386&tid=&pid=&usePUB=true&usePUBJs=true&rhSource=6742> [accessed January 27, 2017]. Certain data records Sarah and Louis Pattillo, Jr. as ‘Sallie’ or ‘Lewis.’ However, the preponderance of records list their names as the monikers I have elected to use in the body of my work.

Peytons' wage-earning jobs placed them in the working-class status to which most black Southern families belonged, the Arkansas-born couple were each exposed in their youth to the possibilities that exposure, education and enterprise presented. In her memoirs, Melba Pattillo Beals recounts the profound presence of her grandmother India Peyton, who lived with her family and whose personal items revealed a world beyond the confines of the Jim Crow South. Records indicate that Charles Peyton was born in Arkansas, but India Peyton's photographs captured visits that she and her husband took to see his family on the Native reservation in Canada where she told Melba Pattillo Beals that he had grown up. Her pictures also showed young India Ripley in Rome, Italy where she had accompanied her father, George, when his boss required him to travel. A 1910 census records that George Ripley's family lived in the Argenta community in North Little Rock, and that he worked as a scrap man for a railway shop, while his wife Anna did not work outside of their home. However, two of the couple's daughters, Annie and Gertrude, worked as a seamstress and as a domestic servant. It is reasonable to assume that keeping the Riley household financially solvent required the efforts of as many workers as possible. Nevertheless, the family valued household wares that indicated beauty and refinement even in humble circumstances, as well as a voracious love of literature that denoted an appreciation for education and self-improvement. Melba Pattillo Beals recalled a clock and copper horse that India Peyton inherited from her parents; a music box, leather furniture and a carved armoire she acquired over her lifetime; and a library of "cherished volumes" that included James Weldon Johnson and Langston Hughes alongside William Shakespeare. From her family values, and through travels with her father and husband, India Peyton and her siblings gleaned invaluable insight into the potential of the world around her and for her own children. Those values evidenced themselves in India's tireless work as a cook for white families on North Little

Rock's elite Park Hill, and the contributions of her sisters and brother, to put Lois Marie Peyton through her undergraduate program that culminated in the doctorate degree she earned as a married lady.²⁵⁶

Generations of effort to create opportunities, earn economic and educational advancement, and solidify themselves as dignified, respectable 'uncommon' people poured into the Pattillo home at 1121 Cross Street that Howell Pattillo, Jr. owned. The white-painted, wooden-framed house still stands in Little Rock on the corner of Cross Street and West Twelfth, underpinned by paint-peeled brick and surrounded by shrubberies that are jade and emerald in warm months and hide a chain-length fence that encompasses the long lot. Picture windows on the façade and sides of the house gaze out across the neighborhood, and a willowy oak shades the north side of the property. Despite the tired ambience of the home, it still evokes the sense that children happily play in its yard and that children grew up in that house feeling comfortable and secure. From their front stoop, young Melba Pattillo accompanied her family to attend the neighborhood Methodist church where she and Gloria Ray belonged. Her parents and grandmother demanded Christian virtue that dovetailed with traditional decorum and uncommon personal goals that were the epitome of respectable black womanhood and especially young black ladies. Ever mindful of the impression her own daughter made, Dr. Lois Peyton Pattillo

²⁵⁶ 1920 United States Census for India Payton, <http://interactive.ancestryheritagequest.com/6061/4313220-00455?pid=58396009&backurl=http://search.ancestryheritagequest.com/cgi-bin/sse.dll?db%3D1920usfedcen%26indiv%3Dtry%26h%3D58396009&treeid=&personid=&hintid=&usePUB=true&usePUBJs=true> [accessed January 17, 2017]; 1910 United States Census for George Ripley, http://interactive.ancestry.com/7884/31111_4327253-00238?pid=755898&backurl=http://search.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/sse.dll?db%3D1910USCenIndex%26indiv%3Dtry%26h%3D755898&treeid=&personid=&hintid=&usePUB=true&usePUBJs=true [accessed January 17, 2017]; Beals, *Warriors Don't Cry*, 9-10.

worked to erase any trace of a Southern drawl from Melba's accent and ensured perfect enunciation that literally and figuratively spoke volumes about the household from which she hailed and the regard for which the people inside believed about themselves. The Pattillos also encouraged Melba's vivacity and natural inclination toward artistic expression. Young Melba enjoyed the kinds of lessons that are emblematic of conventional young ladies' education and social development, with an eye toward the performance career she imagined. Lois Peyton and Howell Pattillo, Jr. placed their daughter in ballet classes, singing and piano lessons and music composition to develop her talents and herself as an accomplished young black *lady*.²⁵⁷ As the cosseted, poised daughter of a doting father and exacting mother, and a "regal" grandmother, Melba Pattillo evinced the kind of rearing and expectations synonymous with socially well-received girls, and that before the integration of Central High School, were claimed only by middle and upper-class white people.

All of the children who became known as the Little Rock Nine exemplified the manners, youthful achievements, and adult goals of the middle and upper-class white girls and boys who were expected to emulate and become the 'fine folks' of their communities, and who themselves were ladies and gentlemen on every condition except for skin color. The complex intersections of race, class and gender presented themselves in each of the three boys who were selected to attend Central High School alongside Minnijean, Elizabeth, Carlotta, Gloria, Thelma and Melba. Their mothers, grandmothers, aunts and sisters all ascribed to the same standards of respectability that defined the gendered norms of the girls' homes, with the same exceptions for black class structure that differentiated the qualifications for 'middle class' and 'lady' from whiteness. All transformed the personal into the political to present a challenge to Jim Crow in

²⁵⁷ Beals, *Warriors Don't Cry*, 13, 35; "Thumbnail sketch of Melba Pattillo," Madison.

ways that Daisy Bates and other middle-class black women used to great effect in the decades before 1957. As a child, Ernest Green, Jr. (the only senior among the Nine when they integrated) watched his mother, Lothaire Scott Green, and his aunt, Treopia Scott Gravelly, participate in the consequential 1942 case *Morris v. Williams, et al* wherein Sue Cowan Morris sued the Little Rock School Board for salary equalization between black and white teachers. An elementary school teacher and a high school teacher respectively, Green and Gravelly participated in the case in part to correct obvious racial injustice. However, this particular case—won after three years of fighting—reverberates with the issues that characterized the upbringings of the six young girls and the challenges that faced the women in their families, and that represent middle-class black women in their total community. Green and Gravelly dived into a contentious public case as a matter of racial and gender and class principles. College-educated, professional black women who represented the ‘better sort’ and who played vital roles in the uplift of black Little Rock as well as the total education of Arkansas, deserved the economic value and protection afforded to white women who taught in Little Rock’s public schools. In fact, the sisters (as well as Williams, who brought the suit, and the myriad of black teachers who joined them) earned the nickname “Steel Magnolias” for their tenacity in defying Jim Crow oppression to earn the what they were entitled to as professionals and as middle-class ladies.²⁵⁸

In a 2015 interview, Treopia Green Washington recalled the vital role that Thurgood Marshall and the NAACP played in the success of the case, and that women like her mother and

²⁵⁸ Chris Hickey, “70 Years Ago, Little Rock Teacher Pay Suit a Major Civil Rights Advance,” *All Things Considered*, NPR/KUAR, June 19, 2015, <http://ualrpublicradio.org/post/70-years-ago-little-rock-teacher-pay-suit-major-civil-rights-advance#stream/0> [accessed January 17, 2017].

aunt “got [the organization] connected to the local people here in Little Rock.”²⁵⁹ In profound ways, *Morris v. Williams* provided a springboard for activism of the *Arkansas State Press* and to Daisy Gatson Bates who would explode the presence of the NAACP in the capital city. Before the 1942 teacher-suit, outward activism had little resonance in Little Rock. Washington, a retired kindergarten school teacher, recalls that her brother, Ernest Green, Jr. embodied the dignity and bravery that defined their mother and aunt fifteen years before Central High School.

Lothaire Scott Green’s self-worth and the value she placed on the professional women of her community, and their duty to emulate the best of black womanhood and blackness that must be recognized by whiteness revealed itself before her activity in the teacher suit. Green is credited as a founding member of the Frances Harper Charity Club of Little Rock. As a clubwoman in the mold of women such as Mary Church Terrell and Anna Julia Cooper—women who firmly believed their class entitled them to treatment as ladies—Lothaire Scott Green would have actively participated in efforts designed to “zero in on the middle-class woman and motivate her interest in her local community.”²⁶⁰ Given her political presence, her professional

²⁵⁹ “Thumbnail Sketch of Ernest Green,” Madison; John Kirk, “Separate and Unequal,” *Arkansas Times*, June 11, 2015; Kirk, *Redefining the Color Line*, 108; Beals, *Warriors Don’t Cry*, 34-35. For more information on Sue Cowan Williams and the court case *Morris v. Williams, et al*, see John A. Kirk, “A Study in Second Class Citizenship”: Race, Urban Development and Little Rocks Gillam Park, 1934-2004, *Arkansas Historical Quarterly*, Vo. 64, No. 3 (Autumn, 2005), pp. 262-286; John A. Kirk, “The NAACP Campaign for Teachers’ Salary Equalization: African American Women Educators and the Early Civil Rights Struggle,” *The Journal of African American History*, Vo. 94, No. 4 (Fall 2009), pp. 529-552.

²⁶⁰ Jeannie Whayne and Willard B. Gatewood, *The Arkansas Delta: Land of Paradox* (Fayetteville, Arkansas: The University of Arkansas Press, 1993), p. 119; Fon Louise Gordon, *Caste and Class: The Black Experience in Arkansas, 1880-1920* (Athens, Georgia: The University of Georgia Press, 1995), p. 163. The author does not think this information cited by Whayne and Gatewood, and Gordon is correct. The author’s research indicates that records have incorrectly listed Lothaire Scott Green in place of her mother, Bertha Scott, a seamstress living in Little Rock with her husband and daughters who was approximately thirty years old in 1907 when the Frances Harper Charity Club was founded. Lothaire Scott Green, according to a 1900 federal census, was born in 1899. She would have been approximately nine years old at the

career and her personal carriage, it is improbable that the Little Rock School Board and Superintendent Virgil Blossom were unfamiliar with Lothaire Scott Green. On the contrary, the dictates that Blossom set for black students' acceptance into Central High School unwittingly created a circumstance by which working-class white women in Little Rock would come face-to-face with their social betters—refined black womanhood in the girls who were being reared as young ladies and the women who already were ladies by every convention but color.

Fewer details are known about the mothers of Terrence Roberts and Jefferson Thomas. Margaret Roberts and Jessie Thomas primarily exist in the historical record as the wives of William Levert Roberts and Ellis Thomas. In some sources, their names are recognized by “Mrs. Roberts” or “Mrs. Thomas” or “Mrs.”, followed by their husbands' first names. Still others reference them only by “his wife” or “his mother.”²⁶¹ A mere handful of interviews conducted in the months immediately following the integration chaos reveal scant details about them, but from those bits, interesting portraits of the kind of women who reared Terrence and Jefferson emerge.

Margaret Roberts established her own catering service from inside the home she shared with her husband and seven children at 2301 Howard Street.²⁶² Though any former occupation

founding of the Frances Harper Charity Club. The author has not yet found reference to Mrs. Green's involvement in the club in any of John Kirk's investigations of *Morris v. Williams*; nor did Treopia Green Washington recall that fact about her mother in a 2015 interview with KUAR. If it is so that she was a founding member, that seems an important precedent to Mrs. Green's political activity in the 1940s. The author has chosen to include the research made in both Whyne and Gatewood's, and Gordon's works as the involvement underscores an important point about intersectionality, but she plans to investigate what she believe is mistaken identity in the Green family at a later date.

²⁶¹ “Thumbnail sketch of Terrence Roberts,” “Thumbnail sketch of Jefferson Thomas,” Madison; Bates, 123-24, 126, 138; 165-66.

²⁶² “Terrence James Roberts,” *The Encyclopedia of Arkansas History and Culture*, November 30, 2016, <http://www.encyclopediaofarkansas.net/encyclopedia/entry-detail.aspx?search=1&entryID=727>; North Little Rock, Arkansas City Directory, http://interactive.ancestry.com/2469/30896_140564-00449?pid=1447308507&backurl=http://search.ancestry.com/cgi-

that Margaret performed is unknown, it is reasonable to assume that she cooked and created dishes well enough to provide that service on her own terms, and not in someone else's kitchen. Historians Tera W. Hunter and Rebecca Sharpless have examined the domestic skills that black women in the Jim Crow South sometimes translated into economic security and physical protection for themselves and their families.²⁶³ While Margaret Roberts' catering work supplemented her husband's income as an assistant in the Dietetic Department at the Veterans Hospital, her job also allowed her to claim the mantles of housewife and stay-at-home mother. That her work fell perfectly into traditional notions of appropriate women's activities underscored those mantels that were traditionally claimed by and reserved for white women. In this way, Roberts wielded her femininity, womanhood and motherhood to fit blackness into what middle-class white American pedestaled as suburban domesticity.²⁶⁴ Adhering to conventional gender roles when the option was often impossible for black women helped to solidify the Roberts family's middle-class status while Margaret offered her daughters Jurreta Dale, Beverly Ann, Janice Marie, and Margaret Elizabeth a role model of black femininity and propriety who

bin/sse.dll?_phsrc%3DYWW781%26_phstart%3DsuccessSource%26usePUBJs%3Dtrue%26indiv%3D1%26db%3Dusdirectories%26gss%3Dangs-d%26new%3D1%26rank%3D1%26msT%3D1%26gsfn%3DWilliam%2520Levert%26gsfn_x%3D0%26gsln%3DRoberts%26gsln_x%3D0%26msypn__ftp%3DLittle%2520Rock,%2520AR%26MSAV%3D1%26msbdy%3D1920%26msrpn__ftp%3DArkansas,%2520USA%26mssng%3DMargaret%26_83004003-n_xcl%3Df%26cpxt%3D1%26cp%3D12%26catbucket%3Drstp%26uidh%3Dy6k%26pcat%3D37%26fh%3D6%26h%3D1447308507%26recoff%3D%26ml_rpos%3D7&treeid=&personid=&hintid=&usePUB=true&_phsrc=YWW781&_phstart=successSource&usePUBJs=true Kirk, *Redefining the Colorline*, 109.

²⁶³ See Tera W. Hunter, *To 'Joy My Freedom: Southern Black Women's Lives and Labors after the Civil War* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1997); Rebecca Sharpless, *Cooking in Other Women's Kitchens: Domestic Workers in the South, 1865-1960* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010).

²⁶⁴ See Teresa Amott and Julie Matthaei, *Race, Gender and Work: A Multi-Cultural Economic History of Women in the United States* (Boston: South End Press, 1996).

could monitor all of her children's deportment, leisure activities, and especially their religious instruction and educations. The Roberts children were faithful Seventh-Day Adventists. Jurreta Dale, the oldest child, particularly melded the theological with the academic. Though she earned a scholarship from Howard University, Jurreta Dale Roberts ultimately chose to attend the Seventh-Day Adventist Oakwood College rather than the prestigious Washington, D.C. school. Still, Jurreta Dale's application to and acceptance at Howard offers a telling clue into the kind of women that Margaret reared.

Long a bastion of stringent, conservative black respectability and class standards, Howard University represents the ultimate 'best men' and 'best women' whose service and example strives to uplift and moderate behavior and goals. A young woman who considered Howard University certainly exhibited the virtuous qualities that characterized well-brought up young ladies.²⁶⁵ Doubtless, Margaret's example guided her daughter and contributed to her gifted son's acceptance into Central High School whom wittingly or unwittingly was recognized by white gatekeepers as an exemplary student and child from the 'better sort' of home where a pedestaled mother protected her family.²⁶⁶

Though Jessie Thomas did not have the luxury of staying at home or working from inside her house at 219 West 20th Street, she lived as a stellar example of black middle-class

²⁶⁵ Black liberal arts colleges and industrial schools founded across the South during and after Reconstruction emphasized traditional gender mores and respectability politics reflected at Howard University. In particular, Spelman College, founded in Atlanta in 1881, underscores these conventions. A women's-only college, the institution specialized in training teachers, enforced rigorous decorum and instilled social virtues that set apart the 'best women' in black communities. Spelman College's official mission stresses academic excellence and empowerment while its graduates have noted the unofficial creed that "from her to whom much is given, much is expected." See Marian Wright Eldeman, "Spelman College: A Safe Haven for a Young Black Woman," *The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education* No. 27 (Spring, 2000), pp.118.

²⁶⁶ Thumbnail Sketch of Terrence Roberts, Madison.

womanhood. While Ellis Thomas sold farm equipment, she labored as a nurse's aide in a private hospital. A caregiver in public and at home, Jessie bore seven children and ensured that each of them exhibited the values excelled and emulated the respectability standards that separated 'common' people from the 'better sort.' The Thomas children reflected those values of tradition, service and self-worth. Older sons, William Horace and Ellis, Jr. shined respectively in the United States Air Force and at Arkansas AM & N (today, the University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff). Each man embodied a testament to dignified black manhood that bespoke rearing from parents who deeply valued opportunity, education and refinement. Daughter Mary Alice mimicked her mother when she earned an education to become a registered nurse. Jessie's work ethic and example instilled in her youngest son, Jefferson, whom his classmates recalled as reserved, but kind and quietly funny, and who pushed himself to uncommon excellence that defined well-reared young gentlemen.²⁶⁷

Generations of striving for better opportunity, economic stability and comfort, social and personal excellence poured into the children who became the Little Rock Nine, and evidenced itself particularly in the rearing of the six young girls who were selected to attend Central High School. Mothers, grandmothers, aunts, and sisters valued and upheld traditional gender

²⁶⁷ Thumbnail sketch of Jefferson Thomas, Madison; North Little Rock, Arkansas City Directory 1956, http://interactive.ancestry.com/2469/30896_140564-00495?pid=1447291703&backurl=http://search.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/sse.dll?_phsrc%3DYWW785%26_phstart%3DsuccessSource%26usePUBJs%3Dtrue%26indiv%3D1%26db%3Dusdirectories%26gss%3Dangs-d%26new%3D1%26rank%3D1%26msT%3D1%26gsfn%3DEllis%26gsfn_x%3D0%26gsln%3DThomas%26gsln_x%3D0%26msypn__ftp%3DLittle%2520Rock,%2520AR%26MSAV%3D1%26msrpn__ftp%3DArkansas,%2520USA%26mssng%3DJessie%26_83004003-n_xcl%3Df%26_83004002%3DBlack%26cpxt%3D1%26cp%3D12%26catbucket%3Drstp%26uidh%3Dy6k%26pcat%3D37%26fh%3D6%26h%3D1447291703%26recoff%3D%26ml_rpos%3D7&treeid=&personid=&hintid=&usePUB=true&_phsrc=YWW785&_phstart=successSource&usePUBJs=true; Kirk, *Redefining the Colorline*, 110; Beals, *Warriors Don't Cry*, 25.

conventions that identified them as respectable young ladies through the prism of blackness that allowed—even demanded—that ladies participate in public discourse that deviated from whiteness. The scale that dictated and separated the ‘best women,’ the ‘better sort,’ and the ‘uncommon’ black women and girls pivoted on standards that distinguish black class structure from white and the qualifications for ladies from those that identify upper-class white women. Before 1957, the nuances of blackness and the particulars of community in black Little Rock hid in plain sight from white citizens who by and large, neither recognized nor appreciated how class, respectability, and pedestals functioned in the context of black womanhood. Nevertheless, some of that criteria that defines who ladies are is shared between communities. Indeed, the commonalities of uncommon excellence were used to denote which applicants to integrate Central High School would be accepted after the Supreme Court demanded that public schools must integrate with “all deliberate speed.” The plan that determined who would be accepted came to be known as the ‘Blossom Plan,’ named for the city’s superintendent of schools.²⁶⁸

Virgil Blossom, the middle-aged white man charged with carrying out the Supreme Court’s ruling, created an arbitrary list of academic and personal standards designed to appear to favor the very best of black Little Rock, while actually employing racist, classist discrimination against scores of perfectly qualified children and families that admitted only a token lot into a school population of nearly 2,000 white children. Ironically, Blossom’s plan shined a spotlight on and centered exceptional black womanhood that adhered to every virtue of classic Southern femininity and ladylike behavior that challenged elite white women and girls’ exalted status, and

²⁶⁸ Brown v. Board of Education, 347 U.S. 483 (1954); Brown v. Board of Education, 349 U.S. 294 (1955); Virgil Blossom, *It Has Happened Here*, (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1959).

especially showcased that working-class white women and girls' sole claim to protection was skin—never class. Black ladies would use Blossom's blinded paternalism to prove their own claims to the pedestal.

Chapter Four: Removing the White Veil from Respectable Black Womanhood

In January 1956, Daisy Bates and F. W. Smith escorted seven teenage girls to the office of Little Rock Schools Superintendent Virgil Blossom. Bates and Smith, a field representative for the Arkansas chapter of the NAACP, intended to enroll each girl in the city's school system. The move also served as a publicity opportunity to showcase the Little Rock School Board's intransigence in integration compliance. A photo of the scene also captures the brilliant gender manipulation on the part of the NAACP that recalled the strategic use of Linda Brown. There can be little doubt that Daisy Bates helped craft the photo snapped by the photographer for the *State Press*. Seated in front of the tight-faced, standing Superintendent were junior Patricia Evans; senior Erma Lee Holden; senior Irma Shockley; junior Hazel Smith; junior Shirley Toombs; junior Lazette Winstedt; and sophomore Pearline Woodard. Each girl sat smartly dressed in fashionable attire, with neatly permed hair, folded hands and demure expressions while Blossom denied them relief from what the *State Press* called the girls' "hardship of getting to and from the jimcro [*sic*] hi [*sic*] school that had been assigned to them."²⁶⁹ Seven girls beseeching a patriarchal figure at once played to American (and Southern) preoccupation with traditional gender roles. What makes the photo interesting, however, is that the poses juxtaposed blackness to whiteness through a gendered feminine lens. White supremacy hinged on pedestaling white femininity as the reason for black subjugation. All deemed innocent, virtuous and worthy of protection lay in white girls and women; by contrast, black girls and women could not be valued that way. Yet this photo showcased black gentility, grace and deference to (assumed) gentlemanly authority that slyly underscored that Blossom should want to exercise his patriarchal authority to the fullest extent he could to protect young girls from

²⁶⁹ *State Press*, January 27, 1956.

unnecessary exertion or malicious privation. What reason could possibly justify that he would not? How could any appointed white man actually standing in a position of authority be threatened by seven girls? No boys sat beside them—an intentional choice to meant to suggest that black girls might show greater interest in attending segregated schools. In a culture that emphasized feminine fragility and viewed black masculinity as inherently dangerous, the NAACP perfectly juxtaposed the prim modesty of young, respectable black womanhood against a recalcitrant white patriarch. Only F.W. Smith’s dubious stare at Blossom reveals the resentment of black Little Rock and outsiders watching the city’s actions on integration with growing interest. Black families rightly believed the school board and Blossom only wanted a token number of students, and that they “translated *Brown v. Board* in to terms of how many, if any, Negro pupils would be required by the federal government to enter...white schools.”²⁷⁰ That photo made obvious the goals of the Little Rock School Board (LRSB), Virgil Blossom, and moderates who paid lip service to federal law. From his seat, the Superintendent dismissed black respectability and especially black womanhood—despite evidence of backgrounds of the young girls and their rearing, and the status of the representatives who recommended them. Middle-class black femininity questioned the entire construct of white supremacy because it challenged white womanhood. That fact stared *State Press* readers and Virgil Blossom in the face, in literal black and white, and it struck at least as much terror into the heart of the whiteness as did the specter of hypersexual black masculinity. Middle-class black ladies in Little Rock, among other women, understood this and so did the seven pictured young ladies. None of those girls integrated Central High School as part of the Little Rock Nine. Still, their challenge to white power structures highlight the qualities of middle-class black ladies that enraged working-

²⁷⁰ Untitled Speech, Mss 523, Box 3, Folder 8, Daisy Bates Papers, Madison.

class whites (particularly women) in 1957. Daisy Bates employed a similar strategy with the six young women who did integrate. On that January day in 1956, however, she stood behind the seven girls and smiled widely. She knew she was serving Blossom a cup of piping hot tea.



*Illustration 15: Standing (L to R): Daisy Bates, F.W. Smith, Virgil Blossom
Sitting (L to R, first row): Irma Shockley, Hazel Smith, Patricia Evans, Lizette Winstedt
Sitting (L to R, second row): Pearline Woodard, Erma Lee Holden, Shirley Toombs
Photo Courtesy of The Arkansas State Press*

Activists and families within Little Rock had exhausted all other avenues to spur the city school board to integration without actual court action. In February 1956, the *State Press* announced that black Little Rock had grown tired of the “run around,” as the NAACP filed a federal lawsuit in the state’s Eastern District with the hopes of expediting the dawdling process of integrating. The organization also sought to mitigate the stress placed on families whose children were forced to attend schools beyond their neighborhoods when easily-accessible accommodations were out of reach only because of the school board’s apathy to the monumental Supreme Court decision in the 1954 case, *Brown et al v. The Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas*.²⁷¹

The particulars of *Brown v. Board* are generally understood. That ruling overturned the legal segregation and discrimination that had been crystalized in the 1896 case, *Plessy v. Ferguson*. Less understood, however, are the social and legal grinds, and international calamity, that paved a road for people to challenge Jim Crow at all. Three decades of uninterrupted global war and economic turmoil from 1914 to 1945, revealed a world irrevocably transformed from the colonialism and Victorian-era Darwinist thinking that had affected virtually everyone on the planet, in some capacity, for centuries. Battling Nazism proved to be a race to save Europe’s Jewish population and any people deemed inferior by in Adolf Hitler’s white supremacist fever dreams. As a result, more than two million black men and women served in the American military to aid in that fight, though judging Hitler as the most salient threat to human and civil rights struck more than a few black Americans as ironic. Even as they served their country, black Americans faced virtually unencumbered discrimination on every conceivable front. Since the end of the First World War, black Southerners had especially struggled against a regional Jim

²⁷¹ *State Press*, February 10, 1956.

Crow identity that erased black efforts to secure and participate in the democratic world envisioned by white governments. By the time Japan bombed the United States into the Second World War, Black America—especially the Black South—had decided to use the opportunity to resist injustice abroad and reveal *de facto* and *de jure* segregation as the homegrown parallel of Nazism.²⁷²

The famed Double V campaign yielded results, as the embarrassing hypocrisy of American racial policy propelled President Harry Truman to form the 1946 Civil Rights Commission. This body recommended an anti-lynching law and protections for black Americans from voter and job discrimination. Two years later, Truman signed Executive Order 9981 that guaranteed “equal treatment and opportunity for all persons in the armed services without regard to race, color, religion, or national origin.” In response to the order, South Carolina Senator Strom Thurmond challenged the sitting Democratic President in the 1948 election cycle, creating the States’ Right Democratic Party, commonly referred to as the “Dixiecrat” Party that focused solely on continued segregation. Thurmond and his small band of supporters ultimately failed, but that the Dixiecrats carried Alabama, Louisiana, Mississippi, and South Carolina in the national election proved the socio-political seriousness of any executive undertaking a federal civil rights campaign.²⁷³

²⁷² Howard Zinn, *A People’s History of the United States, 1492-Present* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2005), 415.

²⁷³ Executive Order 9981- Establishing the President’s Committee on Equality of Treatment and Opportunity in the Armed Services (1948), <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=60737> [accessed June 29, 2016]; Nadine Cohoda, *Strom Thurmond and the Politics of Southern Change* (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 1994); Kari A. Frederickson, *The Dixiecrat Revolt and the End of the Solid South, 1932-1968* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001).

Nevertheless, federal intervention began (albeit, glacially) reshaping legal protocol and social convention at the state and local levels, and was ferociously supported by a contingent of black activism determined to topple Jim Crow. In his first State of the Union address in 1953, Dwight Eisenhower swore to “use whatever authority exists in the office of the President to end segregation in the District of Columbia, including the Federal Government, and any segregation in the Armed Forces.” The new President’s speech echoed his campaign promises that black newspapers had happily turned into headlines lauding the then-Republican candidate as “opposed to segregation” in the nation’s capital. Moreover, Eisenhower’s platform coincided with integration efforts in public schools, in the back yard of the White House and across the country. Gross overcrowding inside of black schools pushed parents in Washington, DC to protest the general inequity of the five schools set aside for black children, while white students attended obviously superior institutions with seats to spare. In the wake of more than a decades’ worth of integration in white colleges and universities, elementary and secondary schools in all regions began socially experimenting. In the same edition where LC Bates gleefully wrote “Eisenhower tells Southerners Equality of All Men Is Basic,” the *State Press* sported the banner “SEGREGATION CRUMBLING IN DIXIE: CAIRO DROPS JIM CROW.” Though the headline took some liberty in its interpretation of “Dixie,” the southern Illinois town near the Kentucky border *had* admitted sixty black students into its formerly-all white grammar schools, junior high and high schools “without incident” in September 1952.²⁷⁴ Black families also challenged segregation on the Plains, in the Lowcountry, at the Chesapeake, and everywhere that

²⁷⁴ Dwight D. Eisenhower, Annual Message to Congress on the State of the Union, February 2, 1953, *The American Presidency Project* <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=9829>; *Arkansas State Press*, September 5, 1952; September 12, 1952; October 25, 1952.

(supposed) separate-but-equal education permeated. The same year that Candidate Eisenhower assured voters that he would end segregation in Washington, the NAACP filed a federal suit on behalf of five individual instances but represented all under one name—*Brown*.

Commonly called *Brown v. Board*, the suit referenced Reverend Oliver Brown, the thirty-two-year-old married associate pastor of St. Mark's AME Church, and father of two little girls. In 1952, Brown filed against the Board of Education of Topeka Public Schools when the segregated system forced his eight-year-old daughter to attend Monroe Elementary, more than a mile from her home, rather than all-white Sumner Elementary, located within seven blocks of her house. The organization's choice to use the Browns as the centerpiece of a landmark national lawsuit was not mere happenstance. Reverend Brown's household embodied every middle-class black standard that the NAACP preferred (or demanded) of its members and legal clients. A former teacher of Reverend Brown's described him as an imminently respectable "good citizen"—not at all a frivolous person who caused unnecessary trouble.²⁷⁵ Moreover, the image of Brown's third-grader radiated the vulnerability that mid-twentieth century Americans had come to associate with idyllic childhood recently afforded to a spectrum of citizens across race and class by the superpower spoils of a postwar society. Hyper-consumerism in the 1950s produced an explosion of children's entertainment, books, toys and items that reinforced even America's youth as exceptional. Combined with reform movements of the early twentieth-century that differentiated children from adults and centered their health and development, brilliant advertising campaigns lastingly convinced the American public of the sanctity of childhood innocence and growth that deserved pampering, pedestaling, and protection. What

²⁷⁵ *Brown v. Board of Education* Oral History Part 2, Manuscript Collection No. 251, Audio/Visual Collection No. 13, Kansas State Historical Society, Topeka, Kansas <http://www.kshs.org/p/brown-v-board-of-education-oral-history-part-2/14003>.

kind of viciousness kept an American child from receiving the kind of quality education that Americans deserved? Even more essential, Linda Brown defied every stereotype of black childhood, black parenting, black motherhood, and black femininity set by whiteness. In an era when black female bodies—no matter how young—were routinely subjected to horrific abuse by white people and whose emotional trauma was generally disregarded, images of eight-year-old Linda Brown forced the American public to acknowledge her feminine virtue, humanity and respectability. In every conceivable sense, she deserved the legal and social protections befitting an American child and a lady.

Image control from the NAACP, along with Thurgood Marshall's brilliantly argued performance for the destruction of Jim Crow, irrevocably altered the United States. In May 1954, the Supreme Court ruled that the "'separate but equal' doctrine in *Plessy v. Ferguson* [had] no place in the field of public education," and was not in accordance with the Fourteenth Amendment. The *State Press* celebrated the monumental victory with the headline "Hi Court Outlaws School Segregation—North Pleased, South Hostile!" Regardless of the decision, when LC Bates inquired if the Little Rock School Board intended to integrate city schools in 1954, Virgil Blossom replied, "No."²⁷⁶ Resistance to the ruling ensured that *Brown v. the Board of Education* was amended the next year in an act known as *Brown II*, which stated that schools should integrate "with all deliberate speed" but neither suggested nor set timetables for doing so. Still, Virgil Blossom assured the city of Little Rock that as superintendent of the city's schools, he fully intended to comply with the high court's ruling. He promised that definitive integration would begin in 1956—one year from the second ruling that allowed the city an adjustment

²⁷⁶ *State Press*, May 21, 1954.

period to prepare for the impending change and thus observe the Supreme Court's decision with all deliberate speed.²⁷⁷

Though the idea may bewilder millions of Americans in the twenty-first century, Arkansas enjoyed a national reputation as the progressive, liberal Southern state in the postwar era. It is a profound marker of how relative that assumption was, given that white people in Little Rock proudly pointed out that the last public lynching had occurred in 1927, and the state's last race riot happened in 1919. White Little Rock behaved as if each instance happened generations earlier, as if families and survivors of those atrocities did not continue to live in communities where white people ignored their grief and anger. Because white Little Rock treated recent and major acts of racist terrorism as old hat, and daily systemic racism as natural, that part of the city convinced itself that black and white people got along well. Because it was true that racial violence in mid-century Arkansas *did* differ from states such as Mississippi or South Carolina, white Arkansans were convinced of their state's moderation and pointed to the government and the press as evidence. Governor Francis Cherry assured citizens that the state would obey the Supreme Court ruling, and historian Tony Freyer affirms that the state legislature in its 1955 session rejected a series of segregationist proposals. The *Arkansas Gazette* referred to black men and women as 'Mr.' 'Mrs.' and 'Miss'—a significant departure in Jim Crow custom for a major Southern newspaper. In an untitled speech, Daisy Bates acknowledged that public transportation, hospitals and other facilities in the capital had integrated without the commotion that hounded cities such as Montgomery. Virgil Tracy Blossom also noted in his memoirs that black and white employees worked in the same jobs and shared the same professional spaces.

²⁷⁷ Brown v. Board of Education, 347 U.S. 483 (1954); Brown v. Board of Education, 349 U.S. 294 (1955); Virgil Blossom, *It Has Happened Here*, (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1959), 12.

Further, the University of Arkansas stood out to white Southerners as the first major regional institution to integrate in 1948. It mattered little in white minds that the state permitted a lone twenty-six-year-old war veteran, Silas Herbert Hunt, admission to the University School of Law only to avoid a national law suit or the expense of erecting a law school exclusively for black students. Nor did it matter that Hunt integrated the state's flagship university in the most limited sense; he attended segregated classes, was barred from participating in social activities and was forced to live away from campus with a local black family.²⁷⁸ Token integration at the university level allowed white Arkansans to believe their state represented a bastion of liberalism.

A Missouri native, Virgil T. Blossom enjoyed this belief about his adopted state. Reared in rural Brookfield, approximately seventy miles south of the Iowa state line, Blossom grew up in a community where less than two percent of the population was black.²⁷⁹ He was the only son

²⁷⁸ Systemic dismantling of Jim Crow in education began at the university level during the Great Depression in a series of court cases spearheaded by the NAACP. Beginning with *University v. Murray* (1936), Donald Murray sued the University of Maryland on the grounds that the state violated "separate-but-equal" education by rejecting his application to the University of Maryland School of Law because of his race, without providing an alternative law school for black students. Thurgood Marshall represented Murray and successfully proved that Murray had been denied "separate-but-equal" accommodations. Murray's victory culminated in a series of similar suits and victories across the Jim Crow South. Recognizing that it would lose a lawsuit and could not afford to offer segregated graduate schools, the University of Arkansas announced it would accept qualified black applicants into graduate programs beginning in 1948. On February 2, Silas Herbert Hunt earned a seat in the School of Law. For more information regarding the NAACP's efforts to end segregation in public colleges and universities, see Gordon Andrews, *Undoing Plessy: Charles Hamilton Houston, Race, Labor and the Law 1895-1950* (Newcastle upon Tyne, England: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014); Gary M. Lavergne, *Before Brown: Heman Marion Sweatt, Thurgood Marshall and the Long Road to Justice* (Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press, 2010). For more information on the life and accomplishments of Silas H. Hunt, see Guerdon D. Nichols, "Breaking the Color Barrier at the University of Arkansas," *The Arkansas Historical Quarterly* Vol. 27, No. 1 (Spring, 1968), 3-21; Nancy Williams and Jeannie M. Whayne, *Arkansas Biography: A Collection of Notable Lives* (Fayetteville, Arkansas: The University of Arkansas Press, 2000); Misti Nicole Harper, "Silas Hunt," *African and African American Studies Magazine* No. 1 (Fall, 2013), 20-21.

²⁷⁹ Demographics of Brookfield, Linn County, Missouri, United States Census 1920. *Social Explorer*. <http://www.socialexplorer.com/6f4cdab7a0/explore> (accessed May 10, 2017).

of a solidly middle-class white household where his father owned a construction company and served as a local tax collector while his mother stayed at home to care for him and his sister. A natural athlete and leader, and gifted student, Blossom excelled in school and graduated from Missouri Valley College with an education degree in 1930. Immediately after his graduation, Blossom earned a position as athletic director and social sciences teacher at Fayetteville High School in Fayetteville, Arkansas. Eight years later, the school district hired him as principal and he used that position to make lavish improvements on the community's public schools and athletic facilities. By 1942, his accomplishments earned him accolades and the title of 'Superintendent.'²⁸⁰ One of the achievements celebrated by white residents, and the one that provides a crystal-clear window into Virgil T. Blossom's attitude toward race relations, was that he arranged for the community's black teenagers who graduated out of Lincoln School (the long-standing school for Black Fayetteville) to attend segregated high schools in Fort Smith and Hot Springs. Each community lie approximately sixty miles southwest or two hundred miles southeast of Fayetteville, respectively. Because of the distance, Blossom allotted school district funds annually to pay for students' tuition, travel, room and board to attend school in Sebastian or Hot Springs County. For the 1953-1954 school year alone, he allocated \$5000 for nine black students to be sent to segregated schools.²⁸¹

To white minds (including his own), this scheme constituted effective dealing with the issue of segregation by placing black high schoolers out of sight. How black families considered the arrangement is an interesting question. For twelve years, black mothers and fathers parted

²⁸⁰ Blossom, *It Has Happened Here*; Obituary of Virgil Blossom, *Arkansas Gazette*, January 16, 1965; Obituary of Virgil Blossom, *San Antonio Express*, January 16, 1965.

²⁸¹ Andrew Brill, "Brown in Fayetteville: Peaceful Southern School Desegregation in 1954," *The Arkansas Historical Quarterly* No. 65, Vol. 4 (Winter, 2006), 343. This article also discusses the history of black education in Fayetteville, about which much is left to be written.

with sons and daughters, entrusting unknown teachers and administrators to care for their children's educations and well-beings in towns far from their homes. That these people sent their children away, however, must not be accepted as evidence that they liked this. In an overwhelmingly white portion of the state, black families weighed the risks of speaking out against the inherent unfairness and cruelty of Blossom's plan. Historians still investigate how many families decided not to send their children to high school rather than entrust them to strangers in strange places. Black parents who decided their children's educations should continue had no other options than to cooperate with the superintendent's plan. In February 1953, Blossom accepted a job offer to serve as superintendent of Little Rock public schools—the largest school district in the state. At the end of the school year, the city of Fayetteville honored his sixteen-year tenure to the school district with “Virgil Blossom Day.”²⁸² One wonders how Black Fayetteville watched the celebration.

Fayetteville did quietly desegregate in 1954, mere months after the *Brown* ruling, and with relatively little incident that owed to skewed racial demographics that did not threaten white supremacy. Charleston (a smaller community located seventy-five miles south of Fayetteville) also integrated its schools with little resistance. In 1955, the community of Hoxie in the northeastern side of the state, voted to integrate its elementary school to include twenty-seven black children. Media coverage of the event spurred bitter protests that included economic boycotts, accusations of outsiders (particularly from nearby Mississippi) influencing segregationists, a boycott of the school itself, and demands for school board members'

²⁸² Todd E. Lewis, “Virgil Tracy Blossom,” *Encyclopedia of Arkansas History and Culture*, <http://www.encyclopediaofarkansas.net/encyclopedia/entry-detail.aspx?search=1&entryID=5610> (accessed June 24, 2015).

resignations.²⁸³ Nevertheless, the Hoxie School Board sued and won against segregationists who planned to force the school out of compliance with the *Brown* ruling. From his new home in the capital city, Virgil Blossom optimistically decided that he could manage the integration of Little Rock as he watched two disparate corners of a Southern state successfully integrate school districts.²⁸⁴

Blossom's boarding school-plan for Fayetteville's black children succeeded because he implemented it before segregation was declared unconstitutional and because the small black population had no recourse. Blind to those facts, Blossom was imbued with a wholly misplaced confidence in his ideas and abilities as he moved his family south to assume the role of superintendent of capital city's public schools. Through his eyes, the city appeared "one of the most pleasant and most progressive communities" in the South.²⁸⁵ This is also the image Virgil Blossom constructed of himself, for himself. His memoirs, written shortly after he and his family left the state in the wake of the integration crisis, are a perplexing combination of wonderful first-person memory from one of the key white actors in the 1957 story; they are also an exercise of a man eager to posit himself as the beleaguered hero of a crisis that could have been avoided if everyone would have only let him do things his way. More recent studies of

²⁸³ *Southern School News*, September 1955, 10.

²⁸⁴ Bates, *The Long Shadow of Little Rock*, 48; Brian D. Greer, "The Lynching of John Carter," *The Encyclopedia of Arkansas History and Culture*, <http://www.encyclopediaofarkansas.net/encyclopeida/entry-detail.aspx?entryID=2289> (accessed June 24, 2015); "The Real Causes of Two Race Riots," *The Gilder Lehrman Center for the Study of Slavery, Resistance, and Abolition at the MacMillian Center*, <http://www.yale.edu/glc/archive/1136.htm> (accessed June 24, 2015); Grif Stockley, *Blood in Their Eyes: The Elaine Race Massacres of 1919* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2001); Tony A. Freyer, "Politics and Law in the Little Rock Crisis, 1954-1957" *The Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 66 (Summer 2007), 150; Untitled Speech (1958), Daisy Bates Papers: 1946-1966, Mss 523, Box Three, Folder 9, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, Wisconsin; Blossom, *It Has Happened Here*, 2.

²⁸⁵ *Ibid*, 1.

Central High School integration have also cast Blossom as a protagonist who found himself in an impossible situation. It is wholly so, and will be discussed, that the Superintendent's position grew increasingly unenviable over the course of the integration process. Yet Virgil Blossom was hardly Job, and it is unfair to afford him the same role as the actual marginalized adults and children in the Central High School story. First and foremost, Blossom was a white man newly placed in a considerably powerful position. A former teacher, coach and principal, he not used to his authority being questioned either professionally or socially. He was an absolute white patriarchal figure who did patronize, either benevolently or menacingly, to his professional and social inferiors—including work underlings, youths, women and people of color. It is fair to argue that he had already proven he would abuse his position to separate black children from their parents under the guise of 'choice,' and to help white people avoid the uncomfortable proposition of actually existing with black people in the same public spaces. Blossom's idea of Little Rock as progressive city and himself as a liberal person were decided through the eyes of a solidly middle-class white man who willingly participated in and perpetuated Jim Crow America. As will be discussed, he ultimately disappointed black Little Rock when he revealed that he would only pursue token integration; that he did not value genuine inclusion or want to share space with black leadership; that he did not value black judgement and especially not black women's judgement. Segregationist Little Rock may have reviled Virgil Blossom, but black middle-class women who organized and worked toward social progress, and who personified ultimate respectability resented Blossom even more because he proved to be another kind of white overseer.

His misguided idea of himself was equaled only by his misunderstanding of the rather obvious reason that explains the general quiet that defined Northwest Arkansas' desegregation

and the squashed backlash at Hoxie. Few black families lived in the six counties nestled in the Ozark Mountains that were then-remote to Arkansans living elsewhere in the state. Benton, Carroll, Crawford, Franklin, Madison and Washington counties boasted a total population of 148,118 in 1950; only nine percent of the figure represented *any* Arkansans of color, of which black people constituted eight percent of that slight population.²⁸⁶ In Madison County, only three black individuals were listed as residents. Franklin County, where Charleston integrated its schools, had the area's third-largest black population with 190 inhabitants of more than 12,000 total. 442 black people claimed Washington County as home amid a white demographic of nearly 50,000. Based upon these figures, it is reasonable to assume that the white population of Northwestern Arkansas, however hostile to integration, recognized that such a small minority did not threaten majority privilege. Though northeastern Lawrence County maintained only 275 black citizens among more than 21,000 white people, the "cotton and cow town" of Hoxie existed in the plantation Delta culture that defined itself by white supremacy.

Nevertheless, the Hoxie School Board reflected a point made by the *State Press*—black students in that school district constituted "approximately twenty-five elementary and high school pupils in a total school enrollment of about 1,050" and thus did not present a danger to whiteness. At least at the 1954 inception of what became known as the "Blossom Plan," the new superintendent of the city schools did not appreciate the social and cultural differences that challenged Little Rock. Nor did he anticipate that black people in the capital had mechanisms to push back against bad policy. Moreover, black experiences and attitudes recounted in the south

²⁸⁶ Rodney W. Harris, "A Town Divided: Leadership at Hoxie," *Ozark Historical Review* 42 (Spring 2013): 117-128; "Population by Race and County, 1950-1980." Census State Data Center, University of Arkansas at Little Rock Institute for Economic Advancement <http://www.aiea.ualr.edu/arkansas-census-data.html?id=166:population-by-race-and-county-1950-1980&catid=1&tmpl=component> [accessed July 1, 2016].

side of town and well-chronicled in papers such as the *State Press* belied the supposed-liberalism of the city. Little Rock lay much farther south than any heretofore integrated district. It was also located on the edge of the Delta, with its black population representing a full quarter of capital citizens. Envisioning the capital as a model for desegregation in the South that would also reinforce Arkansas' then-motto as the "Wonder State," Blossom did initially want to integrate elementary schools at the youngest grade level in 1956 and continue integration each year until all grades held mixed-race classes. He reasonably rationalized that integrating the youngest classrooms where socially-constructed prejudices existed the least, would make subsequent integration much easier on the entire community.²⁸⁷

However, Blossom did not concoct this strategy in a vacuum. In the beginning of his tenure as superintendent, he encouraged white and black groups to meet with him. Members of the city's white and black Parent-Teacher Associations, as well as Daisy Bates and the rest of the executive board of the state chapter of the NAACP, partook in the discussions. Together, they devised a plan that they thought would suit the interests of the federal government and the city regarded as one of the most liberal in the South. Yet the Little Rock School Board that only sought "a legal minimum of integration," ultimately rejected the first Blossom Plan. Rather than fight the school board, the Superintendent elected to pursue a much slower, token-based plan. These approved revisions held that only a small number of black teenagers would attend Central High School by the fall of 1957. Desegregation of the city's junior high schools would begin three years later, while elementary schools were provided no timetable for compliance. White parents balked at the original plan and upended the combined efforts of Blossom, the NAACP and other community groups who had tried to effect tangible results in the district. Integrating

²⁸⁷ Harris, "A Town Divided," *Ozark Historical Review*, pg. 119.

elementary schools first meant that small children who did not yet entirely understand the hierarchy of Jim Crow culture would definitely grow to feel at ease in racially-mixed environments—too much at ease for the comfort of white parents who feared that the Blossom Plan would encourage interracial friendships that encouraged black and white children to forget their respective statuses and possibly even spawn interracial romantic relationships. White revulsion at the thought of interracial relationships must have struck at least some in the city's black community as riotous when it was a common fact that black women had been sexually exploited and abused by white men for centuries. Indeed, the evidence of rape and miscegenation presented itself in the skin tones and features of millions of black Southerners, including Bates herself.²⁸⁸

Bates and middle-class black women across Little Rock watched the integration proceedings with baited breath, skepticism, hostility, elation, and every conceivable emotional description as Arkansas began to implement the court orders that declared separate-but-equal an unconstitutional moot point. Since its inception, the *State Press* meticulously compiled and reported each instance of clubwomen, mothers and concerned women of the community, among others, who lobbied not only for equitable education, but for attention to black women's unique intersectional problems that arose because of segregation and discrimination in virtually every facet of daily living and professional opportunity. In Dallas, black women formed the Committee to Abolish Discrimination against Negro Women that targeted shops where black men would be served, but black women's business was rejected or relegated to "cubby holes and

²⁸⁸ Trial Transcripts of *Aaron v. Cooper*, Daisy Bates Papers: 1946-1966, Mss 523, Box Six, Folder 1, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, Wisconsin; Arkansas *State Press*, July 1, 1955; Blossom, *It Has Happened Here*, 10, 16; Karen Anderson, *Little Rock: Race and Resistance at Central High School* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2010), 55.

closest” where clerks brought them merchandise out of public view. This galling treatment harkened back to degrading stereotypes that stripped black womanhood of feminine delicacy while ironically using the specter of their sex to relegate them below men. A conference of Central Arkansas women for the Arkansas Association of Colored Women’s Clubs titled its symposium, “Women’s Responsibility in the Changing Social Order.” Gwendolyn Floyd, featured speaker and regional director of the National Council for Negro Women, argued “women’s responsibility in an integrated society is the complete understanding of the problems facing the Negro woman”. At the same time, Daisy Bates attended as president of the state chapter of the NAACP and argued that “segregation [was] the basis of all our troubles and that the Negro woman can never make her true contribution to American society until segregation is abolished.”²⁸⁹ This gathering, organized just five months after Chief Justice Earl Warren declared that segregation detrimentally affected black children (and in effect, black adults) emphasized the need to abolish segregation and highlighted the profound role that education has played in black communities as the great equalizer: an avenue to professional and personal success, the ticket that might make race and class irrelevant. While neither the conference nor reporting made allusions to class discrepancies that divided black women, the focus of the meeting clearly centered on issues facing middle-class black womanhood as the standard bearer for elevating black women in general. In the *State Press*, any woman individually discussed was referenced as “Mrs.” or “Miss”—courtesies to and demarcations of respectable ladies who emulated the values, chastity, and merit that defined gender and class status within blackness.

White backlash culminating from the *Brown* decision targeted the entire black community. In February 1955, the Arkansas Democratic Voters Association, the Ministerial

²⁸⁹ *State Press*, July 17, 1953; *State Press*, October 8, 1954.

Alliance, the Southern Regional Council, and the NAACP joined together to defeat Arkansas Senate Bill 319 that aimed to retain segregation in schools, in spite of *Brown*. Thirty-five senators denounced the bill as “ammo for Communists,” while scores of white voters agreed that integrationists in Arkansas were bad citizens with Communist attitudes.²⁹⁰ The grisly and heartbreaking lynching of fourteen-year-old Emmett Till in Mississippi in August 1955 remains the most infamous example of white rage at looming integration and the horror that compelled Roy Wilkins to affirm that the South “maintained white supremacy by murdering children.”²⁹¹ The enormity of that particular moment, and for all of the instances where people lost their lives at the hands lynch mobs and murderers, resonates most acutely in the march toward civil rights.

It is a mistake, however, to dismiss or erase the specifically gendered repercussions that manifested in ways large and small, as physical, psychological or emotional violence. The entire concept of middle-class black womanhood effectively challenged the trope that all white women were morally and socially superior to any black female. Specifically, the working-class white Southerners resented the implications. Hattie Daly insisted that while black women were coworkers, they were not her social equals. Mrs. L. G. Baker of Pine Bluff, Arkansas believed integration meant that she and her children could be “classed with a Negress who has children outside of marriage” and those who engaged in interracial relationships.²⁹² Working-class white women’s anger at shifting social constructs often led them to resolutely rebuke any notion that

²⁹⁰ *Arkansas State Press*, February 25, 1955; Letter to Daisy Bates, Bates Papers: 1946-1966, Mss 523, Box One, Folder 3, Madison.

²⁹¹ Stephen J. Whitfield, *A Death in the Delta: The Story of Emmett Till* (Baltimore, Maryland: The John Hopkins University Press), 28.

²⁹² Hattie Daly in an interview with Frank Clement, May 22, 1954, box 37, Clement Papers, as quoted in Pete Daniel, *Lost Revolutions: The South in the 1950s* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 192-93; Mrs. L.G. Baker to President Dwight D. Eisenhower, Orval E. Faubus Papers, Series 15, Subseries 4, Box 54, University of Arkansas Special Collections, Fayetteville, Arkansas.

black women were not a monolithic group of the worst stereotypes that deleted abuses heaped upon black female bodies by white society.

Gendered fear made prey of black womanhood. It is little wonder that black press outlets constantly pointed to the abuse of black womanhood as tacit proof of white degradation, or that editors such as LC Bates probably relished the opportunity to shine a light on the worst instincts of white communities. In November 1954 and December 1955, the *State Press* identified white men accused of raping black women and girls as a means of defense for the victims. Such reporting also constituted as evidence that licentiousness among black women was a nasty stereotype meant to hide white depravity. The paper also highlighted general physical abuses against black female bodies from entitled white perpetrators. Just three months after Till's murder, the *State Press* reported that a city bus driver slapped a teenage girl who attended Dunbar High School for reaching to take a transfer ticket after the driver refused to give it to her. The reporter opined that the assault was reminiscent "of the World War II days when a Negro in Little Rock has to carry a razor in one pocket, a brick in another, a bible under his arm, and a rabbit foot in his hand, and *then* he had no assurance of reaching his destination safely..." In the deposition, a white woman called the police to notify them of the disturbance and centered the girl as the aggressor. Neither in the mind of the bus driver or the white woman did the seventeen-year-old girl deserve protection as a child, as a young lady, or as a fellow human being. The girl's attempt to assert herself, and to take what she was entitled to, angered the bus driver and the white woman who probably resented that the girl did not cower in the face of white indignation. That kind of gendered outrage and abuse further propelled middle-class black

women to further insist that they receive the treatment befitting dignified ladies of a certain station.²⁹³

Across the South, white people interpreted *Brown v. the Board of Education* as a blatant disregard for (white) Southern society and custom. In Little Rock, white citizens regarded any plan for integration as a personal assault. In 1956, eighty-two United States representatives and nineteen senators signed the “Southern Manifesto” that argued *Brown v. the Board of Education* an inherently unconstitutional and “clear abuse of judicial power.” Arkansas’ own J. William Fulbright, nationally and internationally regarded as a liberal hero, stood alongside the overwhelming majority of his fellow Southerners in assuming a genuine or politically-calculated white supremacist stand against the Supreme Court.²⁹⁴ Only Senators Albert Gore, Sr. and Estes Kefauver of Tennessee, and Senators Lyndon Johnson and Ralph Yarborough of Texas refused to add their signatures, while Representative Harold D. Cooley of North Carolina denounced the document as “dangerous, calculated to aggravate the situation.”²⁹⁵ Beyond a sliver of white Southerners who recognized the growing national resentment of Jim Crow, or who sincerely empathized with and stood for black equality, most Southern whites of all classes opposed the

²⁹³ *Arkansas State Press*, November 25, 1955.

²⁹⁴ James William Fulbright, President of the University of Arkansas from 1939-1941, earned distinction as one of the most influential Senators and foreign policy experts in United States history. An internationalist abroad who assiduously opposed the McCarthy witch hunts and the Vietnam War, Fulbright reflected the social conservatism of the Jim Crow South in his domestic ideas. Despite his lack of patience for Communist hysteria, he signed the Southern Manifesto, voted against the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Voting Rights Act of 1965, and as late as 1975, he opposed civil rights legislation, arguing that he “doubted its efficacy” and his “constituents wouldn’t have tolerated it.” See R.W. Apple, Jr. “J. William Fulbright, Senate Giant, Is Dead at 89,” *New York Times*, February 10, 1995; J. William Fulbright, *The Arrogance of Power* (New York: Random House, 1966); Randall B. Wood, *Fulbright: A Biography* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995); Randall B. Woods, *J. William Fulbright, Vietnam, and the Search for a Cold War Foreign Policy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

²⁹⁵ *State Press*, May 4, 1956.

Supreme Court's decision and its implications. In Little Rock on the eve of integration, outraged white women begged Governor Orval Faubus to stymie "this...humiliation...unspeakable reproach...atrocities" in the public school system.²⁹⁶ Certainly, Daisy Bates and other black citizens in Little Rock failed to understand that humiliation or any emotional circumstance was being forced upon the city's school system. Here, Blossom underlined that he had no interest in fighting the status quo beyond what he was legally required to do. Even after sustained meetings and deliberations with interracial community groups and individuals, the Superintendent stalled ballyhooed promises to integrate the capital's public schools by 1956. He poured time and energy expounding the virtues of his revised plan rang to segregationists and uneasy white 'moderates.' For black Little Rock, middle-class black women across the city, and black leadership, Blossom proved to be an absolute appeaser.

Their deduction was not unfair, and Blossom's own actions showcase that he was hardly a protagonist in the integration effort. In the wake of the earliest backlash against his original plan, Blossom had advocated for minimal compliance with *Brown v. Board*. Segregationist unrest throughout Arkansas shaped his actions. It is further fair to argue that as a white man in powerful seat whose civil rights went unquestioned, he did not empathize with marginalized people whose civil rights were enforced (or not) by men like himself. Integration at Hoxie in 1955 spurred near-immediate resistance in the form of the Hoxie Citizens' Council (HCC). Herbert Brewer, a local soybean farmer with one school-age child, led an eight-man board that resolved to "educate their children in either private or public schools where integration [was] not

²⁹⁶ *Congressional Record*, 84th Congress Second Session, Vol. 102, Part 4 (March 12, 1956) <http://www.strom.clemson.edu/strom/manifesto.html> (accessed November 22, 2015); Grif Stockley, *Race Relations in the Natural State* (Little Rock, Arkansas: Butler Center for Arkansas Studies, 2007), 137; "National Affairs: The Southern Manifesto," *Time*, March 26, 1956; Cope, "'A Thorn in the Side?'" 168.

practiced.”²⁹⁷ Though Hoxie eventually and successfully integrated, white supremacists mobilized across Arkansas. Galvanized by the challenge to Jim Crow, as well as prodded by rabidly segregationist politicians including as Senator James O. Eastland of Mississippi, anti-integrationists formed White America, Inc. in Pine Bluff.²⁹⁸ Little Rock attorney Amis Guthridge, a Dixiecrat described by the *Southern School News* as a “militant States Righter...an unsuccessful candidate for Congress,” and spokesman for White America, Inc. argued that few officials “had guts enough to take a stand against integration.” He warned that school boards would have to “tell us if they are for the white folks or the NAACP.”²⁹⁹ Such baiting led directly to the formation of the White Citizens’ Council of Arkansas, with which White America, Inc. merged to form the Association of Citizens’ Councils of Arkansas (ACCA) in 1956.³⁰⁰ The ACCA appealed to overwhelmingly working-class white Arkansans who tended to be the most virulent segregationists. Despite the humble character of most of its participants, the organization touted its respectability in its manner of fighting integration—it was not a paramilitary on the order of the Ku Klux Klan. Under the leadership of South Arkansas-born

²⁹⁷ *Southern School News*, September 1955, 10.

²⁹⁸ *Southern School News*, March 3, 1955, 2.

²⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰⁰ The White Citizens’ Councils originated in the Mississippi Delta in 1954. Also called Citizens’ Councils, branches quickly sprang up in cities and towns across the South and were known as the Citizens’ Councils of America after 1956. Branches often had the support of middle-class white and prominent white people and were known for economic harassment against civil rights workers in their communities. See Neil R. McMillen, *The Citizens’ Council: Organized Resistance to the Second Reconstruction, 1954-1964* (Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1971); John Dittmer, *Local People: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Mississippi* (Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1995); Numan V. Bartley, *The Rise of Massive Resistance: Race and Politics in the South during the 1950s* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1999); James C. Cobb, “The Real Story of the White Citizens’ Council,” *History News Network*, December 23, 2010, <http://historynewsnetwork.org/article/134814> [accessed April 2, 2017]; Jennifer Jensen Wallach and John A. Kirk, *ARSNICK: The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee in Arkansas* (Fayetteville, Arkansas: The University of Arkansas Press, 2011).

attorney, former state senator, and charismatic demagogue James “Justice Jim” Johnson, the ACCA argued the unconstitutionality of *Brown v. Board* and insisted that they existed to “bring to the people the situation facing them and let them make their choice.”³⁰¹ Frequently invoking the Bible to defend his beliefs, Johnson affirmed that “God did not intend for the races to mix, or mongrelize,” to which Teresa Jones, a staff writer for the *State Press* volleyed back with, “...the Bible also states that “My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are my ways your ways.”³⁰² Johnson likely did not read the *State Press*, but he quickly set about publishing his own paper. The *Arkansas Faith*, edited by ACCA member Curt Copeland served as a mouthpiece that denounced integration and particularly the NAACP as communist.³⁰³ Though not an overtly violent organization nor a large one, the ACCA stoked nationalist fervor and states’ rights zeal in its 517 official members and in the readership of the *Arkansas Faith* who were inclined to see

³⁰¹ *State Press*, September 15, 1955. James Douglas Johnson served as an Arkansas state senator from 1950-1956, and in 1958 he was elected as an associate justice to the Arkansas Supreme Court where he served for seven years. Johnson unsuccessfully ran for governor of Arkansas in 1956 and in 1966. In 1968, he managed the Arkansas campaign for presidential candidate George Wallace. An ardent segregationist throughout his political career, he served as the face of massive resistance in Arkansas and continued to make political enemies, (including President Bill Clinton whom he once called a “queer-mongering, whore-hopping adulterer”), even after he retired from public service in 1970. See Marie Williams, “James Douglas ‘Justice Jim’ Johnson,” *Encyclopedia of Arkansas History and Culture*, <http://www.encyclopediaofarkansas.net/encyclopedia/entry-detail.aspx?search=1&entryID=5848> [accessed March 4, 2016]; Jim McDougal and Curtis Wilkie, *Arkansas Mischief: The Birth of a National Scandal* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, Inc. 1998); Elizabeth Jacoway, “Jim Johnson of Arkansas: Segregationist Prototype,” in Ted Ownby, *The Role of Ideas in the Civil Rights South* (Jackson, Mississippi: The University Press of Mississippi, 2002); Elizabeth Jacoway, “Massive Resistance: Jim Johnson,” in *Turn Away Thy Son*, 28-45.

³⁰² *State Press*, June 29, 1956.

³⁰³ *Arkansas Faith*, May 1956, 3, Daisy Bates Papers, 1948-1966, Box 4, File One, Special Collections Fayetteville.

conspiracy in any group or body that deviated from white, Christian, male-dominated social norms and Jim Crow culture.³⁰⁴

Rowdy, angry white Arkansans eager to loudly denounce integration and to do the tacit bidding of Jim Johnson who longed to be governor of Arkansas, succeeded in a pressure campaign that “had Blossom climbing the wall.”³⁰⁵ Indeed, Johnson’s personal ambition and pettiness contributed to the superintendent’s headache. In tumultuous 1956, he ran for office on a purely segregationist platform against the moderate incumbent, Orval E. Faubus. Journalist Roy Reed has written extensively and compassionately about the state’s thirty-sixth governor. Son of a genuine socialist from the poverty-stricken hills of Madison County, Faubus commiserated with society’s outcasts while also carrying a degree of racial prejudices that affect most Southern white men. Still, Reed concludes that Faubus dramatically improved Arkansas’ infrastructure, services and institutions during his time in office and that he also well-served black constituents by hiring numbers of black people for government jobs, working to eliminate voter restrictions, and investing in black higher education.³⁰⁶ In the state’s Democratic primaries in 1954, Faubus largely avoided racial discussions as twentieth-century Arkansas politics had mostly made losers of men who used race as a wedge issue. Instead, he concentrated on polishing his decidedly rustic, everyman image and focused on economics while he reached out to conservative black clergymen, and declared that while “desegregation was the number one issue of the campaign...it was a decision to be met at the local level.” Faubus’ plan garnered

³⁰⁴ Letter to Curt Copeland, October 25, 1955, Special Collections Fayetteville; Graeme Cope, “‘Honest People of the Middle and Lower Classes’? A Profile of the Capital Citizens’ Council during the Little Rock Crisis of 1957,” *Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 61 (Spring 2002),

³⁰⁵ Stockley, *Daisy Bates*, 105.

³⁰⁶ Roy Reed, *Faubus: The Life and Times of an American Prodigal* (Fayetteville, Arkansas: University of Arkansas Press, 1997).

considerable black support and allowed him soundly beat the incumbent, elite and seemingly-alooof Francis Cherry. Though his opinion on *Brown v. Board* sounded like appeasement to states' rights advocates, it is also true that Faubus made no mention of integration at all in his 1955 inaugural address. Further, he kept the state firmly out of Hoxie, neither siding with or offering assistance to that school board or segregationists on the grounds that "whatever could be done [either way] might only aggravate the situation."³⁰⁷ What is incontrovertible, however, is that Johnson rode of crest of white supremacist support in 1956 that terrified Faubus. In an enormously consequential move, the incumbent governor engaged the firebrand in a race-baiting free-for-all contest that challenged "who could be the more repulsive in his denunciations of the Negro," as Johnson rightly accused Faubus of being an expedient segregationist, while the governor lied that "he thought of segregation of the races first."³⁰⁸ Faubus kept his office but at a price of that placed him firmly in the camp of Arkansas' white supremacists and that would spell lasting consequences for the capital city and state's reputations.

Black Little Rock, and middle-class black ladies, watched the influence the state executive and segregationist opposition exercised on Virgil Blossom who had already failed to stand up for the original, biracially-decided integration plan. Daisy Bates and the state NAACP officials watched him crumble to segregationist pressure. It is true that his assertion that Little Rock would consent to *any* basic legal compliance with the *Brown* decision earned him the ire of white supremacists, but he put forth virtually no principled effort to commit to real integration, either. The city's black press excoriated the Superintendent for buckling as black children had been denied enrollment for spring semester courses in the city's white schools. Their rejection

³⁰⁷ *Southern School News*, February 1955, 2; September 1955, 10.

³⁰⁸ *State Press*, July 27, 1956, 1.

enabled Daisy Bates and middle-class women from the city's black community to assume a mantle of righteous discontent as good mothers who wanted the best opportunities and equitable treatment for their children, as well as assume the pedestal of respectable ladies. Segregationist meddling and influence on a feckless school board and superintendent propelled them to sue in 1956.

Officially titled *Cooper v. Aaron*, four attorneys attended thirty-one plaintiffs. Those lawyers included Wiley A. Branton of Pine Bluff and personal friend of LC and Daisy Bates; Ulysses Simpson Tate of Dallas; Robert L. Carter of New York and Thurgood Marshall, also of New York and among the most famous (or infamous) attorneys in the United States. Though Branton worked most intimately with this case, Marshall's presence guaranteed the star power that focused the South's attention on the courtroom in Little Rock. Two years out from his victory in *Brown v. Board*, the future Supreme Court Justice used his skills as part of a suit that represented thirty-one children between the ages of six and eighteen who had been refused admittance into the city's white schools. John and Thelma Aaron headed the alphabetical list of children and were attended in court by their mother (also called Thelma). Vester Scoggins stood with her two daughters, Evelyn and Virginia. Of the thirty-one children counted among the plaintiffs, seventeen were girls, and two mothers represented their families alongside thirteen fathers when the trial began.³⁰⁹ As the district court subpoenaed Daisy Bates to make

³⁰⁹ For a complete history of *Cooper v. Aaron*, see Tony Freyer, *The Little Rock Crisis: A Constitutional Interpretation* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1984); Tony Freyer, "Enforcing Brown in the Little Rock Crisis," *Journal of Appellate Practice and Process* 6 (Spring 2004), 67-78; Tony Freyer, "The Little Rock Confrontation and *Cooper v. Aaron*: Development and Implementation of Constitutional Litigation," *University of Arkansas at Little Rock Law Review* 30 (Winter 2008), 323-344; Tony Freyer, *Little Rock on Trial: Cooper v. Aaron and School Desegregation* (Lawrence, Kansas: The University of Kansas Press, 2007); Mark V. Tushnet, *Making Civil Rights Law: Thurgood Marshall and the Supreme Court, 1936-1961* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).

depositions to the defense, there is little doubt that middle-class black womanhood and the values defining that structure fundamentally drove the lawsuit and the tone of the courtroom. Transcripts of the trial reveal that even as these women publicly attacked segregation and injustice, they rooted their strategy in graciousness that underscored their positions as respectable black ladies. In her deposition, Bates affirmed to defense attorney Leon Catlett that the plaintiffs had been “very courteously received” by the Little Rock School Board and had responded “friendly” in kind—that did not alter the fact that the Blossom Plan failed to meet black expectations or that unabated segregation persisted.³¹⁰

She further used her platform as the then-most visible female of the integration efforts to challenge white supremacy while also demanding that middle-class black women be treated with the privileges adjacent to protected womanhood. Mere skimming of trial transcripts for *Aaron v. Cooper* reveal an excruciatingly long examination period that frustrated the attorney and the witness. The former certainly chaffed at the latter’s immutability during the process and remarked at one point, “*Daisy*, we have a right to ask you these questions.”³¹¹ As Bates persisted that anything less than immediate desegregation suited the parents or the NAACP, or refused to answer questions that probably seemed nonsensical, Catlett referred to the plaintiffs and black Little Rock in general as “Nigrahs.” The insult prompted Bates to retort, “The word is pronounced ‘*Nee-gro*,’ not ‘*Nee-grah*.’”³¹² For a black woman to correct a white man’s use of racial slurs in a public forum—particularly as the man in question represented elite and therefore untouchable white supremacy—resounded well beyond the confines of the courtroom. She also struck a blow for black ladies’ respectability when she stopped Catlett’s cross examination to

³¹⁰ *Aaron v. Cooper*, Daisy Bates Papers, Madison.

³¹¹ *Ibid.*

³¹² *Jet*, November 21, 1957, 26.

admonish him for overfamiliarity in calling her by her first name. Jim Crow culture pivoted on the infantilization of black adults; the entire concept of exalted Southern womanhood existed upon the juxtaposition of white purity to black degradation. Therefore, Catlett never conceived of referencing ‘Mrs. Bates,’ as he would white women from any social class. Bates refused exclusion for herself or other women of her standing from the decorum afforded to Southern ladies as she pointed out that she had not met Catlett before the trial, and that use of her first name was “reserved for *the right* of my intimate friends and my husband...I want you to refrain from calling me Daisy. My name is *Mrs. Bates*.”³¹³ Such confidence not only revealed Bates’ willful personality and a lifetime of anger at intersectional abuse. Her insistence on recognition of respectable black womanhood belonged to housekeepers, housewives and professional women alike who were categorized by patronizing ‘endearments’ such as ‘Auntie,’ the indignity of their first names in the manner of little children, or a host of gendered, racist pejoratives that served to keep black women beyond the reach of femininity’s pedestal. Daisy Bates’ shaming of Leon Catlett represented scores of middle-class black women across Little Rock and the entire South who insisted that the pedestal was neither the sole province of white women—especially those who claimed only whiteness as their social trump card over the qualities that elevated middle-class black ladies. Moreover, Catlett’s humiliation affirmed that black ladies existed undaunted by white masculinity—the ultimate symbol of power in the Jim Crow South. All of the meanings in that brief exchange must have been quite a lot for the defense attorney to process, as he determined that he would not directly refer to Bates at all. Rather than accept indignity, Bates affirmed, “That will be fine.”³¹⁴

³¹³ *Arkansas Gazette*, May 5, 1956; *State Press*, May 11, 1956.

³¹⁴ *Aaron v. Cooper*, Daisy Bates Paper, Madison; *State Press*, May 11, 1956.

Her dignified defiance won accolades across the nation as letters poured into the Bates' personal mailbox and into the *State Press* office. Marc Johnson of Louisville, Kentucky wrote that he "was made proud by...the reported conduct [she] displayed...in upholding [her] dignity and demanding that it be respected." Beulah Lee Flowers of Pine Bluff, Arkansas congratulated Daisy Bates on her "*womanly* stand and for being such a good witness. You did *credit to womanhood in general*."³¹⁵ Such praise reflected that private citizens intensely valued respectable black womanhood and reveal the growing emphasis placed upon the middle-class women who were emerging as the faces and leaders of the movement. President Irene McCoy Gaines of the National Association of Colored Women's Clubs lauded Rosa Parks as a courageous activist and as a "protector, a treasure and a symbol of finest womanhood."³¹⁶

This attention mirrored the simultaneous media spotlighting of abuse that black women suffered at the hands of white civilians and law enforcement. Press outlets consistently reported sexualized white outrages on black vulnerability, respectability and dignity in an effort to affect justice for perpetrators and also to underline that black womanhood was only degraded by a legal system that refused to protect it. Black newspapers vividly described instances of white men pillaging black homes in search of women who might be easy prey for rape. As *Cooper v. Aaron* played out in the spring of 1956, a sixteen-year-old girl in Magnolia, Mississippi was kidnapped from her home in the middle of the night and raped at gun point by four white men. She escaped when she managed to wrestle the shot gun away from one rapist and clubbed him in the head with the butt of the gun. That the girl reported what happened to white authorities underlines her personal tenacity and her insistence that as a black girl, she had the right to legal and social

³¹⁵ *State Press*, June 8, 1956.

³¹⁶ *Ibid.*

protection. Even in notorious Mississippi, black girls and women publicly embarrassed and challenged Jim Crow when that system harmed them physically and emotionally.³¹⁷

Emboldened not only by the general goals of the civil rights movement but by the ladies who embodied femininity and assertive courage, black women of limited means or station included themselves in the middle-class values embodied by ladies like Bates, Gaines, and Parks as they demanded that private and public alike revere their virtue and femininity. Black women who claimed the pedestals and protections of ladies and the dignity of middle-class respectability did not go unnoticed by any class of the highly stratified white South.

Middle-class black womanhood valiantly asserted itself in the courtroom. However, black mothers and families ultimately did not sway Judge John E. Miller who heard the case and determined the Blossom Plan to be a sound strategy for desegregation on August 28, 1956. Freyer's research reveals that a fundamental misunderstanding between the organization's regional office in Dallas and local attorney Branton ultimately defeated the case. In a bewildering decision that highlighted the general confusion between local, regional and national offices of the NAACP regarding the case, Ulysses Simpson Tate issued a brief without consulting Branton. In effect, Tate argued the unconstitutionality of the Blossom Plan as it did not allot for immediate and total integration of schools that was the goal of the national office. Branton and the local office never constructed their case around the constitutionality of the Blossom Plan. Rather, the local team meticulously cited individual examples of children unduly burdened by attending far-away schools on the basis of segregation. Tate and the regional offices dismissed the approach taken by Branton, thereby allowing the defense to successfully

³¹⁷ *State Press*, May 16, 1956; July 19, 1957.

argue that the Little Rock School Board was complying with the (albeit, vague) parameters outlined by *all deliberate speed*.³¹⁸

White families cheered the defeat of *Cooper v. Aaron*, as did Blossom who noted that he was “just tickled to death” and who later wrote that integration placed “a greater responsibility...on Negro citizens” so the issue might be approached “intelligently” and “sanely.”³¹⁹ Blossom aimed his dig at anyone who opposed the gradual plan settled upon by the school board and anyone who insulted Blossom’s ego in the process. Moreover, by placing a “greater responsibility” on black families, officials and leaders, the white superintendent committed the gross mistake of forcing oppressed people to share blame in their oppression by insisting that *they* shoulder the task of liberating themselves. Yet the great and obvious conundrum to insisting on black Little Rock’s “greater responsibility” is that every avenue toward social equity included hurdles placed by men like Blossom. As did virtually all of his actions excluding the earliest days of his tenure as school superintendent, black Little Rock recognized Blossom’s patronizing that thoroughly disqualified him as an ally. Bowed but not broken, the local branch of the NAACP conferred with Branton, Marshall and Carter, deciding to appeal Miller’s ruling in the Eighth Circuit Court of Appeals in St. Louis in March 1957. That court, too, upheld the Blossom Plan. Yet despite segregationists’ and gradualists’ momentary victory, the federal courts determined in August 1956 and again in the spring of 1957 that Little Rock must integrate Central High School the following autumn.³²⁰

³¹⁸ Freyer, *The Little Rock Crisis: A Constitutional Interpretation*, 50-52.

³¹⁹ Freyer, “Politics and Law in the Little Rock Crisis,” 152; *State Press*, August 31, 1956; Blossom, *It Has Happened Here*, 12.

³²⁰ “Statement by Rev. J.C. Crenshaw,” Mss 523, Box 4, Folder 10, Daisy Bates Papers, Madison; Kirk, *Beyond Little Rock*, 105.

The approved plan, however, remained a token program that aimed to admit as few black students as possible into white spaces. White students were tacitly and implicitly discouraged from entering black schools, as well. During a meeting of the Pulaski County Bar Association, Blossom discussed the particulars of integration and assured his audience that black teachers would not be permitted to teach white children. He also noted that the plan allowed for “transfers” wherein “any child in any area [the city’s three high school attendance zones] where his race is in the minority will be permitted to transfer to another area.”³²¹ In 1956, the Horace Mann High School district encompassed 607 black students to 323 white (potential) students and existed as the city’s lone black high school after Dunbar High School was converted into a junior high school in 1955. Meanwhile, the Little Rock Central High School area served 1,712 white students with the possibility of educating 200 black students. On the western edge of the city, an under-construction high school would house 700 white students while no black students lived in that district.

In effect, the Blossom Plan offered black people inclusion without real institutional power. This pattern of admitting black bodies into educational, economic and entertainment spaces while still barring them from decision and policy-making processes that ensure genuine diversity happed in tandem with desegregation.³²² As a result, black intellect, creativity and prowess were not included, but exploited in such spaces. The destruction of the Negro Leagues

³²¹ *State Press*, June 8, 1956.

³²² Christine M. Riordan, “Diversity Is Useless without Inclusivity,” *Harvard Business Review*, June 5, 2014, <https://hbr.org/2014/06/diversity-is-useless-without-inclusivity> [accessed April 24, 2017]; Laura Sherbin and Ripa Rashid, “Diversity Doesn’t Stick without Inclusion,” *Harvard Business Review*, February 1, 2017, <https://hbr.org/2017/02/diversity-doesnt-stick-without-inclusion> [accessed April 24, 2017]; Pamela Paxton and Melanie M. Hughes, *Women, Politics, and Power: A Global Perspective* Third Edition (Thousand Oaks, California: CQ Press, 2016).

and black baseball teams as black-controlled institutions in the wake of integration represented one of the most infamous and sobering example of inclusion without power where black bodies performed for white entertainment while black intellects owned none of the teams; profited from the franchises; fostered any innovation; or enabled any black economic growth beyond the performance level.³²³ Blossom consciously created the same situation, in an educational setting in Little Rock. He and other white people dictated whose teaching talents would be valued, and whose careers would suffer or be finished; which students would be allowed to move fluidly between white and black spaces, and who would be hemmed in by arbitrary borders; how students would occupy schools as either token faces or full participants in classes, clubs, organizations, teams and events. White spaces would remain white spaces because real black participation was resolutely refused, discouraged and eliminated.

Class and race already crossed and clashed in this contentious part of Blossom's plan, as Central High School's student body comprised of diverse classes of white children who would absorb a tiny minority of black students into its large population. The emergent Hall High School, centered in an affluent neighborhood, would educate upper-middle class and elite white children. The only black students who entered anywhere in the neighborhood belonged to domestic workers who were sometimes permitted to bring their children to work when other arrangements could not be made. Working-class white families on the south side of the city deeply resented the reminder of their inferior class status and what they perceived as an insult to

³²³ For a full history of the creation and destruction and the Negro Leagues, see Neil Lanctot, *Negro League Baseball: The Rise and Ruin of a Black Institution* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008). For an examination of the exploitation and resistance of black athletes in white-controlled athletic franchises, see William C. Rhoden, *Forty Million Dollar Slaves: The Rise, Fall and Redemption of the Black Athlete* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2006).

their racial privilege. Black Little Rock equally resented the general affront to their humanity as well as the meandering pace and bare-minimum of legal compliance with integration.³²⁴

Though the restrictions of the plan were no secret, families and activists constantly pushed to figure out exactly how ‘token’ black students’ presence in Central High School might be. Most within the black community did not know how to organize on a large scale; few people had experience with mass-organization efforts and fewer had the time or resources to devote to such endeavors. Herein is what made the middle-class black women who chose to participate in civil rights efforts remarkable within their community, and well-known within broader Little Rock. These women numbered the few who had the resources, training and wherewithal to organize and affect outcomes. Middle-class black women performed three sets of historic practices when they engaged in social justice work. As women, they carried on a tradition of community consciousness and reform that had encouraged upright, sober, Christian women to look at public ills as an extension of their own homes and families since the temperance movements of the 1830s. This work dovetailed with their identities as black women—members of a caste whom circumstance forced to be publicly political regardless of class or station, recalled in the resistance of enslaved women and in the abolitionist work of free women. As middle-class black women, they assumed the respectability mores and mantels of ‘best women’ that had been emulated by clubwomen such as Ida B. Wells, Mary Church Terrell, Anna Julia Cooper, and Nannie Helen Burroughs. In this way, they organized to uplift black people as individuals and as a singular race. Intersections of sex, race and class demanded that those who could, do. This culminated in a particular social and moral responsibility of middle-class black

³²⁴ Interview with Dearle Graupner, November 28, 2012; Interview with Charlie Harper, March 27, 2016.

women in Little Rock to turn out for educational equality that represented the cornerstone for personal and community improvement. In a 1976 interview, Bates recalled a general groundswell of support for integration from the entire black community that translated into direct action from the mothers of the Little Rock Nine and networks of women. More than 100 black students expressed interest in attending the school for the fall semester in 1957 and at least eighty signed their names to rolls that circulated within Horace Mann High School and Dunbar Junior High School with the encouragement of their families, teacher and neighbors.³²⁵

Yet despite that 200 black students could theoretically attend Central High School based on the Blossom Plan's own estimates of what students lived in which districts, pressure from supremacist groups such as the White Citizens' Council and hostility from unaffiliated white families convinced the superintendent to reduce that figure as much as possible. "I know it is undemocratic, and I know it is wrong, but I am doing it," Blossom declared when he announced

³²⁵ Anna Julia Cooper, *A Voice from the South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990); Ida B. Wells, *Crusade for Justice: The Autobiography of Ida B. Wells* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990); Shirley J. Yee, *Black Women Abolitionists: A Study in Activism, 1828-1860* (Knoxville, Tennessee: The University of Tennessee Press, 1992); Glenda E. Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow: Women and the Politics of White Supremacy in North Carolina, 1896-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996); Wanda A. Hendricks, *Gender, Race, and Politics in the Midwest: Black Club Women in Illinois* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1998); Julia Roy Jeffrey, *The Great Silent Army of Abolitionism: Ordinary Women in the Antislavery Movement* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998); Jane Addams, *Twenty Years at Hull House* (New York: Signet Classic, 1999); Carol Mattingly, *Well-Tempered Women: Nineteenth-Century Temperance Rhetoric* (Carbondale, Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press, 2000); Kristine B. Miranne and Alma H. Young, *Gendering the City: Women, Boundaries and Visions of Urban Life* (New York: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2000); Adam Fairclough, *Better Day Coming: Blacks and Equality, 1890-2000* (New York: Penguin Books, 2002); Mary Church Terrell, *A Colored Woman in a White World* (Amherst, New York: Humanities Press, 2005); Leslie Brown, *Building Up Black Durham: Gender, Class, and Black Community Development in the Jim Crow South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008); Vivian M. May, *Anna Julia Cooper, Visionary Black Feminist* (New York: Routledge Press, 2012); Daisy Bates, Interview by Elizabeth Jacoway, October 11, 1976, Southern Oral History Program, Library of University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

that he would personally interview any interested students for seats at Central High School.³²⁶ He delivered this statement to a delegation of families, black press and officials from Horace Mann High School and Dunbar Junior High—the latter of whom had already completed a screening process for attending Central High School, of which Blossom was entirely aware because he had asked them to do it.³²⁷ The breathtaking arrogance of his statement belies the definite, genuine anxiety and the cacophony of opposition Blossom faced from Jim Johnson and other intransigents while he operated as the white face of social upheaval in Little Rock. Nevertheless, his woes mattered little to black people who watched him cut families and leaders entirely out of the selection process while he allowed himself to be manipulated hither and yon by white supremacists.

When pressed as to why he wanted to conduct a second set of interviews, Blossom insisted that he wanted “the best for the first year [of integration]” and that he was worried about what he considered poor scholastic records of some applicants. That no officials interrogated excellent or average white students for general attendance at public schools was not lost on Leroy Matthew Christophe, principal of Horace Mann, or Edwin L. Hawkins, principal of Dunbar, who each asserted that Blossom’s redundant meetings only served to “intimidate and install a feeling of fear and inferiority in children and parents.”³²⁸ That was the idea, as Blossom scheduled meetings with entire families and required both parents’ attendance for children who lived in two-parent households. His demand reflects the hurdles he helped set for integration but also rings with undeniably gendered overtones.

³²⁶ *State Press*, June 7, 1957.

³²⁷ Kirk, *Beyond Little Rock*, 106.

³²⁸ *Ibid.*

Fathers in most households in 1950s America acted as breadwinners of their families, in higher paying jobs than their wives, if their wives worked at all. Mothers overwhelmingly handled issues that pertained to their homes, families, and children. Indeed, and as will be further discussed, black and white mothers rotated in and out of principals' offices at Central High School during the 1957-1958 school year. Blossom recognized that he placed a cold burden upon black husbands and fathers—largely wage workers who “took off work...a whole day,” and lost their wages, to prove their children met the superintendent's subjective standards.³²⁹ That he insisted upon meeting with both parents proves that he wanted to create arbitrary reasons for denying a black child entry to Central High School and that he did not value the singular thoughts and ideas of black mothers. It is fair to argue that Blossom especially disliked the idea of meeting with the sort of woman who believed her children deserved to attend Central High School as a matter of law and citizenship instead of extended privilege bequeathed by benevolent white men. Black Little Rock rightly believed that Blossom resented working with those who challenged him. In the context of the 1950s that celebrated and emulated hyper-traditional gender norms, it is certain that he exercised intersectional prejudices that rendered assertive black women particularly abhorrent. Regardless of attendant respectability or propriety of the women and mothers who contested him, they menaced white patriarchy, as evidenced by Daisy Bates' continued work for social equality in the 1960s:

“Whenever Negro mothers cry against the denial of a decent education for their children, decent jobs, housing, equal protection under the law, the ‘powers that be’ will pat them on the head and say, ‘Have patience.’ We have been a patient people, tolerant to the point of gullibility...we have endured with patience an unbelievable amount of injustice and mistreatment...*Christian women everywhere must accept the challenge and step forward as a great army...*”³³⁰

³²⁹ Bates Interview, Jacoway, October 11, 1976, Southern Oral History Program.

³³⁰ Untitled Speech, Mss 523, Box 3, Folder 9, Daisy Bates Papers, Madison. Italics within the quotation are my own.

In his memoirs, Blossom diplomatically addressed the character of Bates herself as a “woman of great energy with an aggressive, crusading spirit...an efficient organizer...she was not a person about whom others were indifferent.”³³¹ He definitely recognized similar qualities in the parents and especially the mothers who possessed the fortitude to support their children’s presence at Central High School and leave an indelible mark on a Southern city. As a patriarch, Blossom did not want to place himself in a situation where he might be forced to participate in an exchange with a woman intent on making him acknowledge her humanity as a black person and her values as a black lady.

It is fair to argue that Little Rock’s superintendent of public schools unconsciously spent time pondering something strange for a white patriarch in the Jim Crow South. For Blossom to assiduously avoid confrontations with or sharing intellectual space (or any space) with black girls and women; to wonder about the easiest, best ways (for whiteness) to engage black female bodies in public spaces meant that on some level, he had to really think about the interpretations of black womanhood. From a twenty-first century perspective, Blossom’s consideration of how black female bodies would be received at Central High School is quite extraordinary in that he had to weigh the complexities of class, race and sex so that he could create terms to reduce or erase black femininity within the context of integration. His initial restrictions on the quality of any black student allowed him to use the image of Jackie Robinson—famously selected to integrate the all-white Brooklyn Dodgers’ baseball team not because of talent, but because of his sterling reputation—as the measuring stick by which Central High School admitted black students. Despite loud criticism from the black community of his personal tweaks to the

³³¹ Blossom, *It Has Happened Here*, 27.

approved integration plan, Blossom set out to create academic and ethical bars so high that few teenagers of any race or decade could clear them.³³² He freely acknowledged that he personally rejected two celebrated football players from Horace Mann High School on the basis of middling grades, as well as the revelation that most of Central High School's opponents would not play against an integrated squad.³³³ Blossom and the Little Rock School Board used that experience to entirely discourage interested children by declaring that "Negro students [would not have the right] to participate in regularly scheduled extracurricular activities...social clubs...[or] join with other students in public performances."³³⁴ Carlotta Walls, a gifted track athlete who was selected to attend Central High School, recalled that Blossom delivered a laundry list of limitations—"You're not going...to the football games or basketball games. You're not going to be able to participate in the choir or drama club, or be on the track team. You can't go to prom."³³⁵

Constraints placed on potential black students' talent and social lives within the school extended to boys and girls alike, but Blossom particularly considered and targeted black girls for deterrence. White social construction of black womanhood depended upon interpreting black females through the prism of 'Mammy,' 'Jezebel,' or 'Sapphire' stereotypes. The youth of prospective black girls at Central High School largely negated the one-dimensional caricatures that were assigned to adult black women. What is obvious is that white parents and school officials worried that teenage interaction might lead to friendly or intimate interracial relationships. This fear generally denoted paranoia of miscegenation between white girls and

³³² John A. Kirk, *Redefining the Color Line* (Gainesville, Florida: University of Florida Press, 2002), 106-108.

³³³ Blossom, *It Has Happened Here*, 20.

³³⁴ Untitled Speech, Mss 523, Box 3, Folder 7, Daisy Bates Papers, Madison.

³³⁵ Interview with Carlotta Walls, in Brian Krumm, *The Little Rock Nine: A Primary Source Exploration of the Battle for School Integration* (North Mankato, Minnesota: Capestone Press, 2015), 15.

black boys. To alleviate that possibility, more black girls than black boys were ultimately selected to integrate Central High School. Yet white social construction also created white womanhood as the total inverse of the negative connotations associated with black females. Theoretically, the white student body and faculty would dismiss black girls as untalented, undesirable, and unfeminine. Their sex status placed them in a bizarre limbo that would neutralize their threat to white patriarchy and reinforce exalted white femininity, while simultaneously stripping them of any claim to womanhood. In a racist hierarchy, an ideal black woman was socially invisible, and black adolescent girls were not emerging women but “sexless overgrown pickanninies.”³³⁶ However, impending school integration in the Arkansas capital existed because of persistent and successful pressure from the state chapter of the NAACP, the combined efforts of black citizens, and the insistence of middle-class black women whose existence belied white attempts to castigate them as unfeminine and unworthy. The NAACP specifically sought students to integrate Central High School who belonged to respectable households and were models of young black achievement. Elimination of mediocrity especially affected the scrutinization of girls who would face racist and sexist discrimination. Young black women’s excellence and virtue had to shine beyond reproach for the standards of the organization and the community that supported potential students. Ironically, white school officials agreed with the NAACP and black Little Rock on the sorts of students who would be admitted into Central High School. Virgil Blossom repeatedly stated that only the ‘best’ students would be accepted. Realistically, there was never a chance that the selected black girls would ever be indiscernible. Their skin color and their tokenism promised hypervisibility. So too did their class status. Any black girl chosen to integrate was guaranteed to be intellectually capable,

³³⁶ Cahn, *Sexual Reckonings*, 4.

accomplished, principled and socially unblemished. The entire concept of integration presented a direct challenge to constructed white womanhood by debuting illustrious black femininity on a stage where no one could rationally deny its presence.

Blossom challenged himself to make even inquiry into Central High School as odious an experience as possible for black girls. A seasoned educator and father, he insisted the rejection process in the autumn of 1956 and spring of 1957 was “difficult and often heart-rending” for students and himself.³³⁷ That did not prevent Blossom from bringing one girl to tears as he criticized her grades and patronized her lack of “emotional responsibility”—a singularly sexualized way for him to reach again for the Jackie Robinson analogy wherein admitted boys would behave stoically in the face of adversity. He applied this analogy to girls also, so that he could discard candidates who demonstrated stereotyped hysteria.³³⁸ He employed a litany of gendered tactics to reduce the roster of eighty students to a mere thirty-two stubborn individuals that would be further cut. Daisy Bates recalled one interview between Blossom and a prospective girl that revealed white Southern society’s tacit acknowledgment that black feminine beauty and desirability existed irrespective of white conceptions of either. A Miss Poindexter arrived at Blossom’s office with an impeccable scholastic record and glowing recommendations of family, social engagement and overall character. Finding no ground to refuse her admittance, the superintendent resorted physical appearance to dismiss Poindexter. In her interview with Elizabeth Jacoway, Bates laughed when she recounted that Blossom admitted the teenager was too attractive to attend Central High School.³³⁹

³³⁷ Blossom, *It Has Happened Here*, 20.

³³⁸ Ibid.

³³⁹ Daisy Bates, Interview with Jacoway, 1976.

This noteworthy affirmation divulges far more than the obvious contradiction of the supposed premium that white Southern society placed on melanin-free skin. Blossom's acknowledgement of Poindexter's beauty admitted the multifaceted battleground that black female bodies represented to Central High School, as well as the whole of the civil rights struggle. Where an adolescent black girl could not be reimagined in white consciousness as an overgrown child, she had to assume the qualities of a seductress and be assumed as 'Jezebel' regardless of her chastity. The latent irony of placing black women and girls into the 'Jezebel' trope, however, meant recognizing that black women possessed physical beauty that competed with or surpassed white women's own, and diverted white men's attention. While this is not revelatory in contexts of subservience where black women historically experienced unwanted white male attention and unfettered sexual abuse, integration offered the confounding possibility of appealing black womanhood placed on an equal level with whiteness and where black girls might be genuinely pursued with the freedom to reject romantic advances. A sweet personality, formidable intellect, or other aptitude could be recognized in concert with physical attributes that might make Central High School the site of an entirely upended social order where white men learned to value black femininity and took genuine interest in black girls as (in the parlance of 1950s America) 'the right kind of girl.' In this alternate universe, black womanhood forced white womanhood to share its pedestal. That middle-class black girls who embodied the utmost respectability standards were singularly considered for integration assured this as a possibility.

Yet what makes the Poindexter interview so significant is not her distracting loveliness, but Daisy Bates' remembrance that the young woman was a "pretty little *dark* girl."³⁴⁰ 'Dark' as an adjective in the American South has generally never enjoyed connotations such as 'pleasant,'

³⁴⁰ Ibid. The emphasis within the quotation is my own.

‘affable,’ ‘virtuous,’ and certainly ‘not too pretty.’ Historian Winthrop D. Jordan noted in his investigation of American racial attitudes that eighteenth-century Irish novelist Oliver Goldsmith first posited in popular media that ‘white’ was “the natural color of man” and therefore humanity must consider “European figure and colour as standards to which to refer to all other varieties [as] actual marks of degeneracy in the human form.”³⁴¹ Thomas Jefferson expounded upon these ideas in 1782 when he mused on the “immoveable veil of black” to laud European features over African, thereby offering academic credibility to racist beauty constructs that he would later compartmentalize for his own relationships with black women.³⁴² Regardless of generations of counterevidence that proved white people found black people eminently attractive, whiteness demonized blackness—darkness and African features indicated essential depravity. These ideas persisted into (and beyond) the twentieth century. Grooming standards and “beauty work”—learning trades as stylists, working as chemists to create cosmetics or selling supplies—had existed as an avenue of economic uplift and social respectability for black women and families since the last decade of the nineteenth century. However, mainstream beauty ideals were solely dictated by white appetites that affected how black women interpreted their own looks. ‘Pressing’—the tedious and painful process of straightening dense hair with chemical solutions and hot combs so as to appear more Eurocentric—persisted as the most acceptable treatment for black women’s hair until the 1970s when black communities embraced Afrocentric style. Until the 1940s, cosmetics companies in the South marketed products with the promise of heightened whiteness for black and working-class white women by appealing to the myth of prized,

³⁴¹ Oliver Goldsmith, *A History of the Earth and Animated Nature*, Vol. II (London, 1774), 232-242, in Winthrop D. Jordan, *White over Black: American Attitudes toward the Negro, 1550-1812* (Baltimore: Penguin Books Inc. 1969), 248.

³⁴² Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia*, 144-45; Annette Gordon-Reed, *The Hemingses of Monticello: An American Family* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2008).

privileged, magnolia-skinned Southern belles.³⁴³ A full decade into the Cold War, cosmetics marketed to black women continued to promise the illusion of whiteness by lightening skin through chemical bleaches, even as white beauty standards of the 1950s yielded to tanned skin popularized by upper-class white women and girls who could afford vacations to sunny, summery locales. That any kind of darkness might be considered fashionable in white society must have amused and infuriated women whose native melanin never earned the kind of admiration that made Coppertone sunscreen a must-have (white) beauty staple. Dark-skinned black women and girls most acutely felt that sting. Historic favor granted to whiteness and lightness ensured colorism amongst black people. Blain Roberts has effectively argued that in rural South communities such as Little Rock, black communities advantaged medium-toned, brown-skinned women “as a possible solution to intraracial discrimination.”³⁴⁴

Nevertheless, dark-skinned women rarely received accolades for their looks from black or white communities, or earned acceptance into white spaces. To highlight that reality, one only need glance at photos of the girls who were granted seats inside of Central High School and whose skin tones ranged from exceedingly light to medium brown. Dark-skinned girls were conspicuously absent from the final roster of ten students who would integrate Central High School. Daisy Bates recollected that fifteen-year-old Carlotta Walls—the lightest student of the entire group—perplexed white officials, as “no one could tell if she was white or black.”³⁴⁵ While Carlotta Walls-Lanier has definitively stated that her lightness earned her no advantages inside the walls of Central High School, it is certain that Virgil Blossom and the school board preferred lighter-skinned students who might be as close to imperceptible as possible and who

³⁴³ Roberts, *Pageants, Parlors and Pretty Women*, 42-58.

³⁴⁴ Ibid, 82-83.

³⁴⁵ Daisy Bates, Interview with Jacoway, 1976.

could allow uncomfortable or angry white people to deny the reality of integration.³⁴⁶ Rejecting a dark-skinned student represented lock-step Southern attitudes inherited from centuries of racial indoctrination. What Poindexter's rebuke deviates from, however, is white insistence that dark-skinned women were less desirable, talented or worthy of pedestaling and protection than lighter-skinned black or white women. By refusing to admit an eminently qualified dark girl, Virgil Blossom unwittingly exposed the intersections of white rage. Dark competed with and sometimes exceeded light on its own presuppositions of what constituted feminine worth. The gendered axis on which Southern social structure pivoted shook to its foundation as black ladies refused invisibility to sustain white fantasies. The entire challenge of integration as pursued by middle-class black women and girls, and as resisted by Blossom and the Little Rock School Board, proved that massive resistance to the looming first day of the 1957-1958 school year hinged on three separate prongs that centered respectable black womanhood as the catalyst.

³⁴⁶ Interview with Carlotta Walls-Lanier, February 11, 2016.



*Illustration 16: Little Rock Central High School, present day
Photo Courtesy of the National Park Service*



*Illustration 17: Four Greek goddesses represent Ambition, Personality, Opportunity and Preparation.
Photo Courtesy of the National Park Service*



*Illustration 18: Six young ladies walking to school at Little Rock Central High
Back row, from left: Thelma Mothershed, Minnijean Brown, Elizabeth Eckford
Front row, from left: Melba Pattillo, Gloria Ray, Carlotta Walls
Photo Courtesy of the Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison*



*Illustration 19: An afternoon at the home of LC Bates and Daisy Gatson Bates
From left: Elizabeth Eckford, Minnijean Brown, Daisy Bates, Melba Pattillo, Thelma Mothershed
Photo Courtesy of the Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison*

DO YOU WANT NEGROES IN OUR SCHOOLS?

IF YOU DO NOT THEN GO TO THE POLLS THIS COMING MON-
DAY AND
FOR REMOVAL **VOTE** AGAINST REMOVAL

LAMB
MATSON
TUCKER

McKINLEY
ROWLAND
LASTER

THIS IS THE SIMPLE TRUTH. IF THE INTEGRATIONISTS WIN THIS
SCHOOL BOARD FIGHT, THE SCHOOLS WILL BE INTEGRATED THIS
FALL. THERE WILL BE ABSOLUTELY NOTHING YOU OR WE CAN DO
TO STOP IT.

PLEASE VOTE RIGHT!!!

**Join hands with us in this fight—
send your contributions to**

THE MOTHERS' LEAGUE

P. O. BOX 3321

+

LITTLE ROCK, ARKANSAS

Ad Paid for by Margaret G. Jackson, President; Mary Thomason, Secretary

Illustration 20: Flyer issued by the Mothers' League of Central High School

Photo Courtesy of Special Collections at the University of Arkansas, Fayetteville

Chapter Five: A Matter for the Mothers to Settle

The teenage girls selected to attend Central High School, the women in their families and social circles, and Daisy Bates represented the epitome of black respectability, middle-class values and virtuous femininity. By the standards of how black Americans dictated class structures, these women represented pillars of society although white Americans perceived status first through a prism of wealth and inheritance that in turn produced education and opportunities to serve (or control) communities. Provided that a white person possessed enough money or an especially impressive pedigree, there was little that could ever separate that person from privileged status regardless of deportment or ambition. It was unthinkable to most white Americans that non-white people might possess any of the material or immaterial qualities that separated ‘common’ people from the ‘better sort,’ and certainly the qualities that created ladies who deserved protection and privilege. Middle-class black ladies challenged all of those white conceptions and faced intersectional discrimination because they did so. From their harnessing of the public sphere to carve space for themselves, to their carriage, to their values—middle-class black femininity presented itself in Little Rock in 1957 as a standard equal to whiteness that would not be judged by whiteness, and that demanded the same level of protection. In fall 1957, the black girls and women who entered the orbit of elite and middle-class white Little Rock, and especially working-class white Little Rock, delivered a powerful blow to white women who considered themselves the standard bearers, particularly among those who believed they stood to lose more than anyone in the wake of integration.

The beginning of 1957 spelled a flurry of legal activity for anyone in Little Rock with a vested interest in integration, one way or the other, that has arguably never ceased.³⁴⁷ Jim

³⁴⁷ Since 1957, the Little Rock School District (LRSD) has remained embroiled in controversy and lawsuits related to ensuring the integration of the city’s public schools that

Johnson and other ardent segregationists in the state legislature determined to stop the token Blossom Plan by approving four segregation bills in February of that year. Created as the State Sovereignty Committee, House Bills 322, 323, 324 and 325 served as Arkansas' own answer to Senator Joseph McCarthy's infamous House of Un-American Activities Committee. HB 322 authorized investigation into citizens who supported integration, while HB 323 removed mandatory school attendance at any integrated institution. HB 324 required registration of individuals and organizations devoted to integration—a direct attack on Daisy and LC Bates, and the NAACP. Finally, HB 325 authorized school boards to use school funds—tax-payer dollars contributed by white and black constituents—to fight integration.

In the *State Press*, LC correctly identified the four measures as “Anti-Negro Bills,” while future governor Winthrop Rockefeller worried that the legislation would create “an Arkansas

found within the inner and downtown portions of the capital, and the myriad of attempts by white families to establish de facto segregation through white flight into the western sections of city that have culminated in the founding of private schools and majority-white populations of public schools that are part of the Pulaski County Special School District (PCSSD) in areas where white families have resettled. Attempts to transport white children into LRSD schools and black children into PCSSD schools (“bussing”) throughout the 1970s resulted in heightened tensions between black and white citizens about the issue of school integration. From 1982 until 2014, this on-going case was known as *Little Rock School District, et al v. Pulaski County Special School District et al*, that argued that all three of metro-Little Rock's school districts, including North Little Rock School District (NLRSD) remained unconstitutionally segregated. Beginning in fall 2017, annual payments totaling millions of dollars received by each district for the purposes of integrating public elementary, junior and high schools, will cease. Attorney John W. Walker, the civil rights attorney who has represented black families and school patrons known as the Joshua Intervenors, and has been involved in the LRSD desegregation efforts since 1965, has been quoted in *USA Today* that “The only thing historic about [it] is that the state will no longer have to pay money...for trying to help these districts do what they're supposed to do.” For further reading on the history of this case, see Wiley A. Branton, “Little Rock Revisited: Desegregation to Resegregation,” *Journal of Negro Education* Vol. 52, No. 3 (Summer, 1983), 250-269; Henry Woods and Bethe Deere, “Reflections on the Little Rock School Case,” *Arkansas Law Review* 44 (1991), 972-1006; Debbie Elliott, “Decades Later, Desegregation Still on the Docket in Little Rock,” *NPR*, January 13, 2014 <http://www.npr.org/sections/codeswitch/2014/01/07/260461489/decades-later-desegregation-still-on-the-docket-in-little-rock> [accessed May 21, 2017].

Gestapo.”³⁴⁸ Then-governor Orval Faubus traded his personal integrity for the political capital necessary to best Johnson and approved all four measures after two bills were amended in the Senate. He defended his actions by citing that the majority of Arkansans had voted in November 1956 in favor of Johnson’s proposed Interposition Amendment that became the core of the State Sovereignty Commission and decried “the Un-Constitutional desegregation decisions of May 17, 1954 and May 31, 1955...all deliberate, palpable and dangerous invasions of or encroachments upon rights and powers not delegated to the United States.”³⁴⁹ The *State Press* mocked segregationists as petty “persons who haven’t read anything of weight since the decline of the mail order catalogue” yet had “suddenly blossomed as constitutional lawyers, convinced that...the governor had the power to ‘stop’ integration.”³⁵⁰

Angry buzzing in the unusually warm spring gave way to sweltering calamity in August as the school year and the demands of the Eighth Circuit Court drew near. On August 2, the *State Press* published that the city school board now declared that “not more than 20 Negroes will be expected to enroll at Central Hi [*sic*] this fall,” nor would eligible students be allowed to enroll at Hall High School, or white students at Horace Mann. In plain print, the *State Press* recorded the most insulting quote of all from the school board’s attorneys, that Blossom Plan “was developed to give as little integration as possible over as long a period of time as it is legally possible to have.”³⁵¹ The veracity of this statement had never been lost for a second on

³⁴⁸ *State Press*, February 15, 1957; *Arkansas Gazette*, February 19, February 27, 1957; Jacoway, *Turn Away Thy Son*, 43.

³⁴⁹ Speech of Governor Orval E. Faubus, September 2, 1957, Orval E. Faubus Papers, Box 496, File 1, Special Collections, David. W. Mullins Library, University of Arkansas, Fayetteville, Arkansas; “Now It’s the South’s Move,” *Arkansas Faith*, November 1955, 3, Box 2, Folder 22, Justice Jim Johnson Collection, Arkansas State Archives, Little Rock, Arkansas.

³⁵⁰ *Arkansas State Press*, July 26, 1957.

³⁵¹ *Arkansas State Press*, August 2, 1957.

Daisy Bates, the mothers of prospective students, or any members of Little Rock's black community who had watched this drama unfold. Nevertheless, the frank admission of the board's intent to do the utter bare minimum of legal compliance stung as a refutation of black dignity and humanity. On August 16, ten ministers filed suit to establish the unconstitutionality of the State Sovereignty Commission. A local white businessman, William Rector, filed a suit in the Pulaski County Chancery Court on behalf of the Little Rock School Board the next day that the four measures *were* legal. On August 20, state attorney general Bruce Bennett requested the court ignore the black ministers' suit; five days later, the NAACP countered that the court ignore Bennett. The volley of suits and insults traded between all parties crackled with the energy of a comedy of bad manners had the implications for any party not been so dire.³⁵²

Yet the stakes for both sides were high and underneath the racial tensions were profound classist, gendered fears. On August 19, Amis Guthridge filed a suit in the Pulaski County Chancery Court on behalf of Eva Wilbern and her daughter Kay to demand that white students be granted the right to attend segregated classes. He served as attorney for and an advocate of the Association of Citizens' Councils of Arkansas (ACCA) that was later known by the title, Capital Citizens' Council (CCC). For that organization, Guthridge used his considerable orator abilities to galvanize white Arkansans' fears of black sexuality. He frequently invoked the specter of miscegenation to terrify his core audience of lower-middle-class and working-class white people, arguing that he would "rather see public schools abolished than to see [his] grandchildren sit in classes with Negroes" and that "racial mixing...would lead to undue familiarity and encourage intermarriage" that would "corrupt both races."³⁵³ As president of the

³⁵² Kirk, *Redefining the Color Line*, 112.

³⁵³ Jacoway, *Turn Away Thy Son*, 67, 71.

council, James Wesley Pruden, Sr. directly questioned whether black boys would be allowed to ask white girls on dates if Central High School integrated.³⁵⁴ Guthridge and Pruden's script deserves unpacking because they, like most male segregationist who cloaked their mean-spiritedness under the guise of 'protection,' totally disregarded black womanhood in their fevered condemnations of integration. Black girls who might attend public schools with white children disappeared entirely under the masculine plural noun 'Negroes.' Terror of interracial couples generally extended only to potential relationships between black boys and white girls as the single source for blended families that could be deemed legitimate, and therefore denounced. It is no coincidence that Guthridge elected to represent a white woman and her teenage daughter, rather than a white family with a teenaged son at Central High School. Using the myth of white feminine fragility, he could appeal to white protectionist instincts within the entire white community while underscoring working-class white resentment that "race mixing [would only be] done in districts where the so-called rednecks lived."³⁵⁵

Guthridge's arguments entirely obscured the fact that 'race mixing' was a fact of life. Black Southern women and families had contended with the legacy of 'race mixing' for the entire history of African-descent people in America. When Guthridge and other white people ignored white men's historic sexual assault and subjugation of black women, segregationists exonerated themselves from criminal and social transgressions. Their erasure also attempted to strip black women of the essential feminine virtues that deemed white women worthy of protection and that cast them into a state of sexless invisibility.

³⁵⁴ Ibid, 72.

³⁵⁵ Ibid, 69.

However, the fact that white men went to such lengths to forget the existence of black women rather screams that their presence was more than recognized. By February 1957, Daisy Bates and the mothers and daughters involved in *Cooper v. Aaron* had made significant social impact by the lawsuit as well as by the relentless press that the city's black and white-owned newspapers afforded to the plaintiffs that included numerous photos of middle-class black femininity and womanhood that subscribed to every qualification for the title of *lady* excepting for skin color. After the NAACP lost the case in March, the organization appealed Judge John E. Miller's ruling in the Eight Circuit Court in St. Louis. That court still upheld the constitutionality of the integration plan, but ruled that the Little Rock School Board must integrate Central High School for the fall term of 1957. Eight months of nonstop coverage of the lawsuits and the middle-class black women who engaged in and organized on behalf of them allowed no white citizens in Little Rock to feign ignorance of their existence. In particular, working-class white women most acutely recognized the threats that middle-class black womanhood and respectability posed to their own tenuous social standing.

Working-class white women looked at middle-class black women with particular fear. For starters, working-class white women recognized that they actually shared some social commonalities with middle-class black women. Unlike elite white women, working-class white women often-times worked outside their homes to supplement their husbands' incomes. Generally, these women worked in service and sales jobs, as clerical workers or unskilled labor. Though some middle-class black women were homemakers, many more worked for the same economic reasons that drove working-class white women into the labor force, too. Yet, what defined the class structures of black Southerners deviated sharply from white Southern social standards. Economic privilege, and the lack thereof, precipitated white participation in the

‘right’ clubs, societies, and churches. Money provided the access to other determinants for white status in a way that it did not for the foundations of black class structure. To be sure, financial wealth offered access and privileges to those who had it and factored into who might be considered middle-class or elite in black communities. However, money alone did not shape that class system. Individuals or families of limited means who still adhered to certain respectability standards could subscribe to notions of middle-class standards. Such intangibles that included attention to personal decorum and neatness, spiritual reverence, and educational attainment were gateways into the middle and upper classes for black Southerners. Evidence of personal and racial pride as the ‘better sort’ of women and men offered avenues into the social, civic and political organizations that served as uplift societies as they buttressed personal social standing.

Working-class white women saw the incongruent status that distinguished many of the middle-class black women who belonged to such organizations, possessed higher education and who were immersed in the public sphere—and who wanted to enroll their children into Central High School. Though most working-class white women strived for their own kind of respectability through church attendance, sobriety and strong work ethics, they remembered that only a generation or so separated them from the grinding poverty that characterized most white Southerners and certainly separated them from elites. Few working-class white women had advanced education or held professional statuses, and most of their husbands worked in semi-skilled and unskilled jobs that made them invisible to the upper echelons of white Little Rock. Most recognized they could never belong in the Heights or Hillcrest. These areas, Little Rock’s “silk stocking” neighborhoods where city elites (including Virgil Blossom) lived, helped place a constant psychological pressure on and rift between disparate white people in the city that has prompted civil rights workers to muse that classism worked in tandem with racism to damage

Southern society.³⁵⁶ Two white, former Central High School students recalled that the Little Rock School Board and Virgil Blossom chose to integrate Central High School and its substantial working-class student body, because its acclaimed architecture made it a “highly visible showplace.” However, newly-built Hall High School that stood in affluent Hillcrest would not be integrated.³⁵⁷

These former students belonged to two of thousands of white working-class families who lived in moderately-integrated neighborhoods on the poorer south side of the city—some lived on the same streets as some of the daughters and sons who would be selected to integrate Central High School. Carlotta Walls LaNier has recalled white playmates who lived near her, while Terrence Roberts has recognized the irony that black Little Rock and white working-class neighbors were far more integrated than elite white Little Rock. Black and white neighborhoods surrounded Central High School, where “families on Howard [Street, five blocks south of the school] were black, but on Park Street, one block east of Howard, all the families were white.”³⁵⁸ The respectability and grace of middle-class black womanhood thrived in plain sight of working-class white women who had heretofore ignored that class of women because society had assured poorer whites that race alone made them superior. It is no coincidence that white working-class Southerners, particularly white women, who lived closest to black neighbors tended to be the

³⁵⁶ Stockley, *Race Relations in the Natural State*, 174.

³⁵⁷ Interview with former Central High School Students, (June 9, 2010). Conducted by Misti Nicole Harper at subjects’ home in Bigelow, Arkansas. These subjects wish to remain anonymous.

³⁵⁸ Terrence Roberts, *Lessons from Little Rock* (Little Rock, Arkansas: Butler Center Books, 2009), 63-64; Cope, ““A Thorn in the Side?””, 172-173; Daniel, 269; McMillen, *The Citizen’s Council*, 96, 278; LaNier, *A Mighty Long Way*, 27-34; Kirk, *Redefining the Color Line*, 111.

staunchest institutional segregationists even as they shared the same streets.³⁵⁹ Impending integration not only affronted their racial presuppositions, but underscored a reality they could no longer overlook. Only segregation protected their respectability and their claims to mythical white feminine virtue juxtaposed. Stripped of segregation, middle-class black women were working-class white women's racial and sexual equals, and their social superiors.

On August 22, nearly two weeks before the beginning of the new school year, a substantial group of working-class white women began organizing to oppose integration at Central High School. They also sought to specifically counter the middle-class black ladies whom they had watched during the previous spring and summer. Unlike those women who historically and necessarily entered the political arena and commanded social protests and movements with no fear of retribution for their reputations in their communities, generally only the most elite or extraordinary white women were tolerated in white public spaces. In that way, the Mothers' League of Central High School represented a decisive break from social norms for their class. It is necessary to point out that the League enjoyed some financial support the Capital Citizens' Council (CCC) and that because of HB 324, the Mothers' League membership list revealed that nearly thirteen percent of their participants or their husbands also belonged to the CCC.³⁶⁰ Still, the countermovement of the Mothers' League left the women who participated vulnerable to criticism from establishment sources such as the relatively-moderate *Arkansas Gazette* where that paper's editor, Harry Ashmore, indicated that the League helped incite "a reign of terror" in the city during the integration process. Even the "always biased toward segregationists" *Arkansas Democrat* tacitly admitted that the League's volatile activities

³⁵⁹ Michael Klarman, *From Jim Crow to Civil Rights: The Supreme Court and the Struggle for Racial Equality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 187-88.

³⁶⁰ *Arkansas Gazette*, November 3, 1957.

contradicted those women's traditional image of politically-silent wives and mothers when that paper noted that the "raw material" for the virulent, violent opposition sprang from working-class white women.³⁶¹ Such criticism reflected not only a distaste for the specific political activities of working-class white women, but the white patriarchy made those women cognizant of their precarious place in the public sphere. So too did their hypersensitivity to their social inferiority to middle-class black ladies on every count except race. Therefore, inaugural President Nadine Aaron felt it necessary to affirm that the Mothers' League had "to find ways and means to prevent integration of the races at Central High School and to provide a rallying point for all parents who are like-minded."³⁶²

Though quoted using the word parents, it is reasonable to argue that Nadine Aaron pictured rallying working-class white women to the cause. More than aware that middle-class black mothers and activist ladies were leading the effort to desegregate Central High, the Mothers' League President told the *Arkansas Gazette* that integration was "a matter for the mothers to settle" and that it was time for the "mothers to take over."³⁶³ Aaron's choice to reiterate the motherhood of the League is loaded. In two sentences, she revealed that she and her compatriots reacted directly to middle-class black womanhood that defied stereotypes, as well as the intersectional discrimination that those women from racism and sexism. Indeed, integration was a matter for mothers to settle, and middle-class black mothers had initiated the conversation. Reactionaries in the Mothers' League did not fail to recognize that, which is why when the time came for "mothers to take over," Aaron meant that working-class white mothers were to snatch

³⁶¹ Elizabeth Huckaby, March 16, 1958, Elizabeth Paisley Huckaby Papers, Box 1, Series 1, Folder 3, Special Collections, David W. Mullins Library, University of Arkansas, Fayetteville, Arkansas; Bates, *The Long Shadow of Little Rock*, 93; Anderson, *Little Rock*, 72.

³⁶² *Arkansas Gazette*, August 23, 1957.

³⁶³ *Arkansas Gazette*, August 24, 1957.

back ownership of a title they realized they did not wholly control. Middle-class black women who presented themselves as respectable, refined ladies who were young ‘Misses’, or wives and mothers of children in *Cooper v. Aaron*, and who predated that court case by thriving in black Little Rock were exactly who League Secretary Mary Thomason reacted against when she agreed to be the public face of yet another lawsuit.

On August 29, Thomason joined Governor Orval Faubus’ attempt to shore up his bonafides as a dyed-in-the-wool segregationist by suing the Little Rock School Board for a temporary injunction against opening Central High School on September 3 and thereby avoiding integration. The previous year, Faubus kept his governorship by “us[ing] the Negro as the state’s greatest political issue.”³⁶⁴ In the summer of 1957, his grandstanding meant to appease segregationists in his backyard, as well as win him political approval from the likes of Senator James Eastland of Mississippi and Governor Marvin Griffin of Georgia “who made no secret that of their desire that Arkansas should stand up to the federal courts and preserve Confederate unity.”³⁶⁵ The Pulaski County Chancery Court granted the injunction, only to be overturned the next day by Federal District Judge Ronald Davies, who demanded that Central High be desegregated at the beginning of the fall term. In response to their loss, the Mothers’ League resorted to stoking fears of riots in a last-ditch effort to position themselves as white matrons concerned with social safety. League Secretary Mary Thomason insisted “violence was brewing” in the face of impending integration as rumors swirled that Louisiana and Mississippi’s White Citizens’ Councils openly advocated “bloodshed if necessary” to keep segregation in Little Rock intact.³⁶⁶ To Arkansas Senator Winthrop Rockefeller, Faubus privately affirmed

³⁶⁴ *Arkansas State Press*, August 3, 1956.

³⁶⁵ Reed, *Faubus*, 174.

³⁶⁶ Bates, *The Long Shadow of Little Rock*, 56-57.

working-class white women had “changed the whole situation since Little Rock set up its original plan of integration,” and their anxiety provided the Governor spectacle fodder in addition to actual evidence of potential threats. City police reported information to Faubus, later reiterated by Virgil Blossom to the FBI, that knife sales at city pawn shops had increased among white and black teenagers. This report offered him the validity to declare “blood [would] run in the streets” if integration happened.³⁶⁷

Salient evidence of possible violence also reaffirmed the Governor’s growing contentions that the opinions of a North Dakota-reared federal judge did not usurp his authority as executive of a sovereign (Southern) state, nor did the Supreme Court’s decision in *Brown v. Board* represent the “law of the land,” just the “law of the *case*.” Orval Eugene Faubus—son of a Ozarks socialist—was not only convinced that defending his governorship lay in exploiting the racism of most white Arkansans, but that only Congress could make laws that “bind all people” and that federal courts were illegitimate.³⁶⁸ Faubus’ bizarre mix of states’ rights theory, Constitutional gymnastics, career paranoia, and genuine fear that race riots could happen led him to appear on television on September 2 to announce he would use the Arkansas National Guard to assist local law enforcement in the event of potential crowd violence, as there existed “evidence of disorder and threats of disorder which could have but one inevitable result...”³⁶⁹

³⁶⁷ Ibid, 62; Warren Olney III to Herbert Brownell, September 13, 1957, “Summary of FBI Report in Little Rock, Arkansas Integration Difficulty,” Box 5, Folder 2, Arthur Brann Caldwell Papers, Special Collections, David W. Mullins Library, University of Arkansas, Fayetteville, Arkansas; Anderson, *Little Rock: Race and Resistance*, 59; Cope, ““A Thorn in the Side?,”” 161, 178; Daniel, *Lost Revolutions*, 258; “Desegregation of Central High School,” *The Encyclopedia of Arkansas History and Culture*, April 2, 2010, <http://www.encyclopediaofarkansas.net/encyclopedia/entry-detail.aspx?entryID=718> [accessed June 25, 2010.]

³⁶⁸ Jacoway, *Turn Away Thy Son*, 142.

³⁶⁹ Speech of Governor Orval E. Faubus, September 2, 1957, Faubus Papers, Box 496, File 1, Special Collections, Fayetteville.

Disturbed by the heightened drama of Faubus who was spurred by the Mothers' League, NAACP district officials convened with Daisy Bates and the families of the students who had been admitted to Central High School. After deliberation, Bates conceded to postpone integration until the second day of classes on September 4 in an effort to calm the storm of the Governor's Mansion and working-class white women who were grasping at straws.³⁷⁰

Regardless of the loss and postponement, Faubus' political cynicism fairly easily explains his choices. Thomason's actions on behalf of the League reveal the more complex intersectional reactions that underpinned middle-class black women's experiences. Like the CCC, Mothers' League members wielded their femininity and gender roles as wedge issues. They perched themselves atop the twin pillars of motherhood and Southern Christianity to justify their resistance to integration. At an August 27 rally, Aaron insisted to her members that they work "as a group of Christian mothers in a Christian-like way" that meant "mothers of white children [should] assemble peaceably."³⁷¹ The emphasis on working-class white women's traditional roles as Christian mothers was an attempt to validate their public presence and to strip middle-class black women of the same claims to gender normativity and righteous faith. Since 1954, black women who fought for integrated schools had been claiming the mantles of motherhood and their place within the cult of domesticity. In Little Rock, middle-class black ladies effectively showcased themselves as concerned mothers who wanted quality education and social equity for their children who were brought up in stable, loving homes to respect their

³⁷⁰ Order of *Thomason v. Cooper*, an addendum to *Cooper v. Aaron, et al*, 357 US 566 (1958), Faubus Papers, Box 497, File 6, Special Collections, Fayetteville; Virgil T. Blossom, *It Has Happened Here* (New York: Harper Publishing, 1959), 60; Phoebe Godfrey, "Bayonets, Brainwashing, and Bathrooms," 42.

³⁷¹ *Arkansas Democrat*, August 28, 1957; Anderson, *Little Rock: Race and Resistance*, 71.

mothers and fathers, and God. Every candidate for integration at Central High School represented middle-class black excellence, and the final roster of students included girls who were the epitome of well-brought up, Southern Christian young ladies. They, their mothers and every other middle-class black woman who had been participated in setting a firm integration plan for the city had beaten working-class white women to the strategy of embodying irreproachable Southern femininity by at least two years.

League members also failed in their other sex-based argument that “allowing Negroes into white schools would promote widespread miscegenation.”³⁷² As has been discussed, using the word ‘Negroes’ without specifying men or women allowed white people to masculinize the word. This enabled white people erase black femininity in discussions of interracial sex and also exonerate white men who preyed upon or engaged in consensual interracial relationships with black women. There is little doubt that working-class white women chose their language carefully. They certainly consider how black girls at Central High School and black women generally factored into sexual fears; the specter of black femininity affected League members’ attitudes. In Southern society, blackness defined whiteness and vice versa. Nevertheless, physical whiteness provided the lone identity marker that included the white working class in the top tier of the caste system.

Candid exchanges between white men acknowledged the potential for integration to irrevocably blur the color line. One white lawyer in the Arkansas Delta wrote to his friend in Little Rock that if “the nature of a fourteen or fifteen year old white boy” asserted itself and he “associated with a bunch of colored girls of the same age...[not] all of them would be guilty, but

³⁷² John Wyllie, “Conversations in the South,” March 3, 1959, 2, Faubus Papers, Box 498, Series 14, Sub Series, 6, File 6, Special Collections, Fayetteville.

what a big percent of them would do would be to the detriment of the colored girls and greatly lower the morals of the white boys.”³⁷³ Those words represent a rare moment of self-awareness from an elite white man who admitted that white boys were taught in childhood that they could sexually exploit and abuse black girls with impunity. It is fair to argue that James Robertson’s letter also frankly admits that white boys and men found black girls and women attractive as relationship partners. Black femininity as sexually and emotionally appealing to white men threatened the total identity and social position of working-class white women. Even more than race, the class status and ladylike qualities of the middle-class black womanhood that would integrate Central High School with the full backing of the federal courts, shattered glass castles of white supremacy. For these reasons, black femininity had historically been denied and ignored on the suppositions of race and sex that further cancelled class in white imaginations.

For more than a year, Daisy Bates and activist mothers of Little Rock had worked toward integration, and battled against a paternalist, racist, intransigent school board and superintendent that sought to exclude black students on arbitrary criteria that pretended to prize black excellence while making no mention of accepted white mediocrity that traversed the halls of Central High School. Only on the question of black excellence did middle-class black Little Rock and the NAACP resemble the movements of the city school board, but for markedly different reasons. The students who became known as the Little Rock Nine wanted to attend Central and were supported by their families. They also earned the approval of school officials at Dunbar Junior High and Horace Mann High School; church leaders; the NAACP; and their communities as teenagers beyond character or scholastic reproach. Their sex ratio also revealed a shrewdness on

³⁷³ James Robertson to A. F. House, September 1, 1957, 2, Box 496, File 2, Faubus Papers, Special Collections, Fayetteville.

the part of Bates, the NAACP and organizers. Black womanhood historically faced bizarre, intersectional discrimination—at once being punished for blackness and femaleness, while simultaneously being legally stripped of the protections supposedly guaranteed to the more ‘delicate,’ ‘fragile’ sex because white supremacy insisted that only white women were feminine, which carries a different meaning than biological femaleness. Still, while racism assigned reductive tropes to black women and punished them further when they refused to fit into those Mammy or Jezebel-shaped boxes, femaleness was still regarded as less overwhelming or threatening than maleness and what could be associated with masculinity. Even as white people compartmentalized black femininity or more rarely, admitted that attractiveness of black women, the fact of femaleness relegated black women as less threatening than black men. Fears of miscegenation focused white women’s relationships to or with black men; the myth of white women’s virtue hinged on its protection from black male lust. Black women were erased entirely in the masculine-demarcation ‘Negroes’ that only specified sex if necessary. Activists for integration understood this and in the search for the most irreproachable students, they also considered who might theoretically threaten white people the least or who might reveal the latent hypocrisy of ‘fragile’ womanhood in white minds.

Alongside three boys, seven girls were initially selected to attend Central High School. Minnijean Brown, Elizabeth Eckford, Jane Hill, Thelma Mothershed, Melba Pattillo, Gloria Ray, Carlotta Walls represented the epitome of academic excellence, and spotless girlhood and femininity. Jane Hill, a tall quite fifteen-year-old who longed to become a doctor, is not generally included in broader discussion of any aspect of the Central High School story as she decided to withdraw because of the harrowing events that unfolded on September 4. Few sources or interviews have explored this young woman or her family. Yet what is reasonable to

assume about Miss Hill is that she came from the same kind of conscientious, respectable family and had an impressive array of personal accomplishments as did the other girls who became known as part of the Little Rock Nine. Images captured of Jane Hill on September 4 show a young girl wearing plaid-print dress with short sleeves and a high, cross-buttoned collar. Fashionable but modest, Hill's permed hair crowned a pretty face marred only by a bewildered expression as she stood beside Carlotta Walls. Her evident fear explains her understandable choice to enroll in Horace Mann High School, as well as offers a probable explanation for her silence in the historical record.³⁷⁴

Yet, Hill's presence matters tremendously when the integration effort is considered through the lens of the intersectional drama that unfolded in 1957. Seven teenage girls were selected to represent more than half of the students who were to integrate Central High School as the best of black Little Rock because they were, in fact, examples of well-brought up young Southern ladies whose essences were (theoretically) utterly non-threatening. Jane Hill's selection, her presence in publicity images and interviews before the beginning of the school year, and her single day on the Central High School campus underscore the strategy of Daisy Bates and the NAACP to capitalize on the white South's traditional pedestaling of refined femininity. Jane Hill's inclusion also offered another example of middle-class black womanhood in Little Rock that had centered itself in the narrative of the integration struggle and in the public square as the voice of political, but ultimately ladylike and righteous, moral

³⁷⁴ Walls, *A Mighty Long Way*, 69, 73, 291; Dave Aretha, *The Story of the Little Rock Nine and School Desegregation in Photographs* (New York: Enslow Publishers, 2014), 13; Stephanie Fitzgerald, *The Little Rock Nine: The Struggle for Integration* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Compass Point Books, 2007), 17, 36, 47-48; Frandin, *The Power of One*, 67-68, 82; Sondra H. Gordy, *Finding the Lost Year: What Happened When Little Rock Closed Its Public Schools* (Fayetteville, Arkansas: University of Arkansas Press, 2009), xxiv; Jacoway, *Turn Away Thy Son*, 391, 404.

authority. This seventh young girl highlighted that middle-class black ladies not only carved a political voice but claimed the mantles of essential womanhood that white women erroneously took for granted as theirs alone.³⁷⁵

It was a specific response to the challenge from middle-class black ladies that made working-class white women's heads spin. Mothers' League members' spouted platitudes that they merely "dislike[d] people trying to tell [them] what to do in [their] own schools," that federally-sanctioned integration infringed upon states' rights, that they feared violence and indeed "did not approve of violence," in what Virgil Blossom described as "a highly effective attempt to convince the people that segregationists' activities were of a nonviolent character."³⁷⁶ In reality, however, working-class white women actively engaged in rhetorical violence in an attempt to stop integration and more specifically, keep middle-class black ladies from overshadowing their own slim claims to privilege. In the 1950s, democratic and capitalist America only feared nuclear war more than it feared a Communist take-over. Religion played a central role in juxtaposing wholesome, reverent American character to atheist, amoral Communists, and thousands of segregationist clergy specifically cited integration as un-Christian.³⁷⁷ The convenience of League members insisting integration as a "Communitic" plot

³⁷⁵ Cora Hill, Jane's mother, later requested that her daughter be transferred back to Central High School for the 1958-59 school year. Following a contentious summer where the city and state leadership struggled to move forward after Central High School, Governor Orval Faubus chose to close Little Rock's public high schools in what Sondra Gordy has coined the 'Lost Year.' See Cora Hill to Virgil Blossom, September 2, 1958, Virgil T. Blossom Papers, 1942-1944; 1959, MS T348 274, Box 824, File 1, Special Collections, University of Arkansas Libraries, Fayetteville, Arkansas http://digitalcollections.uark.edu/cdm4/item_viewer.php?CISOROOT=/Civilrights&CISOPTR=259&CISOBX=1&REC=4 [accessed February 17, 2017].

³⁷⁶ *Arkansas Gazette*, September 27, 1957; *Arkansas Democrat*, August 28, 1957; Blossom, *It Has Happened Here*, 47.

³⁷⁷ Jane Dailey, "Sex, Segregation, and the Sacred after Brown," *The Journal of American History*, Vol. 9, No. 1 (June 2004), 125.

to destroy white Southern ‘tradition’ and beseeching Faubus to “save [white women’s] Christian America” erases the fact black women who tried to send or whose children were admitted into Central High School, also prayed to Jesus Christ for salvation and protection. Indeed, for Little Rock’s black community, dutiful spirituality played a key component in determining not only a person’s spiritual status but also served as the springboard for education, mobility, and respectability for every social class.³⁷⁸ Moreover, working-class white women’s desperation to attach middle-class black ladies to the geopolitical anxiety of the 1950s and to more specifically use Governor Faubus to do so, ignored that the black women who represented ideal black femininity were the same who had cornered Virgil Blossom and challenged the Little Rock School Board. Those activists, mothers, community leaders and members had been organizing in pursuit of educational goals since *Brown v. Board* and several had participated in public movements since the 1940s where they had claimed the mantles of Christian motherhood and womanhood in pursuit of social justice. “Delegation[s] of Negro *mothers* [clamored] for an audience” with the Governor to address the specific “propaganda...of the racist white mothers” noting that *black* motherhood and femininity continued to be injured and insulted by working-class white women.³⁷⁹ Even the peaceful protest the League organized for the first official day of school on September 3 infused violent rhetoric into their demonstration, despite insistence that their work was *not* violent. On Park Street in front of Central High School, working-class white

³⁷⁸ Blossom, *It Has Happened Here*, 48; Bates, *The Long Shadow of Little Rock*, 164; Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent*; Calvin White, Jr. *The Rise to Respectability*; C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya, *The Black Church in the African American Experience* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1990).

³⁷⁹ Letter from Olive C. Cox, Daisy Bates Papers 1946-1966, Mss 523, Box 1, File 4, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, Wisconsin. Emphasis on the word *mothers* occurs in the original letter from Ms. Cox to Daisy Bates.

women waved Confederate flags and sang “Dixie.”³⁸⁰ The flags and the song specifically invoked the antebellum South during which the majority of black Southerners lived in enslavement, and that status neutralized any threat to whiteness otherwise posed by black women.

As her compatriots celebrated literal violent subjugation, Margaret Jackson passed out petitions denouncing Virgil Blossom’s performance as superintendent of Little Rock schools. Jackson, who lived in rural Perry County that lay west of the capital, assumed presidency of the Mothers’ League after Nadine Aaron moved to Texas that summer. A divorced mother of two teenage daughters who attended Central High School, Margaret Jackson in her “mercurial temperament” was precisely the sort of white woman to find integration, black respectability, and especially middle-class black ladies as personally threatening. Images of married, relatively affluent women who lived in the capital city and actively challenged Jim Crow while presenting themselves as impressively respectable ladies—figures such as Daisy Bates, Lois Beals, and Lothaire Scott Green, among others—pricked a thousand holes in the balloon of white supremacy where working-class women existed only on the fringes and could not match middle-class black standards.³⁸¹ Gut reactions to the race, sex and class of the women who were fighting to integrate Central High School, and every Southern school, and their daughters who would attend those schools provoked white outrage and gendered white outrage.

At the behest of officials and advisors, Daisy Bates agreed that the selected ten students would not enter Central High School until September 4, the second day of the new school year. In her memoirs, Bates recalled that “the city had apparently accepted the board’s plans; and there

³⁸⁰ Cope, ““A Thorn in the Side?””179; Daniel, *Lost Revolutions*, 261.

³⁸¹ *Arkansas Gazette*, September 29, 1957; *Arkansas Gazette*, October 25, 1957; Wyllie, “Conversations in the South,” Faubus Papers, Special Collections, Fayetteville.

seemed to be little reason to expect serious opposition.”³⁸² Her remembrance is interesting and almost certainly politically crafted to create a specific picture of near-perfect black virtue for any readers of *The Long Shadow of Little Rock* upon the memoir’s first release in 1962. In reality, since *Cooper v. Aaron*, Daisy and LC had endured harassment, cross burnings, and economic retaliation at the *State Press* for Daisy’s particular public presence with the paper, in the fight for equal rights, and as president of the state chapter of the NAACP.³⁸³ By the end of September 1957, armed guards patrolled the Bateses’ home around the clock, and parents of the integrating teenagers kept guns cocked and ready.

Yet, it is also conceivable that neither Daisy, nor the families of the ten children, nor black Little Rock could have anticipated the level of massive resistance from segregationists when the students arrived on the Central High School campus. In a moment that suggests Virgil Blossom may have come to grips with the dysfunction of race relationships in the Deep South and the fires that segregationists were stoking, he specifically requested that the parents of the children not accompany them to Central High School on their first day at campus, on the grounds that parents would attract more attention and raise tensions. Some of the selected students and their families had never met Daisy or LC Bates before September 1, 1957, and rightly worried over which adults would ensure their children’s safety. Imogene Brooks Brown, mother of Minnijean, repeatedly questioned who would protect her daughter.³⁸⁴ Despite his fleeting moment of clarity, Blossom’s assurances for the children’s safety echoed Daisy Bates’ later claims that she did not anticipate violence. Those pledges did not sway all parents; Lois Marie

³⁸² Bates, *The Long Shadow of Little Rock*, 3.

³⁸³ *State Press*, October 19, 1956; Wyllie, “Conversations in the South,” Faubus Papers, Special Collections, Fayetteville; Stockley, *Daisy Bates*, 89-91.

³⁸⁴ Jacoway, *Turn Away Thy Son*, 116, 166.

Pattillo did accompany her daughter, Melba, to Central High School. Most of the parents, however wary, yielded to the superintendent's advice. Their choice evidenced the modicum of good faith they had that the children might be able to go to school without too much ruckus.

What is also true is that those same wary parents, community members and activists must have bristled at yielding one more day so that white people could be comfortable. The idea of appeasing any person or group so determined to resist federal law and basic fairness had to have galled black women across Little Rock, and especially the mothers of those who were to integrate. Concern and fear for their children aside, those students recalled the tenacity of their mothers. In a 2005 interview, Ernest Green remembered Lothaire Green telling him, "If you think you can go through it, I am going to stand by you."³⁸⁵ When the state welfare department threatened to fire social worker Julia Miller Ray if she did not withdraw Gloria Ray from Central High School, she lost her job and was blacklisted throughout the state.³⁸⁶ Dr. Lois Marie Pattillo taught English at Jones High School in North Little Rock, and the district chose not to renew her contract at the end of the 1957-1958 school year.³⁸⁷ Willing though they were to stand up to

³⁸⁵ Oral Interview with Ernest Green, Central High School National Park, Little Rock, Arkansas (2005).

³⁸⁶ Oral Interview with Gloria Ray Karlmark, Central High School National Park, Little Rock, Arkansas, 2005.

³⁸⁷ *State Press*, May 9, 1958. Economic pressure placed by white employers onto black employees was a hallmark of segregationist resistance and reprisal for civil rights activism in the South. Likewise, black employees weaponized their labor by refusing to come to work for white employers until various improvements in social conditions were met. Some of the earliest and best examples of black resistance to white oppression occurred in Montgomery, Alabama during the bus boycotts of 1955, of which Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. became the face but were in reality organized by black women including Dr. Jo Ann Robinson. Among the gendered reasons that black men served as the faces for resistance movements, black clergy featured prominently because their career and financial security was not predicated upon white patronage, employment or comfort. See Jo Ann Gibson Robinson and David J. Garrow, *The Montgomery Bus Boycott and the Women Who Started It: The Memoir of Jo Ann Gibson Robinson* (Knoxville, Tennessee: The University of Tennessee Press, 1987); Vicki L. Crawford, Jaqueline Anne Rouse, and Barbara Woods, *Women in the Civil Rights Movement: Trailblazers and*

injustice, it is obvious from the agreement to postpone attendance that all parties involved seriously considered potential threats to the students' safety. It is unfair to think that any activist, and especially parent, involved in the integration effort pretended nothing would happen on the day the students arrived at Central High School, especially as segregationists were stirring the pot. Ever-desperate to stay a step ahead of Jim Johnson and secure another term as governor, Orval Faubus called out the Arkansas National Guard to thwart integration based on police reports of heightened knife sales and on the city rumors "white boys intended to kill the Negro students."³⁸⁸ Listening to the Governor's address on the radio, fourteen-year-old Carlotta Walls innocently believed that Faubus called out the Guard to protect her and the rest of the students from protesters like Margaret Jackson, who had called for a mass demonstration on September 4.³⁸⁹ In response to rising tensions, Daisy Bates and local leadership agreed that the students would gather at the corner of Twelfth and Park Streets to go to school by police escort. Then all families were contacted, except for one. Everyone failed to inform the Eckfords of the revised plan. In her memoir, Bates wrote that she did not realize her mistake until she heard a bulletin report over her car radio that "A Negro girl [was] being mobbed at Central High School!"³⁹⁰ FBI biographical sketches of each teenager explained that the communication breakdown occurred

Torchbearers, 1941-1965 (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1990); Donnie Williams and Wayne Greenhaw, *The Thunder of Angels: The Montgomery Bus Boycott and the People who Broke the Back of Jim Crow* (Chicago: Lawrence Hill Books, 2006); Pamela E. Brooks, *Boycotts, Buses, and Passes: Black Women's Resistance in the U.S. South and South Africa* (Amherst, Massachusetts: The University of Massachusetts Press, 2008); Harvard Sitkoff, *King: Pilgrimage to the Mountaintop* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2009); R. Drew Smith, *From Every Mountainside: Black Churches and the Broad Terrain of Civil Rights* (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 2013).

³⁸⁸ Reed, *Faubus*, 202.

³⁸⁹ Lanier, *A Mighty Long Way*, 66.

³⁹⁰ Bates, *The Long Shadow of Little Rock*, 66.

because the Eckfords lived “too far away and had no phone.”³⁹¹ Given the threats Bates constantly endured, the apprehension of the NAACP, and the realism of the families involved, it is practically unthinkable that the Eckfords were uninformed of the new plan by calculation or callousness. In all probability, someone (most likely, Daisy) made the human error of forgetting, to grievous result. Nevertheless, everyone involved in the planning process failed to inform Birdie and Oscar Eckford, Jr. and most importantly, fifteen-year-old Elizabeth.

Unaware of the plan, Elizabeth woke up on September 4 and performed her typical morning routine before pulling on the pretty white dress with its blue gingham skirt that she and her sister, Anna, had sewed together. She made sure her permed hair was neat and that she had her sunglasses before she left her home for the bus stop. When the diminutive girl boarded her bus, she picked her seat because Little Rock’s bus system desegregated without fanfare years earlier, and she knew she did not have to sit anywhere in particular. Physically a small girl just under five-foot-tall, who was personally unobtrusive and introspective, Elizabeth Eckford quietly rode until the bus stopped one block away from Central High School. She prepared to walk the rest of the distance.

Striding confidently down the sidewalk before she realized there was anything to fear, Elizabeth Eckford represented the epitome of middle-class black respectability and dignity, wrapped in the refinement of black femininity. A small, cute, black young lady, Eckford emasculated Jim Crow in her walk to school because everything about her proved that white women and girls did not solely own the pedestal of respectable femininity. Black women and girls also embodied those qualities, and deserved the privileges and protection bestowed on

³⁹¹ “Thumbnail Sketch of Elizabeth Eckford,” (Daisy Bates Papers, Reel 6 AP93-1382 Restricted, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, Wisconsin).

ladies. Since respectable femininity extended beyond the parameters of whiteness, Jim Crow served no purpose. White women and girls no longer required protection from blackness if blackness was equal to whiteness. Effectively, white masculinity was rendered impotent.

In emasculating Jim Crow through her existence, Elizabeth Eckford unwittingly unleashed a torrent of intersectional rage and abuse that had been welling within working-class white women. ‘Intersectionality,’ as defined by Crenshaw, is the specific ways that race, sex and class interact and inform each other as to the specific ways black women experience discrimination and disadvantage. There is no more definitive example that the roots of the whitelash at Central High School were intersectional, and that middle-class black ladies provided the impetus for that reaction, than when fifteen-year-old Elizabeth walked into the pack of women-led white protesters gathered in front of the school. She also represented what working-class white women feared they were not, and faced with the presence of a young black lady, those women dropped every pretense of Christian conduct to become a violent “baying mob” in the crowd of approximately 400 protesters.³⁹² At campus and confronted with the Arkansas National Guard soldiers, purportedly called out by Faubus to keep peace, who would not let her onto Central High School grounds, Mothers’ League members and working-class white women pinned Elizabeth from the back. Unable to retreat, the teenage girl endured the brute force of physically-threatening Jim Crow for the first time.

Only in this instance, Jim Crow became ‘Jane Crow.’ In that moment, Elizabeth Eckford embodied the truth of middle-class black womanhood and the right of that womanhood to define

³⁹² *New York Times*, September 8, 1957; Bates, *The Long Shadow of Little Rock*, 65; Roberts, *Lessons from Little Rock*, 90; Minnijean Brown-Trickey, speaking at Holy Cross Girls’ Primary School, Belfast, Northern Ireland, 2001, in Anne Cadwallader, *Holy Cross: The Untold Story* (Belfast: The Brehon Press, 2004), 297.

her as a well-brought up young lady with all the privileges of any white female. White women metaphorically and literally clawed to keep that privilege away from black ladies, as Eckford attempted to get to from white women spitting in her face and on her “spit-drenched homemade dress.”³⁹³ Far from a peaceful protest designed to cast working-class white womanhood as beleaguered and attacked, those women yelled at Elizabeth Eckford to “...go on to your own school” or to “go back to Africa.”³⁹⁴ Others tried to incite violence against the fifteen-year-old and screamed for her to be lynched.³⁹⁵ Thanks to her education at Dunbar Junior High School and Horace Mann High School, Elizabeth Eckford was ground in black history. She also knew the grisly, true horror story of the 1927 lynching of John Carter—the city’s last public lynching where that man’s corpse was dragged and desecrated at West Ninth Street and Broadway in the heart of black Little Rock.³⁹⁶ The raw terror she experienced in those moments that triggered a lifetime of post-traumatic stress disorder never played across Elizabeth Eckford’s face as she maintained a “calm” and “dignity.”³⁹⁷ Her behavior underscores personal fortitude, as well as reflects her rearing. No matter how badly she may have wanted to scream out, lash back, or cry, Eckford’s ‘home training’ to conduct herself in a manner befitting a well-brought up, respectable young lady prevented her from publicly collapsing. Her conduct shined a spotlight on black

³⁹³ Rus Brand, *Forty Minutes of Hell: The Extraordinary Life of Nolan Richardson* (New York: HarperCollins, 2010), 169.

³⁹⁴ Daniel, *Lost Revolutions*, 262.

³⁹⁵ Elizabeth Jacoway, *Behold, Our Works were Good: A Handbook of Arkansas Women’s History* (Little Rock, Arkansas: August House Publishers, 1988), 23; Bates, *The Long Shadow of Little Rock*, 70; Beals, *Warriors Don’t Cry*, 50.

³⁹⁶ David Margolick, *Elizabeth and Hazel: Two Women of Little Rock* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2011), 18, 28-31.

³⁹⁷ *Ibid*, 51; Interview with Elizabeth Eckford, *Arkansas Civil Rights Symposium: Little Rock Central 55 Years Later*, University of Central Arkansas, Conway, Arkansas, February 23, 2012.

middle-class values and femininity that contrasted starkly to the jeers of working-class white women and girls.

In perhaps the most famous photo of the Central High School crisis, sixteen-year-old Hazel Bryan followed Elizabeth Eckford and led Sammie Dean Parker, Mary Anne Burleson and other schoolgirls in chants of “*Two, four, six, eight, we don’t want to integrate!*” when she was captured mid-scream behind Eckford. Born to a deeply blue-collar, working-class white family in Saline County, Bryan’s public spectacle at once underscored her ‘commonness’ from Elizabeth’s restrained, dignified deportment. To further showcase the differences in their rearing and deportment, Bryan found a television crew and in a live interview, declared that “whites should have rights, too! Nigras aren’t the only ones who have a right!”³⁹⁸ Bryan’s lack of self-awareness prevented her from recognizing the obvious fact that white people continued to have rights—up to dictating impromptu media appearances—while black people struggled to walk down a street without harassment. Moreover, Bryan’s specific grouse that Central High School’s white students were not consulted about integration, and her public outburst reflected the shifting mores for race, gender and age.³⁹⁹ In the 1950s, American teens enjoyed a youth culture unknown to previous generations that pivoted on rebellion expressed through literature, film and especially rock and roll music that appropriated black artists and style. Bryan’s conviction that adults refused to listen to white children (perhaps, especially white girls) suggested an independence of body and thought that was a subconscious break from the traditional tenants of

³⁹⁸ David Margolick, “Through a Lens, Darkly,” *Vanity Fair*, September 24, 2007, 3. <http://www.vanityfair.com/politics/features/2007/09/littlerock200709?currentPage=1> [accessed December 1, 2010]; Margolick, *Elizabeth and Hazel*, 51, 71.

³⁹⁹ 1992 interview with Sammie Dean Parker, in *Race, Politics and Memory*, 116; Interview with former Central High School student (June 9, 2010).

the white Southern pedestal.⁴⁰⁰ However, her complaints erase that other girls on campus that day did not get to enjoy an outburst or demand media attention. Elizabeth Eckford's presence at Central High School showcased the intersectional history of surviving the South in a black female body. Racialized taunts of "burr head" competed with the gendered proclamations that "no nigger bitch [would get] into our school!"⁴⁰¹ Eckford's status as a teenaged child did not preclude her from being subjected to sex-specific, adult insults such as 'bitch' that were hurled by adult women. Her total presence, from her female essence to her skin color to her poise, laid waste to white stereotypes of black womanhood, and so she was attacked from all three vantage points. In a statement that defied former-President Nadine Aaron's insistence that the Mothers' League goals were peaceful, member Mary Anita Sedberry affirmed that "if the Guard had not been protecting the girl, she would have snatched [Eckford's] hair out."⁴⁰² What a fact it would have been to Eckford to know that Sedberry or any of the working-class white women believed the Guard was there to protect her. Melba Pattillo Beals remembered arriving with her mother at the corner of Twelfth Street and Park, and watching Elizabeth try to step through openings in the soldiers' line to get on campus—only for "the soldiers [to] close ranks, shutting her out," while white women waved their fists and their "wide-open mouths scream[ed] their rage."⁴⁰³ Five white men noticed Melba and Lois Marie Pattillo, and chased them back to their car as one

⁴⁰⁰ Kelly Schrum, *Some Wore Bobbysox: The Emergence of Teenage Girls' Culture, 1920-1945* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2004).

⁴⁰¹ Elizabeth Eckford, in William Loren Katz, *Eyewitness: The Negro in American History* (New York: Pitman, 1967), 492-494; "The South: Making a Crisis in Arkansas," *Time*, September 16, 1957, <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,809859-1,00.html> (accessed December 8, 2010).

⁴⁰² Mary Anita Sedberry, September 5, 1957, Series 2, Box 1, File 13, Little Rock FBI Report, Archives and Special Collections, Ottenheimer Library, University of Arkansas at Little Rock; Daniel, *Lost Revolution*, 262.

⁴⁰³ Beals, *Warriors Don't Cry*, 49.

carried a rope, and tore at Melba and Lois' dresses. Lois Marie Pattillo stepped out of the high-heeled shoes that she had worn to escort her daughter to school so that they could escape.⁴⁰⁴ Beals' recollection of that moment is a revelation into how much middle-class black women emphasized their status and respectability through their dress. To a detail, Mrs. Pattillo and young Melba arrived at Central High School in their appropriate finest, as indication that they were the 'better sort.' Only mortal peril and her instincts as a mother brought educated, refined Dr. Lois Marie Pattillo out of her shoes on a public street. Whiteness' inability to confront the idea of prized, pedestaled black womanhood momentarily cast Melba's mother as Cinderella, a favorite fairytale heroine for white girls, as she left behind her high heels that symbolize ultimate femininity.

The rest of the students had successfully met at the corner of Twelfth Street and Park. Minnijean Brown, Ernest Green, Jane Hill, Thelma Mothershed, Gloria Ray, Terrence Roberts, and Carlotta Walls stood with Reverend Harvey Bass of Wesley Chapel Methodist Church at Philander Smith College and Reverend Z.Z. Dryver. Each man was a well-regarded black minister who preached to two of the city's largest black congregations. Reverend Dunbar Ogden, Jr. who presided over the Greater Little Rock Ministerial Association; his son, David; and Reverend George Chauncey of First Presbyterian Church of Monticello, Arkansas were also at the corner. These three white clergymen worked with Reverends Bass and Dryver, who were all organized by Daisy Bates to promote integration and on that day, specifically to get the teenagers to Central High School.⁴⁰⁵ After a brief prayer, Carlotta Walls Lanier recalled that as the group made its way to the campus on Fourteenth Street, white mothers "with faces contorted

⁴⁰⁴ Ibid, 50-51.

⁴⁰⁵ Jacoway, *Turn Away Thy Son*, 166.

in anger” shouted while their children waved Confederate flags, and all hurled racial slurs that “pierced [her] ears again and again.” Having never personally experienced that level of white rage, she remembered her mother, Juanita Walls, telling her that such behavior mean those white women were “ignorant, low-class people” and never to retaliate on that level because Carlotta “*was a Walls*.”⁴⁰⁶ Juanita Walls’ words resonate and underscored the tenants of black middle-class respectability that not only valued itself. Middle- and upper-class black Little Rock understood the social divides within their community, and compared their status to working-class whiteness, hypocritically pedestaled for its own sake and that used femininity to do so. Young Carlotta and her compatriots were protected by five adult men—three of them white—but their presence still did not protect her or any of the other young women from the vicious words of the working-class white women whose actions belied mythological white feminine virtue and fragility. Such women resented all of the black teenagers attempting to integrate the school, but especially the girls who represented the greatest threat to white supremacy by existing as black young ladies.

Only there did Carlotta Walls and the rest of the students learn that Orval Faubus called out the Arkansas National Guard to turn them away. As Melba and Lois Marie Pattillo raced home in their car, the other eight students left campus with their entourage of ministers and each safely arrived home. Elizabeth Eckford eventually made her way home, but only after two people had fought through the mob to do so. Benjamin Fine, a reporter for the *New York Times*, approached the stunned, stoic fifteen-year-old who had sat on a nearby bench to wait for the bus. Accused by white mothers of bribing their children for information earlier that morning and jeered for asking protesters questions such as “Don’t you think the Negro has the same rights as

⁴⁰⁶ Walls, *A Mighty Long Way*, 69-70.

you do?” Fine faced an onslaught of anti-Semitic slurs and threats when he introduced himself to Eckford and assured her, “I’m not here to hurt you.” When he sat beside her, he put his arm around her shoulder and told her, “Don’t let them see you cry.”⁴⁰⁷ For a white man to comfort or protect a black girl rejected the basic principle of white supremacy that black women neither needed nor were worthy of comfort or protection. In racist imagination, black women existed to provide comfort to white people. Since whiteness idealized black women existed as sexless caregiver, heterosexual white masculinity purportedly posed no threats to them.⁴⁰⁸ If the idealized caricature performed as subservient or docile, whiteness had no reason to discipline her. Yet the shaken, silent Elizabeth Eckford commanded the compassion of Fine who added

⁴⁰⁷ Benjamin Fine/Lee Lorch Report, 1957, Faubus Papers, Box 498, File 2, Special Collections; Margolick, *Elizabeth and Hazel*, 50.

⁴⁰⁸ White ideals about black women conflicted with the reality of white relationships with black womanhood. White women’s exploitation and abuse of black women’s labor and bodies during enslavement and as domestic workers in the century after the Civil War is an area in which scholarship continues to grow. Black women’s sexual exploitation and abuse by white men has received extensive study and includes investigations of the personal relationships between profound American political figures. President Thomas Jefferson and US Senator Strom Thurmond, white Southern politicians who infamously espoused racist constructs of black femininity and general society, each maintained life-long relationships with black women that culminated in children from each union, and whom Jefferson and Thurmond recognized. See Mary Boykin Chesnut, *Mary Chesnut’s Diary* (New York: Penguin Books, 2011); Susan Tucker, *Telling Memoirs among Southern Women: Domestic Workers and Their Employers in the Segregated South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1988); Deborah Gray White, *Ar’n’t I a Woman: Female Slaves in the Plantation South* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1999); Rebecca Sharpless, *Cooking in Other Women’s Kitchens: Domestic Workers in the South, 1865-1960* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010); Essie Mae Washington-Williams and William Stadiem, *Dear Senator: A Memoir by the Daughter of Strom Thurmond* (New York: Harper Collins, 2005); Annette Gordon-Reed, *The Hemingses of Monticello: An American Family* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2008); Virginia Scharff, *The Women Jefferson Loved* (New York: Harper Collins, 2010); Katherine S. Van Wormer, David W. Jackson, and Charletta Sudduth, *The Maid Narratives: Black Domestic Workers and White Families in the Jim Crow South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2012).

insult to injury by being a “Jewish Yankee.” White women circled around the bench, asking if Fine had a black wife or if Daisy Bates was his sister, and if he had been to Moscow.⁴⁰⁹

The last taunt underscored the constant white supremacist propaganda that smeared the black teenagers, Daisy Bates, the NAACP as a whole and any white allies, all as Communist agitators. Bates repeatedly received letters from white women who claimed to be “real friend[s] of the Negro” that informed her how the NAACP was a Communist front or had failed as an organization, or was “backed by Zionist Jews,” “a bunch of Jews,” or “illiterates.”⁴¹⁰ While the accusations smacked of Cold War-paranoia and rank anti-Semitism, it was entirely so that Communist and Jewish Americans offered sympathy and support to black activists. While Fine comforted Elizabeth, so did Grace Lorch. A former school teacher from Boston and wife of Dr. Lee Lorch who taught mathematics at Philander Smith College, the couple dedicated their lives to working on behalf of civil rights and had each belonged to the Communist Party in their youth.

In 1955, Lee Lorch was summoned before the House of Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) after he and Grace attempted to enroll their daughter, Alice, in a black elementary school in Little Rock.⁴¹¹ When the “kind-faced white woman” came up to Elizabeth, her reputation was well-established among the city’s paranoid white supremacists. Challenging

⁴⁰⁹ Ibid.

⁴¹⁰ Letter from Anonymous, Daisy Bates Papers, Mss 523, Box 1, Folder 1, Madison; Letter from Sarah Williams, Daisy Bates Papers, Mss 523, Box 1, Folder 3, Madison.

⁴¹¹ Grace Lorch to Virgil Blossom, September 21, 1955, Virgil T. Blossom Papers, MC1364, Box 3, File 1, Special Collections, University of Arkansas Libraries, Fayetteville, Arkansas
http://digitalcollections.uark.edu/cdm4/item_viewer.php?CISOROOT=/Civilrights&CISOPTR=169&CISOBOX=1&REC=3, (accessed April 4, 2011); Charles V. Bagli, “A New Light on a Fight to Integrate Stuyvesant Town,” *The New York Times*, November 21, 2010, <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/11/22/nyregion/22stuyvesant.html>, (accessed April 4, 2011).

the mob to see Elizabeth as a “scared...little girl,” Grace Lorch affronted white women’s sense of self by reminding them that the fifteen-year-old black girl deserved all of the protection that Hazel Bryan or any of the white teenage girls took for granted. As Lorch assisted Eckford onto the city bus, segregationist women brayed racial slurs and political insults at the pair.⁴¹² It was a wild moment, as native-born white women obsessed with maintaining their small place in the Southern social order, outcast another woman from whiteness because she defended a black young lady and all that the girl represented.

More interesting are the pretenses to pedestaled, lauded femininity that working-class white women traded. Middle- and upper-class white women resolutely eschewed racial slurs, at least publicly. Acting from a position of maternalistic *noblesse oblige*, privileged white women who personified the traditional white criteria for ‘ladies,’ who hired black domestic help to help them maintain the appearance of gentility, and who aspired to set examples for their communities avoided behaviors that smacked of bad taste or reeked of white trash.⁴¹³ Employment of nouns such as ‘Negro’ or ‘colored’ instead of racial slurs represented the bare minimum of respectful interaction between people, but stood as one of the standards separating ‘moderates’ from segregationist agitators. Their personal ideas about who belonged where in society differed little from working-class women, but language clearly demarcated where white

⁴¹² Bates, *The Long Shadow of Little Rock*, 70; Jacoway, *Turn Away Thy Son*, 6; Herbert Shapiro, *White Violence and Black Response: from Reconstruction to Montgomery* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1988), 414.

⁴¹³ Interview with Billye Buckner Shaw (April 22, 2012). Conducted by Misti Nicole Harper at Pleasant Valley Country Club, Little Rock, Arkansas; Interview with Rhea ‘Bunny’ Buckner Harper (November 17, 2014). Conducted by Misti Nicole Harper at Harper’s home in Little Rock, Arkansas; Interview with Dearle Jones Graupner (July 3, 2015). Conducted by Misti Nicole Harper at Graupner’s home in Bella Vista, Arkansas; Interview with Deborah Hulsey (December 27, 2016). Conducted by Misti Nicole Harper at Hulsey’s home in Little Rock, Arkansas.

women belonged. In their efforts to keep Elizabeth Eckford out, working-class white women unwittingly showed themselves out.

Will Counts' infamous photo of Elizabeth and Hazel Bryan blazed out from the corner of the front page in the following issue of the *Arkansas Democrat*, and a firestorm of coverage of the catastrophe at Central High School spread across the city. Local press lit up their front pages in indignation or shame, and sometimes both. The *State Press* carried Eckford's image from September 4 as she was stalked by white teenage girls and women, with the caption "A Girl Without A Country," while a photo of Carlotta Walls, Jane Hill and Gloria Ray being rejected by soldiers graced the same front page with the title "Federal Court Says Yes—Arkansas Says No!"⁴¹⁴ Harry Ashmore, Pulitzer Prize-winning editor of the *Arkansas Gazette*, had used that paper to plead with the city for measured, rational behavior and to follow the federal orders to integrate while excoriating Orval Faubus for his selfish opportunism. Ashmore proved the *Gazette's* reputation as the city's white voice of moderation when he ran an ad purchased by local farmer Davis Fitzhugh that featured Counts' photograph with the caption, "If You Live in Arkansas, Study This Picture and Know Shame."⁴¹⁵

What had happened in Little Rock immediately became news across the country and around the globe. Papers across the country lambasted Faubus as a "heel" and decried the "stupidity of the jeers" of the "mob in Little Rock," while some directly admonished Hazel Bryan as the symbolic antagonist "white girl with her mouth open in hate like a dog's" who was a "disgrace to the female sex, a terrible American and...a sore disappointment to God."⁴¹⁶

⁴¹⁴ *State Press*, September 13, 1957.

⁴¹⁵ *Arkansas Gazette*, September 7, 1957.

⁴¹⁶ *Chicago Defender*, September 21, 1957; *Milwaukee Defender*, September 28, 1957; *Fresno Bee*, *Milwaukee Journal Reader*, in Margolick, *Elizabeth and Hazel*, 72, 87; Letter to Hazel Bryan, Daisy Bates Papers 1946-1966, Mss 523, Box 1, Folder 2, Madison.

Because of the spotlight on Bates in the months before September 1957 and the horrific scene that centered Elizabeth Eckford, much of the discussion and reporting focused the women and girls who pushed (for or against) school integration in the Southern city. Elizabeth Huckaby, who served as the girls' vice-principal at Central High School and who later became a key figure inside the school's integration struggle, wrote in a letter to her brother that Hazel Bryan was a "badly organized child" from a violent home and a "poor emotional history." Further, Huckaby insisted that none of the girls featured in newspapers or on television were "typical" or "leading students." In her view, Central High School's so-called "leading students" refused to speak out because their parents feared for their safety, as underscored when Virgil Blossom kept his own daughters away from the school "for their protection."⁴¹⁷ Elizabeth Huckaby's reflections on class and status among the white girls at Central High School indirectly assert revelations about the *black* girls around whom white outbursts revolved. The seven girls who arrived at Central High School were as far from "badly organized" as Hazel Bryan's family was from the exclusive Little Rock Country Club. Because of the qualifications set by Daisy Bates and the NAACP, and by Virgil Blossom (albeit for markedly different reasons) those seven teenage girls were not allowed to be anything less than exceptional, leading students and imminently respectable young ladies from well-structured homes with absolutely no hint of scandal or salaciousness. In effect, Elizabeth Huckaby's frustrated letters to her brother admit that the selected black girls were much better suited to attend and participate in life at Central High School alongside the students

⁴¹⁷ Letter to William "Bill" Paisley, September 8, 1957, Huckaby Papers, MC 428, Box 1, Series 1, Folder 3, Special Collections, Fayetteville.

whom the girls' vice-principal clearly valued, rather than the "unknowns" who just made "a lot of noise" but attended the school purely by an accident of race.⁴¹⁸

Journalists also used decidedly gendered frames to cast the principle actresses as either heroines or villains, and evoke emotionalism as well as discuss the crisis and the entire concept of American democracy. International press ripped Little Rock, and by extension, the entire United States. *Le Monde*, France's moderate newspaper, correctly argued that images of adult white Southerners abusing black children would become Communist propaganda, as the official Kremlin mouthpiece, *Pravda*, proved when it gleefully denounced American "school bells...[as] not for instruction but for the 'rallying of racists.'" That paper also salaciously printed that Elizabeth Eckford had been murdered by the mob, and the entire Soviet press mocked "free America." The *Sovetskaya Rossiya* declared Arkansas the "shame of America," while the *Trud* highlighted the "Explosion of Racist Hysteria in the United States."⁴¹⁹

National press declined to declare democracy a fraudulent system, but did use gender and the image of middle-class black womanhood to elicit sympathy for integration in Little Rock and to underscore the hypocrisy of segregation in American society. The *New York Times* ran a full-feature of Thelma Mothershed as "representative" of the black teenagers who "[did] not consider herself a heroine" but nevertheless described her as a "happy," "petite" "pioneer" whose mother, Hosanna Mothershed, "just had to let her go [to Central High School]" because "there [was] a principle involved."⁴²⁰ NBC News reported an interview with Elizabeth Eckford and described her as "the most sensitive of children...the prettiest girl...who loves deeply and can be hurt

⁴¹⁸ Letter to William "Bill" Paisley, September 1, 1957, Huckaby Papers, MC 428, Box 1, Series 1, Folder 3, Special Collections, Fayetteville.

⁴¹⁹ *New York Times*, September 26, 1957.

⁴²⁰ *New York Times*, September 10, 1957.

deeply.”⁴²¹ The *New York Times* and NBC commentary resound as each of these internationally-revered sources afforded humanity, femininity, and youth to two black teenage girls. Among the myriad of insidious effects of perpetual, legal racial discrimination and sexism was the reality that black children were rarely recognized by white society *as* children. Black girls endured particular callousness wherein whiteness refused them the sweetness and innocence of being little and young girls, and tried to value them only for what they could provide white people. Middle-class black ladies rebuked intersectional abuse by their carriage, accomplishment, grace and commitment to uplifting blackness that was evident in Mothershed, Eckford and each of the women working to integrate Little Rock.

Local attitudes reflected that reality. Defying the city’s anti-Semites, Benjamin Fine continued covering the story at Little Rock and questioned faculty and students at Horace Mann High School, focusing on girls’ opinions of the goings-on. Despite their hurt that “so many bad things are said about [black students],” seventeen-year-olds Anna Eckford and Sylvia Poindexter affirmed how proud they were of Elizabeth (Anna’s sister) and all of the students because “someone [had] to break the ice” and it “[took] courage to do what they did.” Sixteen-year-olds Shirley Byrd and Delores Hubbard directly questioned the philosophy of Jim Crow and wondered why “white people put the color line above a love of justice or human rights...or even...the Constitution...” and mocked the silliness of using “300 troops to keep out nine young kids [who]...didn’t want to fight anyone.” Horace Mann counselor Treopia Scott Gravelly (aunt to Ernest Green) hailed her nephew and all of the students who endured September 4 as “living up to the highest ideals of American citizenship.”⁴²² From the Netherlands, Reverend William

⁴²¹ Margolick, “Through a Lens, Darkly,” *Vanity Fair*.

⁴²² *New York Times*, September 15, 1957.

Janssen a letter to the NAACP in which he dedicated a poem to Elizabeth Eckford and the girls attempting to integrate Central, writing:

“The truth was dressed in innocence, fear’s uniform was force—
Two hundred men, and just one girl...who’ll lose? The girl of course.
But governor of Arkansas, two hundred men won’t do!
One day the girl comes back to school, and brings her girl-friend, too!”⁴²³

Commendation for the grace and poise of the black teenage girls, their mothers, Daisy Bates, and the efforts of black Little Rock poured in from the city, throughout the United States and around the world. Black women’s organizations celebrated the “dignified, courageous, calm and steadfast” ladies who had been on the front lines of the effort to create equitable educational opportunities in Little Rock.⁴²⁴ Across the country, historically-black sororities and professional women’s organizations invited the teenager girls to conferences as guest speakers, noting them as “ladies” who were among “the greatest inspiration.”⁴²⁵ Black and white teenagers in the Northeast and Midwest clamored to join the NAACP, while White Unitarian churches in Michigan encouraged all of their congregation to join the organization because the girls were “made of the stuff that all heroes of history [were] made of.”⁴²⁶ Teachers in New York City lauded the tenacity and “fine representation” of Daisy Bates and activist ladies, while residents in

⁴²³ “Dutch Pastor Writes Hymn of Little Rock,” *Milwaukee Defender*, September 21, 1957.

⁴²⁴ Letter from the Phyllis Wheatley Branch of the Young Women’s Christian Association of Little Rock, Daisy Bates Papers, Mss 523, Box 1, File 2, WHS, Madison.

⁴²⁵ Letter from Louise Batson on behalf of Zeta Phi Beta Sorority, Inc., Daisy Bates Papers, Mss 523, Box 1, File 2, WHS, Madison. Letter from Marion H. Jackson on behalf of Iota Phi Lambda Sorority, Daisy Bates Papers, Mss 523, Box 1, File 6, WHS, Madison.

⁴²⁶ Letter from fifteen-year-old Richard Pendleton of Boston, Massachusetts; Letter from sixteen-year-old Laurie Geisel of Wausau, Wisconsin, Daisy Bates Papers, Mss 523, Box 1, File 5, WHS, Madison. Letter from Genora Dollinger, Daisy Bates Papers, Mss 523, Box 1, File 2, WHS, Madison.

Washington, DC heralded them as “good looking [ladies] with brains.”⁴²⁷ Scottish women commented that “all over Britain, people [were] despising the treatment” of the teenagers, and their families and communities by extension.⁴²⁸ White appreciation for the anxiety that the teenagers’ mothers endured showcased a new empathy for black Southern experiences that television now beamed into white living rooms. Technological and media advancement provided visibility for black womanhood and motherhood, as well as the ability to challenge white stereotypes that attempted to strip black women of both attributes.

Bates herself even garnered support from her past. Hortense Hays Sawyer, a younger foster child of the extended Smith family in Huttig, Arkansas, had moved to New York in 1952 but closely followed the activities of Daisy Bates in the Little Rock integration crisis. The younger woman “loved [her] for it,” and wrote that Daisy’s name was “as popular as the name ‘Faubus’, except that the name ‘Mrs. Bates’ is mentioned with an air of respect rather than with a groan.”⁴²⁹ It is a testament to deportment and presentation that middle-class black women in Little Rock showcased that across the country, they were afforded the titles and reverence generally reserved for pedestaled white womanhood. In challenging the intersectional discrimination of Jim Crow sanctions, middle-class black womanhood claimed that pedestal. Sawyer’s letter also represents a personal achievement for Daisy Gaston Bates, who had so effectively reconstructed her image from rebellious teenage seductress to dignified lady, that correspondence from a woman who would have effectively been her cousin never hinted that Daisy was anything less than a paragon of feminine grace and respectability.

⁴²⁷ Letter from Elaine S. Yatzkan; Letter from Edward Marshall, Daisy Bates Papers, Mss 523, Box 1, File 4, WHS, Madison.

⁴²⁸ Letter from Grace Paton, Daisy Bates Papers, Mss 523, Box 1, File 7, WHS, Madison.

⁴²⁹ Letter from Hortense Hays Sawyer, Daisy Bates Papers, Mss 523, Box 1, File 5, WHS, Madison.

Despite the national and international admiration for the black women and girls who were central to Little Rock's integration effort, the breakdown and hysteria among the city's white citizens—particularly working-class white women—terrified black *and* white Little Rock. Daisy Bates, Wiley Branton (the Bateses' friend who had represented Thelma Aaron and the other families in *Cooper v. Aaron* and remained the local NAACP legal counsel), and local activists who had coordinated the morning were shaken to their cores. Middle-class black Little Rock watched that day unfold in horror, with mixed results. Church ladies argued amongst each other whether black students should “stay out of that white school where [they] weren't wanted” or admit “white folks ain't never *given* us *nothing*...we gotta grab everything we can...integrate, now!”⁴³⁰ Parents of the ten teenagers reacted individually. Jane Hill's parents immediately withdrew their daughter from Central High School, while Birdie Eckford reasonably wondered if Elizabeth—or any of the children, or all of them—would meet the same fate as John Carter. Still, only Jane Hill withdrew. Wiley Branton implored the remaining families and the nine teenagers to stay enrolled at Central High School and play the “waiting game...for Judge Davies and federal law to prevail...for as long as it takes.”⁴³¹ Harvey Ray recounted to Daisy Bates that he would “be terrified each day, each hour [Gloria Ray was] at Central,” but he took pride in his daughter's tenacity and courage.⁴³² Virginia Gardner, an Arkansas-reared journalist whose writing reflected her left-wing politics, conducted an interview with the Eckford family for New York's *Daily Worker*. When she asked Birdie how she prepared her daughter for desegregation and essentially confronting whiteness, Gardner realized that teaching challenge and survival was

⁴³⁰ Beals, *Warriors Don't Cry*, 69-71.

⁴³¹ *Ibid*, 74-75.

⁴³² Bates, *The Long Shadow of Little Rock*, 62, 141.

“what Negro mothers in the South have been doing for generations.”⁴³³ Wiley Branton recalled the intense pressure on him from the United States Justice Department and “well-placed individuals in Little Rock” to recommend a one-year delay for the integration process that would allow “attitudes to change and tempers to cool.”⁴³⁴ He refused and sought the assistance of Thurgood Marshall to help him rebuke such suggestions.

Members of the Little Rock School Board, however, immediately begged Judge Davies to suspend the desegregation order.⁴³⁵ Much of white Little Rock recoiled at the mob where working-class white women and girls enrolled at Central High School screamed front and center. International embarrassment slapped whites in the face and exacerbated their fears of what might happen to any of the black teenagers if integration continued. As a whole, the board had always resisted equal access in the Little Rock school system, and Virgil Blossom admitted that his finalized plan offered the barest minimum of legal compliance with the statutes for *Brown v. Board*. White supremacy insisted that black teachers would not lecture white children, and House segregation measures ensured that white families could opt out of their children attending majority-black schools. One board member, Dr. Dale Alford, later romanticized the paternalistic segregationist perspective by questioning why integrationists had sacrificed “public tranquility” when Little Rock had “such good schools for both races” including “a fine, modernistic high school for Negroes.”⁴³⁶ Integration under the direction of board president Wayne Upton and the

⁴³³ Margolick, *Elizabeth and Hazel*, 83-87; William H. Pruden III, “Virginia Gardner,” *Encyclopedia of Arkansas History and Culture*, <http://www.encyclopediaofarkansas.net/encyclopedia/entry-detail.aspx?entryID=8802> [accessed March 1, 2017]; Roberts, *Lessons from Little Rock*, 90-92; Beals, *Warriors Don’t Cry*, 48-52.

⁴³⁴ Wiley A. Branton, “Personal Memories of Thurgood Marshall,” *Arkansas Law Review* Vol. 40, No. 4 (1987), 669, in Jacoway, *Turn Away Thy Son*, 135.

⁴³⁵ *Arkansas Gazette*, September 6, 1957.

⁴³⁶ Dale Alford and L’Moore Smith Alford, *The Case of the Sleeping People (Finally Awakened by Little Rock School Frustrations)* (Little Rock, Arkansas: Pioneer, 1959), 5-6, 72.

assembled board, and Superintendent Virgil Blossom was pure tokenism. Ronald Davies recognized that fact and also resented that Governor Orval Faubus' executive action in using the Arkansas National Guard to halt integration set a dangerous precedent for other intransigent Deep South politicians. Four minutes after the board's request, Judge Davies shot them down. He also instructed the United States Attorney General Herbert Brownell, Jr. to file a petition for injunction against Faubus to prevent him from further obstructing a federal court mandate.⁴³⁷

By evening on September 4, 1957, no one watching the Little Rock crisis unfold knew what was going to happen next. What is certain, however, is that middle-class black femininity had exposed the hypocrisy of white feminine gentility and 'Jane Crow's' claims to the tenants of Southern womanhood. Middle-class and elite white women in the city had been largely silent regarding integration and would not make a significant public appearance until the end of the school year.⁴³⁸ Working-class white women and teenage girls who formerly would "never have gone out" to make a public scene, followed the voices of the Mothers' League and wrapped themselves in the Confederate flag of racial terror. They then proceeded into the public square to abandon all traditional virtues of 'fragile' white womanhood.⁴³⁹ In stark contrast, the seven black girls who stepped onto the Central High School campus presented pictures of ladylike refinement and grace, as well as the necessary courage that historically separated what constituted proper femininity for white and black Southern women. Opportunities for personal

⁴³⁷ LaNier, *A Mighty Long Way*, 78; Jacoway, *Turn Away Thy Son*, 137-140.

⁴³⁸ Diary of Dorothy 'Dottie' Peacock Harper 1958-1959, Charles Sean Harper Family Records, Little Rock, Arkansas [accessed September 6, 2010]. See also Sara Alderman Murphy, *Breaking the Silence: The Little Rock Women's Emergency Committee to Open Our Schools 1958-1963* (Fayetteville, Arkansas: University of Arkansas Press, 1997); Elizabeth Jacoway, "Down from the Pedestal: Gender and Regional Culture in a Ladylike Assault on the Southern Way of Life," *The Arkansas Historical Quarterly*, Vol. 56, No. 3 (Autumn 1997), 345-352.

⁴³⁹ Interview with a former Central High School student (June 9, 2010).

and community advancement meant that an essential precept of black womanhood risked the public square. September 4, 1957 was not the first time that white supremacy had been confronted with the truth of black Little Rock—that it was not a monolithic mass of people living largely in the southeastern section of the city who could be ignored or exploited based on white whims. Nor was that day the first time that white supremacy had been faced down in the city by middle-class black ladies, buttressed by respectability politics, who asserted their rights to equal treatment as black Americans and protection as black ladies. Decades of ladies’ activism precluded Central High School that included the desegregation of the city bus system, some businesses and all public colleges. The difference presented on that particular September morning was the hypervisibility of middle-class black women and girls who claimed their right to one of the last segregated spaces that was occupied predominantly by working-class and unremarkable whiteness. The accomplished black daughters of imminently respectable families who were led by the most prominent woman in black Little Rock with a cadre of middle-class black ladies supporting her, successfully challenged the entire concept of white superiority. Most importantly, middle-class black womanhood attacked the excuse on which the basis for Jim Crow pivoted—miscegenation and threats to white women’s virtue. It is no small irony that Benjamin Fine painted a portrait of Elizabeth Eckford in Christian innocence when he compared her to a “little lamb” while Buddy Lonesome of the *St. Louis Argus* reported that white women, like wolves, chased the lamb down the street.⁴⁴⁰ Whitelash to integration swung on intersectional hinges that failed to process blackness as at least equal to whiteness, and middle-

⁴⁴⁰ Margolick, *Elizabeth and Hazel*, 47; David Margolick, “When Louis Armstrong Blew His Top,” *Arkansas Times*, September 11, 2011.

class black womanhood as the repudiation of three centuries' worth of devaluing black female bodies.

Chapter Six: Of Battlefields and Pedestals

Massive resistance in Little Rock on September 4 shocked the world and terrified black people within the city. Yet, whitelash steeled the resolve of Daisy Bates, NAACP officials and lawyers, the nine remaining children and their families, and local activists to integrate Central High School. All resolutely refused suggestions that they wait another year for what the Supreme Court ruled were the teenagers' civil rights to attend the school. Less clear, however, was a plan for the immediate aftermath of the riot. No one in the nation seemed to know how to proceed, but practically everyone was begging for a response, or goading one from President Dwight D. Eisenhower. Two days after the initial riot, the Commander-in-Chief sent Orval Faubus a telegram insisting his (misplaced) faith that the governor would give full cooperation to the Supreme Court. Eisenhower's note was hardly enough of a statement. Attorney General Brownwell stated that regarding Little Rock, he "increasingly realized that a clash of historic importance was inevitable between the President who was required by the Constitution to enforce the law of the land and political leaders in the South..."⁴⁴¹ Attorney Thurgood Marshall urged the President to take some initiative. Private and public citizens alike wondered why he had not already, especially as Judge Davies had served Governor Faubus with a summons for September 20, where black and white witnesses alike would be called to testify as to what happened on September 4.⁴⁴² Famously sunny Louis Armstrong had watched the chaos unfold on television and the newspapers. In newspaper interview after a performance in Grand Forks, North Dakota, the legendary trumpet player charged that Eisenhower showed "no guts" to that "no-good motherfucker" Orval Faubus. That Armstrong broke his infamous "no politics" rule

⁴⁴¹ Beals, *Warriors Don't Cry*, 77; Jacoway, *Turn Away Thy Son*, 134.

⁴⁴² LaNier, *A Mighty Long Way*, 78; "U.S. Court Summons Served on Governor," *Arkansas Gazette*, September 11, 1957.

signaled that what had happened in Little Rock was something black Americans were no longer willing to tolerate. Some of the most famous athletes and entertainers of the day, including Jackie Robinson, Sugar Ray Robinson and Eartha Kitt, lined up behind him.⁴⁴³

Feeling the pressure to actually act, President Eisenhower hosted Governor Faubus at his summer home in Newport, Rhode Island to discuss how integration would proceed. Arkansas' Congressman Brooks Hays arranged the meeting for September 14, ten days after the initial attempt to integrate Central High School. For more than a week, the nine black teenagers who remained enrolled at that institution were effectively school-less and were learning lessons only because Daisy Bates had enlisted tutors so that they did not fall behind their white classmates.⁴⁴⁴ Clocks literally ticking on the entire situation, Congressman Hays sat in the President's office as the Arkansas governor asked the Commander-in-Chief for an executive recommendation to the Justice Department of an injunction for "ten days, thirty days, three months...so some of these [white] people might...be able then to admit the blacks without difficulty." Hays recalled that Eisenhower almost capitulated. The decorated general's segregationist sympathies are well-documented and are illuminating in their gendered construction. In a private conversation at a White House dinner before the *Brown v. Board* ruling, Eisenhower insisted to Chief Justice Earl Warren that segregationists were "not bad people. All they are concerned about is to see that their sweet little girls are not required to sit in school alongside some big overgrown Negroes."⁴⁴⁵ Three years later to Faubus, the President shared that he had "a lot of friends down in

⁴⁴³ Margolick, "When Louis Armstrong Blew His Top," *Arkansas Times*, September 11, 2011.

⁴⁴⁴ Bates Interview with Elizabeth Jacoway, October 11, 1976, Southern Oral History Program.

⁴⁴⁵ Earl Warren, *The Memoirs of Chief Justice Earl Warren* (New York: Doubleday, 1977), 291.

Georgia...and they [said] that you're not going to make these little white children even as early as the first grader unaware of the attractiveness of this cute little colored girl sitting next to him."⁴⁴⁶

Describing elementary-age children as “big overgrown Negroes” allowed Eisenhower to masculinize the word ‘Negroes,’ effectively erasing black girls from his imagined classrooms or conceiving of them as indistinguishable from boys. In either case, the President tried to strip the purity of childhood from black schoolboys and characterized all black masculinity as inherently threatening, while he took femininity and visibility away from black schoolgirls. Eisenhower’s social constructions of gender and race enabled him to contrast stereotypes of black masculinity and femininity against the image of little white girls as the ultimate standard bearers of girlish virtue and idyllic youthful sweetness, even though all of the hypothetical children in question were the same age. In narratives where black masculinity did not exist, the President could recognize certain qualities of “cute little colored girls,” but his ideals still reveal the complex intersectional discrimination placed on black female bodies from birth. Even with the national emphasis on large nuclear families and children in the postwar baby boom, whiteness excluded black children from the vulnerability and sacredness of infancy. Black babies who grew into little girls were compartmentalized out of traditional girlhood and delicate femininity tropes that whiteness claimed exclusively for white girls and women. With Faubus, Eisenhower painted black girls as sensual enticement and temptation to white male innocence. Black femininity could only distinguish itself sexually; without the Jezebel stereotype, white male imagination reduced black women to sexless, invisible beings.

⁴⁴⁶ Brooks Hays Interview with John Luter (June 27-28, July 27, 1970), 40, Eisenhower Administration Project, Dwight David Eisenhower Library, Abilene, Kansas, in Jacoway, *Turn Away Thy Son*, 150. Emphasis within the quotation is my own.

Moreover, sexualized black femininity posed the single Achilles' heel to supposedly all-powerful white masculinity. As late as the 1950s, conventional American gender norms associated masculinity with reason and fortitude, and femininity with emotionalism and delicacy. Heterosexual white men constituted the top of the gender pyramid as the most rational Americans with the strongest characters—unless teased by supposedly-hypersexual non-white women. Black sensuality, in particular, juxtaposed to purported white celibacy, and defined black women by who they were not—white women. The entire structure of middle-class black propriety combated against such stereotypes. Yet buried within Eisenhower's ruminations to Faubus was an important admission—whiteness sometimes found blackness attractive and vice versa. White men necessarily attached oafishness to black masculinity of all ages to perpetuate the myth that white women could not find black men physically handsome or fall in love with black men's intelligence, kindness or humor. Likewise, black womanhood threatened white supremacy by threatening its given reason for existence—the sanctity of white womanhood. On its own merits, black femininity presented gentility, lovability, wit and charm to white men that sustained interaction would eventually reveal.

That last threat was the exact reason Orval Faubus sat in the President's summer home. Attorney General Brownell advised Eisenhower that he could not legally intervene to ask the Justice Department for an injunction, and the meeting ended with an empty handshake between the Governor and the President, captured by the media that had gathered at Newport. "Faubus Asking Compromise, Ike Refusing Commitment; Status of Troops Still Unanswered," blared the next day's headline from the *Arkansas Gazette*.⁴⁴⁷ Yet, the Arkansas governor made no specific

⁴⁴⁷ *Arkansas Gazette*, September 15, 1957; Press release, statements by President Eisenhower and Governor Faubus from Newport, Rhode Island (September 14, 1957), Gerald D. Morgan Records, Box 6: Civil Rights; Diary - Notes dictated by President Eisenhower on

promises to the Commander-in-Chief of the United States, either. Another week passed. To the September 20 trial, Faubus sent his attorneys in his place while Elizabeth Eckford took the witness stand, and where reporters snapped endless pictures of Daisy Bates and questioned the teenagers who became known on that day as the ‘Little Rock Nine.’ Melba Pattillo Beals recalled Bates media-coaching them all to “Smile!” and “Straighten their shoulders” as they performed for reporters, camera people and television crews. Indeed, the entire trial was a riveting performance where Orval Faubus made the dramatic choice to not appear but nevertheless act as the proverbial elephant in the room; where stylish Daisy Bates dazzled the audiences with her persistence and sheer will; where Ronald Davies earned approval as a “civil rights hero” for his respectful treatment of Wiley Branton and Thurgood Marshall; and where the six girls of the Little Rock Nine showcased how their upbringings and values cast them in their roles as young ladies. Their parts juxtaposed to the adult white women who watched the proceedings and taunted the well-coiffed, stylishly dressed girls with racial slurs and insults.

By the end of the afternoon, Judge Davies decided that Governor Faubus had attempted to thwart court-ordered integration based on “no real evidence,” and ordered him to cease interference. That evening, Faubus appeared on television to announce that he planned to appeal Davies’ ruling, but that he would change the orders of the Arkansas National Guard despite insisting that “blood would run in the streets of Little Rock.” After three weeks of waiting, Virgil Blossom called Daisy Bates on Sunday, September 22 to make sure the nine

October 8, 1957 concerning meeting with Governor Faubus at Newport, Rhode Island (September 14, 1957), Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Papers, Administration Series, Box 23, Little Rock, Arkansas; Press release, statement by the President from the U.S. Naval Base, Newport, Rhode Island (September 21, 1957), Gerald D. Morgan Records, Box 6: Civil Rights http://www.eisenhower.archives.gov/research/digital_documents/LittleRock/littlerockdocuments.html [accessed December 7, 2010].

students would be ready for school on Monday, September 23. This time, Daisy made absolutely sure that every family and student understood the plan to arrive at Central High School, as she and LC drove until the early hours of Monday morning to get assurance that everyone would gather at the Bateses' home and leave for school together. Imogene Brooks Brown; Birdie Eckford; Lothaire Scott Green; Hosanna Claire Mothershed; Lois Marie Pattillo and her mother India Peyton; Julia Miller Ray; Margaret Roberts; Jessie Thomas; and Juanita Cullins Walls prayed for their daughters and sons, as did grandmothers, sisters, aunts, and friends across their community whether or not they agreed with integration. Mostly irreverent but "sick with fear," Daisy Bates also prayed like Susie Smith taught her. Arguably, middle-class black ladies' social status existed in part because of what church they attended or what denomination they claimed. Still, it is fair to muse that those kinds of distinctions mattered little across the black community that night, as everyone participating in or simply watching the Central High School drama unfold waited for morning in some level of anxiety.⁴⁴⁸

The morning edition of the *Arkansas Gazette* advertised that city and state police would patrol the campus grounds. Principal Jess W. Matthews had dictated the students' morning bulletin to state that "after three weeks of tensions and being the focus of world attention...students in Central High School [had] a great responsibility...to conduct themselves as good citizens and should adopt a kindly and helpful attitude toward the Negro students." The Governor hoped for "no unrest." In reality, Faubus did not change the orders of the Arkansas National Guard to protect the entering black students or control riots. He simply ordered them to evacuate the premises in a show of defiance to Judge Davies and President Eisenhower that

⁴⁴⁸ Bates, *The Long Shadow of Little Rock*, 86; Beals, *Warriors Don't Cry*, 95-96, 100-101; LaNier, *A Mighty Long Way*, 79-81; Jacoway, *Turn Away Thy Son*, 169.

earned him the nickname “Orval Fabulous” among segregationist women.⁴⁴⁹ His action left only the police and the arriving black students to the mercy of a women-led white mob, more than 1,000 protesters-strong.⁴⁵⁰ Their reactions leave little doubt that the social and political persistence, visibility and symbolism of middle-class black femininity and black ladies are the heart of and key to understanding the calamity at Central High School. Order collapsed as the nine students, accompanied by Daisy Bates, attorney C.C. Mercer and NAACP official Frank Smith, arrived on campus. Mothers’ League secretary Mary Thomason organized the mob outside the school on Park Street and effectively overwhelmed the all-white city and state police forces. Police protection for the students and their escorts particularly enraged the crowd, but for disparate reasons. At the crux of Jim Crow culture lay the stringent policing of black bodies on the myth that white femininity must be protected from degenerate blackness. That law enforcement—especially local, city police forces—mobilized to protect adult black men and teenage boys meant that either white feminine vulnerability no longer underpinned Southern social mores *or* that the entire concept was always a fabrication. Most appalling of all, however, was that an all-white, all-male police squad protected black women and girls. In two cars sat six black teenage girls and Daisy Bates, all of whom were immaculately coiffed, stylishly dressed, and horrified by howling, hysterical and violent white people. Middle-class black womanhood pivoted on traditional tenants of gendered respectability norms while that also valued women’s activity in the public square and ensured that black ladies were not strangers to political action.

⁴⁴⁹ Daily Bulletin, Monday, September 23, 1957, in Huckaby Papers, Box 1, Series 2, Folder 2, Special Collections, Fayetteville; *Arkansas Gazette*, September 23, 1957; David Chappell, “Diversity within a Racial Group: White People in Little Rock, 1957-1959,” *Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 54 (Winter 1955), 448; Godfrey, “Bayonets, Brainwashing and Bathrooms,” 42-43.

⁴⁵⁰ Jacoway, *Turn Away Thy Son*, 169.

Nevertheless, on September 23, the lady and girls in those cars resembled nothing so much as the quintessential damsels in distress. Working-class white women judged the Little Rock police and the police chief, Gene Smith, as ultimate traitors for pedestaling black femininity. In her memoir, Bates remembered the intense pressure and harassment that working-class white people dealt to city police officers, most of whom occupied the same social rung. Effects of intersectional discrimination stretched beyond its immediate targets of middle-class black ladies and girls to strain white relationships. One Central High School student recalled how her father's post at school affected her parents' marriage because of who her father protected. Shortly after his resignation, Chief Smith killed his wife and committed suicide.⁴⁵¹ Intersectionality proved the catalyst for what amounted to a year-long (but much further-reaching) terror campaign.

Gender and class meant as much as race, as nine black teenagers attempted to start their semester at their new school. Because of the massive mob gathered at the front entrance of the school, the cars carrying the students pulled away to the east side entrance of the building where police had gathered and where Mercer and Smith jumped out of the cars to rush the teenagers inside.⁴⁵² There they met Elizabeth Huckaby who attempted normalcy by dispersing individual schedules and guiding students to their classrooms.⁴⁵³ Incensed that the students had at last gotten into the building, Mary Thomason insisted to the outside mob that building entrances

⁴⁵¹ Interview with former Central High School student (June 9, 2010); Bates, *The Long Shadow of Little Rock*, 182-83; Cope, "'A Thorn in the Side?'" 182; "Little Rock Central High School National Historic Site," *We Shall Overcome: Historic Places of the Civil Rights Movement*, <http://www.nps.gov/nr/travel/civilrights/ak1.htm> [accessed December 7, 2010].

⁴⁵² Investigation Report by Captain Alan Templeton, Arkansas State Police, Monday, September 23, 1957, pg. 2, in Faubus Papers, MS F27 301, Box 498, Folder 1, Special Collections, Fayetteville.

⁴⁵³ LaNier, *A Mighty Long Way*, 83-87.

were locked to prevent the white students from leaving and that her daughter was trapped “in there with those niggers.”⁴⁵⁴ Abandoning any pretense to Christian, ladylike gentility or decorum, Thomason used she and her daughter’s sex to manipulate pandemonium by preying on white fear of miscegenation via relationships between white girls and black boys. Yet, her language and use of the racial slur masculinized all of the students, even though all of Little Rock knew that six of the nine were girls. That those girls, particularly Elizabeth Eckford, had been legitimated as vulnerable and sensitive in the media played a crucial role in the way segregationists viewed the entire integration process. Precisely because middle-class black femininity attacked the root of white supremacy, black womanhood must be ignored by segregationists or desexualized. Black women and girls’ perpetual presence at the forefront of the movement erased the possibility of the former option. It was much easier to try and delegitimize black womanhood than it was to ignore its existence. During the three weeks that the city waited for a federal decision on integration, working-class white women and girls reported instances of racial harassment to the Arkansas State Police that featured an interestingly high proportion of black teenage girls as perpetrators. Mrs. Marion Baker and her sixteen-year-old daughter Mary Ann, who attended Central High School, each reported that they were verbally harassed by “three or five Negro teen-age girls” near their home at 1722 Wright Avenue, four blocks from the high school.⁴⁵⁵ Working-class women also swapped stories of encountering black women who seemed “*more dangerous than men*” because they “carried razor

⁴⁵⁴ Godfrey, “Bayonets, Brainwashing, and Bathrooms,” 43.

⁴⁵⁵ Investigation Report provided to Director Herman E. Lindsey, Department of Arkansas State Police by Mr. and Mrs. Marion Baker and Mary Ann Baker, September 18, 1957, pg. 2, in Faubus Papers, MS F27 301, Box 498, Folder 1, Special Collections, Fayetteville.

blades in their hair” and “ice picks at night.”⁴⁵⁶ Captain Alan Templeton of the Arkansas State Police wrote in his report of September 23 that members of the mob stated a “teen-age negro female walked down 14th Street behind the crowd” shortly before the students arrived, and “this caused some comment.”⁴⁵⁷

This last incident is patently absurd. It is nearly unthinkable that a black teenaged girl would have ambled by to taunt a large, angry white mob focused specifically on forcibly removing black people from the premises, and who are on record for viciously attacking black journalists and passers-by that same morning.⁴⁵⁸ The vagueness of all of these incidents featuring girls is revealing, but so is the purpose of recounting these purported exchanges that all of a sudden recast black femininity as more frightening than black male sexuality. Black femininity and middle-class black womanhood invalidated the total notion of white supremacy, and more specifically, working-class white people’s place inside of that notion.

In response, white women screamed from the street for their own children or any white children to come out of the school. White girls filtered out in tears over integration and “howled hysterically” at their classmates to come out; Sammie Dean Parker, who helped Hazel Bryan stalk Elizabeth Eckford on September 4, leapt from a second-story window and was subsequently arrested by police. White mothers entered the building (it seems the entrances were, in fact, unlocked) and smashed windows with the dual goal of creating mayhem and targeting the six black girls who were trying to navigate the labyrinth hallways of their new

⁴⁵⁶ Interview with former Central High School student (June 9, 2010). The emphasis within the quotation is my own.

⁴⁵⁷ Investigation Report by Captain Alan Templeton, Arkansas State Police, Monday, September 23, 1957, pg. 2, in Faubus Papers, MS F27 301, Box 498, Folder 1, Special Collections, Fayetteville.

⁴⁵⁸ Ibid, pp. 3, 5.

school.⁴⁵⁹ Inside the hallways, Melba Pattillo Beals recalled “mostly [white] women...staring at us as though we were the eighth wonder of the world.” While she was en route to class, one middle-aged white omen slapped her across the face and spit on her while she called the sixteen-year-old a “bitch” who “next thing, [would] want to marry one of our children.”⁴⁶⁰

Centuries of dehumanization of black women and girls, and the specific caste status created by Jim Crow, played a fundamental role in white mothers’ compartmentalization of a young black girl who was the exact age of their daughters, but who existed to them as an adult-sized threat. Thelma Mothershed physically struggled to survive the terrorism of the day, as her heart condition caused shortness of breath and prevented her from moving quickly throughout the halls to escape threatening white students or adults. The actual delicacy of Thelma, and the youth and girlishness of Carlotta, Elizabeth, Gloria, Melba and Minnijean made them special targets for abuse inside of Central High School and exposed the twin myths of white supremacy and femininity. In their initial interviews with potential candidates for integration, Horace Mann principal LeRoy Matthews Christophe and Dunbar principal Edwin Hawkins selected only the best young scholars, from good families, who boasted a litany of talent and accomplishments that highlighted those children as some of the finest students of any color in the city. For the principals of the state’s premier black high school and junior high school, and for the larger black community, each of the nine students destroyed white supremacist insistence that blackness equated shiftlessness, poverty, or immorality. Virgil Blossom demanded the same standards as Christophe and Hawkins because of how exclusionary and difficult achieving excellence is; he also wanted students who were unlikely to fight back against verbal or physical

⁴⁵⁹ Godfrey, “Bayonets, Brainwashing, and Bathrooms,” 46-47; LaNier, *A Mighty Long Way*, 86.

⁴⁶⁰ Beals, *Warriors Don’t Cry*, 111.

torment. By insisting on almost impossible patience, Blossom unwittingly invited young black *ladies* who repudiated stereotype and whose Christian virtues dwarfed that of violent working-class white women and girls who insisted they prayed for “divine guidance” to deliver them from integration.⁴⁶¹ Despite Principal Matthews’ vain hope that white students would respond well to their new classmates, only a few attempted even sympathetic smiles and feared showing “even minimal empathy.” State police investigations yielded a more brutal account. Senior Martha Sue Eason checked out of school, and reported that white students had been “hitting the Negroes” and had chased “one Negro girl into the office” so that she could not exit. Eason further reported that white students walked out of classrooms where black students entered, with little repercussion from teachers. One girls’ gym teacher did tell white students to “shut up” when one black girl came into class. Eason possibly referenced the gym class where Melba Pattillo Beals was hit with a volleyball and tripped by white girls who were astonished that black girls “bleed red blood.” Calamity inside and out of the school ensured that police evacuated the nine black students before afternoon classes, belying Principal Matthews’ special bulletin that claimed “the Negro students, as they left Central High School, reported that they had been treated very nicely by the students in the school. *They have declared, however, that they will not return to school until President Eisenhower assures them of his personal protection.*”⁴⁶²

⁴⁶¹ “A Call to Earnest Prayer,” Weekly Bulletin, September 8, 1957, Rose City Immanuel Baptist Church, North Little Rock, Arkansas, in Faubus Papers, MS F271 301, Box 498, File 1, Special Collections, Fayetteville.

⁴⁶² LaNier, *A Mighty Long Way*, 88; Martha Sue Eason to Sergeant Arthur Halsell and Sergeant L.E. Gwyn, for Investigation Report by Captain Alan Templeton, p. 10, Arkansas State Police, September 23, 1957, in Faubus Papers, MS F27 301, Box 498, Folder 1, Special Collections; Beals, *Warriors Don’t Cry*, 113; Special Bulletin, Monday, September 23, 1957, in Huckaby Papers, Box 1, Series 2, Folder 2, Special Collections, Fayetteville. The emphasis within the special bulletin is my own.

It is reasonable to argue that in selecting the students who integrated Central High School, everyone involved in that process—including Daisy Bates, Principals Christophe and Hawkins, Superintendent Blossom—probably believed the select possessed endless patience and the literal ability turn the other cheek. Patience is traditionally considered a feminine virtue; girls comprised six of the nine chosen students. No one in this scenario was endlessly patient, however. Fear tormented parents. Imogene Brooks Brown described her terror to investigators when she relayed what had happened on September 23, and how she had “driven wildly” to Daisy Bates’ home to collect Minnijean, only to find that the squad cars evacuating the students had not arrived yet. She waited for Minnijean at their own home while she listened to radio reports that the nine students had been “chased through the halls and bloodied up.”⁴⁶³ Physical abuse hurt and terrified the students. Racial slurs and nasty insults stung. Quite understandably, none of the girls wanted to take the abuse heaped on them—middle-class, ladylike deportment be damned. Carlotta Walls LaNier remembers wanting to “sock” and “knock the hell out of” a white girl who constantly targeted her over the course of the school year.⁴⁶⁴ Minnijean Brown was eventually expelled from Central High School for retaliating against harassment. Still, their insistence that they would not return to school at all without a modicum of protection (buttressed by their families’, community, and the insistence of the NAACP that the President intervene) reflected personal will to attend Central High School on social principles that were part and parcel to black femininity. Their demands also underscored their determination to be no one’s sacrificial lambs. Dwight D. Eisenhower responded because he was livid at Governor Orval Faubus’ antics in allowing the segregationist mob to overrun Central High School and royally

⁴⁶³ Report on Minnijean Brown, in Bates Papers, Reel 6 AP93-1382 Restricted, WHS, Madison.

⁴⁶⁴ LaNier, *A Mighty Long Way*, 111; Bates, *The Long Shadow of Little Rock*, 132.

embarrassed the President of the United States. He had grossly misunderstood the Arkansas governor's political desperation, and he wrongly believed that Faubus would do his part to carry out Davies' mandate and the will of the Supreme Court.⁴⁶⁵ On September 24, President Eisenhower deployed Major General Edwin A. Walker and the 101st Airborne Division to Little Rock to force Governor Faubus to comply with the integration ruling. No matter his personal disdain for integration or his subconscious intersectional discrimination that affected black women and girls, Eisenhower's unyielding demand for respect of the Constitution and rule of law (and his own office) meant that he extended the umbrella of protection to black Southerners. Specifically, black women and girls stood under that umbrella.

Sharing the privileges of American citizenship and white womanhood looked like oppression and occupation to those who had always been able to monopolize both. Major General Walker's announcement to the students, faculty and staff at a September 25 assembly that he was "happy to be [at Central High School]" struck white women teachers as "such a brutal thing."⁴⁶⁶ Hysterically, Mothers' League members claimed their daughters were "being endangered by federal troops" while Governor Faubus strummed states' rights melodies by insisting that the "naked force of the Federal Government is here apparent in these unsheathed bayonets in the backs of [white] schoolgirls."⁴⁶⁷ For the second time in less than a century, the rights of black Southerners and black femininity were protected by federal decree in "occupied

⁴⁶⁵ Godfrey, "Bayonets, Brainwashing, and Bathrooms," 42-43; Lewis, *Race, Politics, and Memory*, xix.

⁴⁶⁶ Statement of Mrs. James E. (Lovie) Griffin to Sergeants Chandler, Clayton and Gwyn of the Arkansas State Police, in Faubus Papers, MS F271 301, Box 496, File 11, Special Collections, Fayetteville.

⁴⁶⁷ *Arkansas Democrat*, September 28, 1957; *Arkansas Gazette*, September 28, 1957; *Time*, October 7, 1957, 24-25. The emphasis within the quotations is my own.

Little Rock,” a parallel of the Reconstruction South that dovetailed into violent Lost Cause mythologizing that segregationists had already been employing since the summer.⁴⁶⁸

Soldiers in the hallways of Central High School underscored how seriously President Eisenhower respected the judicial branch of the federal government and how insulted he was personally by Faubus’ actions. The company also made a fact of black humanity instead of a theoretical suggestion to be arbitrarily determined. Moreover, the culture of military courtesy and decorum offered the pedestal to black femininity. Black teenage girls became “ma’am” to white soldiers—some of whom were no more than teenage boys themselves.⁴⁶⁹ ‘Ma’am’ as a term of respect had been the exclusive province of white women in the South since the solidification of African and African-descent slavery as an inherited, matrilineal condition. ‘Ma’am’ signified a waited-upon white woman, or whose racial status offered her the possibility of being waited on upon by black bodies. Middle-class black ladies had led the public and private campaign to integrate Little Rock’s public schools; their entrance into Central High School proved their success. The personal attitudes and mores of individual soldiers about their assignment did not matter. All that counted was that blackness had been validated by law and now by custom. Black teenage girls who represented the “best-reared of their group” enjoyed

⁴⁶⁸ Cope, ““A Thorn in the Side’?” 190. Arkansas seceded from the Union in May 1861 and remained in Confederate control until the summer of 1863. That year, Union General Ulysses S. Grant captured Vicksburg, Mississippi and control of the Mississippi River, thereby allowing Union General Frederick Steele to enter eastern Arkansas and repel Confederate forces in Little Rock in September 1863. The city remained occupied by Union troops and federal-instituted government until 1874. See Carl H. Moneyhon, *The Impact of the Civil War and Reconstruction in Arkansas: Persistence in the Midst of Ruin* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1994).

⁴⁶⁹ Margolick, *Elizabeth and Hazel*, 106-107; Interview with (ret.) Chief Warrant Officer Edward Glover (May 18, 2009). Interview conducted by Misti Nicole Harper, at Camp Joseph T. Robinson, North Little Rock, Arkansas.

the conjectural protection of law and literal safety guaranteed by white men who addressed them by the noun used to identify ladies.⁴⁷⁰

Even more shattering to white conceptions of feminine privilege than the dignity and respect afforded to black womanhood, was the distinct impression that the new black girls believed they were entitled to that decorum. Moreover, they acted as though they belonged at Central High School. Their presence, heralded academic excellence and talents of all of the nine galled segregationists inside and out of the school, but perhaps black confidence stunned the most. None of the young ladies selected to attend Central High School had ever had any reason to demure or cower around children their own age. Upbringing in their communities pivoted on expectations and values that sometimes mirrored those of suburban white America. Witty Elizabeth Eckford longed to be a lawyer. Elfin and sunny Thelma Mothershed wanted to teach elementary school. Melba Pattillo dreamed of being a performer. Enamored of the space race in mid-century America, the pampered and ambitious Gloria Ray imagined a career as an atomic scientist. Athletic, bright Carlotta Walls also showed excellent aptitude for science and mathematics. Finally, gregarious Minnijean Brown loved literature. She, in particular, exuded confidence. While Ernest Green, Terrence Roberts, and Jefferson Thomas endured harassment and abuse at the hands of white students, and neglect or indifference from most of the school's white faculty and staff, retaliation to the presence of the Little Rock Nine centered the girls. Ratios played an obvious factor—twice as many girls had been selected for integration. Black and white officials agreed on this selection as traditional gender conventions held (and still hold)

⁴⁷⁰ Letter to William "Bill" Paisley, Huckaby Papers, Box 1, Series 1, Folder 3, Special Collections, Fayetteville.

that girls and women by nature are less aggressive or volatile than boys and men. However, this was (and is) demonstrably false.

Middle-class black women and girls carved the social and political paths, and stepped into the public square that challenge Jim Crow education in Little Rock; white women and girls retaliated. The battle within Central High School was not merely for black students to break racial barriers. Rather, the fight was that black girls rebuked that segregation existed to protect white supremacy by safeguarding ‘fragile’ white femininity. Further, the middle-class status of those girls exposed that they were hardly inferior to working-class whiteness. More than most events or incidents that had occurred since the beginning of the desegregation efforts in Little Rock in 1956, how the six girls navigated daily life at Central High School spotlights that intersectionality drove reactions to the process, and then to the fact of integrated schools. Self-assured black femininity rooted in the politics of middle-class respectability, protected by law and custom, and that deferred to no one—least of all, to whiteness—sparked a retaliation campaign led by working-class white girls and women that lasted the rest of the year.

As early as October 2, Minnijean Brown and Melba Pattillo stated they were attacked in the hallway as they transitioned between morning classes. Despite the presence of soldiers in the hallways, the volume of students and flurry of activity often meant that bullying and harassment went undetected. In this instance, Minnijean and Melba reported to Vice-Principal Elizabeth Huckaby that they had been insulted and hit by white girls. The incident rattled them so badly they wanted to call Daisy Bates but decided not to after speaking with the girls’ vice-principal.⁴⁷¹ Thus began daily patterns of the six girls reporting abuse to Huckaby and occasionally to

⁴⁷¹ Report from Melba Pattillo to Elizabeth Huckaby; Report on Minnijean Brown, pg. 2, in Bates Papers, Reel 6 AP93-1382 Restricted, WHS, Madison.

Principal Jess Matthews. When questioned as to who the ringleaders of the harassment campaign were, soldiers affirmed that a “clique of girls...mainly the children of Mothers’ League parents were dedicated to...organized persecution...”⁴⁷² Encouraged by the group, white teenage girls insulted the soldiers charged with protecting the black students, and focused intimidation and abuse on the six middle-class black girls who exhibited herculean endurance as working-class white girls abandoned all pretense of behaving ladylike and making any claim to caste superiority. Minnijean Brown bristled as white girls in the hallways and in classes hissed “black bitch” at her.⁴⁷³ On several occasions, she reported incidents to teachers, to mixed response. Lovie Griffin, a chemistry teacher, dismissed every complaint asserted by Minnijean, and later insisted to the state police that she believed “Minnijean Brown [was] just [at Central High School] to cause trouble. She seem[ed] to *want to be noticed*.”⁴⁷⁴

Griffin’s report is especially telling of faculty and staff attitudes toward integration, and the presence of a black female body in the class of an unsympathetic white woman. Within the report, the chemistry teacher appeared to disregard Minnijean’s complaints because of the volume of them, as well as because of the teenaged girl’s personality. Tall, outgoing, expressive and spirited, Minnijean quite naturally drew people’s attention. In the years since 1957, white women who were students at Central High School remember Minnijean specifically as the single black student who did not “stay in her place” and who “had an attitude...a haughty, snotty, look-down-your-nose-at me attitude.” They recall her height and her size, noting Minnijean was a

⁴⁷² Graeme Cope, “‘Marginal Youngsters’ and ‘Hoodlums of Both Sexes’? Student Segregationists during the Little Rock School Crisis,” *The Arkansas Historical Quarterly* Vol. 63, No. 4 (Winter 2004), 40-42; Cope, “‘A Thorn in the Side?’” 185.

⁴⁷³ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁴ Statement of Mrs. James E. (Lovie) Griffin, in Faubus Papers, Special Collections, Fayetteville. The emphasis within the quote is my own.

“big girl,” contrasted with themselves at that age, and also with the other five black girls who are described across sources as physically small or short, or both.⁴⁷⁵ Her physical appearance clearly intimidated her white classmates; her innate personality also meant that Minnijean Brown was unlikely to accept abuse if she could prevent it. She talked back and eventually physically retaliated against the abuse aimed at her. Lovie Griffin’s report lambasted Brown’s poor attendance record to her class and her average semester grades, but her comments reveal that she thought Minnijean’s character influenced her performance as much as her aptitude. Griffin commended one teacher who “had enough starch to give Minni Jean [*sic*] Brown the grades she deserved.” She also recounted an incident where a white girl was crying in the hall, “but no member of the Army personnel seemed to be interested enough to ask why the white girl was crying.”⁴⁷⁶ Taken together, it is fair to argue that teenaged Minnijean Brown’s entire existence threatened an adult white woman who could not fathom that she had to teach black students at all—much less a girl who believed she was entitled to a modicum of fair treatment within Griffin’s classroom. The chemistry teacher’s reactions also showcase the level of projection that threatened white women and girls tried to force onto Minnijean and each of the black girls. Without considering how the barrage of harassment may have affected their personalities, their physical ability to attend or participate at school, and white women’s roles in that fact, Griffin could pretend the faults were Minnijean’s. Eschewing her own role in this particular student’s harassment, Griffin and the women who shared her prejudices claimed the black girls simply did

⁴⁷⁵ Beth Roy, *Bitters in the Honey: Tales of Hope, Disappointment across Divides of Race and Time* (Fayetteville, Arkansas: The University of Arkansas Press, 1999), 176-178.

⁴⁷⁶ *Ibid*, pg. 4.

not belong at the school, despite a litany of evidence that the majority of the fault lay with white “near-delinquents.”⁴⁷⁷

Of course, Minnijean was not a lone target. As the international symbol of the Central High School movement and the first girl attacked by massive resistance, Elizabeth Eckford suffered a disproportionate share of working-class white rage. In one heartbreaking report, Elizabeth admitted to Vice-Principal Huckaby that she had retaliated and kicked a white girl who had first kicked her. When Huckaby asked Elizabeth to refrain from retaliation so that the incidents were “attacks, not scuffles,” Elizabeth stated that the kicking “happened all the time.”⁴⁷⁸ In separate incidents, Elizabeth’s gym shoes were destroyed; her dress squirted with ink; she was punched and shoved by white girls in the hallway who were sometimes punished if they were caught by soldiers. In one such incident, Darlene Holloway described Elizabeth by a racial slur to Vice-Principal Huckaby as she explained that she had shoved Eckford because she was “in my way!”⁴⁷⁹ Sixteen-year-old Holloway’s crudeness to an adult woman reveals two interesting points. First, Holloway’s insistence that she could force a black body out of her way when that body inconvenienced her own is classical white supremacist ideology that Holloway either believed Huckaby would understand, or she did not care about the consequences of her actions. As Elizabeth Huckaby earned admiration from some of the black girls for her fairness, and the ire of segregationists for the same reason, it is most likely that Holloway did not care what Huckaby thought or planned to do about her violence toward Eckford. That point highlights the important difference between Darlene Holloway and Elizabeth Eckford. In all but

⁴⁷⁷ Letter to William “Bill” Paisley, Huckaby Papers, Box 1, Series 1, Folder 3, Special Collections, Fayetteville.

⁴⁷⁸ Report from Elizabeth Eckford to Elizabeth Huckaby, in Bates Papers, Reel 6 AP93-1382 Restricted, WHS, Madison.

⁴⁷⁹ Margolick, *Elizabeth and Hazel*, 129.

the wildest situations, Eckford's upbringing precluded her from interacting with an adult in as careless and artless a manner as Holloway had with Huckaby. It is fair to argue that Holloway's attitude smacked of 'common', low-class behavior, especially when juxtaposed to the middle-class, well-heeled Eckford. One reason that working-class women feared integration was a supposed lowering of social standards, yet between Eckford and Holloway there was no question as to who was superior. Whether Holloway recognized that is debatable. What is certain is that in the overall fight to integrate Central High School, working-class white women as a group absolutely recognized what middle-class black womanhood represented, and it terrified them.

Classrooms; the cafeteria; hallways; the auditorium; the gymnasium; and bathrooms became battlegrounds between who claimed the pedestal of protected femininity. Bathrooms in particular served this purpose. As places that male soldiers could not breach to protect black girls from harm, showers, toilets and dressing spaces presented dangerous obstacles to navigate. Here Melba Pattillo Beals recalled finding herself trapped in a stall while white girls screamed that they would "burn her alive!" She emerged but not before receiving minor burns from flaming toilet paper that the girls flung over the top of the stall.⁴⁸⁰ More often, however, white girls tried to humiliate black girls by refusing to participate in gym classes so that they avoided personal spaces like locker rooms and bathrooms altogether. One tenth-grade girl, Frankie Greggs, candidly told state police that white girls brought notes from their parents to excuse them from gym and that white girls stopped using the restrooms at school. Gregg also volunteered at the beginning of the year, "[white girls] tried to be as friendly as possible...until a group of girls overheard Minnie Jean Brown say to Elizabeth Eckford one day "Look how

⁴⁸⁰ Beals, *Warriors Don't Cry*, 118-120.

friendly these stupid white kids are, they treat us like superiors” and that because of this, white girls would not “be satisfied until they’re back to their own schools where they belong.”⁴⁸¹

The dubiousness of Gregg’s claims notwithstanding, it is clear how severely the six black girls who entered Central High School threatened whiteness and white womanhood, particularly working-class white femininity that existed on the margins of the upper caste. Middle-class black womanhood, personified in girls like Minnijean Brown and Elizabeth Eckford, or any of the six, underscored what the Frankie Greggs and Darlene Holloways of Central High School were definitely not. Their antics inside the school only provided short-term satisfaction, as the six black girls continued to attend school. Mass publicity stunts to attract sympathy also failed. In October, under the direction of the Mothers’ League President Margaret Jackson, working-class white girls attempted to organize and stage a walk-out of Central High School in protest. A *New York Times* reporter dispatched to follow the integration process as it unfolded, covered that event. An unidentified white girl admitted that she expected more than 100 participants, but less than seventy left school. When she realized only the most ardent segregationists were outside, the girl huffed that she was “so ashamed” of her classmates that she “could scream.” The incident only led to the suspension of those students, as dictated by Principal Jess Matthews.⁴⁸²

This harassment directed continued throughout the year. The simple presence of six black teenage girls elicited vengeful resentment from working-class white girls and women that hinged on race, but also revealed how threatening white femininity found black talent, belonging, and joy. Segregationist girls constantly challenged the right of Carlotta, Elizabeth, Gloria,

⁴⁸¹ Frankie Gregg to Sergeants Bob Ward and Jim Rowell, Arkansas State Police, February 6, 1958, in Faubus Papers, MS F271 301, Box 496, File 11, Special Collections, Fayetteville.

⁴⁸² Cope, ““A Thorn in the Side’?” 185-187; Special Bulletin to Teachers Only re. “Barred from Class-Suspended”, in Bates Papers, Reel 6 AP93-1382 Restricted, WHS, Madison.

Melba, Minnijean, and Thelma to even claim affiliation with Central High School. Vice-Principal Elizabeth Huckaby recalled that white girls resented seeing the black girls wear school colors.⁴⁸³ Even pride and school spirit were battlegrounds, as were all events outside of classrooms. Despite the litany of social restrictions placed on all nine of the black students attending Central High School, Minnijean Brown had been permitted to sing in the Glee Club Christmas program. As soon as that fact became common knowledge, Margaret Jackson railed against Principal Jess Matthews and the “negro dominated school administration” for the “disgraceful betrayal” of white parents to make black families adhere to the agreed-upon parameters (whiteness) for extracurricular participation.⁴⁸⁴ Matthews endured with white mothers’ rage and black mothers’ indignation. Imogene Brown met with the principal to discuss her daughter’s appalling treatment, where she learned Minnijean was cut from the Christmas program because of the racial tensions stirred in part by Jackson. Black and white femininity battled across administrators’ desks and in the press. In December, Jackson also dubiously advertised that the school administration banned the song “White Christmas” from its holiday program because the song “wounded the ‘tender sensibilities’ of an unspecified black girl.” In reality, school officials omitted the song because white girls bastardized the lyrics to sing “I’m dreaming of a white Central.”⁴⁸⁵

Tension and hostility within the school sometimes made it understandably impossible for the black teenage girls who were steeped in respectability standards and middle-class social mores to keep from ‘stooping’ to the white students’ level. Just one day before Christmas

⁴⁸³ Huckaby, *Crisis at Central High*, 84-87

⁴⁸⁴ Ibid, 93-94.

⁴⁸⁵ Ibid, 181-82; Bates, *The Long Shadow of Little Rock*, 115; Blossom, *It Has Happened Here*, 41-43; Beals, *Warriors Don’t Cry*, 115.

vacation, December 17, the school board suspended Minnijean for what is now known as the “chili incident.”⁴⁸⁶ Lunch time in the Central High School cafeteria was one more place where the black students were insulted, jeered, pelted with spitballs and because of the location, frequently scalded with hot food. It also became a place of black feminine retaliation. As two eleventh-grade white boys repeatedly blocked Minnijean’s path to a table, Melba Pattillo Beals remembered that her friend looked “trapped and desperate...and very fast running out of patience.”⁴⁸⁷ When Minnijean dumped her lunch tray on the heads of Dent Gitchel and Rob Pittard, white students cheered because they realized that even though she was clearly provoked, she would be suspended. Yet, Beals also watched as “*our people* who were serving food behind the counter began to applaud.”⁴⁸⁸ For three months, every faculty and staff member of Central High School had witnessed the incessant, non-stop harassment of the nine black students, and the particular attention that the girls incurred. Minnijean’s retaliation struck a blow for her own self-respect as a black girl and for her friends. The black employees who kept Central High School fed, clean, and running, but who were virtually invisible to white people inside the building, also celebrated her spunk and her refusal to be disrespected by whiteness.

Minnijean’s defiance in service of her personal self-respect, and her protection of black middle-class femininity, contrasts interestingly to Sammie Dean Parker’s antics inside of Central High School. A “well-heeled” white girl who served as secretary for the student council and who was a vivacious leader in school, Parker had used her considerable influence over other white students to harass and intimidate black students all year.⁴⁸⁹ After Minnijean’s suspension,

⁴⁸⁶ Bates, *The Long Shadow of Little Rock*, 118-120; Gordy, *Finding the Lost Year*, xxvi; Jacoway, *Turn Away Thy Son*, 226; Roy, *Bitters in the Honey*, 177-178.

⁴⁸⁷ Beals, *Warriors Don’t Cry*, 219.

⁴⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁸⁹ Murphy, *Breaking the Silence*, 53-54; Roy, *Bitters in the Honey*, 169.

Parker enlisted other girls to pass out cards emblazoned with “One Down, Eight to Go.”⁴⁹⁰ Ironically, this stunt earned her own suspension from Principal Matthews and Vice-Principal Huckaby. Enraged, Mrs. Parker and Sammie Dean met with Superintendent Virgil Blossom, Matthews and Huckaby on February 26. Throughout the meeting, Mrs. Parker allowed Sammie Dean to denounce the principals, especially Huckaby, as personally vindictive toward her for harassing her black classmates. Sixteen-year-old Sammie Dean spoke over adults and singled out an adult woman of considerable authority for specific disrespect. Like Darlene Holloway, Sammie Dean Parker clearly felt entitled and empowered by segregationist women to forgo the qualities imbued in the myth of the white Southern lady, for the sake of protecting her claims to exactly that pedestal. Any retaliation from the black teenage girls was aimed specifically at other children—never at adults, even when white adults undoubtedly frustrated them. Further and for a score of reasons that include the crudity of the behavior, it is nearly unimaginable that Minnijean Brown or her mother Imogene, would ever have physically attacked a school official, especially a ‘well-heeled’ white woman, as Elizabeth Huckaby was. Yet, that is exactly what the Parker women did to her in that meeting. As the vice-principal stood to leave the meeting, Sammie Dean seized Huckaby’s umbrella as her mother grabbed the glasses from Huckaby’s face and shouted, “I am going to hit you for what you did to my daughter!”⁴⁹¹ As he tried to defend the vice-principal from the attack, Jess Matthews revealed the roiling gender and class dynamics unfurling in front of him as he shouted at the Parker women, “Here, you can’t hit a lady!”⁴⁹²

⁴⁹⁰ Ibid, 177-78.

⁴⁹¹ “Hits Central High Official, White Girl Expelled,” *Jet*, March 20, 1958, 44; Jacoway, *Turn Away Thy Son*, 239.

⁴⁹² Ibid.

Though no black women or girls were present for that unseemly exchange, they are also represented in Matthews' spoken assessment of who did or did not qualify as a 'lady.' Segregationist women hinged their rejection of integration on Christian precept that tried to mask their insecurity of the class status they occupied within whiteness. They also insisted that integration would mean corrupted morality, yet here brawled no one but white women, one of whom screamed that she knew of more than "200 women who would pay my fine if I hit [Huckaby]!"⁴⁹³ The distinctions between who was recognized as a Southern lady, who purported to be one, and who actually embodied the qualities therein are jarring in this episode. Without a single black girl or woman present in that space, black girls and women used the constructs of black middle-class femininity to prove they deserved to claim the pedestal and protection of Southern womanhood while also undermining the entire ideology of white supremacy.

⁴⁹³ Ibid.

Afterward

By the time senior Ernest Green walked across the football field of Central High School as the institution's first black graduate in May 1958, it appeared that the hard-fought integration effort was won. What Daisy Bates, attorneys, the NAACP offices, black and white Little Rock could not have anticipated was the extent of Governor Orval Faubus' political cravenness. To reaffirm his image as an unyielding segregationist and secured his re-election to the state's highest office, Faubus elected to close Little Rock's public schools for the following school year. The remaining seven students who integrated Central High School either moved away from the city or took correspondence courses, as did their white counterparts for school districts across the capital. Little Rock's schools re-opened in autumn 1959, and have attempted ever since to recover from the Central High School crisis and subsequent "Lost Year" that have left a legacy of issues that continue to swirl around education in Pulaski County. In the sixty years since 1957, *de jure* segregation in Little Rock's public schools has been declared legally dead. Yet, the battle to *de facto* integrate continues as the capital struggles against perpetual white flight into the western edges of the city; against the allocation of funds that favor majority-white schools; against constant fights over representation on the Little Rock School Board; against white support for charter schools that strip money from majority-black public schools; against the on-going fight between blackness and whiteness, and the right of the former to claim the same privileges and opportunities of the latter.⁴⁹⁴

⁴⁹⁴ Gordy, *Finding the Lost Year*, 88; William Henry Chafe, *The Unfinished Journey: America since World War II*, 5th Edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 151-52; Roy Reed, "Little Rock a Symbol Again: The Resegregation of Schools," *The New York Times*, March 23, 1985 <http://www.nytimes.com/1985/03/23/us/little-rock-a-symbol-again-the-resegregation-of-schools.html?pagewanted=all> [accessed May 30, 2107]; Ronald Smothers, "At Little Rock, 30 Years Later: Starting Over," *The New York Times*, September 27, 1987 <http://www.nytimes.com/1987/09/27/us/at-little-rock-30-years-later-starting->

Race drives the history of integration in Little Rock and it is not difficult to understand why color is the overarching theme in this particular story. However, this research has argued that a more complicated, intersectional narrative answers the question of what spurred whitelash and massive resistance in the capital. Seven girls, who eventually became six, were initially selected to attend Central High School. The world in which they grew up were populated by women who represented the epitome of black respectability, middle-class values and virtuous femininity. Indeed, Daisy Lee Gaston Bates, the woman who led them to Central High School, repainted herself into a portrait of a middle-class, respectable black lady. By the standards and legacy of how black Americans dictated class structures, these women represented pillars of society as ladies who deserved protection and privilege in an era where whiteness claimed that term and that concept.

over.html?pagewanted=all [accessed May 17, 2017]; Shea Stewart, "What White Flight?: Little Rock Public Schools Remain More Diverse than in Other Southern Cities," *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette*, September 18, 2007 <http://www.arkansasonline.com/news/2007/sep/18/what-white-flight/> [accessed May 30, 2017]; Max Brantley, "Whites Now Minority in Little Rock," *Arkansas Times*, February 11, 2011 <https://www.arktimes.com/ArkansasBlog/archives/2011/02/11/census-whites-now-minority-in-lr> [accessed May 30, 2017]; Dexter Mullin, "Desegregation Funding Dries Up in Little Rock, but Problems Remain," *Al-Jazeera America* <http://america.aljazeera.com/articles/2014/2/23/desegregation-fundingdriesupinlittlerockbutproblemsremain.html> [accessed May 30, 2017]; John Kirk and Jess Porter, "The Roots of Little Rock's Segregated Neighborhoods," *Arkansas Times*, July 10, 2014 <https://www.arktimes.com/arkansas/the-roots-of-little-rocks-segregated-neighborhoods/Content?oid=3383298> [accessed May 30, 2017]; Alana Semules, "How Segregation Has Persisted in Little Rock," *The Atlantic*, April 26, 2016 <https://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2016/04/segregation-persists-little-rock/479538/> [accessed May 30, 2017]. The cited articles do not represent even a fraction of the studies and commentary on the ongoing social and legal issues that surround Little Rock and desegregation, but together, these offer a sampling of how Little Rock has changed, stagnated or regressed. There is also an emerging body of work that discusses the rise and meaning of private schools in the South in the wake of *Brown v. Board*, and I think this research will grow to include charter schools. Arkansas, and the preponderance of Walton money that is supporting the burgeoning charter school movement in this state, will yield interesting work.

While this research is constructed around the saga of Little Rock, the crisis at Central High School merely provides the stage for my broader contention that middle-class black femininity and respectability politics engendered white reactionary violence across the nation, throughout the civil rights era and has not stopped. A wealth of recent research argues that black femininity and intersectionalism have continued to challenge white conceptions of class structures and womanhood. The constructions through which middle-class black femininity presented itself in Little Rock in 1957, as a standard equal to whiteness that demanded the same pedestal but would not be judged by whiteness, is the springboard I will use to showcase how black womanhood, class politics, and intersectionality is the comprehensive lens through which we can understand the shaping and reshaping American social politics through the present political climate.

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