

WHITE FLIGHT



ATLANTA AND THE MAKING
OF MODERN CONSERVATISM

POLITICS AND SOCIETY IN TWENTIETH-CENTURY AMERICA

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OF MODERN CONSERVATISM

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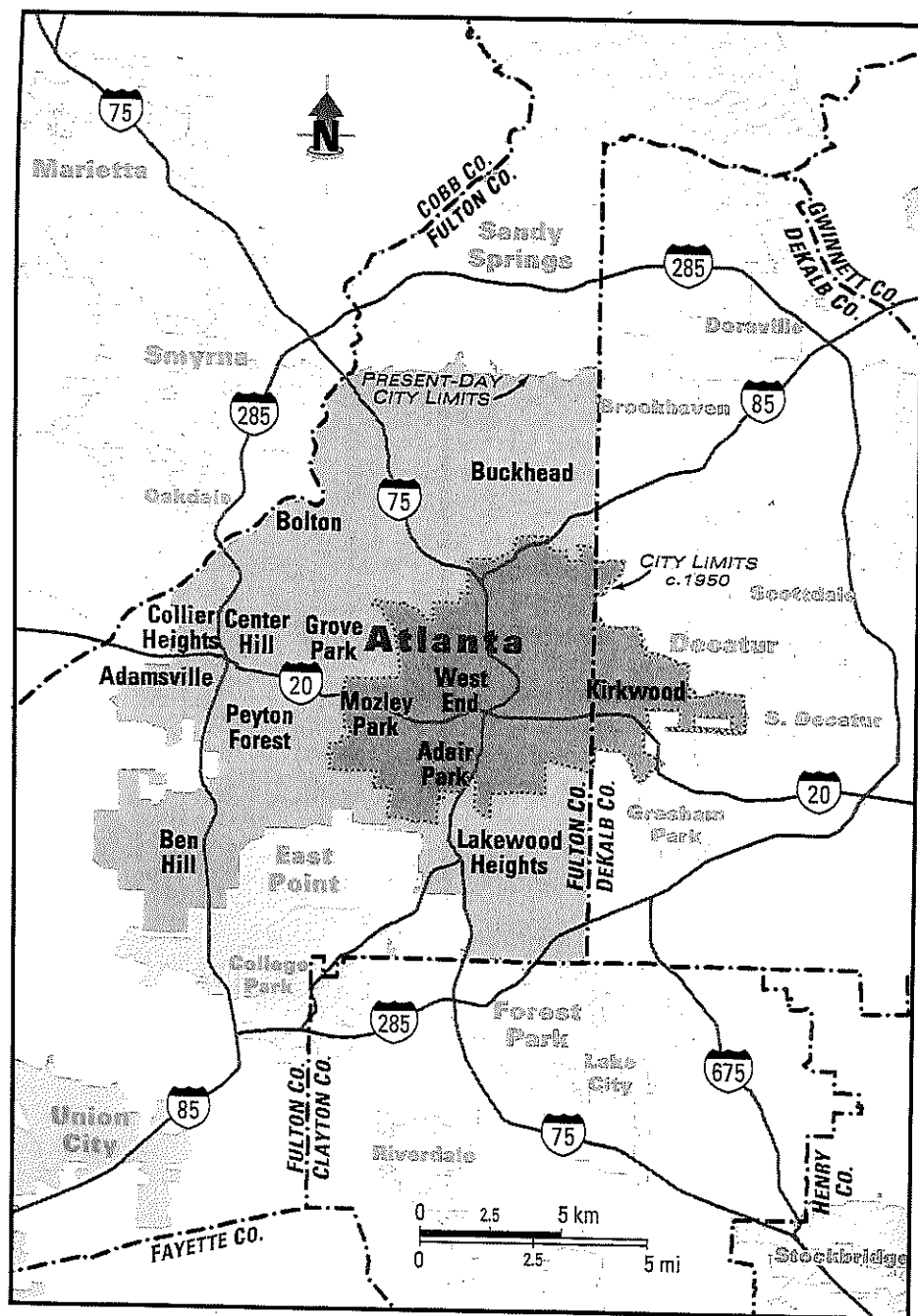
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for Lindsay



Introduction

IN THE STORIES spun by its supporters, Atlanta had accomplished the unthinkable. Their city was moving forward, they boasted, not just in its bank accounts and business ledgers, but in the ways the races were learning to live and even thrive together. While the rest of the South spent the postwar decades resisting desegregation with a defiant and often ugly program of "massive resistance," Atlanta faced the challenges of the civil rights era with maturity and moderation. During these decades, the city had emerged as a shining example for the New South, a place where economic progress and racial progressivism went hand in hand. This was, to be sure, not an empty boast. By the end of the 1950s these supporters could point with pride to a litany of sites that the city had desegregated, from public spaces like the buses, airport, libraries, and golf courses to countless private neighborhoods in between. When Atlanta successfully desegregated its public schools in 1961, even national observers paused to marvel at all the city had accomplished. The city found countless admirers across the country, from the press to the president of the United States, but it was ultimately its own Mayor William Hartsfield who coined the lasting motto. "Atlanta," he bragged to anyone in earshot, "is the City Too Busy to Hate."¹

Just a year later, this image came crashing down. The trouble surfaced in an unlikely place, a quiet, middle-class subdivision of brick ranch houses and loblolly pines called Peyton Forest. And the trouble started in an unlikely way, as city construction crews built a pair of roadblocks on Peyton and Harlan Roads. The barriers seemed to have no significance. They were simply wooden beams which had been painted black and white, bolted to steel I-beams, and sunk into the pavement. But their significance lay in their location. As all Atlantans understood, the roadblocks stood at the precise fault line between black and white sections of the city. Over the previous two decades, black Atlantans had escaped the overcrowded inner city and purchased more and more homes in neighborhoods to the west; during the same period, white Atlantans to the south had grown increasingly alarmed as those areas "went colored." The roadblocks were meant to keep these two communities apart and at peace, but they had the opposite effect. Indeed, the barricades immediately attracted intense national and even international attention. Civil rights activists surrounded the racial "buffer zone" with picket lines, while wire photos

1.1 Overview map of Atlanta

carried the images across the globe, sparking an unprecedented public relations nightmare. "We Want No Warsaw Ghetto," read one picket. Another denounced "Atlanta's Image: A Berlin Wall." Civil rights organizations announced they would launch a boycott against area merchants unless the barriers were removed, and two lawsuits were immediately filed in local courts. Mayor Ivan Allen Jr., who had recently replaced Hartsfield in office, had expected some backlash but was stunned by its intensity. From retirement, his predecessor offered a bit of belated advice: "Never make a mistake they can take a picture of."²

As the national press denounced the "Atlanta Wall," local whites embraced the roadblocks as their salvation. The day after the crews sealed off their streets, residents wrapped the barricades in Christmas paper and ribbon; beneath the words "Road Closed," someone added, "Thank the Lord!" Meanwhile, a powerful organization of white homeowners, the Southwest Citizens Association, sought to explain white residents' perspective. President Virgil Copeland, a Lockheed employee, told reporters that the barricades were simply a response to the "vicious, block-busting tactics being used by Negro realtors." Carlton Owens, an engineer at Atlantic Steel and a member of Southwest Citizens' board of directors, noted that several residents had said they were going to "sell and get out" if something concrete were not done "to stabilize the situation." "The barricades were erected for that purpose," Copeland added, "and we think they will do it. All we want to do is to keep our homes." Barbara Ryckley, an officer with Southwest Citizens, pointed out that not just Peyton Forest but all of white Atlanta was "endangered" by black expansion. "If the whites could just win once," she explained, "they would have some hope for holding out. I think the whole city of Atlanta is at stake. You realize that every time Negroes replace whites about eighty-five percent of the whites move out of the city?"³

As much as they embraced the "Peyton Wall," these whites worried it would not be enough. Two weeks later, their fears came true. Sources reported that blacks were closing deals on three homes on Lynhurst Drive, immediately west of the Peyton Forest neighborhood. According to alarmist press coverage, the sales represented a deliberate attempt to break through the roadblocks—a "flank attack" on the all-white neighborhood. "If those barricades hadn't been put up," an unnamed "Negro leader" was quoted as saying, "I don't think Lynhurst would have been bothered." As white residents expressed outrage, black real-estate agents claimed the story had been concocted by Southwest Citizens. Soon, this war of words escalated into a pitched battle. Late one Friday night in February, "parties unknown" descended on the Harlan Road barricade, pulled the I-beams out of the ground, sawed the timbers in half, and tossed the scraps into a nearby creek. The next morning, stunned residents grabbed saws and hand tools, chopped down nearby brush and trees.

dragged the debris into the street and added a few dozen heavy stones for good measure. That night, the raiders returned and set fire to the new barricade. Once firefighters subdued the blaze, Mayor Allen announced that the city would rebuild the barricades, deploring the fact that "any group has seen fit to take the law into their own hands." Early Monday morning, construction crews sunk new beams into the scorched asphalt, attaching steel rails this time to prevent further fires. Just to make sure, small groups of robed Klansmen stood guard at the barricades on Monday and Tuesday night. Patrolling the street, they held aloft signs: "Whites Have Rights, Too."⁴

In spite of the movement to insure its permanence, the "Peyton Wall" was short-lived. Local courts quickly ruled against the roadblocks and the mayor, relieved to find a way out of the public relations nightmare, had them immediately removed. But as the barricades were destroyed, so was whites' confidence in the neighborhood. In less than a month, most homes in Peyton Forest—including that of Virgil Copeland, the head of the homeowners' resistance movement—were listed for sale with black real-estate agents. "When the barricades came down, everything collapsed," he told a reporter. "It's all over out there for us." Indeed, by the end of July 1963 all but fifteen white families had sold their homes to black buyers and abandoned the neighborhood. They were not simply fleeing Peyton Forest, Copeland pointed out, but the city itself. "We are trying to find some area outside the city limits where we can buy homes and get away from the problem" of desegregation, he noted. "Everybody I know is definitely leaving the city of Atlanta."⁵

The "Peyton Wall" incident, as famous as it was fleeting, was only the most public eruption of the much larger phenomenon of white flight. That year alone, the beleaguered mayor noted, City Hall had been confronted with 52 separate cases of "racial transition," incidents in which whites fled from neighborhoods as blacks bought homes there. And although the information never appeared in Atlanta's positive press coverage, a steady stream of white flight had in fact been underway for nearly a decade. During the five years before the 1962 Peyton Forest panic, for instance, nearly 30,000 whites had abandoned the city. Afterward, the numbers only grew larger. In 1960 the total white population of Atlanta stood at barely more than 300,000. Over the course of that decade, roughly 60,000 whites fled from Atlanta. During the 1970s, another 100,000 would leave as well. "The City Too Busy to Hate," the skeptics noted, had become "The City Too Busy *Moving* to Hate."⁶

This book explores the causes and course of white flight, with Atlanta serving as its vantage point. Although it represented one of the largest, most significant, and most transformative social movements in postwar America, white flight has never been studied in depth or detail. Indeed,

the scant attention it has received has only been as a causal factor for other concerns, such as the decline of central cities and the rise of suburbia. This study, however, seeks to explore not simply the effects of white flight, but the experience. While many have assumed that white flight was little more than a literal movement of the white population, this book argues that it represented a much more important transformation in the political ideology of those involved. Because of their confrontation with the civil rights movement, white southern conservatives were forced to abandon their traditional, populist, and often starkly racist demagoguery and instead craft a new conservatism predicated on a language of rights, freedoms, and individualism. This modern conservatism proved to be both subtler and stronger than the politics that preceded it and helped southern conservatives dominate the Republican Party and, through it, national politics as well. White flight, in the end, was more than a physical relocation. It was a political revolution.

In order to understand white flight with precision, we first need to understand the whites who were involved. As a starting point, therefore, this study seeks to reconstruct the world of segregationists, without relying on familiar stereotypes. In the traditional narrative, white resistance to desegregation has generally been framed as yet another southern lost cause. In the wake of the Supreme Court's ruling against desegregation in *Brown*, this story goes, southern politicians on the national scene denounced the decision in no uncertain terms, while their counterparts in state politics passed a wide array of legislation to prevent desegregation at home. This campaign of political resistance was reinforced on a second front, as segregationist organizations employed extralegal and illegal methods to enforce conformity among whites and inspire fear among blacks. At the forefront of this movement, the powerful White Citizens' Councils used economic reprisals to intimidate those who dared to challenge the racial status quo. Although the Councils did not advocate violence, their endorsement of resistance encouraged cruder acts of intimidation and terrorism. The Ku Klux Klan soon rode again in the South, and a wave of murder, assault, and arson followed in its wake. For a time, these assorted groups succeeded in their campaign against desegregation. But in the end, the determined activism of the civil rights movement and, in time, the intervention of the federal government overcame the resistance of these die-hard segregationists. By the mid-1960s, with black children enrolled in once-white schools across the South and major pieces of civil rights legislation passed at the national level, this narrative concludes, the forces of massive resistance had been soundly defeated.⁷ Recent revisions to this traditional narrative have only concluded that massive resistance was perhaps even more of a failure than originally thought. According to this argument, segregationist brutality and lawlessness only

elicited the nation's sympathies for the civil rights movement and inspired the intervention of the federal government. Massive resistance not only failed to save segregation, this theory holds, but actually helped speed its demise.⁸

As compelling as this traditional interpretation of massive resistance has been, it suffers from a focus that stresses the words and deeds of top-level politicians over the lived realities of everyday whites. This approach dates back more than three decades, when historian Numan Bartley firmly entrenched such a top-down political perspective in his seminal study of massive resistance.⁹ The studies that followed in his wake have largely fleshed out the original framework, detailing the different components of white political resistance. Some scholars have offered close studies of the careers of segregationist politicians,¹⁰ while others have chronicled the growth of the white supremacist organizations that acted as their unofficial allies.¹¹ Still others have conducted thorough studies of the southern communities that served as the central stages in this political drama.¹² Ironically, because of their reliance on this top-down political perspective, such studies have actually missed some of the most important political changes that occurred at the grass roots during these years. At the top levels of southern politics, massive resistance stood as a campaign that accepted no alteration in the racial status quo and allowed no room for accommodation with change. In the famous phrasing of Alabama governor George Wallace, this stance became cemented as a defiant promise: "Segregation now! Segregation tomorrow! Segregation forever!" Indeed, Wallace's career represents a repeated series of such stances, ranging from his promise never again to be "out-niggered" in politics to his defiant "stand in the schoolhouse door."¹³ Looking back on white opposition to desegregation, many historians have seized upon the promises and posings of such politicians and assumed that segregationist resistance was precisely the all-or-nothing proposition that its boldest defenders made it out to be. Rendering judgment on the movement's success, these observers have simply compared the promises to preserve the racial status quo of 1954 with the realities of desegregation a decade later. Judged by such standards, the conclusion was clear: massive resistance failed.

This study, however, argues that white resistance to desegregation was never as immobile or monolithic as its practitioners and chroniclers would have us believe. Indeed, segregationists could be incredibly innovative in the strategies and tactics they used to confront the civil rights movement. In recent work on the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century South, several historians have argued that the system of racial segregation was never a fixed entity, but rather a fluid relationship in which blacks and whites constantly adjusted to meet changing circumstances.¹⁴ If the southern system of racial subjugation is understood as responsive to change

during its era of dominance, it naturally follows that segregationist ideology and strategy did not remain inert when the system confronted, in the form of the civil rights movement, a threat to its very existence. And, as this story makes clear, the original goals of massive resistance were, in fact, frequently revisited and revised as the struggle to defend the “southern way of life” stretched on. While national politicians waged a reactionary struggle in the courts and Congress to preserve the old system of de jure segregation, those at the local level were discovering a number of ways in which they could preserve and, indeed, perfect the realities of racial segregation outside the realm of law and politics. Ultimately, the mass migration of whites from cities to the suburbs proved to be the most successful segregationist response to the moral demands of the civil rights movement and the legal authority of the courts. Although the suburbs were just as segregated as the city—and, truthfully, often more so—white residents succeeded in convincing the courts, the nation, and even themselves that this phenomenon represented de facto segregation, something that stemmed not from the race-conscious actions of residents but instead from less offensive issues like class stratification and postwar sprawl. To be sure, on the surface, the world of white suburbia looked little like the world of white supremacy. But these worlds did have much in common—from the remarkably similar levels of racial, social, and political homogeneity to their shared ideologies that stressed individual rights over communal responsibilities, privatization over public welfare, and “free enterprise” above everything else. By withdrawing to the suburbs and recreating its world there, the politics of massive resistance continued to thrive for decades after its supposed death.

If we shift our attention away from politicians and focus on the lives of ordinary segregationists, the flexibility and continuity of white resistance becomes clear. Exploring the ever-shifting terrain of race relations and conservative politics at the grass roots, this study finds inspiration in the work of many others. In recent years, for instance, a new generation of scholarship on the civil rights movement has moved beyond simply recounting the words and deeds of prominent civil rights leaders to delve instead into the hopes and beliefs of ordinary African Americans. As a result, our understanding of that movement has been enriched by a better appreciation of the social texture of the African American community.¹⁵ Building on such work, new studies in southern history have likewise sought to move beyond a superficial understanding of segregationists and instead root the actions of ordinary whites in a deeper social and cultural analysis.¹⁶ At the same time, other historians have chronicled the course of modern conservatism in areas outside the South, taking their subjects seriously and thereby reconstructing their world and worldview as they

themselves understood them.¹⁷ This book draws on the insights and interpretations of such works, seeking to treat its subjects with the same degree of seriousness.

If we truly seek to understand segregationists—not to excuse or absolve them, but to understand them—then we must first understand how they understood themselves. Until now, because of the tendency to focus on the reactionary leaders of massive resistance, segregationists have largely been understood simply as the opposition to the civil rights movement. They have been framed as a group focused solely on suppressing the rights of others, whether that be the larger cause of “civil rights” or any number of individual entitlements, such as the rights of blacks to vote, assemble, speak, protest, or own property. Segregationists, of course, did stand against those things, and often with bloody and brutal consequences. But, like all people, they did not think of themselves in terms of what they opposed but rather in terms of what they supported. The conventional wisdom has held that they were only fighting *against* the rights of others. But, in their own minds, segregationists were instead fighting *for* rights of their own—such as the “right” to select their neighbors, their employees, and their children’s classmates, the “right” to do as they pleased with their private property and personal businesses, and, perhaps most important, the “right” to remain free from what they saw as dangerous encroachments by the federal government. To be sure, all of these positive “rights” were grounded in a negative system of discrimination and racism. In the minds of segregationists, however, such rights existed all the same. Indeed, from their perspective, it was clearly they who defended individual freedom, while the “so-called civil rights activists” aligned themselves with a powerful central state, demanded increased governmental regulation of local affairs, and waged a sustained assault on the individual economic, social, and political prerogatives of others. The true goal of desegregation, these white southerners insisted, was not to end the system of racial oppression in the South, but to install a new system that oppressed them instead. As this study demonstrates, southern whites fundamentally understood their support of segregation as a defense of their own liberties, rather than a denial of others’.¹⁸

Understanding segregationists in such a light illuminates the links between massive resistance and modern conservatism. Those responsible for the rise of the New Right have long denied any connection between these two strands of American conservatism. In 1984, for instance, noted conservative activist Paul Weyrich asserted that the leadership of the New Right “bears no resemblance to the reactionary Southern icons of the past.”¹⁹ Despite such claims, several historians and journalists have repeatedly linked the New Right with the Old South. Much like the tradi-

tional narrative of massive resistance, their interpretation has generally relied on a top-down explanation of political transformation predicated on the presidential campaigns of Strom Thurmond, Barry Goldwater, George Wallace, Richard Nixon, and Ronald Reagan. Focusing largely on closed-door strategy sessions and stump speeches of such conservative politicians, these studies have paid particular attention to their use of the “racially coded language” first developed by segregationists like George Wallace to appeal to white voters in national campaigns. Some of the more famous instances, such as Ronald Reagan’s anecdote about the apocryphal Chicago “welfare queen” and George H. W. Bush’s notorious Willie Horton advertisement, seemed less-than-subtle appeals to racist assumptions about black criminality and shiftlessness. While this study does not discount the importance of such language and imagery, it argues that the connections between the Old South and New Right run much deeper than mere rhetorical appeals to racism.²⁰

This study advances a new perspective on the connections between southern segregationists and modern conservatives. Although it touches on the conventional political narrative that has contributed to our understanding of the origins of the New Right, it has a rather different dynamic. Instead of focusing on the ways in which national politicians sought to exploit the anger and alienation of white voters, this study focuses on those whites themselves. The conventional framework, with its attention on the highest levels of national campaigns, largely neglects the important transformations taking place at the grass roots. More problematic, because it focuses only on the more famous flashpoints in presidential politics, this narrative inexplicably skips past the years between the Dixiecrat rebellion of 1948 and the Goldwater campaign of 1964. Because racial conservatism was not a central issue in the intervening elections, the creation narrative of modern conservatism has overlooked that era entirely. But during the decade and a half between the collapse of the Dixiecrats and the rise of the Goldwater Republicans came one of the most turbulent and transformative eras in southern history. The vast bulk of the civil rights movement and the white resistance it inspired unfolded in the late 1940s, 1950s, and early 1960s. During that period the entire southern landscape was reshaped. Southern politics was no exception.

In the end, this work demonstrates that the struggle over segregation thoroughly reshaped southern conservatism. Traditional conservative elements, such as hostility to the federal government and faith in free enterprise, underwent fundamental transformations. At the same time, segregationist resistance inspired the creation of new conservative causes, such as tuition vouchers, the tax revolt, and the privatization of public services. Until now, the origins of those phenomena have been located in the suburban areas of the South and Southwest, a region since christened the “Sun-

belt.”²¹ In recent years, scholars have explored that landscape to explain the rise of the “tax revolt” in the late 1970s,²² the trend toward isolation in exclusive “gated communities” in the 1980s,²³ and the attendant privatization of public services thereafter, ranging from the establishment of private security forces to the campaign for tuition vouchers for private education.²⁴ While this scholarship generally assumed that such conservative trends emerged from an established suburban Sunbelt in the late 1970s and 1980s, this book argues, to the contrary, that those trends were already apparent before the rise of the suburbs, inside cities such as Atlanta, as early as the 1950s.

In locating the origins of these phenomena in urban, and not suburban, politics, this book considers the origins of the conservative “counterrevolution” in their proper environment. Problematically, some accounts often start their stories only after the white suburbs had become an accomplished fact. And by solely examining the conservative political outlook in that overwhelmingly white and predominantly upper-middle-class environment, these observers have often failed to appreciate the importance of race and class in the formation of this new conservative ideology. Inside such a homogeneous setting, it is perhaps easy to understand how some have accepted without question the claims of some conservative activists that their movement was—and still is—“color-blind” and unassociated with class politics.²⁵ Indeed, in the suburbs, with no other colors in sight and no other classes in contention, such claims seem plausible. How could modern conservatism be shaped by forces that weren’t there? But, as this study shows, when the conservative politics of the Sunbelt is correctly situated in the crucible of urban politics, surrounded by different races, multiple classes, and competing social interests, it can be seen in a rather different light.

Indeed, a community-level approach helps illuminate the realities of white resistance to desegregation in a number of ways. First, such a perspective best brings into focus the complex relationships between people and places, which are always their clearest at the local level. Only by restricting the scope of a study to a specific setting and a finite time can otherwise unwieldy issues—racism, segregation, backlash, and “white flight”—be dissected and discussed in any meaningful detail. Second, this work employs a community-level approach to demonstrate the interconnected nature of different stages of white resistance. Too often, civil rights histories have focused on a single aspect of the story, such as school desegregation or the sit-ins, without acknowledging that all these struggles were closely intertwined in the minds of whites and blacks alike.²⁶ As this book demonstrates, white resistance to desegregation was much more complex than previously understood. Chronicling the course of segregationist activity, in a single city, in a single era, allows for patterns of indi-

vidual involvement, cycles of protest and politics, and an overall evolution of segregationist thought and conservative ideology to come into focus.

In examining these issues inside the urban environment, this study adopts an approach used by urban historians in recent years to explore postwar race relations in northern cities, particularly Chicago and Detroit. Like those histories, this work discovers an interconnected web of racial, social, and economic conflicts inside Atlanta's city limits that suggests that the "urban crisis" was a phenomenon that stretched far beyond the industrial Northeast. In the struggles over race and residence, for instance, Atlanta closely resembles those cities. The familiar language of homeowners' rights and community protection resurfaces in white neighborhoods here, as does the pattern of violence visited upon all those who challenged them. The common themes shared by the homeowners' movements of the urban North and the segregationist resistance of the urban South suggest that the white backlash that surfaced in later years was not, as many assumed at the time, a southern product imported to the North. Instead, white flight was a phenomenon that developed in cities throughout the nation, with the commonalities and cross-regional connections only becoming clear in retrospect.²⁷

While this study sees more similarities than differences in the urban struggles of the North and South, it does find such differences. Unlike northern studies, which uncovered large amounts of "hidden violence" sparked by residential conflicts and chronicled a successful white resistance to racial change, this study demonstrates, almost counterintuitively, that whites in this segregated city were generally less violent in their resistance and less successful than their counterparts in the urban North. The relative failure of racists in Atlanta was not due to their lack of commitment to the cause, but because the black population they challenged was both larger and stronger than those in the North. In terms of percentages, Atlanta's black population outpaced that of most northern cities: in 1940, for instance, blacks represented 35 percent of Atlanta's population, but just 8 and 9 percent in Chicago and Detroit, respectively. By the 1970s, as the disparities in racial percentages narrowed, these metropolitan areas looked more alike—with black political power rising in the cities and conservative white suburbs growing around them. But the paths taken by northern and southern cities to that common destination had decidedly different origins. In cities of the postwar South, the larger demographic presence of African Americans meant that both the pressure for racial residential transition and the political clout of the black community were much stronger than in the North. As a result, southern whites were confronted with a pace of residential racial change that came much earlier, faster, and stronger than their northern counterparts.²⁸

Readers familiar with the Rust Belt narrative will find other differences in the Sunbelt. For one, the relative lack of heavy industry in Atlanta and most other southern cities dictated a different pattern of postwar change, especially in regard to race. In northern cities, the predominance of heavy industry helped move race relations in both progressive and reactionary directions. At first, the rise of biracial unions served as an early impetus for desegregation not simply on the shop floor but throughout the city. But as hard times fell on northern cities, the consequences of economic decline and deindustrialization—massive layoffs, plant closings, and industrial relocation to the suburbs—not only fueled white flight, but also served to splinter the unions and, in the process, the entire liberal-labor political alliance. But in the South, with a few notable exceptions, the postwar urban struggle centered not on deindustrialization but desegregation.²⁹ Again, this represented a key difference. In most northern cities, court-ordered desegregation had no direct impact until the early 1970s, when the Supreme Court considered—albeit briefly—the implementation of metropolitan-wide remedies such as cross-district busing. When busing became an issue in nonsouthern cities like Denver, Detroit, and Boston, it had a tremendous impact on white flight and urban decay. But until then, school desegregation played virtually no role. In the South, however, desegregation, especially in the schools, had tremendous influence during the 1950s and 1960s in reshaping cities and the course of white resistance within them. Desegregation of neighborhood schools impacted surrounding neighborhoods, of course, convincing white residents to sell their homes and leading community institutions to pull up roots. The process worked in reverse as well, as racial residential change often prompted the transfer of public schools and other public spaces from white to black hands. The changes that deindustrialization made to the physical landscape of Rust Belt cities have been widely recognized, but this study argues that desegregation had just as significant an impact on the structures and spaces of the urban and suburban Sunbelt.

On the surface, Atlanta may seem an odd focal point for examining the ways in which white resistance reshaped the urban environment, social relations, and political ideology of the South. For contemporaries, Atlanta always seemed an exception to the segregationist rule, a city that presented a moderate image and contributed much to the civil rights movement. Central figures in the African American struggle for equality, such as W.E.B. Du Bois, James Weldon Johnson, Walter White, Martin Luther King Sr., Martin Luther King Jr., Ralph Abernathy, Whitney Young, Julian Bond, John Lewis, Andrew Young, and Vernon Jordan, all lived inside its limits at one time or another. Likewise, key civil rights agencies, such as the Commission on Interracial Cooperation, the Southern Regional Council (SRC), the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC),

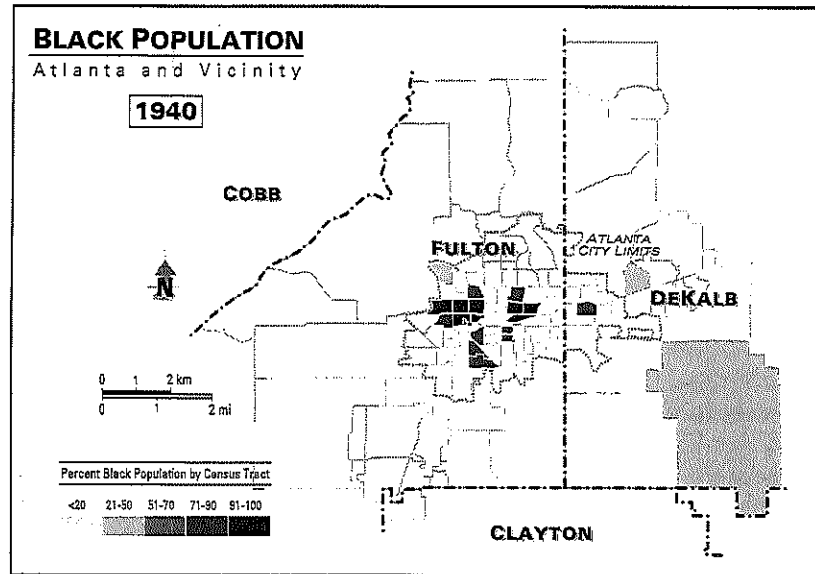
and the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), all called Atlanta home. So too did the South's premier cluster of black colleges, Atlanta University, and the region's best-known hub of black economic activity, Auburn Avenue. There was, perhaps, no clearer source of African American strength in the modern South than Atlanta.³⁰

This is all true. But as Atlanta emerged as the center of civil rights activity, it still remained the site of sustained segregationist resistance. Some of the most brutal incidents of Jim Crow violence occurred inside Atlanta, including a notoriously bloody race riot in 1906 and the infamous lynching of Leo Frank in 1913. In the 1920s and 1930s, the Ku Klux Klan located its national headquarters on prestigious Peachtree Street; after the Second World War, a revived version of the hooded order held its ceremonial rebirth just outside the city's limits. (One historian of the Klan has gone so far as to anoint Atlanta "its holy city.") Aside from the several incarnations of that organization, other white supremacist groups have anchored themselves in Atlanta as well, including the country's first neo-Nazi organization. During the civil rights era, a number of the South's leading segregationists called Atlanta their home, including Eugene and Herman Talmadge, Marvin Griffin, Calvin Craig, and Lester Maddox. Tellingly, when segregationists waged legal challenges against the 1964 Civil Rights Act, two of the three cases came from Atlanta.³¹

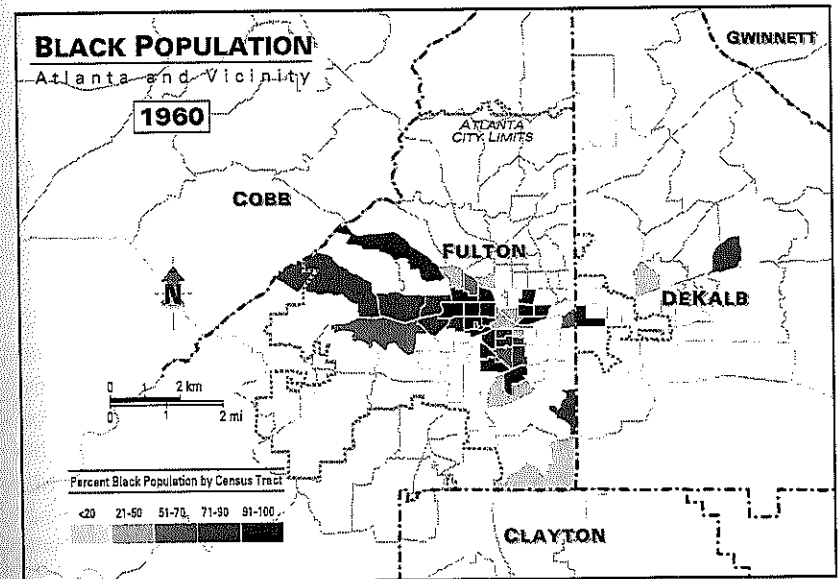
Given the central historical importance of Atlanta, for both civil rights activists and segregationists alike, the lack of scholarship on its changes during the civil rights era is surprising, to say the least. Recently, fine work has been done on race relations in the first half of the century,³² but the historiography on the postwar era remains thin. What scant scholarship does exist has been dominated by a paradigm stressing the centrality of the "community power structure" above all else. Now commonplace, the phrase was originally coined to describe Atlanta, a city long controlled by a moderate coalition of businessmen and boosterish politicians.³³ In studies centered on this power structure, the course of civil rights has usually been addressed, but only in relation to the main concern of mainstream politics. After World War II, African Americans emerged as a crucial part of the coalition that controlled the city, and, as such, these scholars have had to explain their rise to prominence and their role as the "junior partner" in a reformulated power structure.³⁴ But black Atlantans operating outside—or even against—the dominant political coalition have received little attention in these works.³⁵ In the past decade, additional works on the civil rights era have appeared,³⁶ but little change has been made to the "community power structure" approach created a half century ago. Black radicals are still marginalized. Meanwhile, the great numbers of white working-class and middle-class segregationists aligned on the other side of the racial divide have received no attention at all.³⁷

This book seeks to change that approach, shifting the focus to those whites who found themselves outside the mainstream of the moderate coalition and who, in time, moved themselves outside the city as well. A focus on the resistance of such whites, predominantly of the working and middle classes, should not be misinterpreted as a simplistic claim that they alone were racist while other whites were not. In the end, virtually all whites reacted to the course of civil rights change with some degree of opposition and distancing. For working-class whites, the confrontation came in the late 1940s and early 1950s, as their neighborhoods emerged as the focal point in the city's struggles over residential desegregation. With middle-class whites, however, the conflict only surfaced in the second half of the 1950s, as residential desegregation spread into their neighborhoods and, more important, as the public spaces they frequented—parks, bus lines, and the public schools in particular—came under the mandate of court-ordered desegregation. Upper-class whites, meanwhile, stuck by the moderate coalition until the early 1960s, when civil rights activists targeted both their public lives, as the sit-ins focused on the businesses they owned, and their private lives, as civil rights leaders questioned their commitment to integration in light of the segregated world in which they lived and played. *How* whites reacted to desegregation thus emerges as a constant. As this study shows, class differences merely determined *where* and *when* they did so.

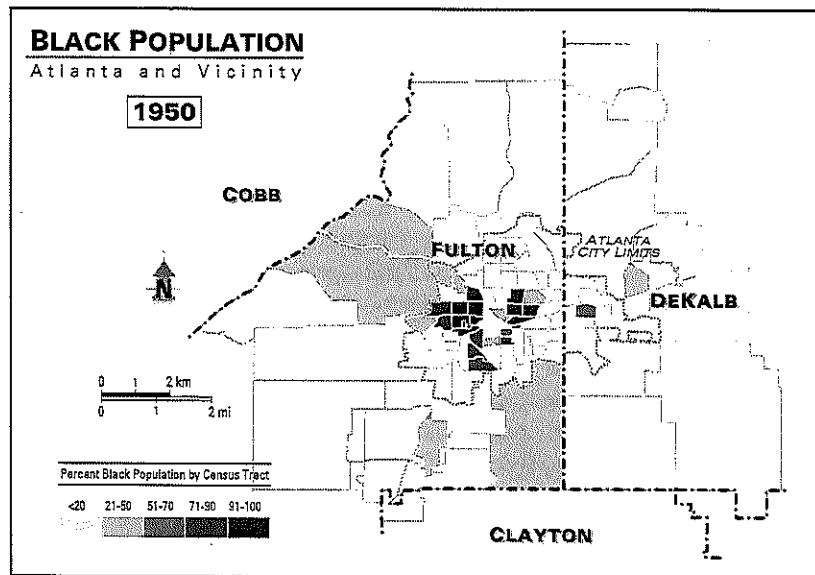
The story that follows takes place in the city and suburbs of Atlanta but has connections to the country as a whole. It has such connections not simply because the local struggle over segregation spread across the region and sought resolution in national politics, but because the issues that stood at the center of that struggle also stood at the center of the postwar national debate: the demise of white supremacy and the rise of white suburbia; the fragmentation of old liberal coalitions and the construction of new conservative ones; the contested relationship between the federal government and state and local entities; the debates over the public realm and the private; the struggle over the distribution of money and the sharing of power; the competing claims to basic rights and responsibilities of citizenship; and, of course, conflicts rooted in divisions of generation, class, and, above all, race. All these issues spread far beyond the city limits of Atlanta and into every corner of the country. In the end, then, this is not simply an Atlanta story or a southern story. It is, instead, an American story.



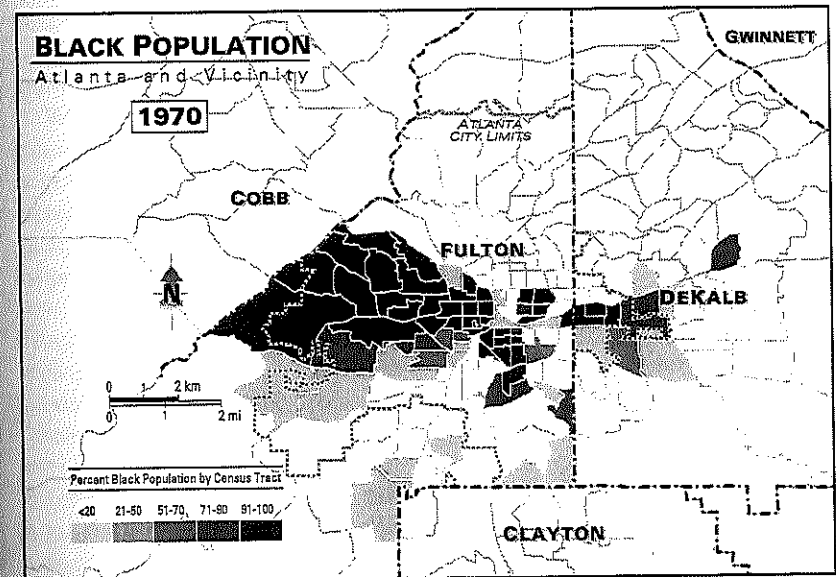
Map 1.2 Black population, Atlanta and vicinity, 1940



Map 1.4 Black population, Atlanta and vicinity, 1960



Map 1.3 Black population, Atlanta and vicinity, 1950



Map 1.5 Black population, Atlanta and vicinity, 1970

CHAPTER ONE

“The City Too Busy to Hate”: Atlanta and the Politics of Progress

THE STORY OF Atlanta's struggles with segregation was centered, oddly enough, on neither the crusade of civil rights activists nor the reactionary resistance of segregationists. Instead, the tale balanced on the moderate coalition that controlled the city in the postwar era. During those decades, an unlikely collection of moderate white politicians, elite businessmen, and African American leaders dictated the pace of racial change. Seeing the successes of “the city too busy to hate,” visitors arriving in Atlanta were stunned by the differences they saw between it and other cities in the Deep South. Repeatedly, they found themselves reduced to what became a common litany of questions. How did Atlanta do it? How did the white elites take control of local politics in a city and state so dominated by other classes of whites? How did they come to find common cause with a racial minority oppressed throughout the rest of the region? How did blacks, meanwhile, overcome the significant legal and political obstacles in their way to become a central political power inside Atlanta? And once both groups had succeeded, how—and why—did they join forces?

While such questions about Atlanta's leaders were asked and answered countless times, those posing them rarely came away with much in the way of details. Floyd Hunter, a sociology graduate student from the University of North Carolina, was determined to dig deeper. In a stroke of luck, for both Hunter and those who sought insight into the true patterns of political power in Atlanta, he secured an audience in late 1950 with a man who had not only all the answers but a willingness to share them. Hughes Spalding, senior partner in Atlanta's most prestigious law firm, welcomed the student to his offices and, to Hunter's astonishment, proceeded to lead him through a frank and detailed blueprint of the highest levels of politics and society in Atlanta. “You fellows who make these surveys most of the time do not get ‘under the crust,’ ” Spalding told his stunned guest. “I'm going to take you under the crust.” Over the next hour, the lawyer discussed in candid detail the inner workings of the coalition that ran the city. As Hunter took notes, Spalding traced the behind-the-scenes networks linking city hall and the Atlanta Chamber of Commerce, tracking the ways in which the city's political and business elites worked together to keep both races in Atlanta prosperous and at peace.¹

Walking away from the session, Hunter searched for a way to describe all he had learned. In the end, he found himself forced to coin a new phrase, one that would change the ways sociologists, historians, and political scientists thought about local government. Atlanta, he decided, was ruled by a "community power structure." Actually, as Hunter soon discovered, the city had two power structures, not one. The white elite was not the only game in town. "I find that it will be necessary to run a separate study in the Negro community," he informed his thesis adviser. "There is a power structure there that cannot be overlooked, and follows, as far as I can see at this point, much the same pattern as the white." And so, just as Hunter traveled to Spalding's offices to learn about the white elite, so too did he visit the corridors of power in black Atlanta to understand its dynamics. Through his travels between black and white Atlanta, Hunter uncovered the secrets of the city's moderate coalition. In the wake of World War II, these two elites, white and black, had worked together to create something in the city that stood apart from the more familiar politics of white supremacy surrounding Atlanta: a political system that saw racial progressivism and economic progress as inseparable.²

The close cooperation of Atlanta's elites did not mean that racism or racial politics did not exist inside the city. Far from it, in fact. When Hunter asked Hughes Spalding to name some of the "major issues before the Atlanta community," the attorney answered, "I will give you one—segregation. You can slice that one in two and have two [issues] if you want to, or if you want four, cut it four ways." Segregation overshadowed everything, he suggested. And yet, even if the blacks and whites of Atlanta found themselves focused on the racial lines between them, they managed to work across those lines, not simply for their own self-interest but for the common good of the city as well. Ultimately, the story of Atlanta's moderate coalition signaled a departure from a traditional southern politics dominated by white supremacy and rural interests. It represented, instead, a bold model that held that progress in race relations would create progress in economic growth, too. As Hunter and countless others recognized, this was something new.³

GEORGIA AND THE "RULE OF THE RUSTICS"

For the first half of the twentieth century, Georgia was dominated by the politics of rural racism. In the decades after Reconstruction, the state steadily robbed blacks of their hard-won right to vote. The first stage of disfranchisement came in 1877, when the legislature installed a cumulative poll tax. Most freedmen, along with many poor whites, proved unable or unwilling to pay all their back taxes. By 1900 only one out of

every ten eligible blacks remained on the rolls. That same year, hoping to rid themselves of that remnant of voters as well, the state Democratic Party began to bar blacks from its primaries. With the Populists in disarray and Republicans reduced to numbers of no consequence, a whites-only Democratic primary effectively removed black voters from the political process altogether. As an added precaution, the state assembly pushed through a constitutional amendment in 1908 to establish the additional burdens of a grandfather clause, literacy test, and property qualification. Taken together, this coordinated attack on black Georgians erased their presence from state politics for decades to come.⁴

As Georgia undermined black voters through disfranchisement and discrimination, it likewise weakened urban voters through the "county unit" system. Under this scheme, installed in 1917, statewide and congressional contests were determined not by the popular vote, but through an arcane electoral arithmetic instead. Originally, each county in Georgia was granted twice as many unit votes as it had members in the lower house of the legislature. The eight most populous counties received six votes each; the next largest thirty took four votes apiece; and the remaining 122 counties each had two. In elections, the candidate with a plurality of votes in a county took all of its votes. When the system was first installed, the distribution of unit votes roughly corresponded to that of the state's population. The allotments were not tied to population shifts, however, but instead remained fixed. As urban populations grew and rural ones shrank, the county unit system thus ensured that smaller counties wielded wildly disproportionate political power. (In 1946, for instance, 14,092 votes from Atlanta's Fulton County carried precisely the same weight as 132 votes from rural Chattahoochee County.) Because of this imbalance, candidates in statewide races simply ignored the cities and concentrated on the four- and two-unit counties of the countryside. As a result, Georgia politics embodied, in the apt phrase of political scientist V. O. Key Jr., the "Rule of the Rustics."⁵

The disfranchisement of blacks and the county unit system ensured that Georgia's politics would be dominated by the forces of rural racism for decades. More than anyone else, Eugene Talmadge embodied that world. A consummate campaigner, the "wild man from Sugar Creek" appeared in all but one statewide Democratic primary in the years between 1926 and 1946. Famous for his fiery stump speeches, Talmadge proved incredibly popular among poverty-stricken whites in the countryside. As he liked to brag, "The poor dirt farmer ain't got but three friends on this earth: God Almighty, Sears Roebuck, and Gene Talmadge." The key to his popularity was his stress on white supremacy. "I was raised among niggers and I understand them," he told crowds from the stump. "I want to see them treated fairly and I want to see them have justice in the courts. But I want

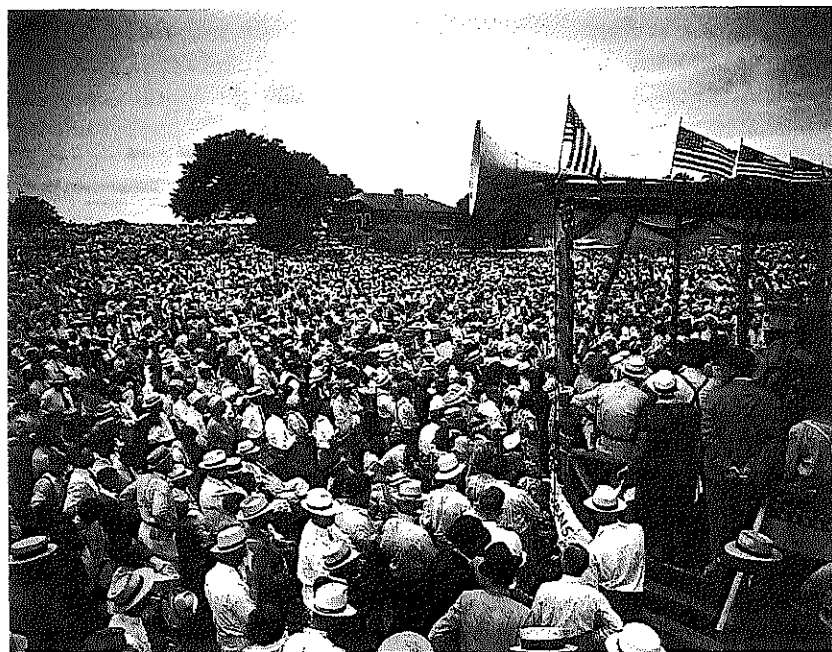


Figure 1.1 A massive rally for Governor Eugene Talmadge in rural Georgia. Elected governor four times and commissioner of agriculture three more, Talmadge was an incredibly popular figure with rural white voters.

to deal with the nigger this way; he must come to my back door, take off his hat, and say, 'Yes, sir.' " This raw racism won Talmadge the overwhelming support of rural whites, which, through the county unit system, won him elections. By 1940 Gene Talmadge had been elected governor three times and commissioner of agriculture three more.⁶

With the dawn of the 1940s, Talmadge and the politics of rural racism seemed permanently cemented in the state. "By the World War II years," historian Numan Bartley has observed, "Georgia's segregated social system had hardened into a rigid caste structure accepted by virtually all whites and substantial numbers of blacks as the ordained and proper way of doing things." Even the unwieldy county unit system had assumed a sense of permanence. In the words of Herman Talmadge, Eugene's son and heir apparent, the system represented a time-honored tradition dating "back before the Christian era when people had similar tribe representation." It was, he hinted, the way things were meant to be. Together, the two institutions protected Talmadge and his associates so thoroughly that in 1949 a shrewd observer of the state boiled Georgia's politics down to one term—"Talmadgism."⁷

During that same decade, however, serious threats to "Talmadgism" emerged. First, when the legislature rewrote the state constitution in 1945, Georgia did away with its poll tax. Though out of office, Talmadge actually endorsed the repeal, on the grounds that the poll tax prevented poor whites from voting. He assured his supporters that blacks would not return to the polls because they "don't care to vote anyway, unless they are encouraged by some communistic elements." Talmadge's successor in office, the otherwise progressive Governor Ellis Arnall, agreed. There was "no danger" that blacks would take part in Georgia's politics, he announced, as long as the state Democratic Party maintained its whites-only primary. That bulwark of segregation, however, was also coming under fire. The first shots came in April 1944, when the United States Supreme Court ruled in *Smith v. Allwright* that the white primary held by Texas Democrats was unconstitutional. Cutting through the segregationist fiction that such primaries were "private" functions and therefore not subject to federal election law, the Court asserted that the primary represented an essential part of the political process and therefore had to be held to the same standards as a general election. Immediately after the ruling, black Georgians mobilized to challenge their state's white primary as well. That July, several blacks, who were already registered, tried to participate in the primary but were turned away at the polls. One of them, the Reverend Primus King of Columbus, filed a federal suit in response. Ruling on the case in October 1945, the U.S. District Court in Atlanta simply applied the Texas precedent and invalidated Georgia's white primary. The ruling was affirmed on appeal in March 1946, and the Supreme Court refused to review the matter in April. Thus, within a year's time, both the poll tax and white primary had been struck down.⁸

Suddenly, after more than forty years of obstruction, Georgia's black population found political roads open again. The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), whose lawyers had led the charge against the white primary, watched its membership in Georgia surge to some 13,000 strong. Black voters' leagues sprang up across the state, and registration drives began in earnest. By the summer of 1946 more than 100,000 African Americans had registered, just in time to vote in the upcoming gubernatorial primary. This turn of events horrified Georgia's segregationists, and none more so than Gene Talmadge. Running once again for governor, Talmadge made the court decisions and blacks' response to them a central theme of the campaign. Speaking at a Ku Klux Klan rally in Atlanta, his son Herman asked, "Why should Nigras butt in and tell white people who should be elected in a white primary?" His father felt the same way and predicted the turn of events would lead to the end of white supremacy in the state. "With the white

primary out of the way," he told a Greensboro audience, "negroes will vote in numbers and repeal our laws requiring [segregation] in schools, hotels, and on trains—even those which prohibit intermarriage." In his mind, the situation was serious but the solution simple. Asked how they might keep blacks away from the polls, Talmadge picked up a scrap of paper and wrote on it a single word: "Pistols."⁹

Some of Talmadge's supporters took the suggestion seriously. In the south Georgia town of Fitzgerald, for instance, signs were tacked onto black churches with a warning: "The First Nigger Who Votes in Georgia Will Be a Dead Nigger." In spite of such threats, many black Georgians showed up at the polls anyway. Rural whites still outnumbered them, however, and Talmadge emerged with his fourth gubernatorial win. (Once again, the county unit system proved crucial to Talmadge's success. He lost the popular vote to opponent James Carmichael, 297,245 to 313,389, but dominated the county unit vote, 242 to 146.) Talmadge's success spurred segregationists to make good on their earlier threats. In western Taylor County, for instance, a black World War II veteran who dared to vote in the primary was dragged from his home and shot to death by four whites. Afterward, a sign was posted on a nearby black church: "The First Nigger to Vote Will Never Vote Again." The ugliest incident, however, came in Walton County, midway between Atlanta and Athens. Hundreds of blacks had turned out to vote there, and segregationist resentment soon reached a fever pitch. "The sight of that long line of niggers waiting to vote put the finishing touches on it," one white man remembered. Shortly after the primary, when word got out about a scuffle between a black tenant and a white landowner, a white mob responded by gunning down the man, his wife, and another married couple in an open field. According to reports, one body was found riddled with 180 bullets. "This thing's got to be done to keep Mister Nigger in his place," explained a local. "Since the state said he could vote, there ain't been any holding him. . . . Gene told us what was happening, and what he was going to do about it. I'm sure proud he was elected."¹⁰

With his election to a fourth term, Talmadge demonstrated the power of the politics of rural racism for the state and, indeed, the nation. To the dismay of his supporters, however, this chosen son of segregation passed away in an Atlanta cancer ward before he could take office. What followed was a convoluted and controversial succession crisis, known ever after as the "Three Governors" affair. Through the early months of 1947, outgoing governor Ellis Arnall, incoming lieutenant governor Melvin Thompson, and Herman Talmadge, the leading write-in candidate, all claimed rights to the governor's office. In the end, after a good deal of legal wrangling and even some physical confrontations in the statehouse, the office went to the moderate Thompson. Undaunted, Herman Tal-

madge reclaimed the position in a special election two years later. And with his return, the "rule of the rustics" would continue in state politics for the better part of the next two decades.¹¹

ATLANTA AND THE POLITICS OF PROGRESS: THE POWER STRUCTURES

As Georgia's politics drifted further and further under the control of the Talmadge organization, the political scene in Atlanta moved in precisely the opposite direction. This was hardly surprising, since the town was home to the two groups that regularly served as targets in Gene Talmadge's stump speeches—blacks and urban moderates. Long scapegoated under the politics of rural racism, these two constituencies rebelled against the state machine in the 1930s and 1940s and forged a new political system that placed them, and not Talmadge's poor whites, at the center of power.

At the state level, segregationist politics drew strength from the county unit system, which gave poor whites a preponderance of power. Inside Atlanta, working-class whites had long drawn power from a different arrangement—the ward system. For the early decades of the century, city government consisted of a weak mayor and a powerful city council, whose members were elected not on a citywide basis but by individual wards. As a result, councilmen remained closely tied to the white working-class politics of the city. Nearly half of Atlanta's registered voters belonged to trade unions and they marshaled their numbers well. They helped elect a printer, James G. Woodward, as their mayor four times between 1900 and 1916 and installed other blue-collar whites in lower positions. By the 1930s, however, the ward system found itself under steady assault. When a 1929 graft investigation ended in the conviction of six councilmen, the corruption in city politics started to sour more and more voters on the system. The Depression, in turn, further weakened ward operations, as funds for local campaigns and kickbacks dried up along with the city's finances.¹²

The biggest blow to ward politics, however, was the election of Mayor William Berry Hartsfield in 1936. A strong and shrewd politician, Bill Hartsfield was able to rise above the constraints of the "weak mayor" system and emerge as the city's political powerhouse. With the exception of a single term, he remained in the mayor's office, and at the center of Atlanta's political life, until his retirement in 1962. Throughout his long career, Hartsfield relied on a combination of hard work and hucksterism to make his way. The son of a tinsmith, unable to afford a legal education, he wrote to the deans of prominent law schools, asked for their recommendations on readings, and taught himself. (His alma mater, he later



Figure 1.2 William Berry Hartsfield, mayor of Atlanta. With the exception of a single two-year term, Mayor Hartsfield led the city from 1937 until his retirement in 1962. An ardent booster of Atlanta and the politics of progress, Hartsfield coined the city's nickname as "the City Too Busy to Hate."

said without shame, was the Atlanta Public Library.) From there he quickly entered the world of Atlanta politics. Colorful and bold from the start, Hartsfield made the promotion of his city—and, by extension, himself—his top priority. During his years as an alderman, for example, he helped transform the old railroad town into a national center for air transportation. With what would become his habitual flair for the dramatic, Hartsfield first secured a federal airmail route for the city and then publicized his coup by personally riding along with the first delivery to New York. As mayor, Hartsfield became an even bigger booster for his city. When the film *Gone with the Wind* premiered in 1939, for instance, he made sure the first showing was at Loew's Grand Theater on Peachtree Street. Even with Vivian Leigh and Clark Gable in attendance, Hartsfield still stood at center stage, occupying his natural role as ringmaster.¹³

As he played up his public image, Hartsfield also worked behind the scenes to undercut the strength of his rivals in the ward organizations. When he first took office, for instance, the mayor tightly restricted city spending with a new budget law. The patronage system on which aldermen and city councilmen depended soon dried up. Then, in 1939, Harts-

field and his allies in the Chamber of Commerce moved quickly to create a civil service system, robbing the precinct politicians of their appointment power, too. Meanwhile, the mayor and his new departmental heads eliminated nearly two hundred positions in city government and tightened their control over the remaining employees. By the end of the 1930s the ward organizations of the city were fading fast and, with them, the political clout of the city's white working class.¹⁴

Without the old precinct politics to rally voters, Bill Hartsfield relied instead on a positive public image. In this regard, the mayor was helped immensely by Ralph McGill, the outspoken editor of the *Atlanta Constitution*. McGill had taken charge of the morning paper in 1938, just a year after Hartsfield gained control of city hall. He arrived with a similar splash. On his first day in office, for instance, McGill required that the word "Negro" receive the courtesy of a capital "N." Although he thought of himself as a moderate, McGill would gradually emerge as one of the most liberal and best-known voices of his native South. His political evolution was somewhat slow in coming, but McGill was always an ardent booster of Atlanta and, because of that, a strong supporter of his mayor. In 1953, when McGill wrote a long piece on Hartsfield for the *Saturday Evening Post*, the title captured perfectly McGill's pride in the mayor and the mayor's pride in his city: "You'd Think He Owns Atlanta."¹⁵

In truth, the men who *did* own Atlanta supported Hartsfield as well. Early in his career, the mayor used his reputation as a reformer to secure the financial and personal support of Atlanta's most influential businessmen. Chief among these was Robert Woodruff. As head of the Coca-Cola Company, Woodruff controlled the city's pride and joy, a business that was then already worth nearly a half billion dollars. But Coca-Cola was only the beginning of Woodruff's power. He also served on the boards of General Electric and the Southern Railway and presided over the powerful Trust Company of Georgia. He held considerable sway at Emory University as well, since he had personally underwritten the medical school and helped establish the research laboratory that would become the Centers for Disease Control. Needless to say, Woodruff cast an enormous shadow. "When he gets an idea," Hughes Spalding noted, "you can depend on it, others will get the idea." Mills Lane, a powerful banker in his own right, agreed: "He was the only man in Atlanta who could snap his fingers and everybody would genuflect."¹⁶

Together, Bob Woodruff and Bill Hartsfield quickly formed a close working relationship. When the young mayor took office in 1937, the financially strapped city was paying its employees with scrip. At Hartsfield's request, Woodruff stepped forward not only to guarantee the payroll but to refinance the city as well. From then on, the pair remained inseparable. Woodruff's financial muscle and personal support allowed

Hartsfield to emerge as a formidable politician; in return, Hartsfield promoted Woodruff's interests as he promoted the city's. He hawked Coke without end, using it to christen new planes at the airport and toast dignitaries as well. Without hesitation or embarrassment, Hartsfield called himself the mayor of "Coca-Cola City." He reverently referred to Woodruff as "my number one friend on Earth" and prominently displayed his picture in the mayor's office. "I never made a major decision," Hartsfield later admitted, "that I didn't consult Bob Woodruff."¹⁷

With Woodruff solidly behind the mayor, other businessmen quickly added their support as well. As attorney Harold Sheats remembered, Hartsfield had "a kitchen cabinet of businessmen who advised him." Besides Woodruff and his associates, it included heads of the major banks, Citizens & Southern and First National; executives of major family businesses, such as Rich's Department Store and the Ivan Allen office supply chain; and top men at utilities like the Georgia Power Company and the main railroads. Together, this close alliance of big businessmen and moderate politicians formed an urban elite that was quite unique for its time and place—the "community power structure" of Floyd Hunter's notes. An incredibly close-knit group of friends, neighbors, and business partners from the city's posh Northside, the power structure shared a common history. "Almost all of us had been born and raised within a mile or two of each other," remembered Ivan Allen Jr., a member of the group who would succeed Hartsfield as Atlanta's mayor from 1962 to 1970. "We had gone to the same schools, to the same churches, to the same golf courses, to the same summer camps. We had dated the same girls. We had played within our group, married within our group, partied within our group, and worked within our group." Members of the power structure not only shared a common past and present; they shared a common vision of the future. In Allen's telling, they were "dedicated to the betterment of Atlanta as much as a Boy Scout troop is dedicated to fresh milk and clean air."¹⁸

Meanwhile, another group of accomplished professionals—college professors and ministers, contractors and real-estate men, insurance executives and bankers—lived and worked together in the finer black neighborhoods of the city with a sense of community and common purpose quite like that of their white counterparts. The center of their power was the short stretch of black businesses on Auburn Avenue. Many knew the street as "Sweet Auburn" because, as one leader later explained, money was sweet. Indeed, there was an abundance of money in the city's black community. By 1945 the black-owned businesses of Atlanta could boast of a combined worth nearing \$30 million. The financial strength of Auburn Avenue derived, in no small part, from the work of two unlikely candidates—an ex-slave from rural Georgia and a Texas migrant with a sixth-grade education.

Alonzo Herndon had spent the first seven years of his life as a slave and, as he put it, he "was very near it for twenty years more." Moving to Atlanta, he established an elegant chain of barbershops for an elite white clientele. In 1905, with the profits from that venture, Herndon founded the Atlanta Life Insurance Company. At the time of his death two decades later, the former slave left behind an estate worth a million dollars and a company that had become a financial powerhouse. By the 1940s Atlanta Life had \$12 million in assets and fifteen hundred employees, with operations in nine states and an impressive headquarters on Auburn Avenue. Equally important for the growth of Sweet Auburn was Heman Perry. The son of a Texas grocer, Perry learned the insurance trade and founded Standard Life in 1911. Over the next dozen years, he launched a bank, the Citizens Trust Company, and a wide array of "service" organizations for black customers, ranging from a laundry and pharmacy to an engineering firm and fuel corporation. Although Perry personally fell from financial grace in the late 1920s, many of his former employees went on to rebuild the black business community from the ruins. Citizens Trust, for instance, was resurrected and restructured so well that it soon became the first black-owned bank in the Federal Reserve System. At the same time, more of Perry's men founded the Mutual Federal Savings & Loan Association. In time, these two institutions, along with nearby Atlanta Life, would form such a formidable financial center that *Fortune* magazine would christen Auburn Avenue "the richest Negro street in the world."¹⁹

In terms of politics, meanwhile, the main power broker among Atlanta's blacks was John Wesley Dobbs, a Post Office Republican, and proud member of the Prince Hall Masons. Often called "the Grand," after his masonic title, Dobbs also held an honorific title as "the mayor of Auburn Avenue." Indeed, if Bill Hartsfield had a single counterpart in the black community, it was Dobbs, a man as colorful, controversial, and proud as the mayor himself. He was so well known by his fellow postal workers that Hartsfield once wagered he could mail a letter to "John Wesley Dobbs, U.S.A." from Europe and it would find its way to Auburn Avenue. It did. Returning the flattery years later, Dobbs saw to it that a similar letter to "William B. Hartsfield, U.S.A." made its way from the continent to the mayor's office at City Hall. (Although Dobbs would not live to see it, his grandson, Maynard Jackson Jr., would in time occupy that same office, as Atlanta's first black mayor.) If the "mayor of Auburn Avenue" had a rival for that title, it was Austin Walden. Leader of the city's black Democrats and president of the local NAACP from 1924 to 1936, Walden was recognized as one of the best black attorneys in the South. Armed with a law degree from the University of Michigan, he had long challenged discrimination in Georgia's courts. For decades, Walden and

Dobbs—sometimes at odds, but frequently together—dominated the political dialogue of black Atlanta. That dialogue, in turn, reached the larger community through the pages of the *Atlanta Daily World*, the South's only daily black newspaper. W. A. Scott had established the paper in 1928; after he was gunned down by an unknown assailant in 1934, his younger brother, C. A. Scott, continued to publish the paper. An active participant in the local NAACP and Democratic politics, Scott ensured that political activity on Auburn Avenue received persistent and positive coverage.²⁰

Unlike its white counterpart, the black power structure of Atlanta included more than just politicians and businessmen. Auburn Avenue was also home to the city's most prominent black Baptist churches, Ebenezer and Wheat Street. In 1931 Ebenezer's pastor, the Reverend A. D. Williams, passed away, and he left his congregation in the hands of his son-in-law, a rugged sharecropper's son by the name of Martin Luther King Sr. In 1937 a similar generational change occurred at Wheat Street when the congregation replaced its pastor with the Reverend William Holmes Borders, a preacher's son from rural Georgia who had gone on to earn degrees from white colleges in the North. Though often rivals, Holmes and King together pushed their congregations out of their traditional complacency and toward a confrontation with white supremacy. At the same time, the two ministers closely linked their houses of worship with the financial houses of Auburn Avenue. King, for instance, encouraged local insurance agents to become members of the congregation. As they made rounds for Atlanta Life, they could collect contributions for Ebenezer; in turn, they would find a host of new clients in the church. Likewise, Borders remembered how he and other black ministers helped strengthen Citizens Trust by placing their collection money there. "They put in deposit that Monday morning," he recalled. "And the people, seeing their preacher deposit God's money from the churches in Citizens Trust, put their money into it and helped to put it over."²¹

As important as Auburn Avenue was for black Atlantans, there was an even older hub of activity at Atlanta University on the city's west side. Founded in the aftermath of the Civil War, Atlanta University soon claimed esteemed faculty such as John Hope and W.E.B. Du Bois and notable alumni like Walter White and James Weldon Johnson. Withdrawn from the world of white supremacy, the campus was, in Johnson's memories, "a spot fresh and beautiful, a rest for the eyes from what surrounded it, a green island in a dull red sea." By the 1940s the original Atlanta University had merged with four black colleges—Morehouse, Spelman, Morris Brown, and Clark—and the Gammon Theological Seminary to form the Atlanta University Center. As it grew in size, the center became an even greater source of strength for black Atlantans. "Atlanta University was an oasis," remembered Clarence Bacote, a professor of

history there. "You could live here, at any of these schools, and not suffer the injustices that the person who had to make his living in the city did. You didn't have to face Jim Crow, you had your own group right out here." While Du Bois had once complained that Atlanta University was an isolated "ivory tower of race," it soon emerged as an active force in the black community at large.²²

Indeed, the educators of Atlanta University often worked closely with activists from the city's burgeoning civil rights community. The NAACP, of course, had a long relationship with Atlanta. In 1909 Du Bois helped found the organization; in 1917 Walter White founded the local branch, before moving on to lead the national office. Beyond those famous names, however, the local branch made significant gains in the campaigns for voter registration and school equalization. Likewise, the Atlanta Urban League, founded in 1919 in the offices of Heman Perry, led the charge for better housing and fair employment. Under the able leadership of Grace Towns Hamilton and Robert Thompson, the league forged close ties with the businessmen of Auburn Avenue along the way. And, as with the NAACP, one of its local leaders, Whitney M. Young Jr., would later move on to head the national organization.²³

By the 1930s, then, a new generation of black leaders had emerged in Atlanta. From the businesses of Sweet Auburn and the campuses of Atlanta University, they found financial and intellectual independence, as well as a great deal of pride. In the pulpits of Wheat Street and Ebenezer, they heard ministers who encouraged them to stand up for their rights, and on the streets outside, they had political players like John Wesley Dobbs and Austin Walden who could show them how to do just that. Under the auspices of civil rights organizations, they could leave behind personal rivalries and work together for the betterment of the larger community. Together, they formed a formidable power structure of their own, one that would work closely with the more prominent white power structure toward their common goals.

RISE OF THE MODERATE COALITION

The first, important step toward the creation of the moderate coalition was the reclamation of the vote by black Atlantans. Through the early decades of the century, a small core of black voters had remained registered in Atlanta. Although the white primary had shut them out of most contests, the state's electoral rules allowed them to participate in special elections, such as bond referenda or the failed attempt to recall Mayor James L. Key in 1932. In these years, black leaders were able to seize a few chances to marshal their small "bloc vote" at the polls and bargain with the city

for better services or improved schools. Although they made the most of these opportunities, the elections were simply too infrequent and the number of black voters too few to press for any consistent change.²⁴

With a new generation of black leaders emerging in the 1930s, however, voter registration quickly became a concerted community effort. Early in the decade, citizenship schools were established to educate blacks about politics and their right to vote. The fluid movement of the schools—held first at Atlanta University, then hosted by the local NAACP, and finally housed at the churches—stood as testament to the new ways that black leaders were working together. Political activity showed a similar coordination. In 1935, for instance, the Reverend Martin Luther King Sr. led a large march to city hall as part of a campaign for voting rights. The next year, John Wesley Dobbs and others founded the Atlanta Civic and Political League, which had the goal of registering ten thousand voters. The group fell short of that goal but continued its registration efforts all the same. “We always thought that it was time for us to get blacks prepared for the ballot,” explained Clarence Bacote, “because we never knew when the Supreme Court might overturn the white primary. When that happened, we’d have a representative number on the books.” And numbers, black leaders knew, were what mattered in Atlanta. In the early 1940s they had asked Mayor Hartsfield for more street lights in their neighborhoods. He refused: “Come back and see me when you have 10,000 votes.” In spite of his bluntness, Hartsfield recognized that such a day was fast approaching. When the Supreme Court struck down the Texas white primary in 1944, for instance, he understood the ruling’s implications for his city and his career. “What the courts have done is give the black man in Atlanta the ballot,” he confided to his chief of police. “And for your information, the ballot is a front ticket for any-damn-where he wants to sit, if he knows how to use it. And Atlanta Negroes know how to use it.”²⁵

Before the courts could apply the white primary ruling to Georgia, another chance for black political mobilization surfaced when Congressman Robert Ramspeck unexpectedly resigned from office. Instead of simply appointing a caretaker successor, Governor Arnall called for a special election for February 1946. Because it functioned under state guidelines, and not the rules of the Democratic Party, the election was not “protected” by the rules of the white primary. Recognizing the rare opportunity, the NAACP, the Atlanta Civic and Political League, the *Atlanta Daily World*, and local churches and social organizations joined together to launch a massive registration campaign. As a result, Atlanta’s blacks more than doubled their strength in the district, from 3,000 to 6,876. Surveying the field, black leaders decided to support the candidacy of Helen Douglas Mankin. A representative of Fulton County in the General Assembly, Mankin already had the backing of a number of liberal groups and orga-

nized labor. “Her attitude on the race problem was fair,” Bacote recalled, “and she was willing to talk to us.” On the night before the election, after the final radio broadcast and after the white newspapers had gone to press, they spread the word: “Vote for the woman.” And they did. When the polls closed the next day and every precinct except one had reported, Mankin’s opponent held a thin lead of 156 ballots. The final precinct, which would determine the race, turned out to be Precinct B in the predominantly black Third Ward. Of the 1,040 votes cast there, less than twenty went to Mankin’s rival, giving her the election by a margin of more than 800 votes. Local observers pinned the victory on the black “bloc vote.” The *Atlanta Journal* noted that the “totals swung decidedly in favor of Mrs. Mankin when Three-B reported,” adding pointedly that 2,173 blacks were registered to vote there, but only 10 whites. The national press stressed the role of black voters, too. *Newsweek* headlined its coverage “Georgia’s Black Ballots,” while *Time* was even more direct. Beneath a picture of a grinning Helen Mankin ran a simple caption: “The Negro vote did it.”²⁶

Thus, Atlanta’s black community already had a running start when the courts officially struck down Georgia’s white primary in April 1946. Inspired by the decision and their past successes, black leaders established a bipartisan All Citizens Registration Committee to strengthen their presence at the polls. As chairman Clarence Bacote remembered, the registration drive represented “a community effort.” The committee itself was composed of rival political leaders, Dobbs and Walden; civil rights activists, such as Grace Towns Hamilton and Robert Thompson of the Urban League; and a variety of businessmen. Citizens Trust and Atlanta Life helped fund the drive, the *Daily World* gave it nonstop coverage, and black churches and colleges contributed to its organization. The turnout was stunning. Within three hours on May 1, for instance, 678 black Atlantans registered at the Butler Street YMCA; the next day, within another three hours, 750 more were added to the rolls at a local housing project; and during a third three-hour period the following day, another 955 signed up at a funeral home. By the end of the two-month drive, the committee had more than tripled the number of blacks registered in the city, to a grand total of 21,244. Less than a year before, blacks had been essentially shut out of Atlanta’s politics. Suddenly, they composed more than a quarter of its electorate.²⁷

Armed with the vote, Atlanta’s black community now had the power to demand better services from the city. In its eyes, a particular problem was the use of police in black neighborhoods. In the words of Herbert Jenkins, chief of police from 1947 to 1972, most white officers “didn’t want to spend a lot of time” in black neighborhoods. And on the rare occasions that white patrolmen did appear there, they often caused as

much trouble as they solved. As Jenkins remembered, "at one time most of the members of the police department were members of the Ku Klux Klan" who relished the chance to put black Atlantans in their "place." Hoping to solve the problems caused by both the absence and presence of white policemen, black leaders had long pressed for the commission of black patrolmen. Before they had the votes, however, their requests were brushed aside. "I remember quite distinctly," Rev. Borders recalled, "going to Mayor Hartsfield and asking him for black police. And he told us, without the slightest blinking of an eye, that we'd get black police about as soon as we'd get deacons in the [white] First Baptist Church." The revolution in registration changed all that, however. When black leaders returned with the same demand in 1947, Hartsfield simply asked, "How many do you want?"²⁸

After months of political maneuvering and preparation, eight black patrolmen joined the force in March 1948. But their employment came with a host of restrictions. Keeping with the customs of segregation, they operated out of a separate station, on a separate watch, and solely in the city's black neighborhoods, where they were not allowed to arrest whites. More problematic, their presence on the force met with hostility from white officers. (Much of this was directed at Chief Jenkins, whom some officers dared to call "nigger lover" to his face. The chief responded by busting one of his harshest critics, the head of the police union, and sending him out to walk a foot patrol in a notoriously tough black neighborhood.) For black Atlantans, of course, the sight of black men in uniform elicited a decidedly different reaction. On their first day of patrol, hundreds turned out to see the patrolmen walk the beat. Mayor Hartsfield and Chief Jenkins were there in person, looking on with disbelief as black crowds filled the sidewalks, first watching in silence but soon shouting with joy. As the police patrol turned into a celebratory parade, Bill Hartsfield seized the opportunity and followed right along. Desegregation, he saw, could make for great politics.²⁹

To consolidate the political power of black Atlanta, Republican John Wesley Dobbs and Democrat Austin Walden put their partisan differences aside and formed the Atlanta Negro Voters League (ANVL) in 1949. Members of the group would be free to vote for their party's candidates in national elections, but in local races they promised to support the "most desirable" Democratic candidate. Black voters—roughly a fourth of the electorate—would now vote as one, making the black community a powerful swing vote between competing factions. "This concentration of strength was recognized by the city fathers," Clarence Bacote later remembered. "No longer was it political suicide for a candidate for public office to openly seek the Negro vote."³⁰

In the 1949 mayoral race, Bill Hartsfield and his main challenger, Fulton County Commissioner Charlie Brown, both reached for that vote. ANVL leaders eventually sided with Hartsfield, who pointed to his recent improvements and made specific promises for the future—more black police, a black fire station, additional parks and public projects in black neighborhoods, and so forth.³¹ Unwilling to concede the black vote, the Brown campaign tried to undermine the arrangement. On the night before the election, a doctored list of league endorsements appeared in black neighborhoods, this time with Charlie Brown chosen for mayor.³² While that served as testament to the new interest of white politicians in black votes, so did Hartsfield's response. He contacted the editors of the *Atlanta Daily World* to denounce the list as a forgery and even sent a sound truck to patrol "those sections where negro citizens vote, for the purpose of notifying them of a false, fraudulent and forged ticket distributed in the late hours of last night."³³ His counterattack worked. In the primary, Hartsfield won with the slimmest possible majority—50.1 percent of the vote—over Brown and two other candidates. A change of just 102 ballots would have forced a runoff. The key to Hartsfield's narrow victory, it seemed, was the solid support of black voters. In three predominantly black districts, for instance, the mayor trounced his challenger by a margin of 3,704 to 658.³⁴

After this election, a new political calculus ruled Atlanta. The old allies, business leaders and Bill Hartsfield, realized that they could not maintain control of the city on their own. Instead, a new political coalition would be needed, with blacks supplying a key source of strength at the polls. Just a decade before, such an alliance between the city's privileged white elite and Jim-Crowed black community might have seemed unthinkable. But with the political changes of the postwar era, the two groups realized that they had much in common. Together, they would dominate Atlanta's politics for the next two decades.

THE COALITION IN ACTION

For their own reasons, both halves of the new coalition supported a progressive politics centered on economic growth, civic pride, and—to the surprise of outside observers—a moderate pace of racial change. Black Atlantans pressed for desegregation for obvious reasons. Affluent whites, meanwhile, acquiesced to limited changes in hopes of presenting a positive public image for themselves, their city, and, most important, their business interests.

When it came to handling racial issues, the mayor found himself walking a tightrope between the two groups. Personally, Bill Hartsfield was as

much a segregationist as most southern whites of his era. But he was a political realist and quickly put his personal prejudices aside in order to secure black votes. The changes in Hartsfield's racial attitudes were striking. As late as 1944, for instance, he had asked Congressman Martin Dies, head of the House Committee on Un-American Activities, to investigate the NAACP. Hartsfield had no proof of the organization's "subversive activities," but he believed it was behind many of the "professional white agitators" who were "stirring up racial questions in the South." After the creation of his new coalition, however, Hartsfield took a decidedly different tone. In 1951 the NAACP not only held its national convention in Atlanta but found the mayor presiding over opening ceremonies "as warmly as if it had been a meeting of the National Association of Manufacturers." Such actions in the segregated South were, of course, not without risks. A few months after the NAACP convention, segregationists began circulating a number of photos. One showed Hartsfield on stage with the civil rights leaders; another depicted interracial couples dancing. For years thereafter, opponents denounced him as "the NAACP candidate."³⁵ In truth, however, Hartsfield was not so much concerned with the cause of civil rights as he was with the continuation of his political career. "I knew Negroes were going to vote," he remembered, "and I decided they might as well vote for me." As Hartsfield understood the coalition, blacks were not equal partners with the white elite but rather a resource to be tapped by that elite. "Shortly after leaving office," noted Harold Martin, an Atlanta reporter and early biographer of the mayor, "he was heard to say, privately, that he knew how to 'use' the Negro, but was able successfully to avoid letting the Negro 'use' him."³⁶

In his private racism and paternalism, Hartsfield simply echoed the attitudes of his business allies. As Floyd Hunter found in his study of Atlanta's "power structure," many businessmen who appeared racially progressive in public were decidedly less so in private. "I'm a true friend of the Negro," one man told him, "and will be, as long as he keeps his place." Like the mayor, many of these businessmen adopted a public image of racial moderation that was strongly at odds with their personal racism. Hartsfield's leading patron, Robert Woodruff, played an undeniably important role in advancing desegregation in Atlanta. As late as 1960, however, he privately mocked civil rights laws as guaranteeing "the right of a chimpanzee to vote." Likewise, John Sibley, chairman of the Trust Company of Georgia and a close friend of Woodruff's, championed "natural segregation," a thing that all races with different cultural backgrounds and aspirations always seek." In Sibley's mind, school desegregation would assuredly result in a "mongrel race of lower ideals, lower standards, and lower traditions." In spite of these convictions, however, Sibley would play a pivotal role in bringing about the desegregation of Georgia's

schools. For Sibley and Woodruff, and the countless others who took their cues from them, personal racism was ultimately much less important than public prestige. As Atlanta's affluent whites understood, their main concerns—the stability of their city and the success of their businesses—would be damaged by acts of racial extremism. Forced to choose between the social customs of segregation and the economic creed of progress, they readily chose the latter.³⁷

At the same time, black leaders approached the political coalition with just as much calculation. They recognized that their partners from the white elite had little genuine concern for civil rights. "Businessmen were pathetically slow in Atlanta when it came to using their refined mechanisms, so good for making money, to achieve some sense of purpose in life beyond dollars and cents," remembered the Reverend Martin Luther King Sr. "On the issue of racial discrimination, there was *no* white leadership at all." At the same time, black leaders understood that, whatever their faults, the white elite represented their best chance for change. Although Hartsfield may not have appreciated it, the black community was, indeed, using the white members of the coalition as much as whites were using them.³⁸

In the workings of the coalition, the balance of power between the black community and the business elite was a delicate one. By 1950, for instance, blacks composed well over a third of Atlanta's total population. Continued black migration into the city and white flight from it seemed likely to increase their percentage even further. For coalition leaders, the issue presented a special problem. The alliance relied on black numbers at the polls, of course, and would likely receive a boost there as a result. At the same time, coalition leaders worried that if the black percentage of the population became *too* pronounced, that would work against the coalition. As Hartsfield reminded blacks and whites alike, a black-majority city would be simply unworkable in the South. To Hartsfield and his allies, the solution was simple. Atlanta should annex the surrounding suburbs, thereby increasing its size and, more important, its white population. The mayor had pushed the idea as far back as the early 1940s. In a letter to several hundred "gentlemen" of the upscale Buckhead neighborhood, he presented annexation as a way to bring "decent people"—middle-class whites—into the city. Hartsfield warned of the alternative:

Our negro population is growing by leaps and bounds. They stay right in the city limits and grow by taking more white territory inside Atlanta. Outmigration is good white, home owning citizens. With the federal government insisting on political recognition of negroes in local affairs, the time is not far distant when they will become a potent force in Atlanta if our white citizens are just going to move out and give it

to them. This is not intended to stir race prejudice because all of us want to deal fairly with them, but do you want to hand them political control of Atlanta, either as a majority or a powerful minority vote?

Still, despite the mayor's repeated pleas, the annexation crusades of the 1940s consistently failed.³⁹

In 1950, however, the mayor introduced an ambitious "Plan of Improvement." The plan called for the annexation of eighty-two square miles containing almost 100,000 people. It would triple the city's size and boost its population by a fourth—almost all whites. Ironically, this time around, the "powerful minority vote" inside Atlanta proved to be the key to annexation's success. Although the additional population would dilute their electoral strength, many black leaders supported the Plan of Improvement all the same. Some, like Grace Towns Hamilton of the Urban League, simply took the view that "what was best for the city was best for their community within it." Others, like Clarence Bacote, felt that Hartsfield's record of racial moderation merited their allegiance. The mayor had, by this time, brought street lights to Auburn Avenue and ordered city hall to use the respectful "Mr." and "Mrs." when addressing letters to black residents. "I hope that your administration continues along the progressive lines that it has taken in the past," Bacote wrote the mayor that year, "and, if it does, you can be assured of Negro support as long as you desire to remain a public servant." For still other blacks, the plan seemed to strengthen their political position. The whites annexed by the city were, after all, much like their current partners in the coalition. Politically, they would side with them in future elections; financially, they would contribute to the city's tax base. For all these reasons, the Atlanta Negro Voters League endorsed the Plan of Improvement. As a result, when the plan was put to a popular vote in the spring of 1950, it won inside the city's limits by a huge margin, 23,031 to 2,613. Those on the city's fringes were more skeptical, but the measure passed there as well, 6,560 to 4,816. With the endorsement of the legislature, the Plan of Improvement went into effect on January 1, 1952. As white coalition members had expected, Atlanta's black population dropped from 41 percent of the total population to just 33 percent, literally overnight.⁴⁰

Although black leaders stuck with Hartsfield during the drive for annexation, some complained that the mayor was moving too slowly on their demands. John Wesley Dobbs, for one, had been pressing the mayor to follow up on his reform of the police force by integrating the fire department as well. Hartsfield demurred, noting that because firemen had to live and sleep together, their integration would pose much more of a problem for whites. Dobbs refused to accept that rationale. Shortly before the 1953 primary, he stunned the black community by resigning from the

Atlanta Negro Voters League he had created and throwing his support to Hartsfield's rival, Charlie Brown. As an added blow to the coalition, the *Daily World* announced that it would refrain from endorsing one side or the other. To shore up Hartsfield's black support, Helen Bullard, the mayor's campaign manager and public relations expert, sought the advice of Grace Towns Hamilton, head of the Atlanta Urban League. In a detailed blueprint, Hamilton urged the mayor to call black leaders together for a special meeting. She named fifty-four individuals to be invited, taking care to select an important cross-section of Atlanta's black leadership. She also chose the meeting site—the Butler Street YMCA, a hub of black activity whose selection would underscore the mayor's attempts to meet black leaders on their own terms. Most important, Hamilton urged the mayor to speak frankly. He should stress that his enemies were denouncing him as "the Negro's representative," when he was simply trying to be "mayor of all the people." Hartsfield should list his accomplishments, she advised, but acknowledge "that the Negro did have legitimate gripes. The sore spots should be brought up and discussed—no Negro firemen, more Negro policemen, better schools and parks for the Negroes, appointment of Negroes to planning boards, and the elimination of police brutality. Bringing all these into the open and discussing them fully would rob the disgruntled of their ammunition." Running on Hamilton's advice and Hartsfield's record, his coalition kept the support of black Atlantans. Indeed, in several black precincts, the mayor piled up margins of nearly 90 percent, bringing in enough votes to secure reelection.⁴¹

Just as black voters supported the larger coalition, so too did the coalition support a black candidate. Dr. Rufus Clement, president of Atlanta University, ran for a spot on the board of education with Hartsfield's hearty endorsement. Aghast, segregationists on the city's Democratic Executive Committee contacted the House Un-American Activities Committee, hoping to find dirt on Clement. But when they sought to spread word of Clement's past membership in left-leaning groups, they found the city's white elite aligned against them. The newspapers denounced the smear campaign as "dirty politics," and no less an establishment figure than Hughes Spalding came to Clement's public defense. With the coalition behind him, Clement beat his white opponent by a margin of roughly 10,000 votes. To the added dismay of segregationists, court rulings forced the Democratic Executive Committee to accept blacks as candidates for its seats. As a result, the largely black Third Ward elected Dr. Miles Amos and Austin Walden as their representatives. In a touch of poetic justice, the men who led the crusade against Clement not only lost that battle but found blacks elected to their own ranks as well. By all accounts, the 1953 elections represented the triumph of coalition politics. Not only had Atlanta returned its moderate mayor to city hall; it had also elected its first

black officials since Reconstruction. "You had to experience Atlanta," John Egerton has written of that time, "to get the full flavor of its uniqueness as an urban oasis in the Sahara of segregation."⁴²

Indeed, the changes in Atlanta's racial climate forced national observers to take a second look at the city. As late as 1945 the *Saturday Evening Post* still portrayed Atlanta as the backward setting of *Gone with the Wind*. "She's a hot-bread, boiled-greens, fried-chicken-and-cream-gravy town," a reporter noted with a flourish. In his view, the city's worst crisis was "an Old Mammy shortage," which left white women "raising their mammyless children and dreaming for the first time of secondhand washing machines." With the postwar political changes, however, these Old South stereotypes were replaced by New South themes of economic progress and progressive politics. "Here is a city which has been accused of extreme backwardness in racial matters," observed *Christian Century*. Yet the recent "encouraging" political changes meant that Atlantans "have a right to feel proud of themselves." The city had proved it had "more hum than drawl," agreed *Newsweek*. Rejecting racism, Atlanta had become "the nerve center of the New South." Even the *Saturday Evening Post* accepted the image change, running a Ralph McGill piece that praised the "showcase city of the South" for its good political sense and sound race relations. The mayor and his business allies, boosters to the core, had long dreamed of press coverage so positive. Now that the image of Atlanta as a moderate, modern city had finally taken hold, Bill Hartsfield was determined to maintain it. In 1955 the mayor mugged for the National Toastmasters' Club and coined a new nickname for the city. Atlanta, he told the crowd, was "a city too busy to hate." To his delight, the nickname stuck. A few years later, Hartsfield explained what he meant. "We strive to undo the damage the Southern demagogue does to the South. We strive to make an opposite impression from that created by the loud-mouthed clowns. Our aim in life," he concluded, "is to make no business, no industry, no educational or social organization ashamed of the dateline 'Atlanta.'"⁴³

Political realities allowed Hartsfield to take a stand against the southern demagogues in his city. "The Mayor," noted an adviser before the 1953 race, "should not let himself be mislead into the belief that he can possibly get any of the really biggoted vote. That's already lost and has been lost since 1946 and no concession should be made to it." Close analysis of voting results made it clear that working-class whites, who sided the most consistently with segregation, were in fact a lost cause. In the 1953 primary, for instance, Hartsfield received 90 percent of all votes cast in a typical black precinct and 60 percent in a typical upper-income white precinct, but just 29 percent in a precinct of lower-income whites. Running for reelection in 1957, the mayor maintained the allegiance of his

core constituents but saw his working-class white support plummet to 17 percent. By all appearances, such voters could be safely ignored. Moreover, instead of reaching out to segregationists, Hartsfield learned to hold them at arm's length and thereby hold his constituency together. As he knew, both blacks and businessmen saw working-class, white reactionaries as a common enemy. Outside Atlanta, the forces of rural racism still vilified the city's moderates and blacks alike. If similar forces gained power inside Atlanta, the coalition members understood that years of progress would quickly come to a halt. "If there is anything the coalition fears most," one observer noted, "it is seizure of city government by what are called the 'red neck,' 'wool hat' elements." In this regard, the Hartsfield coalition represented, in the words of another study, a "tacit alliance" of blacks and upper-middle-class whites against the working-class whites of Atlanta.⁴⁴

As this brief overview of Atlanta's political landscape suggests, the idea of "the city too busy to hate" was invented and sustained by a moderate coalition born not out of chance but through careful calculation. For their part, white politicians and corporate leaders were just as segregationist in their thinking as other whites of the city. But they were practical. They discovered to their delight that progressive politics—or the appearance of it, at least—resulted in economic progress and profits. And although the white leadership thought of themselves as "using" their black partners, the African American community used them in return. Like their white partners, black Atlantans forged their own kind of progress, social as well as economic, within the workings of the coalition. Together, both sides stood united through the 1940s and 1950s in pushing an agenda of progress and suppressing the segregationist sentiment of working-class and middle-class whites.

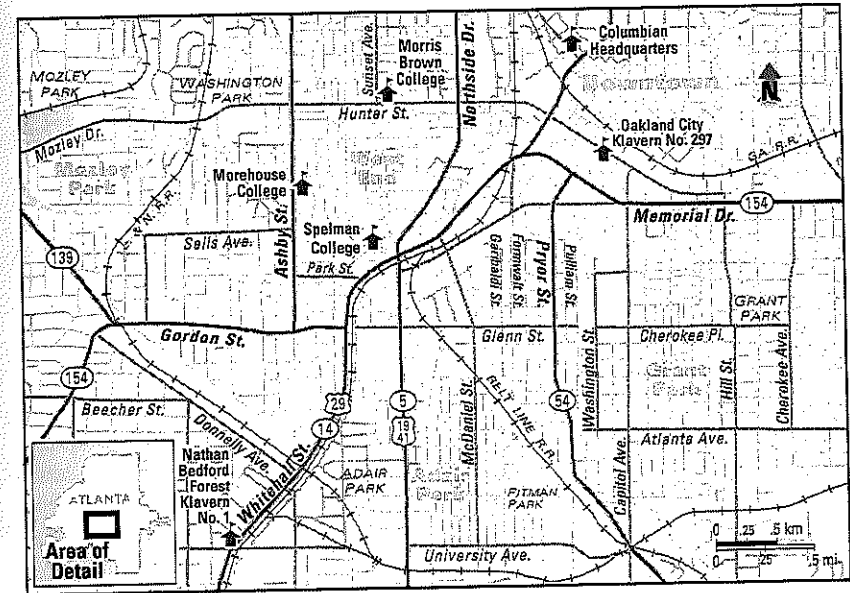
In time, however, these whites would challenge the rule of the Hartsfield coalition. Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, during the peak of the moderate coalition's apparent power and prestige, Atlanta's segregationists slowly gathered steam. As city leaders pressed ahead with the politics of progress, these disaffected working-class and middle-class whites gathered together in a politics of retrenchment. As Hartsfield and his allies bragged about the "city too busy to hate," these whites began to speak a new language of their own, one centered on their beleaguered rights. In the end, their revolt would not only create a separate movement of white resistance in Atlanta but would also irreparably fragment the coalition against which they railed.

CHAPTER TWO

From Radicalism to "Respectability": Race, Residence, and Segregationist Strategy

IN SEPTEMBER 1946 Holt Gewinner stood in a vacant lot near the Piedmont Mills on Atlanta's West Side and served up a half-hour rant to gathering workers. Something of a semiprofessional fascist, Gewinner stood before the crowd as a featured speaker for the Columbians, the first neo-Nazi organization in Atlanta and, for that matter, the United States. His address covered the usual range of extremist arguments, but he ended with an issue he knew would interest his audience more than anything else. "The reason veterans cannot find housing," Gewinner argued, "is that unscrupulous real estate dealers are selling white property to Negroes, thus forcing all whites in the neighborhood to move." The crowd had been watching with some curiosity until then, but now it cheered "enthusiastically and spontaneously." Gewinner understood the importance of the housing issue to Atlanta's whites and he played it to its fullest. "There are two ways to fight this thing," he roared. "With ballots and with bullets! We are going to try ballots first!" A curious observer roamed through the crowd, "watching their expressions and listening for comments, with a view to finding out whether the talks were going over. I decided that they were." At a folding table near the stage, a brown-shirted man stood by, hoping to recruit new members for the Columbians. The pledge cards he distributed were short and simple. "I want the Columbians to continue the fight for the American white working man," the signers swore. "I want the Columbians to continue the fight to effectively separate the white and black races." Several mill workers inked their names on the spot and urged friends to follow suit. One of them, a bus driver who had arrived late, seemed reluctant. "I don't know anything about it," he protested. One of the newest recruits summed it up for him: "It's to keep the niggers down."¹

The tensions laid bare at this rally, and countless others like it across Atlanta, demonstrated the ways in which race and residence stood at the forefront of the city's racial politics in the postwar era. For the working-class white Atlantans who cheered the Columbians and their cause, the problem of "transition neighborhoods," where the population shifted from white to black, was their most pressing concern. As these whites knew all too well, their neighborhoods on the city's West Side had become the focal point of residential transition in Atlanta. Just to their east stood



Map 2.1 West End, 1950

the Ashby Street region, which had grown rapidly during the previous decades, emerging as one of Atlanta's most overcrowded black neighborhoods. Indeed, by the 1940s nearly 40 percent of the city's black population lived there, making the enclave's name synonymous with "black Atlanta." (When segregationists sought to paint Helen Mankin as the "Negro candidate" in the 1946 elections, for instance, they simply dubbed her "the Belle of Ashby Street.")² But as the region found fame, it also reached a critical mass. The end of World War II brought a severe housing crisis to Atlanta, as thousands of veterans returned home to discover the city had not only failed to build new homes during their absence but actually started to destroy old ones. Black leaders banded together to create new housing on the city's outskirts, but found such projects blocked by local resistance and government red tape. In the end, they had only one option. "Following the pressure of increased population," Atlanta's Metropolitan Planning Commission observed, "their only avenue for expansion has been 'encroachment' into white neighborhoods adjoining their own areas of concentration." Logically, the bulk of the early years of black "encroachment" emerged from the most significant "area of concentration," Ashby Street.³

Thus, in the late 1940s Ashby Street became the central place where blacks and whites battled over their relative positions and places in the postwar world. Tapping into working-class white resentment over such residential racial change, three waves of segregationist groups sprang to

life there in rapid succession—first the fascist Columbians, then a revived version of the Ku Klux Klan, and finally a homeowners' group known as the West End Cooperative Corporation. In the short term, the Hartsfield coalition held each group in check and allowed the racial transitions around Ashby Street to continue. Although all three organizations were ultimately unsuccessful in preserving white supremacy, their careers still testify to an important evolution of segregationist organization and outreach. Originally, as Gewinner's address made clear, segregationists relied on populist rhetoric and stark racism to harness the discontent of working-class whites. But with each passing year and each new group, segregationists steadily adopted a subtler pitch predicated on appeals to white homeowners with middle-class aspirations of respectability and upward mobility. In time, they would learn to put aside the brown shirts of the Columbians and the white sheets of the Klan and instead present themselves as simple homeowners and concerned citizens. They would tone down their racist rhetoric and stress their own rights instead. And as they did so, the forces of residential resistance found their campaign gaining a wider and wider audience. Although they lost their immediate campaign to "defend" the Ashby Street area from further residential transitions, these segregationists gained much more in the process—a new understanding of how to present their politics in a more appealing package.

The end result of this evolution from radicalism to "respectability" became clear in nearby Mozley Park. In that neighborhood, the Hartsfield coalition seized the initiative from segregationists for the first time. The administration established a structure of negotiated settlements for future crises over race and residence, one that would maintain peace in the city for years to come. But this approach relied heavily on the cooperation of white homeowners' organizations, groups whose means, motives, and membership had directly descended from the blatantly racist organizations of Ashby Street. By empowering these groups to negotiate the course and character of neighborhood racial changes, the Hartsfield coalition thus unwittingly legitimized the very segregationist forces it had just routed. Their voices of resistance, which had only recently seemed so far outside the political mainstream, would now occupy center stage for the remainder of the 1950s and 1960s.

THE EVOLUTION OF SEGREGATIONIST RESISTANCE

The Columbians, Inc.

The first segregationist organization to "defend" Ashby Street called itself the Columbians, Inc. The origins of the name remain unclear, but the founders likely drew inspiration from "Hail, Columbia!," a Revolution-

ary War anthem that often played at their rallies. While the Columbians claimed to be a "patriotic and political group" inspired by an earlier generation of Americans, the organization derived greater inspiration from another, more recent source—Nazi Germany. Indeed, the founders, Emory Burke and Homer Loomis, proudly styled themselves fascists. An Alabama native, Burke had already made his impact on the national stage. According to one source, his name appeared on the letterhead of "nearly every fascist organization in the country prior to World War II." With the defeat of European fascism, Burke hoped to continue the cause in America. "When the American people awaken to the realities of this age," he wrote, "what the Germans have done to the Jews will be a mere tea-party compared with what we are going to do with them!" Burke found a willing partner in Homer Loomis. "His hair was close cropped, Prussian style," an acquaintance recalled, "and his eyes had a Satanical look about them." Loomis had a specific model in mind. "I'm going to be the Hitler of America," he bragged. Friends were asked to greet him with "Heil, Loomis!"⁴

With the war's end, Burke and Loomis launched their crusade. "Atlanta is the logical place to start something," Loomis reasoned. "The South comes by its racial convictions instinctively." Thus, in 1946 they founded the fascist Columbians there. Dressed in khaki army uniforms with a red lightning bolt insignia, its members soon spread across the city, conducting military marches and drilling in the streets. Pointing to the recent rise of black political power, the Columbians asserted "the same right to organize a white block vote in order to maintain political control that is guaranteed the Negro and other minority groups in their attempt to wrest power from us." Although they framed their fight as political, in truth the leadership had more sinister goals. "We're going to show the white Anglo-Saxons how to take control of the Government," they told their associates. "We're trying to show them they have power in their grasp if they'll just organize and assert themselves!" In an ambitious scheme, they hoped to take control of the city in six months, the state in two years, the whole South in four years, and the entire United States within a decade. "There is no end to what we can do through the ballot," Loomis explained. "If we want to bury all niggers in the sand, once we come to power we can pass laws enabling us to bury all niggers in the sand!"⁵

To launch their plan, the Columbians set up headquarters at the edge of Atlanta's warehouse district. Their dirty, three-room office held a library of Nazi histories and a Confederate battle flag. Enlisting was fairly easy. "There are just three requirements," Loomis told prospects. "Number one: Do you hate niggers? Number two: Do you hate Jews? And three: Have you got three dollars?" The result was a collection of social outcasts, but the leaders saw their troops in a different light. "We welcomed all

members of the Whiteman's community into our fellowship, but we worked mainly among the underprivileged—those of our brothers and sisters that many of the politicians call 'poor white trash,' " Burke later recalled. Indeed, while the Hartsfield coalition spurned such support, the Columbians consciously targeted the working class. The door to their headquarters pointedly identified them as the "Columbian Workers Movement," and the leadership often professed its common ground with working-class whites as well. "In spite of the smugness of some of our financially well-off White brethren," Burke noted, "there are far fewer betrayers of the Whiteman's Way of Life among the simple and hard-working young textile workers and farmers."⁶

Indeed, the textile mills served as a ripe recruiting ground.⁷ In mill neighborhoods across Atlanta—the Exposition Cotton Mills, the Whittier Mills in the northwest section, the Fulton Bag and Cotton Mills on the East Side, and especially the Piedmont Mills off Ashby Street—the Columbians made their pitch directly to working-class whites. Setting up shop in an alleyway or vacant lot, the group worked from a flatbed truck draped with the American flag and the Columbians' lightning bolt banner. Portable speakers blared out renditions of "Dixie," "Atlanta, G-A," and "Hail, Columbia!" so loudly they could be heard several blocks away. Drawn by the music, crowds of curious mill workers and wives drifted in, finding young men in khaki uniforms welcoming them. When two hundred or three hundred had gathered, the music stopped and the speeches began. The speakers varied, but their themes were usually the same. "We're going to them and putting on a show," Loomis explained. "We're telling them stuff they want to hear—that they, the white Anglo-Saxons, are the best people on earth, and that they're entitled to more than they're getting."⁸

All around Ashby Street, in these working-class mill neighborhoods, the Columbians found receptive audiences. "It is in areas as this," the local branch of the Anti-Defamation League warned, "that hate organizations like the Columbians recruit their membership, playing upon the fears, tensions, and insecurities of the people." Another study agreed that "Columbian members were, for the most part, residents of 'transitional' areas in central Atlanta, where housing was rapidly shifting from white to Negro occupancy." Recognizing the housing issue's appeal, the Columbians soon focused entirely on plans for "protecting" white working-class neighborhoods. "White Men and Women" were urged to attend meetings and hear "plans for your neighborhood to keep the Negro out and stop his attack on white people." Burke vowed that his men would bar blacks from the region "if we have to zone them out, walk them out, or throw them out." Signs with the Columbian logo and the words "WHITE COMMUNITY" were posted in "endangered" areas. The group formed street

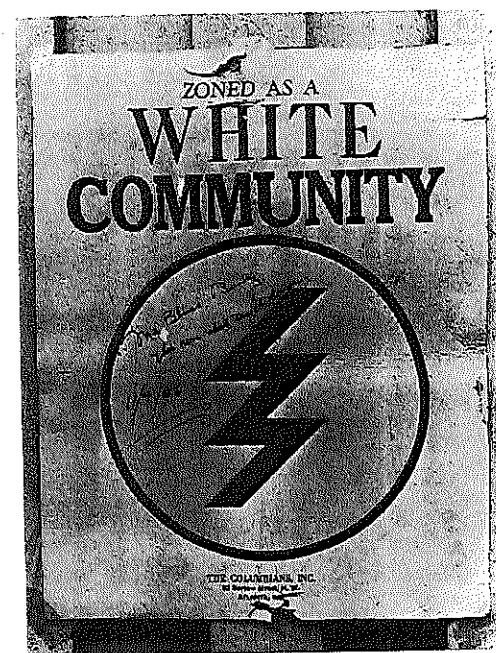


Figure 2.1 Sign posted by the Columbians, Inc., in the "transition neighborhoods" around Ashby Street in the fall of 1946. Although racial zoning was illegal, the Columbians insisted that such areas were, in the words of this sign, "Zoned as a White Community." The symbol at the center is the red lightning-bolt insignia used by the group.

patrols and announced it would "arrest" any black caught in a white section of town. All offenders would be "turned over to the police, beaten with blackjacks, and locked up for being drunk."⁹

The Columbians took this "defense" of white working-class neighborhoods quite literally. On a large map at headquarters, the leaders sketched out the perceived threat. "Here on Ashby Street, the Negroes are driving a wedge toward Bankhead Avenue. And here on Chestnut they're getting another wedge started," Loomis confided to a reporter. "Objective of the enemy here is to cut off this Western Heights section—and make it an 'island' of whites surrounded by Negroes. Then they want to keep moving on in." The former army private continued, jabbing his finger at a dark red line along Garibaldi and Formwalt streets. "We've drawn the color line here," he said, tapping the map, "and that's the line we're going to hold!" All along those streets, his troops patrolled in thirty-minute intervals, armed with .38 caliber pistols and blackjacks. "If you see any niggers so much as walking on the wrong side of the street, stop 'em and whip 'em within an inch of their lives!" Loomis ordered. "After you've whipped

them, tell them what you whipped them for. Tell them this is a white neighborhood and they must not pass through it! If one sasses you and you have to kill him, that's what you've got a gun for!"¹⁰

On the night of October 28, 1946, a young black man named Clifford Hines was walking home along Formwalt Street, where his family had lived for four years. A gang of six Columbians—including one from Garibaldi Street—caught sight of him, whistling and listening to a portable radio. "Ain't this a nigger?" asked seventeen-year-old Ralph Childers. An eighth-grade dropout from Forsyth County, Childers long resented black Atlantans buying homes he could not even afford to rent. In the Columbians, he found a way to vent his anger. By his own account, he had already been involved in the beatings of a dozen or so black men and the bombing of several houses by the time he caught sight of Hines. Chasing him into an alley, Childers and his fellow Columbians proceeded to blackjack the man into screaming hysteria, as Hines's white neighbors stood by, doing nothing. Fortunately for him, police stumbled onto the scene just after the Columbians forced him into the backseat of a waiting car. Unfortunately for Hines, however, the patrolmen arrested him along with Childers, allowing the others to go free. Soon bailed out of jail, Ralph Childers received a hero's welcome and a medal of honor at the Columbians' next meeting. Encouraged, the other troops stepped up their attacks. A black home at the white end of Ashby Street was bombed by the passenger of a passing car on Halloween. Two days later, more Columbians tried to stop another family from moving into a Garibaldi Street home, attracting an angry mob and the police in the process.¹¹

Sensing that things were getting out of hand, city and state officials finally decided to crack down. "In those border areas where Negroes and whites live close together," Assistant Attorney General Dan Duke warned, "we have a potential powder keg that could break forth any day in bloodshed." A liberal ally of the Hartsfield coalition, Duke aggressively moved to revoke the Columbians' charter, on the grounds that the group was "peddling hatred and intolerance among our people." The Columbians accepted the challenge. For two days, they drove sound trucks through the tension area, publicizing an upcoming meeting at the nearby Plumbers and Steamfitters Union Hall. Some two hundred residents attended, including many women with children in tow. "A week ago, we were only an organization," Burke announced, "but we have grown because we have helped you with your problem niggers." The Columbians, Burke lied, patrolled the neighborhood armed only with "two fists and an iron will." Without that protection, everything working-class whites cherished would be lost. "Our heroes in Europe didn't die to give a nigger the right to marry a white American girl," he thundered. "That's right!" roared the crowd, which had now become what a reporter could only describe



Figure 2.2 Members of the Columbians at Ralph Childers's trial for the assault of Clifford Hines. The Columbians appear in their official uniform—a khaki dress outfit with red lightning-bolt insignia on the upper arms.

as a "cheering, whistling, Rebel-yelling, foot-stamping throng." Burke shredded the charter and stomped on it. The crowd stomped with him, clapping and screaming "Send the little pieces to the Jews!"¹²

Despite their disdain for the proceedings, Burke and Loomis welcomed the chance for publicity. Responding to the state's allegations, the Columbians claimed they defended Anglo-Saxon civilization from communism, which called for an "ungodly doctrine of one nation and one race." "This doctrine, if not repelled," the Columbians warned, "will bring about a condition where all men will be colored and no man will be white." Although charter revocations are usually a dry matter, this one turned ugly. At one point during the hearings, Assistant Attorney General Duke, a barrel-chested former Marine, responded to an insult by suddenly turning and slugging Loomis across the chin, knocking him out of the witness chair and onto the floor. The Columbian demanded Duke's arrest, but the judge demurred: "I must have looked away for a moment." In the end, an Atlanta jury took only twenty-nine minutes to revoke the charter. As an added blow, the Columbians found themselves added to the House Un-American Activities Committee's list of subversive groups, placed alphabetically alongside the Communist Party they so despised.¹³

By the time of the charter revocation, however, the courts had already caught up with the Columbians on other matters. A number of the rank and file, for instance, were caught hatching an ambitious plan to bomb city hall, police headquarters, the municipal auditorium, and the offices of the *Atlanta Journal* and *Atlanta Constitution*. Others were rounded up on assorted charges stemming from their street patrols. Loomis himself stood trial in early 1947 on charges of inciting a riot, assault, and usurping police powers. In an impassioned two-hour speech to "my fair-skinned brothers" of the jury, his attorney father claimed his son was being "crucified like Christ by the Jews." The jury disagreed, sentencing him to two years on the chain gang and six months in prison. Meanwhile, Emory Burke was sentenced to three years on multiple misdemeanor charges. Neither seemed distraught. "Jail can't hurt me!" Loomis shouted as the bailiffs led him away. "Hitler wrote a book in jail that did all right. I'll call mine *Thunder in the South!*" "They can put me behind forty feet of granite," Burke bellowed, "and I'll still shout white supremacy!"¹⁴

Although the Columbians had disappeared from the streets of Atlanta, the circumstances that encouraged their growth had not. "The fact that the Columbians were able to rally 200 persons despite all the adverse publicity is an indication of the reality of the issue of interracial housing friction," noted an informant after the Union Hall meeting. "If the Columbians are jailed, it is quite likely that the Klan will mobilize the Columbian followers on the same issue."¹⁵ Indeed, that prediction soon came true.

The Ku Klux Klan

Although the Ku Klux Klan had a long history in Atlanta, the order had been dormant for years. Its postwar rebirth came, appropriately enough, at the hands of an Atlanta obstetrician, Dr. Samuel Green. In late 1945 Green, an unassuming man with wire-rimmed glasses and a toothbrush mustache, anointed himself the Grand Dragon of the Association of Georgia Klans and led his new recruits to Stone Mountain on Atlanta's outskirts. Using a mixture of fuel oil and sand, the men carved out an enormous cross, stretching three hundred feet across the mountainside. Once lit, it was visible some sixty miles away. According to one of the hooded men who constructed it, the blazing crucifix was meant "to let the niggers know the war is over and that the Klan is back on the market." Green returned to the mountain the following May to hold a mass initiation. "America is calling every White Man, who has red blood, into the fight," his invitation intoned. "WHITE SUPREMACY is threatened on every hand. YOU CANNOT FAIL." Sensational newspaper ads attracted nearly a thousand spectators, who watched silently as three hundred men took their

oaths and set a ceremonial cross ablaze. At the end of the evening, the Grand Dragon solemnly intoned, "We are revived."¹⁶

The new recruits came from all walks of life. Cab drivers and truckers, farmers and dairymen, textile workers and factory men, gas station attendants and firefighters were all prominently represented, as were a staggering number of sheriff's deputies and city policemen. An informant snidely reported that the Association of Georgia Klans appealed mainly to working-class whites, who "will not stop to think but will fall in line with 'Dr. Green' as a person of such ranking can easily deceive people who lead an uneventful life."¹⁷ But white collars were just as frequently found under the hoods as blue ones. Tax collectors and assessors were "almost 100% organized," while the clerks and commissioners of other county and state agencies were judged "in good standing." One city councilman's photo was displayed prominently in the East Atlanta post, while two others won door prizes for attracting the most new members at another. Judge Luke Arnold emerged as a popular lecturer at Atlanta Klaverns, and at least three of his fellow jurists were issued special commendations for "conforming with the principles of Klannishness." With such a strong cross-section of working-class and middle-class support, Klaverns quickly cropped up across the city. Weekly meetings took place in rural East Point, along Howell Mill Road to the west, and on Moreland Avenue to the east. Small posts sprang up in the exclusive Northside neighborhood of Buckhead and on the city's suburban outskirts, in Lithonia and Marietta. Despite this sprawl, the two largest and most powerful Klaverns—Nathan Bedford Forrest Post No. 1 and the Oakland City Post No. 297—both stood close to the city's center, not coincidentally near the transitional neighborhoods of Ashby Street.¹⁸

Because the Klan had so much in common with the Columbians—the same fears, the same enemies, the same base of support in the same neighborhoods, all at the same time—many assumed the two groups were related. "The Columbians are nothing but the juvenile delinquents of the KKK," Dan Duke thundered to the press. "They are one and the same, and ought to be tarred with the same tar!" To be sure, a handful of men wore both the Columbians' brown shirts and the Klan's white sheets. But the organizations themselves were not officially aligned. Publicly, the two groups adopted an attitude of mutual contempt. Each accused the other of peddling hate for profit; each claimed it alone was the true champion of white supremacy. Privately, however, the Klan welcomed the upstart organization. As long as the Columbians remained on the streets, "protecting" white neighborhoods, it did not have to confront the issue. As soon as the Columbians collapsed, however, Klansmen rushed to fill the vacuum.¹⁹

As it turned out, the hooded order was even better prepared for the task of "neighborhood defense" than the Columbians, given the large numbers of city patrolmen and detectives in its ranks. Sporting nicknames like "Itchy Trigger Finger" and "Shotgun," policemen figured prominently in several of the Klan's more brutal escapades. When one patrolman won a prize for killing his thirteenth black "in the line of duty," he teased the others: "I hope I don't have to kill all the niggers in the South without getting some help from my Brothers!" "Don't worry," they responded. "You'll have plenty of help!" Indeed, in "defending" white neighborhoods, Dr. Green strongly relied on this police presence. At an April 1947 meeting, for instance, a Klansman announced, "I've been told that a family of niggers has moved into an apartment building for whites at 300 Pulliam Street!" At this, the Grand Dragon called out for a particularly ruthless patrolman. "Take three more of your police officers," he ordered, "and go in your police car to that address at once, and report back here!" Four officers tore off their sheets, revealing uniforms beneath, and rushed to investigate.²⁰

The weekly meetings at Atlanta Klaverns soon focused on similar stories of black "invasions" in white working-class neighborhoods, especially around Ashby Street. "The West End situation was again brought up," an informant noted after a May meeting, when Grand Dragon Green argued that "the negro is definitely stepping out of his place and that he would have to be put back." But how? The first week of June, a Klansman reported that a black man had moved into a house between two white homes on Sunset Avenue, only one block over from the "black side" of Ashby Street. Neighboring whites had whipped the man and torn the windows out from his house, but he still refused to leave. Now, "it looked like they would have to kill him in order to get rid of him." Likewise, at a July meeting, Klansmen heard about a white man on Ashby who had tried to dynamite a black family from the house next door only to wind up in a gunfight with the man. As they learned of further "outrages" around Ashby Street, the Klansmen called for more extreme measures. One recommended that "whenever they learned of a house being advertised for sale to the negroes that they go out and burn the thing down." Another thought "it would take a riot here to straighten out the negroes."²¹

While the Columbians had engaged in countless acts of reckless behavior, Green tried to stem all talk of Klan violence. Dan Duke, emboldened by his success in revoking the charter of the Columbians, had started similar proceedings against the Klan. Afraid of the consequences, the Grand Dragon did not want to give the prosecutor any more ammunition than he already had. As his men pushed for action, Green merely promised, in the words of one Klansman, that "as soon as the trial coming up

soon is won we would have some demonstrations such as Parades and Kid naping and public gatherings and cross burnings." In the meantime, Green clamped down on all lawlessness, even banning cross burnings for a while, lest they be charged with violating local fire ordinances. Instead, he kept his men busy with improbable public relations stunts. Food was distributed to the needy and twenty pairs of long Johns, stamped "K.K.K.," showed up at an old folks' home. In the most memorable act, a Klansman donned a Santa Claus outfit—over his white robe and hood—and presented a 107-year-old black man with a brand new radio.²²

The Grand Dragon acted so cautiously because he knew informers had infiltrated his Klavern. Any detailed discussions on the protection of white neighborhoods would follow other private plans into the pages of Ralph McGill's *Atlanta Constitution* and onto the weekly radio broadcasts of Drew Pearson and Walter Winchell. The leaks came from Stetson Kennedy, an enterprising writer who had infiltrated the Klan and delighted in airing its dirty laundry. In a particularly inspired move, he contacted the scriptwriters of the *Superman* radio serial and gave them detailed descriptions of Klan ceremonies, right down to the passwords. Atlanta Klansmen soon found their own children imitating the episodes, fighting over who got to be Superman and who had to be the cowardly Klansmen. Humiliated in their own homes, they became obsessed with finding the informer. On one occasion, as Kennedy sat among his fellow Klansmen, Green described plans to "split his tongue, strip him naked and nail his penis to a log, set fire to the log at both ends and give him a straight handle razor and tell him to cut it off or burn up." Despite the considerable thought the Association of Georgia Klans put into catching and condemning Kennedy, it never succeeded. And as long as the informer spied on them, Grand Dragon Green refused to go overboard in the "protection" of white working-class neighborhoods.²³

In any case, the Klansmen had bigger problems. First, as Green feared, they lost their charter, when the state amassed ample evidence in 1947 that the Klan was neither "non-profit" nor "benevolent." Then, in 1949, they lost their hoods, when moderate forces in Atlanta enacted an anti-mask law. As a final blow that same year, they lost their leader, when Grand Dragon Green unceremoniously slumped over dead in his garden. Green's men tried to carry on without him, but they found the odds stacked against them. "You can't start a new fire in wet ashes," remarked a retired imperial wizard. "Under Dr. Green the Klan might have amounted to something, for he was an old Klansman and the old-timers would follow him. Now it's breaking up into little splinter groups that won't last." The times had changed, he said. "Too many people don't like its methods. Too many laws are now hemming it in. The Klan can't defend

the wearing of the mask. And it can't live without the mask. Unmask it everywhere, and in two years it will be dead—no more powerful, politically, than the Red Men or the Maccabees.” But the retired wizard was wrong. The Klan did, in fact, learn to live without the mask.²⁴

The West End Cooperative Corporation

Compared with the leaders of the Columbians and the Klan, Joe Wallace seemed the embodiment of respectability. Slightly balding, with white hair and round wire-rim glasses, he worked in the scrap business and dabbled as a building contractor on the side. A resident of Park Street, just around the corner from Ashby, Wallace had long been prominent in neighborhood affairs. He was an active joiner, with memberships in the Loyal Order of Moose, the West End Business Men's Association, the Atlanta Tuberculosis Association, the Park Street Methodist Church, and American Legion Post No. 147 on Ashby Street. His most treasured membership, however, was to Klavern No. 297 of the Association of Georgia Klans. There, Wallace made a name for himself as head of their “Housing Kommittee,” leading the fight against black “invasions” in the area. As the Klan disintegrated, Wallace branched off from the discredited group and formed his own organization, the West End Cooperative Corporation (WECC). Though technically outside the Klan, the group adopted the hooded order's means and methods, not to mention much of its membership.²⁵

Although the WECC built upon the legacy of its white supremacist predecessors in a number of ways, it differed from them considerably in one important aspect—its public image. With their outlandish costumes and crude displays of violence, both the Columbians and the Klan had been ridiculed by Atlanta's moderate establishment as racial extremists who stood outside the circle of respectable life, as rabble-rousers looking for trouble. The WECC members, in contrast, self-consciously presented themselves as honest homeowners confronted with a “social problem” not of their making. In so doing, the organization successfully shifted the terms of debate from one that stressed the defense of white supremacy to one that stressed the defense of home, neighborhood, and community. “You of the middle class,” Joe Wallace asked in a typical pitch, “you with that Southern accent, Georgia-born and reared, are you going to stand by and lose your birthright without a struggle?” The mounting wave of “Negro invasions” would ruin the rest of Ashby Street through a drop in property values and the steady spread of decay, he charged. From there, other neighborhoods would follow suit, and then the entire city. “The Negroes will have Atlanta lock, stock, and barrel in less than ten years if we fail to act,” he warned. “The Negro race will multiply so rapidly and

then we will again even at the edge of town be forced to live with them or move farther out.”²⁶

Throughout 1947 Joe Wallace reached out to the working-class and lower-middle-class whites of the region with a series of recruitment rallies. Generally, these meetings took place in reputable locations essential to white citizens' sense of their community—the local schoolhouse, a Baptist church, the American Legion post. With small groups of twenty or so, Wallace gave a simple pitch. “We don't hate the nigger,” he would tell them. “We love him—in his place!” Unlike earlier groups which had resorted to violence, Wallace promised that the WECC would seek to use capitalism and conversation to solve the problem. If whites would purchase homes from blacks and help them “find homes in the Negro district,” he argued, they could effectively “remove all Negroes from the West End.” After that, the neighborhood could be permanently protected by a “Great White Wall” of racially restrictive covenants written into the deeds of neighborhood houses. But to create this “paradise,” the WECC needed money. It would cost \$5 for each covenant and considerably more for repurchasing the homes. Residents of the West End—white residents, at least—could help by purchasing stock in the nonprofit organization. The maximum amount was set at \$500 per person, just to keep things democratic.²⁷

In addition to fundraising, the West End Cooperative Corporation served, in Wallace's words, as a “sort of a watchdog” for the region. When black buyers were spotted, a careful plan sprang into action. “I put some of our ladies to work making chain telephone calls, and in no time we mobilize quite a crowd around the house where the nigger is trying to move in,” he explained to a confidant. “Then I step in and have a little private talk with the nigger. I tell him he has a perfect legal right to move in, and that I will try to protect him. But at the same time I tell him I doubt if I can control more than a small part of the mob, and that if he does move in he'll be endangering his whole family.” With the crowd outside, Wallace would move in for the hard sell. “You're too intelligent a Negro to put your family in such a spot,” he would say. “Now if you'll just leave everything to me, I'll guarantee to either sell your house for what you paid for it, or our Corporation will buy it, within fifteen days.” As Wallace once bragged at a Klan meeting, “Ninety-nine times out of a hundred, that ought to do the trick!”²⁸

The scheme of balancing a public image of respectability with private threats of violence worked well for the WECC, especially during its first year. Locals still had a fresh memory of the Columbians' activities around Ashby Street, and thus Wallace's offers of repurchasing black homes found some takers. But with the demand for housing still incredibly high in the black community, the WECC scheme created little more than a

temporary truce. In May 1948 the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that racially restrictive covenants were unenforceable, effectively destroying the WECC's only "respectable" tool of defense. With his "Great White Wall" suddenly in ruins, Wallace seemed shaken. Publicly, he still promised a "diplomatic handling" of the housing situation. But without the legal bulwark of racially restrictive covenants, Wallace now only had his hard-sell method to "protect" white neighborhoods in the West End. And by his own admission, that technique required terrorizing his targets.²⁹

To that end, Wallace and his allies slipped out of the guise of respectability and stepped up their intimidation campaign. In this regard, the WECC relied on men like H. C. Harris Jr., a pipe fitter in the Southern Railway's repair shop. As the WECC's vice-president, Harris took neighborhood "defense" every bit as seriously as Wallace. For instance, in November 1948, when real-estate agents showed a home at 328 Ashby Street to a prospective black buyer, Harris appeared on the lawn and ominously mentioned that "some property occupied by negroes in the neighborhood had been blown up." Intimidated, the prospect refused to bid on the home. But another black buyer, Bennie Glenn, purchased the house in early 1949. When Glenn's mother Estelle showed up at the home, Joe Wallace was waiting for her. He repeated his usual threats, adding that he would not be responsible "for what harm might happen to them and any negroes in the event they did move in." The Glenns refused to budge. Their old home had been condemned as part of an expressway project; they had nowhere else to go. Refusing to be intimidated, they secured a restraining order against Wallace and Harris, arranged for police protection, and then moved in.³⁰

Seeing that threats had failed, the WECC decided to abandon negotiations and resort to violence. Their next chance came in March, when a black beautician, Rose Torrence, purchased a home at 369 Ashby Street, just two doors north of the intersection of Sells and Ashby. Wallace and Harris confronted the new owner immediately. "Mr. Wallace asked me was I the owner of the house," Torrence recalled. "I said yes, then he questioned me about my moving in. He said that it wasn't advisable for me to do so because they were going to bomb it. Then the other white man said that if I moved in I would be running my own funeral." The house exploded that night. With a "deafening blast" heard a mile away, several sticks of dynamite blew out the windows, crumbled the plaster walls, and shot a wooden plank fifty feet down the street and through a neighbor's window. The WECC was apparently no longer content to make empty threats. And yet, with the evidence scattered across Ashby Street and the only testimony coming from a lone witness—and a black

woman at that—the Atlanta police were unable or unwilling to charge either Wallace or Harris with the bombing.³¹

In spite of its turn to violence, the WECC still tried to project an air of respectability. It distributed a new neighborhood newspaper, the *West End Eagle*, as a courtesy to "the home owners, residents, and business men of the West End." According to the editors, the paper would simply discuss those issues, such as racial "invasions" in their neighborhoods, which were ignored by the larger Atlanta dailies. "The *Eagle* is definitely NOT a hate sheet," its editors claimed, "but is motivated solely with the idea of promoting better relationships between the white and colored races." However, the advertisement for subscriptions indicated just what sort of relationship the WECC had in mind. "HELP STOP Negro Encroachment into White Areas, Unscrupulous White and Negro Real Estate Agents from Exploiting Negro Home Buyers, Spreading of Communism," the ad implored its readers. "The *Eagle* will stand for the rights of Southern people." Those rights—to private property, segregation, and self-determination—had been trampled on by petty politicians and minority groups. "Through the columns of this newspaper," the publishers promised, "we will show you how . . . big slogans 'Racial Equality,' 'Civic Improvement,' and other self-righteous, pious, high sounding overworked words have become a tool of exploitation in the mouths of a handful of unscrupulous individuals and organizations, working for their own gain of political, monetary or personal power." At the same time, Wallace played up his personal image as the respectable protector of white working-class and middle-class neighborhoods. "I have been called a rabble rouser and blamed for the delivery of fiery speeches," he claimed. "If a Negro family moved into your block as your neighbor, would you need anybody to rabble-rouse to start you on the warpath? Would you need fiery speeches? No! You would have more need for a pacifier, a diplomat, to cool you down and help you to work out a plan, using the law rather than violence to make a peaceful settlement. That is exactly what I had to do."³²

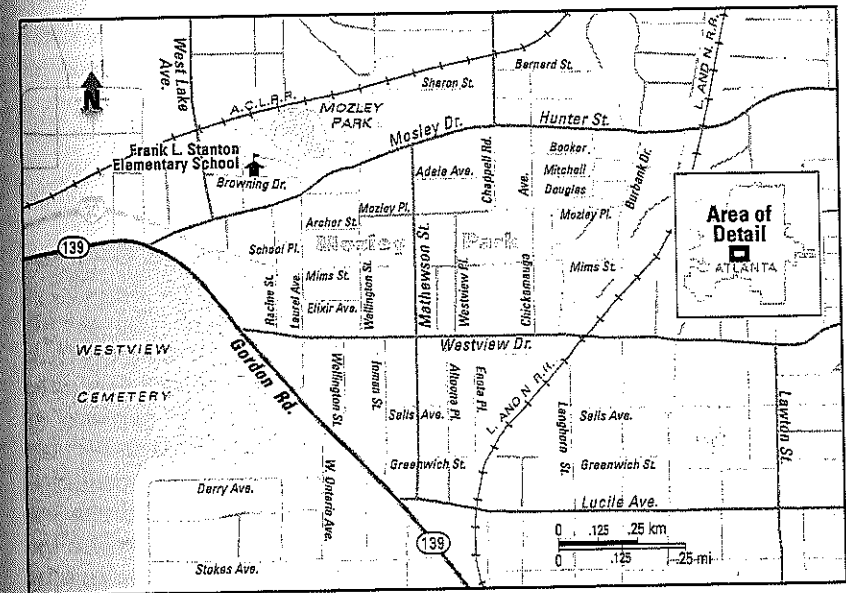
Although Wallace tried to portray himself and his organization as respectable, the damage to the image of both had already been done. In its early years, the WECC had succeeded where the Columbians and Klan had failed, largely because it managed to disguise the rabidity of racial violence with the respectability of community politics. Rather than project an air of lawlessness and violence, WECC members presented themselves as hard-working, honest homeowners, concerned about their families, their homes, their neighborhoods and their city. Their motivation was not racism, they insisted, but their rights. But as soon as the organization resorted to outright violence, it ceded all claims to respectability and

steadily lost its appeal. Within a few years, Joe Wallace had no credibility and no following. But other segregationist groups in Atlanta looked to the WECC example. They realized that success lay in respectability and a "reasonable" appeal to middle-class values, while violence and open bigotry would only lead to failure.

THE LEGITIMIZATION OF WHITE RESISTANCE: RACIAL TRANSITION IN MOZLEY PARK

For all the tension and trouble in the Ashby Street neighborhood, its problems were soon overshadowed in the neighborhood immediately to its west, Mozley Park.³³ "Of the postwar tension areas, perhaps the most crucial for Negroes and whites was Mozley Park," reflected Robert Thompson of the Atlanta Urban League in 1960, "not only because it illustrates some of the problems which arise when Negroes move into a 'restricted' area in Atlanta, but because it has had a continuing effect on the thinking and the activities of buyers, sellers, builders, financing agents, and city officials involved in similar situations in other parts of Atlanta." Indeed, as this small and seemingly insignificant area underwent "racial transition" during the late 1940s and early 1950s, the city entered a new era in its struggles over race and residence. Black leaders would shape and reshape their approach to residential desegregation during the neighborhood's transition, forging cautious compromises with city officials and even white homeowners' groups as they went. Those homeowners' groups, meanwhile, would build on the lessons of Ashby Street to create an even stronger and stabler form of white middle-class resistance to racial change. This time around, they staged a more prominent "defense" of their neighborhood in the streets, in the courts, and at City Hall. Though they were ultimately unable to hold back black expansion in Mozley Park, these homeowners' groups would foster the growth of a larger politics of white resistance across Atlanta.³⁴

Located three miles west of downtown, along what was then the city limits, Mozley Park stood as a small community of working-class and lower-middle-class white families, living in single-story homes along narrow streets. On the pages of city maps, their neighborhood took the shape of a small triangle, pointing west and extending, along its longest lines, five blocks high and seven blocks wide. Though a small neighborhood, its attractiveness was greatly enhanced by a wide semicircle of parklike public spaces surrounding it. Along the southwest stretched Westview Cemetery, established in the 1880s with nearly six hundred acres of richly landscaped lawns and a strict requirement that all who came there—both visitors and permanent residents—be white. (Fittingly, when Grand



Map 2.2 Mozley Park, 1950

Dragon Green died in 1949, his Klansmen made sure he was laid to rest in one of Westview's whites-only plots.) Then, in the neighborhood's northwest corner stood Mozley Park itself, a thirty-eight acre park that boasted of a large swimming pool, a natatorium, and even a clubhouse, complete with showers and changing rooms downstairs and a hardwood dance floor upstairs. Finally, overlooking the park from the west stood the three-story Frank L. Stanton Elementary School for white children.³⁵

Just as these neighborhood spaces—cemetery, park, and elementary school—barred blacks, so too did the residential region enclosed by them. The neighborhood of Mozley Park, however, lay immediately west of the black enclave around Ashby Street. As that area filled to capacity in the 1930s, blacks began edging further west, where the white working-class residents of Mozley Park kept constant watch. When a black physician purchased three lots there in 1937, for instance, he had to abandon his building plans after whites threatened the work crews. The next year, when a black businessman began construction on the neighborhood's outskirts, a group of hooded whites warned him that black homes would not be allowed in Mozley Park itself.³⁶

To "protect" the area from advancing blacks, in 1941 city officials proposed the construction of a highway that would seal off the white neighborhood from black areas to its east. The West View Parkway, as it would be called, would run south of Mozley Drive down to the Louisville and

Nashville Railroad. Between two parallel lanes of traffic and, more to the point, between the two races, the city would set up a "no man's land" of trees and shrubs, with tall cyclone fences running alongside. Despite a continued push for the program throughout the 1940s, the buffer was never built. Unable to build a new barrier, white residents instead tried to transform an existing street, Westview Drive, into a racial blockade. While the city had thought of using fences and traffic to separate the races, local residents settled for intimidation and threats. Construction crews working for black developer Walter Aiken and others were warned not to build homes within a hundred yards of the thoroughfare. To make the boundary line plain for all parties, the paving of streets leading out from black developments toward Westview Drive abruptly stopped a hundred yards shy of the "white" boundary.³⁷

The resistance of these whites to the "encroachment" of blacks resulted not solely from their personal racism but also from the larger manifestations of racism in real-estate practices. By the time these white homeowners confronted racial transition at their neighborhood's borders, the American real-estate industry had completely embraced the idea that such racial transition would, without doubt, lead to a devastating decline in property values. From the 1930s on, leading appraisal manuals linked the worth of property to the status of its occupants, warning that the arrival of "undesirable" racial and ethnic groups would cause home prices to plummet. Shortly thereafter, such ideas became entrenched as federal policy. The Home Owners' Loan Corporation (HOLC), for instance, instituted the practice of "red lining" minority areas—identifying them on color-coded maps as neighborhoods in decline and decay, where property values were in doubt and, therefore, where loans were strongly discouraged as a risky investment. The Federal Housing Administration (FHA) and, after 1944, the Veterans' Administration (VA) adopted HOLC standards in their own massive loan programs to home builders and buyers. To prevent any possible mixture of "inharmonious races and classes" and thereby protect property values, the FHA encouraged the use of racial restrictions, such as restrictive covenants and even physical barriers, to keep blacks from lowering the value of "white" property. As housing expert Charles Abrams observed in the 1950s, the FHA embraced "a racial policy that could well have been culled from the Nuremburg laws."³⁸

These new federal policies echoed and amplified the existing racism of the real-estate industry. Until 1950, for example, the code of ethics of the National Association of Real Estate Boards (NAREB) included this canon: "A realtor should never be instrumental in introducing to a neighborhood a character of property or occupancy, members of any race or nationality, or any individual whose presence will clearly be detrimental to property values in the neighborhood." To illustrate the supposed ill

effects of black occupancy on the property values of a white block, a NAREB brochure from 1943 warned realtors that

the prospective buyer might be a bootlegger who would cause considerable annoyance to his neighbors, a madame who had a number of Call Girls on her string, a gangster who wants a screen for his activities by living in a better neighborhood, a colored man of means who was giving his children a college education and thought they were entitled to live among whites. . . . No matter what the motive or character of the would-be purchaser, if the deal would institute a form of blight, then certainly the well-meaning broker must work against its consummation.

Like other local boards nationwide, the Atlanta Real Estate Board took the equation of black ownership and neighborhood decay to heart and stood on guard against such sales. In 1946, for instance, board president A. H. Sturgess confided that his member realtors were "under obligation not to sell to Negroes in predominantly white areas."³⁹

Thus, with real-estate officials—public and private, national and local—insisting that the "encroachment" of black buyers on all-white neighborhoods would assuredly depress property values, the white residents of Mozley Park and countless other neighborhoods across Atlanta accepted the idea without question. In truth, most of the Mozley Park properties were already quite modest. For instance, along Mozley Place, one of the streets closest to nearby black neighborhoods, stood simple wooden frame houses, usually just a single story high and situated on small land lots. Much of the housing had been built before the Depression, yet was still of a higher stock than blacks' homes to the east. Unlike most of those shotgun shacks, all the homes on Mozley Place had running water and almost all had private baths.⁴⁰ Much like the rest of the neighborhood, the residents there represented a mix of working-class and lower-middle-class whites. Two or three held white-collar positions as clerks or claims agents. Some served as foremen and managers at small businesses, such as a drapery shop or a tire company, while others worked as salesmen on the road or at retail stores like Sears, Roebuck. But the majority worked as skilled and semiskilled craftsmen, including a seamstress, a plumber, a bricklayer, a mechanic, a machine operator, a serviceman, a welder, and a pipe coverer. For the most part, they worked long hours at hard jobs. But most of them—forty out of forty-six—had saved enough money to purchase their own homes. Those homes were by far their largest investment, and their neighborhood a prized possession. All of the authorities in their lives insisted that the presence of blacks would destroy both.⁴¹

For these working-class whites along Mozley Place, the first sign of "transition trouble" appeared in 1948. William A. Scott Jr., son of the

Atlanta Daily World founder, had returned from overseas service to help his uncle run the paper. For two years, Scott scoured Atlanta for a home but, like many of his fellow veterans, failed to find one in the tight housing market. Therefore, he decided to build one himself, on two lots he had inherited at the corner of Mozley Place and Chappell Road. Although the part of the block along Mozley was completely white, blacks occupied all but two homes on the remainder and owned virtually everything to the east. Nearby whites had apparently accepted this arrangement, though in a less than neighborly manner. When blacks began "taking over" blocks of Hunter Street to the east, for instance, white residents convinced the city to change the name of their part of Hunter to Mozley Drive, so they could avoid the stigma of having a "black" address. The exact dividing line was Chappell Road.⁴² Building a home a block below this borderline, at the corner of Chappell and Mozley Place, but still on the "black" side, must have seemed to Scott an uncontroversial extension of earlier expansion.⁴³

White residents, however, disagreed. Learning of Scott's plans to make Mozley Place his home, they gathered at Stanton Elementary in hopes of stopping him and preserving property values. First, they tried to have Scott's building permit revoked, but found no support at city hall. Next, they pleaded with him through the minister of a large local church. The pastor repeatedly called the young veteran, begging him to build elsewhere or, at the very least, turn his home around so it would not face Mozley Place. When that approach failed, fifty residents banded together to purchase the lot back from the black owner, in order "to keep them off the street," as one of them later put it. Those negotiations fell through, but yielded an unexpected result. Scott informed them that "Negroes would pay much more for these lots than the whites thought they were worth." Thus, unable to remove Scott, some whites instead decided to remove themselves, placing their homes on the black real-estate market.⁴⁴

The first homes listed were those nearest Scott's site. Ed Turner, a plumber, and his wife Maybelle lived in a small single-story house at 1400 Mozley Place, about a hundred feet across the street. Watching the black veteran lay his home's foundation, Maybelle Turner decided he was there to stay. "I feel like [they] have a right, that this is a free country," she later explained. "I did not object to colored people building there on their property. They owned it." But just as she claimed Scott had a "right" to stay there, Maybelle Turner asserted her own prerogative to sell and leave. "I did not feel like I wanted to be there and be a fence to protect other people," she stated. Soon thereafter, the Turners listed their home with a black real-estate agent, starting a domino effect along Mozley Place. The couple next door at 1406 Mozley, salesman John Ogletree and his wife Ethel, quickly listed their house with a black broker. Margaret Hall of

1416 soon followed suit. "Mrs. Turner and Mrs. Ogletree were selling their houses to colored people," she reasoned, so "I knew no white person would buy mine."⁴⁵

Whites farther down Mozley Place understood what was happening, especially after John Calhoun paid visits to the Turner and Ogletree homes. Calhoun's business cards described him as a "realist"—the job title used by black real-estate agents who were denied membership in the whites-only NAREB and, as a result, prohibited from using its copyrighted title of "realtor." The occupational semantics spoke volumes about the segregated nature of the real-estate market. But, more important, because black realists almost exclusively handled property for black buyers, Calhoun's presence in Mozley Park told neighbors that the Turners and Ogletrees were selling their homes to blacks. "He was going back and forward to their houses just like an ant, two or three times a day," recalled one. "We would catch him in there, see him in there, and at night." In response, some whites tried to keep their neighbors from selling. "Well, they had committees come down and suggest that we stay down there and be on the fence and let the colored live there," recalled Maybelle Turner. "They said they didn't blame me, but that they wished that I wouldn't sell, being down there, and stay and protect them." The Turners realized, however, that their neighbors only wanted them to stay on the front lines of defense because they feared blacks would then become *their* next-door neighbors. "I told them that if they objected so much to me selling," Ed Turner scoffed, "they could move on down there to my place, but they didn't want to do that."⁴⁶

While some whites pleaded with their neighbors, others tried intimidation. Chief among these was Ramsey Allen, a bricklayer who had lived at 1433 Mozley Place for fourteen years. Although the white two-story house belonged to his elderly in-laws, Allen was as fiercely protective of the neighborhood as any homeowner. He argued with John Calhoun in August 1948 and William Scott in October, but finally decided to take his case directly to the whites who "betrayed" him by showing their homes to blacks. The brickmason made "a lot of threatening and ugly talk," a neighbor recalled, harassing white sellers and potential black buyers alike. Allen even threatened to import other neighborhood "defenders" from Ashby Street. "Well, he said the Klu-Klux were coming down there," remembered Maybelle Turner, "and he was going to get Joe Wallace to stop us one way or another." Ultimately, however, the threats failed to stop the white owners of 1400, 1406, and 1416 Mozley Place from listing their homes.⁴⁷

All three homes were quickly sold to black buyers. The Turner place was the first to go, bought by the Reverend William Weatherspool, pastor of the Mt. Olive Baptist Church. No sooner had he and his wife arrived

at the house, however, than two hundred whites from the neighborhood appeared, with Joe Wallace at the lead. An angry mob of a hundred more stormed the mayor's office, telling him they had "no intention of moving or selling out to Negroes" and demanding a solution. With several city councilmen, the chief of police, and concerned delegations of white and black citizens surrounding him, Mayor Hartsfield met personally with the pastor, begging him to think of the greater good. "That is your property, if you so desire to stay there," he told him, "but in the midst of the tenses, if you will consider not staying there at night . . . perhaps this will clear up the situation." The minister agreed to remove his family from the property, leaving only his furniture behind. The new owner of 1406 Mozley followed Weatherspool's lead. Meanwhile, Geneva Allen, the third buyer, went a step further and sought to break the sales contract she had signed for 1416 Mozley Place. As seller Margaret Hall recalled, "she said someone came to see her and told her they were going to bomb the house if she moved in it." Hall refused, claiming their contract was binding. The Fulton County Superior Court agreed.⁴⁸

Looking for a way to break the contract, local segregationists tried to nullify the agreement—and get a little revenge in the process—by having the Georgia Real Estate Commission (GREC) revoke John Calhoun's license. Unable to back out of the transaction any other way, Geneva Allen stepped forward to make a charge of "misrepresentation" against the realtor, claiming he had told her the neighborhood was "going colored." The "misrepresentation" charge held a double appeal for segregationists. Internally, it reinforced a fundamental pillar of segregation, the belief that blacks consented to racial separation and would never knowingly purchase a home in a white neighborhood. Externally, the charge let them circumvent recent court rulings. Instead of outlawing residential desegregation, the state would simply make outlaws of those who *enabled* residential desegregation. There was only a slight difference between the two tactics, but the result would be the same. That May, the GREC heard the case and refused Calhoun a license renewal. Not content with putting Calhoun out of business, angry whites sought to put him in prison as well. In Criminal Court, however, a lone juror voted in Calhoun's favor, and prosecutors had to drop the case. The message to others involved in similar "encroachments," however, had still been made.⁴⁹

When the state and county finished their cases against John Calhoun, local whites in Mozley Park tried to correct the "damages" he had wrought in their neighborhood. In April 1949 more than a hundred concerned residents met at the neighborhood's Joel Chandler Harris School to form a new "defensive organization," the Mozley Park Home Owners' Protective Association. In a study of similar groups, historian Thomas Sugrue described the significance of their names. "As protective associa-

tions, they fiercely guarded the investments their members had made in their homes," he noted. "They also paternalistically defended neighborhood, home, family, women, and children against the forces of social disorder that they saw arrayed against them in the city." To lead that defense, the new group elected Arnold Kennedy as its president. He had worked with the West End Cooperative Corporation in "defending" Ashby Street and thus seemed a logical choice to "defend" his own neighborhood. Business agent for Local 84 of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, Kennedy surrounded himself with others from the lower-middle-class—a post-office clerk, a drugstore proprietor, a career soldier, a salesman's wife, and a conductor on the Southern Railway. Above all of them, acting as trustee and sponsor for the organization, stood none other than Joe Wallace, who considered this resistance group a branch of his own.⁵⁰

Although most observers neglected to notice, the creation of the Mozley Park Home Owners' Protective Association signaled the legitimization of white resistance to residential transition. Throughout the late 1940s the cause of neighborhood "defense" had passed from one segregationist group to another, with each seemingly more respectable than the last—first, the outlandish fascists of the Columbians; next, their associates in the (comparatively) more reputable Ku Klux Klan; and then the West End Cooperative Corporation, an apparently harmless homeowners' organization that had, in fact, been founded by a Klansman. Now, in Mozley Park, Wallace's WECC helped establish an even more respectable homeowners' group, one that distanced the cause even further from the ugliness of its early days, while still ensuring the same result—the successful "defense" of segregated neighborhoods. While the WECC had never been able to shed its violent image completely, the new Mozley Park group insisted it could solve the "racial problem" solely through nonviolent ways. The key, Kennedy explained, would be raising enough money to buy back the homes and then establishing a "voluntary boundary line for Negro expansion." And so, working in pairs, the homeowners' group visited every house around Mozley Place, quickly raising the needed funds through the sales of bonds. Within a month, 1400 and 1406 Mozley Place were "safely" in the hands of two white veterans. When their fellow veteran William Scott finally finished his home across the street and moved in, he was the only black owner on the block.⁵¹

This stabilization proved temporary, however. Taking stock of the situation, some whites realized that, by selling to black buyers, their former neighbors had turned a tremendous profit. The Turners, for instance, had originally spent \$3,750 for their home but resold it, after years of wear and tear, for \$9,050. For some working-class whites, the possibility of tripling their investment simply proved too strong a temptation. In Octo-

ber 1949 eight homeowners along Adele Avenue and Mozley Drive decided to list their homes on the black realty market. To their surprise, many black realists refused to handle the sales. The largest and most reputable realty firms belonged to the Empire Real Estate Board (EREB), Atlanta's association for black realists. Their representatives had agreed to the "voluntary boundary line for Negro expansion" that spring, and the members promised to abide by that agreement. There were, however, several unaffiliated black brokers in the city who had no qualms about handling the hot properties. By early spring, all eight of the homes—plus two more—had been sold to black buyers.⁵²

The Mozley Park Home Owners' Protective Association tried to fight back the new wave of "invasion" as it had the first. In March 1950 Arnold Kennedy sketched out an ambitious plan, calling for local businessmen to "purchase or resell to Whites" all the recently transferred property—the five homes on Mozley Drive, the three on Adele Avenue, a number of empty lots on various streets, and even the Scott residence on Mozley Place. In addition, he advocated closing virtually every street connecting to Mozley Place and Westview Drive to isolate the neighborhood. White residents welcomed the plan and assumed blacks would once again go along. This time, however, black realists refused. The original agreement had been easily circumvented by others, they pointed out, and in any case they never enjoyed endorsing a system of segregation that held them in check, both personally and professionally. The entire rationale behind the "defense" of white neighborhoods was preposterous, complained Robert Thompson and Austin Walden. "Negroes have legally purchased property or moved into homes adjacent to or near white sections, and such actions cannot be considered as 'encroachment,'" they asserted. "It is inconceivable to believe that Negroes have gradually or silently infringed upon the rights of the white citizens in the Mozley Park Section of Atlanta, especially when the white residents of the area made overtures first." With all of the black realty firms in agreement, the Empire Real Estate Board decided to stop supporting residential segregation in Mozley Park.⁵³

As black realists collected listings in Mozley Park, each followed his own rules. Some refused to take a house unless every other one on the block was also listed, therefore ensuring "a complete transition from white to Negro occupancy." Others accepted individual parcels, with an expressed agreement that the white seller would remain in his former residence "until conditions permitted the Negro to move in." Furthermore, to avoid alarming whites south of Westview Drive, the realists decided to concentrate solely on blocks to the north. As an added safeguard, they agreed to contribute a 5 percent commission from each sale to "a separate fund for emergency," such as another lawsuit or licensing trial. The realists stuck together through the spring and summer of 1951,

holding their prized listings until they had secured a majority of the homes along Mozley Place and surrounding streets. At that point, the EREB gave the "go" sign. On the first Sunday of September 1951 black brokers suddenly announced a number of Mozley Park properties in the *Daily World*. Each realist had his own cache of land: J. R. Wilson displayed a whole block on Mozley Place, Caldwell Realty had eight homes on nearby Browning Street, and the offices of J. L. Wolfe Realty bragged of fourteen more on Mozley Drive. The next week, the pages were nearly filled with listings there. In two-column photo spreads with half-inch banners, the Alexander-Calloway Real Estate Company announced "LET US HELP YOU PURCHASE A BEAUTIFUL HOME IN THE MOZLEY PARK SECTION." Agents encouraged all of black Atlanta to drive through the neighborhood, browse its streets, and attend open houses. "These Home Owners Want to Sell," assured Caldwell Realty. "They Are Friendly People Who Want You to Stop, Look, and Call Us for an Appointment." The whole region was up for grabs, they promised. "If you see a house anywhere in this section you want," read another ad, "call us." An already heavy load of listings grew heavier, as white homeowners further south rushed to put their property up for sale. "Whites panicked and many became anxious to sell to get the top dollar while the getting was good," remembered T. M. Alexander, then president of the Empire Real Estate Board and an active realist himself. "One Sunday, while driving a Black client around, a White lady stood out motioning to us excitedly to, 'Come look at our house!'" By early October, entire rows of homes on Mims Street and Westview Drive were likewise listed for black buyers.⁵⁴

Selling the homes, however, depended on finding financing. Scarce for black homeowners in general, loans were especially rare for those who wanted homes in "transitional" areas. "In my humble opinion, it is not altogether the Government that is keeping Negroes and other minority groups confined to the central sections of our metropolitan areas," Robert Thompson reported to the National Urban League. "The groups that keep us hemmed in are the officials of banks, building and loan associations, life insurance companies and other approved lending institutions." Around Atlanta, discriminatory lending practices were an open secret. As late as 1959, during testimony to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights no less, the president of the Atlanta Savings and Loan Association admitted they were a common practice. "We do not want to be a part to creating unrest and dissatisfaction," noted W. O. DuVall. "A loan made in an area of that type"—a transitional neighborhood—"is not so attractive, not so stable. There is a tendency for these houses to be sold, transferred, and it is our general feeling and our experience that it is not so satisfactory."⁵⁵

While most banks refused to make loans in any transitional neighborhood, in the case of Mozley Park they had an added incentive. In an

effort to stall racial change in the neighborhood, the Mozley Park Home Owners' Protective Association persuaded at least one white institution against loaning money to blacks in the area. To the astonishment of whites, however, Auburn Avenue quickly filled the void. In late 1951 Citizens Trust Company began working with two black insurance companies to provide mortgage money for black buyers in the area. "Some of these loans," Robert Thompson later noted, "made possible the 'breaking' of the Mozley Park bottleneck." But the bank did more than assist black buyers. It also worked the other end, helping white sellers settle outstanding loans, so they could get their finances in order and get out. By the end of the year, the realists and bankers had secured the sales of most of the property around Mozley Place. Finally, on January 2, 1952—"Moving Day"—all the black buyers arrived together to take possession of their new homes.⁵⁶

From their home on Altoona Place, a traveling businessman named Donald McLean and his wife Alma saw the "Moving Day" arrivals as the start of a larger "conspiracy." To stop the supposed threat, the McLeans lashed out at the traditional scapegoats, real-estate agents. In May 1952 they filed a suit asking Fulton County Superior Court to enjoin eleven realty firms, both black and white, from "listing or selling to colored persons any additional property" in the neighborhood, on the grounds that such actions were destroying local property values. The neighborhood, as they understood it, included not just the traditional Mozley Park area north of Westview Drive, but a number of still-white blocks to the south, such as theirs. Compared with the section "taken over" on Moving Day, this new area was slightly more middle class. Every single home was owner-occupied and nearly every homeowner held a white-collar job. The McLeans' neighbors on Altoona Place, for instance, included a claims examiner, a supervisor for Atlanta Newspapers, a Hormel salesman, an inspector at the Fort McPherson army base, an accountant for the U.S. Department of Agriculture, an auditor with the army, a career military man, and two business superintendents. (The only exceptions to the middle-class character of the block stood at the very ends—a painter and a foreman for Southeastern Meat and Poultry.) Just as Mozley Park had witnessed a gentrification of the white resistance from Ashby Street, so too did the McLeans' lawsuit represent another small step up the social ladder of respectability.⁵⁷

Indeed, in their lawsuit, the McLeans drew directly on a middle-class self-image, which emphasized the role of the home as a reward for a life of hard work. The residents in their neighborhood, they claimed, had each "established their permanent home in its present location in the belief that they could live out their lives there in peace and contentment." They had done this "at great financial expenditure and personal sacrifice" and now

that they had reached middle age, they did not want to abandon "the sentimental and nostalgic memories of their present home where they have spent so many happy years." Unlike earlier crusades for neighborhood "protection," individual homes were no longer the main issue. Instead, the McLeans claimed rights to the entire neighborhood, which they described as "a completely developed and established section of long standing, with white schools, parks, churches, and shopping centers nearby." The neighborhood as a whole belonged to them, the McLeans stated, but real-estate agents sought to steal it. In strikingly militaristic terms, their suit accused brokers of trying to sell blacks "certain strategically located properties" to effect "an encirclement of the city public park for white persons known as Mozley Park, and the city public school for white children known as Frank L. Stanton School." The objective of this "conspiracy," they charged, was "to cause the said public park and the said public school to be turned over to colored persons for their exclusive use, thereby further decreasing the value of petitioners' property and the property of others, and further unlawfully and by means of conspiracy depriving petitioners and others of the use and enjoyment of said public park and school." In other words, if enough homes in Mozley Park "went colored," the school and park would inevitably follow.⁵⁸

The McLeans' charge was not a new one. As early as 1947, when blacks began buying homes north of the neighborhood, white residents spoke knowingly of a similar conspiracy. "The Negroes are slowly but surely surrounding Mozley Park," Joe Wallace warned. "It has been said that the Negro leaders want the Park [and] also the school for the Negro Race." (In a claim that other whites would overlook, Wallace also charged that the "Old Folks Home" of Battle Hill Haven would similarly be "lost" if Mozley Park underwent transition.) As blacks began buying homes closer to these public spaces, whites grew increasingly defensive. Most of them, like the McLeans, considered "their" elementary school and "their" city park the best parts of the neighborhood and refused to abandon them without a fight. Taking stock of the situation years later, a black banker estimated that "95%" of white homeowners in Mozley Park had refused to sell "mainly because of the PARK & the SCHOOL."⁵⁹

In an effort to "steal" their park and school, the McLeans charged, black brokers were deliberately "using the race issue as a weapon and a device to drive down the market value" of white residents' homes. Their lawsuit accused the real-estate agents of spreading rumors that "colored persons will take over at least half the area . . . by January 1, 1953, and force out the remaining white property owners in another year or two." To speed white flight, the unscrupulous brokers were supposedly using a variety of "nefarious schemes" and "conniving practices," including placing ads in newspapers and putting up "For Sale" signs in the neighbor-

hood. Furthermore, through repeated telephone calls, letters, and personal visits, the brokers had asked them directly to sell their homes. As an added insult, their lawsuit charged, the agents "caused persons of the colored race to drive slowly over the area . . . at all hours of the day and night pretending to be searching for houses to purchase which causes apprehension, alarm, and embarrassment to petitioners, their neighbors, and friends."⁶⁰

White real-estate firms claimed the charges were an outrage. Gann Realty, for example, swore that its agents had never violated the sanctity of a white neighborhood in Atlanta. As proof of the firm's sincerity, its attorney informed the court that George Gann was a lifelong southerner, who "verily believes in all the Southern traditions pertaining to the segregation laws and customs of the white race of the South, and especially the State of Georgia." Anyone who said differently was a liar, and "should be indicted and convicted for such false swearing." Naturally, the black firms named in the suit responded differently. The McLeans had no case, they charged, because property sales could not be restricted by race. As for the claim that black neighbors would destroy their peace of mind and property values, that was merely a matter of personal prejudice. In the end, the court reluctantly agreed. "The Supreme Court has already made a ruling in this case, and I can't do anything but follow the rule laid down by the high court," said Judge E. E. Andrews apologetically. "I must administer the law justly and impartially."⁶¹

Undeterred, the white residents of Mozley Park carried their fight to city hall, asking the mayor to do what the courts could not. In an unusual move for that time and place, Mayor Hartsfield made a personal trip to the black-owned restaurant where the Empire Real Estate Board held its monthly meetings. Before the assembled brokers, the mayor asked them to let "Westview Drive serve as a dividing line of houses for whites and colored in the area." His suggestion struck the realists as a mixed proposition. On one hand, the proposal would open the rest of Mozley Park for blacks; on the other, the agreement would signal an acceptance of residential segregation. In the end, the brokers decided to strike a delicate balance; they would go along with the mayor's plan, for the time being, but "would not make any boundary line" that might legitimize segregation. In a public letter, they announced their withdrawal from all business south of Westview Drive. All outstanding listings would be turned over to Councilman Milton Farris, who would act as the mayor's representative in contacting white sellers and "asking them to withdraw their property from the market."⁶²

The white residents below Westview Drive, however, were unwilling to trust the black real-estate agents. As whites of the West End had done before, they again decided to unite in "defense" of their neighborhoods.

The new group they created, the Southwest Citizens Association, largely resembled its immediate predecessor, the Mozley Park Home Owners' Protective Association. Still devoted to the "protection" of property owners, the new group's name signified a new wrinkle to the ideology of resistance. As "citizens," these middle-class white residents asserted certain rights, such as the right of self-government and the right to private property, but also acknowledged certain duties, such as working with city officials to ensure that their needs and the needs of others were met. In a civic spirit, they sought to help their immediate neighbors, to promote the common good of their region, and to present a unified voice in city politics.⁶³ Practically speaking, the new organization and its predecessor in Mozley Park were virtually identical. The only real difference was that Southwest Citizens embraced a much larger region of the city and therefore could count on a much larger pool of middle-class membership and financing. Despite its expanded scope, Southwest Citizens remained focused on the problems of Mozley Park. Its president Sid Avery, a transportation engineer with General Electric, lived there on Mathewson Place, one street west of the McLeans, and he well understood the "conspiracy" to take over the neighborhood. Likewise, the group's rank and file, living both inside and outside Mozley Park, believed that the line had to be drawn there to prevent further "encroachments." Naturally, they welcomed the word of the Westview Drive agreement. Whether black brokers were calling it a "boundary" or not, that was exactly what the street was becoming, as the realists removed themselves and their "For Sale" signs from streets south of Westview.

In order to cement the dividing line, Southwest Citizens worked behind the scenes with Mayor Hartsfield and the ward's councilmen, settling on a foolproof plan. On the evening of October 13, 1952, in the gymnasium of Brown High School, more than fifteen hundred whites gathered to hear the "startling progress" that had been made. On behalf of Southwest Citizens, Richard Florrid gave them the good news, announcing there would finally be a "barrier" between blacks to the north and whites to the south. The mayor, he explained over cheers, had agreed to build a six-lane highway along Westview Drive, running from the far side of Ashby Street all the way to Westview Cemetery. Old calls for a "West View Parkway" had finally been realized, but that was only the beginning. Alongside the highway, Florrid continued, residential lands would be rezoned for light industry and warehouses. Furthermore, the Atlanta Housing Authority promised to build a five-hundred-unit housing project, for whites only, around the Ashby Street and Sells Avenue intersection. Ordinarily, middle-class whites would not have welcomed news that their neighborhood would soon be filled with factories, warehouses and public housing. But the residents of Mozley Park considered these changes a small nuisance

when compared with the “threat” of black homeowners. Together, this line of barriers, coupled with the cemetery and park, would provide an unprecedented “buffer zone” between blacks and whites stretching for miles along the West End.⁶⁴

Immediately, black leaders attacked the plan. Though they found the whole scheme reprehensible, critics were particularly incensed by the city’s plan to create a housing project merely “as the east anchor of a so-called racial ‘buffer.’” Public housing was desperately needed in other “slum areas,” the *Atlanta Daily World* editorialized. To waste the Housing Authority’s time and money for the purpose of *preventing* citizens from securing homes, instead of its purported goal of *helping* them, seemed a cruel joke. The local chapter of the NAACP agreed, publicly voicing its opposition and even filing complaints with federal authorities over their participation in the scheme. Despite the protests, the Housing Authority pushed ahead with the project, completing it in late 1955 and naming it after Joel Chandler Harris, the Atlanta author of the Uncle Remus tales. Further underscoring the segregating purpose of the Harris Homes, the city constructed high-strength cyclone fences between the whites-only project and the black neighborhood to the north. Although black realists resented the “buffer plan,” they grudgingly went along with it. Practically speaking, they knew, the acquisition of more than seven hundred homes in a fine residential section outweighed the stigma of the “buffer zone.” And so, after three years of bitterness, the Mozley Park problem had found a solution.⁶⁵

The transition of Mozley Park, however, remained incomplete. Black residents, having moved into more than seven hundred homes on the neighborhood’s streets, now spilled over into blocks to the north. By early 1953 the new residents had, as the McLeans predicted, “encircled” both the park and school. Despite racial changes in the surrounding residences, however, the mayor refused to change the racial designation of these neighborhood spaces. The reason was largely political. Running for reelection, Hartsfield worried about upsetting whites in the region. The “loss” of individual homes had given the mayor headaches enough; he refused to fuel whites’ resentment by pushing for the transfer of the prized park and school as well. (Some in his administration thought the mayor might even use the situation to his advantage, by claiming his opponent was “going to put negroes on the Fire Dept. and in the City Hall and in the Sanitation Dept. AND on a population basis give Moseley Park and Stanton School to them.”) Hartsfield decided to wait the campaign out, promising to do something after the election.⁶⁶

Only then did the city begin preparation for the transition of the neighborhood’s facilities to its new population. The board of education, as expected, announced that Frank L. Stanton Elementary School would be

used for black students, beginning that fall. For the new black children in the neighborhood, like Charlayne Hunter at 1306 Mozley Place, the thought of taking over the “white” school atop Mozley Drive was a daunting one. “Of course,” she later recalled, “once I had climbed the hill and walked through the doors for the first time, there was nothing white in sight—only the ghost-whites that I conjured up as I climbed the stairs to my classroom and as I sat down in one of ‘their’ seats for the first time. It was a strange experience, being in one of ‘their’ schools.” Once the school had its racial designation changed, black leaders called for the city to follow suit with the pool and park. The Metropolitan Planning Commission likewise warned in June 1953 that “pressure was very strong in some quarters for the immediate transfer of Mozley Park to the Negroes.” But Hartsfield still wanted to wait. Until “a comparable facility for whites” was constructed on the west side as a replacement, Mozley Park would remain all white. In the meantime, Hartsfield shuffled the transfer date back again and again. Ultimately, the park changed hands in April 1954, finally completing the transfer of the Mozley Park neighborhood from white to black after nearly five years of animosity and negotiations.⁶⁷

During that time, the whites of Mozley Park had assumed that the “invading” blacks were of a lower class and cruder background. In truth, blacks in the first wave of residents were very much like their white counterparts, at least in terms of occupation, while the second wave came from a higher class. The stretch of Mozley Place from Ed and Maybelle Turner’s home to Mathewson Place on the west was a prime example. When whites fled, their homes were initially inherited by a nearly identical cross-section of blacks. A few were middle-class, such as the principal of an elementary school and an office clerk at Clark College, but the vast majority held working-class jobs, making a living as a painter, a baker, a maid, a day laborer, a laundry machinist, a freight handler, a loader for a trucking firm, and a janitor at Georgia Tech. Once the neighborhood had settled down, however, white-collar professionals moved into the area, including several ministers, faculty members from nearby Atlanta University, and even some of the same real-estate agents who had secured the neighborhood’s “transition” in the first place. In a 1957 study, Carson Lee of Atlanta University’s sociology department compared the new residents of Mozley Park with the whites they had replaced. In general, he found the new black homeowners generally had higher levels of education, income, property ownership, political activity, and civic involvement. The new population, Lee concluded, was “characteristically stable, mature, upwardly mobile, with a design for respectability.”⁶⁸

Like other members of the middle class, these black residents had bought their new homes to escape working-class areas to the east. Two-

thirds of the new homeowners, Lee reported, had picked Mozley Park because it had a "better location" or was "less crowded" than older black enclaves. Indeed, in contrast to where they had once been, the neighborhood seemed a paradise. "The house my mother bought was on Mozley Place," remembered one newcomer. "It was twice as big as our [old] house . . . with beautiful grassy lawns in the front and back. The streets were paved, just like the white folks' streets." Not surprisingly, these new occupants wanted to keep those streets in the condition they had inherited them. The main problem with this was, of course, the scorched-earth retreat of the whites who had lived there before them. In keeping with the "buffer plan," two areas of light industry, a center of industrial warehouses and a housing project soon appeared around the neighborhood. With those aspects of the "no man's land" in place, Mayor Hartsfield pressed for the buffer highway as well. "There is a very delicate racial situation along this highway which we are anxious to aid," he wrote his chief of construction in 1954, "and the people out there are going to expect action." The highway project stalled when bonds could not be secured, but later in the decade, the city ensured that a stretch of the new interstate highway took its place. To make way for the project, the state and county condemned much of the black-owned land there in 1959, offering extremely low sums as compensation. Rev. William Holmes Borders, for instance, was offered \$992 for a lot he owned, even though homes on that block had been going for nearly ten times that amount. Despite strong protests, the city bulldozed the whole southwestern section of the neighborhood.⁶⁹

Although the freeway presented an obvious instance, public incursions occurred in less obvious ways as well. Typically, once blacks had "taken over" an Atlanta neighborhood, city officials automatically assumed that property values would plummet and the area would become a slum. Accordingly, planners and zoning committees lowered their standards for the region and began approving projects they would have routinely rejected if the residents were still white. After fighting to get into a neighborhood of single-family homes, middle-class black residents now saw cramped apartment complexes and commercial projects springing up nearby. "It's awfully disgusting to pay inflated prices for homes in a residential section and as soon as you begin to get settled, here comes white 'investors' throwing up anything that will get by the inspectors," complained one black Atlantan. "Juke joints and pool rooms will probably be next. Can't we expect any type of protection from our city government?"⁷⁰

Not surprisingly, blacks found this pattern playing out in Mozley Park immediately after their arrival. In December 1952 they discovered that a white landlord on Penelope Road, just two blocks on the other side of the park and school, planned to turn her fifteen acre plot into a two-

hundred-unit apartment complex for whites. Mozley Park residents protested, not merely because the project would present another "buffer" to the west, but because it would mean more overcrowding. Austin Walden complained to the Municipal Planning Board, employing a middle-class rhetoric that resembled that of white residents who protested black "encroachments." "The Atlanta Urban League has worked hard and long to provide decent housing in desirable locations for Negroes, and we are naturally opposed to any efforts to destroy the investments of the property owners," he argued. "To permit the re-zoning . . . is tantamount to admitting that Negroes do not have the same right to protection of their neighborhoods as do citizens of white residential sections." In a coordinated protest, busloads of homeowners were shuttled to city hall, where they presented city planners with a petition. "The fifteen acre tract of land is in the heart of a brand new Negro residential community," they noted. Construction of such a large project "would tend to lower property values of the existing home owners" and "would increase the population density, a major factor in the development of a slum." On this one occasion at least, their protests succeeded.⁷¹

While black residents fought to maintain their high standards for the neighborhood, the city rarely followed suit. This pattern became clear in the decline of the public park. Prior to the "racial transfer" of Mozley Park, black Atlantans had only three underfunded recreational sites in the city, compared with the twenty-two reserved for whites. Even with the addition of Mozley Park, Atlanta still fell short of meeting the needs of its black population, due to its segregation policies. "If all park areas were equally open to all Atlanta citizens, our city would provide one acre of public recreational land per 200 people," the Atlanta Urban League calculated in 1954. "Under the present arrangements which limit the use of public recreational space and facilities to separate racial groups, there is one acre for every 155 white citizens and one for every 1020 Negro citizens." While all black parks suffered from overcrowding, Mozley Park received the most visitors. Built with white patrons in mind, it was by far the best-equipped and most attractive spot available to blacks. "Because there was no other facility like it anywhere in Atlanta," one patron remembered, "it drew crowds of young Black people." Those crowds took a toll. After the first summer of black use, the *Atlanta Daily World* complained that the lack of other recreational spots created "the necessary overuse of the Mozley Park" pool and recreation center. "Overcrowding of Negro parks has long been a sore spot," the reporter noted, adding that surrounding "residential sections suffer." The city ignored the pleas of black patrons. Mozley Park stayed underfunded and increasingly overused. Just a decade later, the decline was already striking. In 1964 the *Atlanta Inquirer* listed a litany of problems that had accumulated across

Mozley Park—windows broken for years, boards on the pool's deck completely rotten, and grounds so untended as to "evoke a feeling of disgust." "The general run-down conditions," the newspaper noted, "make it hard for a person to believe that this is the same recreational facility that existed when it was tabbed 'For White Only.'"⁷²

The city's neglect of Mozley Park and its assault on middle-class standards there can perhaps be explained by the fact that white officials, like white residents, assumed that property values would inevitably decline once the neighborhood "went colored." In truth, however, the opposite was true. In spite of all the changes that should have demonstrably lowered property values in the area—introduction of new industrial sites and warehouses, construction of a housing project and apartment complexes for the poor, intrusion of an interstate highway, and general neglect by municipal officials—property values in the black-occupied section of Mozley Park actually witnessed a boom. A comparison of census block statistics, taken first in 1950, when the neighborhood was still all-white, and then a decade later, after the "transition" had long been completed, shows that property values, measured in constant dollars, rose by an average of 27 percent over the decade. According to the then-dominant theories of real-estate value, a brief surge in prices would be expected, since "the first black families had to pay a premium to break the color barrier," but such a rise would be short-lived and followed by a "drastic decline." However, in Mozley Park, some of the largest increases were found on blocks with the longest history of black occupancy. For instance, the four blocks straddling Mozley Drive, the street where the "transition troubles" first began, showed price increases of 17, 20, 42, and 50 percent over the decade. By comparison, on blocks to the south—blocks that underwent transition later and stood even farther removed from the Ashby Street enclave—homes of almost identical 1950 appraisal values only showed increases of 6, 12, and 16 percent over the same period. By all objective measurements, the transition of property from white to black ownership did not lower its value but raised it instead. White assumptions that black ownership would automatically lower home prices reflected not the realities of the free market as a whole, but an artificial market that segregated not just white and black homes by race, but white and black buyers as well. Only a slanted perspective, one that interpreted "value" according to what whites would pay, could see homes in a black neighborhood as worth less.⁷³

Such realities of real estate escaped the notice of white Atlanta. For them, the visible decline of the Mozley Park neighborhood after the "transition troubles" served as a warning. In truth, the steady decay had been brought on by city planners who lowered zoning standards, parks officials who allowed overuse, private companies who slighted the needs of black

residents, and the fundamental economic exhaustion of black buyers, who bought secondhand housing at prices often three times the initial value and therefore had limited funds for repairs or refurnishings. To white eyes, these causes were hidden. In their understanding, the reason was much simpler—blacks had moved in and the neighborhood went down. The decay reinforced their feelings that blacks were lazy, sloppy, and shiftless. As blacks began to move into other "white" neighborhoods around town, the specter of Mozley Park remained in their minds as a warning of what residential transition would bring in its wake.

Although white residents "lost" Mozley Park, and Ashby Street before it, they gained something of tremendous importance. In their effort to defend the region, they had greatly improved the image of white resistance, evolving from fringe groups such as the Columbians and Ku Klux Klan to more "respectable"—and respected—organizations like the Mozley Park Home Owners' Protective Association and, more prominently, the Southwest Citizens Association. In moving their resistance into the mainstream, these whites managed not only to legitimize their cause but to place themselves in positions of influence for the next rounds of resistance. The "defense" of white neighborhoods was no longer the province of racial extremists seeking to sway the opinions of the working class, but instead something woven into the worldview of the upwardly mobile middle class, wholly respectable and admired. Thus, in the course of a few short years and a few short blocks, the cause of neighborhood "defense" had been fundamentally transformed. Mainstream whites no longer saw these residential resistance groups as a threat to the image and ideals of Atlanta; instead, they saw them as legitimate community activists, ones who acted as integral partners in managing the city's peaceful race relations.

CHAPTER THREE

From Community to Individuality: Race, Residence, and Segregationist Ideology

AS RESIDENTIAL racial transitions spread in the postwar era, Atlanta's moderate coalition sought to control its pace. Mayor Hartsfield had been so pleased with the negotiations over Mozley Park that he decided in December 1952 to bring blacks and whites together as a permanent planning committee "to consider the various living, building, and development problems of the west side of our city." To represent black Atlantans, he appointed three prominent leaders: builder Walter Aiken, realtor T. M. Alexander, and attorney Austin Walden. In a move that signified the new strength and status of the white resistance movement, Hartsfield chose the top three officials of the Southwest Citizens Association as representatives of the region's whites: Sid Avery, the General Electric engineer; Richard Florrid, executive secretary of the Atlanta Restaurant Association; and Ernest Sewall, a serviceman for an adding machine company. Together, the six men launched the West Side Mutual Development Committee (WSMDC).¹

More than any other public or private agency, the WSMDC played the pivotal role in determining the course of residential racial change in postwar Atlanta. Despite its importance, the committee generally reacted to rumors of racial change and conflict as they surfaced. Typically, the WSMDC began by investigating reports of neighborhoods "threatened" by racial transition, gauging the attitudes of local whites with telephone canvasses, written questionnaires, and public meetings. The information collected offers a rare degree of detail and an impressive amount of insight into the processes of residential racial change at the most minute levels. The polls conducted by the committee offer immediate measures of the mood of different neighborhoods, while the house-by-house surveys enable mapping the geography of white resistance with unprecedented precision. Most important, for the WSMDC and its allies in city hall, the reams of information they collected stood as a means to limit the impact of residential desegregation on their city and maintain the peace on its streets.

With such information in hand, the WSMDC would generally call white homeowners' groups and black real-estate agents together to see if some sort of compromise—a boundary line, a program of repurchasing homes already sold to blacks, an alternate site for black homes, and so forth—could be voluntarily worked out. Once such a "gentleman's

agreement" had been achieved, the WSMDC used the information "to advise and influence property buyers and sellers, realty and home finance firms, and city departments" about the neighborhood. On the surface, the WSMDC merely made friendly suggestions. But the organization enjoyed public backing from the mayor and aldermen, as well as other planning committees and housing agencies. "The backing of the City government," a WSMDC report noted, "has been a vital force in effecting and maintaining the agreements reached in this [voluntary] way." Furthermore, the committee had the strong support of local newspapers and businessmen, and its members had private connections to major real-estate and financial institutions. As a result, most Atlantans recognized that "unofficial" recommendations of the WSMDC were, in fact, the official word on issues of race and residence.²

Throughout the 1950s the West Side Mutual Development Committee used its tremendous influence to negotiate conflicts over Atlanta's neighborhoods "within the framework of the housing market." Practically speaking, this meant working along segregated lines. "There are really two real estate markets—one Negro and one white," the WSMDC conceded in 1958. This resulted not from any public policy of segregation, the committee claimed, but rather from private preferences. According to the WSMDC's technical adviser, Robert Stuart, "the decisions of thousands of individual buyers and sellers of property exercising their constitutional rights [are what] determines whether a particular area is white or Negro." From its own perspective, the WSMDC merely sought to clear up confusion and prevent violence. When committee members spoke of "determining" a neighborhood's racial status, they thought of themselves as trying to discover an objective truth, whether a neighborhood was solidly white or surely becoming black. But more often than not, WSMDC actions "determined" a neighborhood's status in quite another sense. Its pronouncements—this area will stay white, that section is a lost cause—attached an air of certainty to otherwise unpredictable situations. In many cases, WSMDC predictions became self-fulfilling prophecies.³

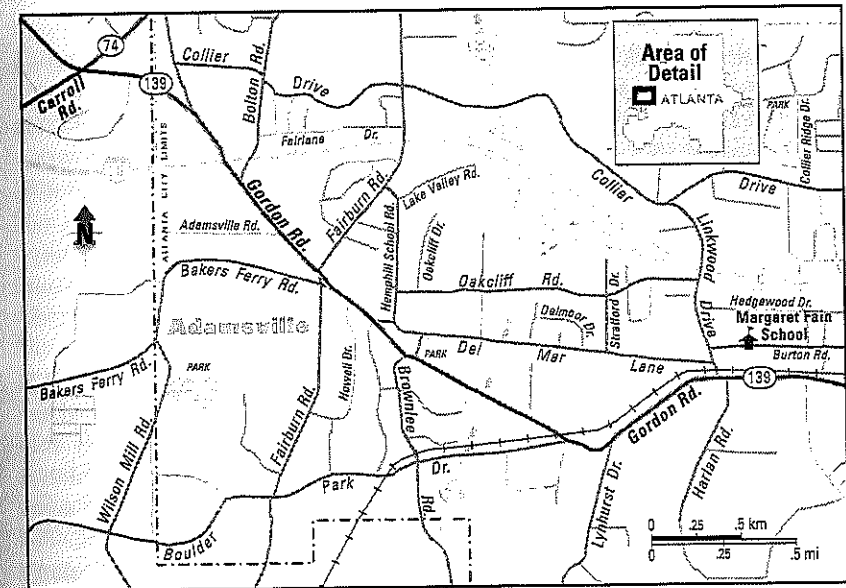
In making those determinations, a single concept of "community integrity" dominated the WSMDC deliberations and, as a result, decided the future of countless neighborhoods. T. M. Alexander explained the idea this way:

A community which has "integrity" as defined by that committee was a complete, homogenous community. It was a community composed of neighbors who were accustomed to living together, and whose children go to the same schools, churches, and parks. It had its own shopping center and a variety of homes in various classes. It had potential growth, and development was already in progress. It was not a "fringe" or "pocket" community nor tied into any other community of similar character.

If a contested area lacked “community integrity,” the WSMDC stepped aside and let racial transition continue. But if the WSMDC decided that an area indeed had “integrity,” it threw its considerable strength behind private efforts to maintain the racial status quo. When a reporter asked Alexander if the “community integrity” standard wasn’t “merely a polite way of masking segregation,” the black realist disagreed. “It has gotten away from the idea of fixed boundary lines, buffer zones, and all the rest,” he explained. “I couldn’t sell that to Negroes. But we can buy the idea of community integrity.” Indeed, Alexander liked the idea so much that he convinced the WSMDC to adopt “We Protected the Integrity of Communities” as its official slogan.⁴

Because the WSMDC relied on community integrity as its “yardstick,” white residents consciously tried to measure up to the standard. If they could demonstrate their solid sense of community, past and present, they believed their neighborhood might be “saved” from racial transition. If they could not, they knew their area would be “lost.” Therefore, whites in borderline neighborhoods began stressing their common ties, their common rights, and their common goals. They papered over their significant internal differences and tried to present a unified front. To varying degrees, they succeeded. Outside observers largely accepted their claims of “community” without question. But how substantial were such “white communities” in reality? The experiences of several white, working-class neighborhoods in Atlanta demonstrate that “community” was an ideal that was regularly celebrated but rarely experienced. The neighborhood of Adamsville, for instance, seemed to have strong “community integrity” but, in fact, only stayed a white neighborhood through artificial, external measures. Kirkwood, by comparison, seemed to find “community integrity” in neighborhood institutions but ultimately disintegrated under the bitter internal squabbling of white residents. Adair Park, meanwhile, was a small section that tried, and failed, to invent a larger community of whites for its own protection. And as the experiences of Collier Heights, Center Hill, and Grove Park made clear, urban neighborhoods functioned in an interconnected world that made it ultimately impossible for any one “community” to stand alone, regardless of its supposed “integrity.”

As these studies demonstrate, the concept of a “white community” was anything but a simple matter in struggles over race and residence. The working-class whites who lived in transition areas assumed that they and their neighbors shared not only the common traits of race and class but also common interests in preserving segregation in their neighborhood and the status quo in local politics. During the course of residential desegregation, however, they discovered that their supposed common ground on these issues and identities was ultimately less important for them and their neighbors than each one’s self-interest. As long as individual home-



Map 3.1 Adamsville, 1950

owners felt that their individual needs—protecting property values and maintaining a stable home—could be met by working with their neighbors, they did so. Invariably, though, when some whites decided that their needs and the neighborhood’s diverged, they resolved to act on their own and in their own self-interest, regardless of the repercussions. The reality of individuality, these whites quickly realized, would always trump the rhetoric of community. And so, during the course of residential desegregation, as more and more working-class white Atlantans made this discovery, they thought of themselves less and less as participants in a larger society, with the attendant rights and responsibilities. For them, connections to other whites, on the same street, in the same neighborhood, or in the city at large, had been proved pointless. Instead of thinking in terms of their supposed community, these working-class whites now started to think of themselves as individuals, set apart from and, indeed, set against the rest of Atlanta.

A COMMUNITY WITH INTEGRITY: ADAMSVILLE

Adamsville had long been an isolated area, only annexed by Atlanta during its postwar sprawl. Even after incorporation, the neighborhood maintained its rural feel. The housing stock was generally poorer than that in

the city, with more than a third of its homes dilapidated or without running water. As late as the 1950s the section had no library, no park, no doctor or dentist. It was four miles to the nearest drugstore, and nine to the closest hospital. That sense of isolation, however, quickly faded. "We soon found ourselves in the path of Atlanta's enormous urban growth," the Adamsville Civic Club noted. "Expressways began reaching out to serve our traffic, and people from counties beyond us began using our stores. Open fields became dotted with homes. We were swiftly being transformed into an urban community." And as urban developments spread into Adamsville, so did black residential expansion. By late 1954 black homes were quite literally at its borders.⁵

Alarmed by the approach of black Atlantans, civic groups around Adamsville asked the WSMDC for protection. Tellingly, they all used the language of "community" in their pleas for help. "We are deeply concerned with the continued infiltration of Negroes," wrote the West Manor Civic Club. "This movement is beginning to pose as a threat to some adjoining white communities." Other homeowners' groups agreed. The Adamsville Civic Club, for example, wanted "a new 'Gentleman's Agreement Line' that will respect the integrity of the Adamsville community." Following their lead, neighborhood agencies made a similar appeal. The local parent-teacher association and Women's Thrift Club, for instance, asked the WSMDC to "protect the integrity of the Adamsville community and the interests of its citizens." The Adamsville American Legion Post and its Ladies' Auxiliary stressed the investments residents had made in the area. "[T]his community of Adamsville is almost entirely composed of home owners who established residence here for the purpose of bringing up families and entering their children in white churches and schools," they explained. In a similar vein, the churches themselves begged for help. "In the interest of Christianity and fair play," the pastor and lay leader of Bethel Methodist asked for "a new 'Gentleman's Agreement Line.'" Likewise, the pastor and clerk of the Brownwood Baptist Church wrote to say they were "deeply concerned about our community, our Churches, School, our homes, that the people have worked so hard to have. As you know," they added ominously, "the colored people are moving closer week by week."⁶

By all surface appearances, the people of Adamsville seemed to form a coherent community in contrast to the "colored people" around them. In January 1955 a variety of working-class residents—truck drivers, metalworkers, railroad switchmen, auto mechanics, contractors, plumbers, brickmasons, carpenters, widows—all signed their names to a petition calling for the protection of their neighborhood. "We have invested many years and considerable money in what we feel is one of the best communities in the greater Atlanta area," they asserted. "It is our desire and deter-

mination not to sell any of our property which will change the status of our present ADAMSVILLE COMMUNITY." In several cases, this apparent community spirit was amplified when bonds of the neighborhood were reinforced by bonds of a workplace, especially the railroads. Those involved in the early "defense" of Adamsville, for instance, included a switchman, a car repairer, and an engineer for the Southern Railway, as well as a switchman and a clerk for the Nashville, Chattanooga, and St. Louis line. At the top levels of "defense," the ties became even more pronounced. Of the eight residents leading the campaign, for example, two were married to vehiclemen for the Railway Express, while a third's husband was chief clerk there. With these overlapping bonds of home and work, Adamsville seemed a model of "community integrity."⁷

Impressed with this grass-roots response, the WSMDC decided to intervene. Through a series of negotiations with local blacks and whites, Linkwood Road was made the boundary between the "white community" of Adamsville and nearby black neighborhoods. To strengthen the semblance of "community," and thereby cement the "gentleman's agreement," the WSMDC encouraged the Adamsville Civic Club to come up with its own vision of what that community meant to its residents. Its report, *Adamsville: Now . . . and Tomorrow*, began by noting the toll that the city's progress had taken on their once isolated area. "As Atlanta grows larger, small communities like ours begin to lose the personal contacts we once had with our political leaders," the report lamented. "Fewer people vote. Local issues are rarely discussed." But this could change, the civic club promised. In the pages that followed, it sketched out a bold vision of the Adamsville of tomorrow—new streets, schools, parks, and shopping centers, all combined with the traditional values of community that made Adamsville special in the first place. Race was never mentioned. Instead, it existed as an unspoken undercurrent throughout the discussion of creating "a desirable community." For white Atlantans, only an all-white community was desirable.⁸

With Adamsville now defined as a white "community," city planners assumed it would remain so. But it turned out not to be so simple. In 1956 homeowners on Del Mar Lane, immediately inside the Linkwood Road line, discovered that "colored families" not only stood to their east, across the boundary line, but had also occupied homes inside the line to the west, "leaving us completely surrounded by colored citizens." "As you know," they wrote the governor, "the above situation makes our homes unsalable except to colored citizens." Soon, "For Sale" signs appeared along Del Mar. The Adamsville Civic Club sprang into action, cautioning other residents not to panic. At a mass meeting, representatives from the Metropolitan Planning Commission, the West Side Mutual Development Committee, and the Southwest Citizens Association, along with an assort-

ment of mortgage brokers and real-estate interests, all spoke to the residents of Adamsville "for the purpose of stabilizing this area, according to the wishes of the majority." Likewise, the mayor and city council made it known that they, too, would do everything within their power to protect the "community integrity" of Adamsville. The entire city, it seemed, was working together to provide a solution satisfactory to the majority of local homeowners.⁹

The problem with this "majority rule" approach was that whites at the center of the controversy, those living on Del Mar Lane, increasingly felt like a tormented minority. "We have never considered ourselves residents of Adamsville," they insisted, "and we feel that Linkwood Road was arbitrarily set as Adamsville's eastern boundary FOR SELFISH REASONS only." The Adamsville Civic Club had sent letters out asking for their input, but those letters were also sent to people far removed from the crisis area. "Instead of confining the circulation of this letter to *those concerned, residents of Del Mar Lane—from Linkwood to Stratford Drive*," they complained, "it was circulated in a staggered fashion, (*a delaying action, we think*) to residents of Stratford Drive and Oak Cliff Drive, making a total of 70 to 75 letters circulated which places those of us who are REALLY concerned in a great minority group." The entire situation left them feeling persecuted. "Unless the City of Atlanta takes steps immediately to remedy this situation by re-designating the eastern boundary of Adamsville," the Del Mar residents wrote, "we will construe this to mean that not only our civil and legal rights, but even our 'human' rights, have been taken away."¹⁰

Mayor Hartsfield tried to settle the crisis over what was and was not part of the "white community" of Adamsville, never bothering to question if a "community" even existed. He ordered the WSMDC to do everything in its power to "maintain a white market on Delmar" and thereby return it to the fold of Adamsville. To that end, the committee urged local whites to raise money to repurchase all the black homes inside the boundary line. In just a few days, sixty working-class families pledged a total of \$1,100. An additional door-to-door pledge drive and fundraising by the Adamsville Civic Club boosted the total to \$13,200. Southwest Citizens contributed its considerable financial muscle, spending over \$30,000 more to put four additional pieces of property back in white hands over the winter of 1956–57. Meanwhile, the West Side Mutual Development Committee worked to restore confidence in Del Mar Lane as a "white market." In a mass mailing to mortgage brokers in January 1957, the WSMDC explained the repurchasing program and its conviction that the "integrity" of Adamsville had been restored. "With the previous doubt in regard to race of residents, we understood that the lending institutions were not approving loans for this area, with resulting hardship on the

individual families affected," the committee stated. "We believe the area, now, is to be stable for white occupancy, and hope that you will extend full home financing to persons purchasing homes in this area." Additionally, the WSMDC encouraged the development of an all-white realty market on Del Mar throughout the spring of 1957. "The absence of a stable real estate market has been the chief cause of unrest," noted WSMDC planner Charles Allen. "Property owners who, through necessity, have been required to sell their homes have turned to the only available market, which has been the colored real estate market." To secure a "stable market"—in other words, a "white market"—the WSMDC contacted several black realtors and convinced them to withdraw their services and signs from Del Mar.¹¹

Despite this massive operation of organizing residents, repurchasing homes, and revitalizing the "white market," the situation remained uneasy. Resting on nothing more than good-faith agreements, the stabilization of Del Mar Lane—and, by extension, all of Adamsville—could be upset by a single black buyer. In June 1957, for example, a black man named M. C. Jackson purchased a home at the intersection of Del Mar Lane and Stratford Road, directly in the crosshairs of earlier conflicts. After repeated requests by the WSMDC and the Atlanta Police Department, Jackson agreed to delay moving into his new home. Meanwhile, Southwest Citizens arranged to repurchase the property at the original price and the WSMDC pulled strings to secure Jackson a spot in public housing. Before the repurchase and removal could be completed, however, arsonists set fire to the home, scorching the roof and gutting the interior. Desperate to remove Jackson, Southwest Citizens decided to buy the home anyway. With his presence erased, the WSMDC renewed its public relations campaign, swearing once more that Adamsville had "integrity" as a white community, recent troubles notwithstanding.¹²

As soon as this eastern boundary of Adamsville had been "secured," however, similar troubles sprang up along the northern border as developers began building homes for blacks there in early 1958. White working-class residents on Fairburn Road, just inside the line, panicked and the whole process of neighborhood transition began again. Once again, the WSMDC sent letters to boost white morale. "The Committee feels that Adamsville has a fine future as a community," it assured residents. But the committee took more aggressive steps, as well. It drew up a petition, on WSMDC stationery, urging local whites to decide "by majority feeling" which real-estate market—black or white, but not both—would function in the neighborhood. After whites followed the WSMDC's lead and voted for a white market, the committee went even further, typing up form letters for homeowners to send real-estate agents. "In view of existing circumstances of Fairburn Road, being a disputed area and all the owners not

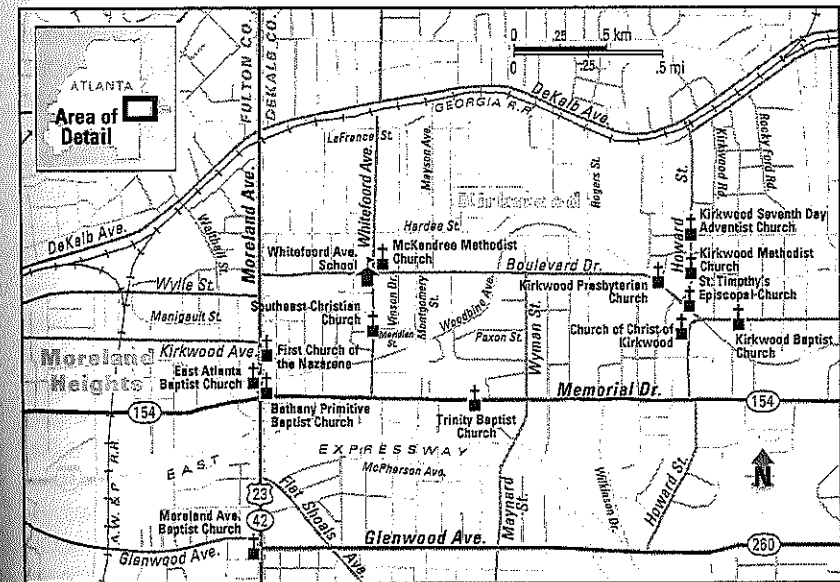
wishing to sell, and for the best interests of the community," the sheets read, "I wish to notify you that I am withdrawing my property from the market." All homeowners had to do was fill in a few blanks and drop the form in the mail. Afterward, city officials continued to stand guard over Adamsville's boundaries. When a real-estate firm began soliciting business for black buyers on the "wrong" side of the northern line, for instance, the WSMDC strongly discouraged its presence. "You will notice from the map the location of the northern boundary of Adamsville," warned an adviser, adding that the line would remain a racial border until "a clear majority of the property owners" decided differently. To establish the dividing line in more concrete terms, the city planned to make the West Expressway, now Interstate-20, "the boundary between the white and Negro communities." Their intention was no secret, as city construction crews clearly marked the highway's planned route along the way.¹³

In the eyes of city officials at the decade's end, Adamsville was a success story. The neighborhood had weathered countless crises—the dissent of white residents near its eastern boundary, the threat of transition on its northern boundary, the exhausting process of organizing residents, the financial strain of repurchasing homes, and even an occasional outbreak of violence. In spite of all this, the WSMDC noted approvingly that "community integrity" had been maintained. That verdict, however, was somewhat disingenuous. To be sure, Adamsville stood, for the time at least, as an all-white residential area. But that was not the same as a "community." Whites in the region had been unable to hold the neighborhood together on their own and had, in fact, begun to turn against each other when racial residential change loomed large. It was only because of the constant and concerted effort of the city's moderate political, social, and business forces that Adamsville had maintained its segregated status. The neighborhood had staved off racial succession, but it was at heart a hollow victory, one that offered no proof of any "community spirit" at all.

Whereas Adamsville had to be propped up from the outside to maintain any semblance of unity, other neighborhoods in Atlanta possessed their own internal sources of "community integrity," in the form of local institutions. They readily marshaled those sites of local strength in an attempt to do for themselves what Adamsville had relied on outsiders to do. In the end, however, their "community" proved to be just as much of an illusion.

COMMUNITY INSTITUTIONS AND COMMUNITY INTEGRITY: KIRKWOOD

In its private discussions and public pronouncements, the West Side Mutual Development Committee constantly stressed the importance of neighborhood institutions as sources of community strength. "The values of



Map 3.2 Kirkwood, 1950

community life built around schools, churches, lodges and other organizations, are built up over a period of years, even generations," an official policy statement noted. "In the sense that the city of Atlanta is made up of a number of parts, the city as a whole suffers a loss when an established community is destroyed." And, in the WSMDC's mind, established white communities were destroyed by residential desegregation. "In my opinion, transition of a large established community from one racial occupancy pattern to the other is wasteful," noted WSMDC adviser Bob Stuart. "Community institutions, churches, schools, lodges, etc., are made up of people. If the people are suddenly changed, these institutions are wiped out." Of all the neighborhoods in Atlanta, the pivotal relationship between "community institutions" and "community integrity" was perhaps clearest in Kirkwood.¹⁴

Situated in southeast Atlanta, Kirkwood was a white, working-class neighborhood of long standing. Surveys from 1957 showed that more than three-fourths of its residents had lived on the same block for more than five years, although many had been there much longer, some since the 1910s. As in Adamsville, many of the residents not only lived together, but worked together too. Within just a few blocks of each other, for instance, stood the homes of two textile workers, the time-card handler, and a power-room employee at the Fulton Bag Mill. Likewise, three switchmen, a foreman, and the chief clerk of the Atlanta Joint Terminal

all lived in close proximity. In rare cases, family ties overlapped with these connections of work and home. Clay Sims, George Sims, and James Sims, for instance, all lived on the same block of Wylie Street and all worked for their family's radiator repair service.¹⁵

In stark contrast to these close ties of home, work, and even family stood the distinctly separate settlements of blacks to their northwest, around the juncture of the Central of Georgia Railroad and the A. & W. P. Railroad, and to their northeast, between the Central's lines and Boulevard Drive. The whites of Kirkwood watched these black enclaves nervously, waiting for any signs of "encroachment." In 1954, when blacks began looking at homes in the eastern half of Kirkwood, a region known as Moreland Heights, whites sounded the alarm. "An attempt is being made to sell white property to Negroes," warned the Moreland Heights Civic Club. "We believe that those white people attempting to sell to Negroes have failed their responsibility as home owners and neighbors." Whites resented the "infiltration" of black buyers because, in their minds, they threatened their long-standing community. "We have lived in this section for many years and own our homes and we certainly don't want to be surrounded by negroes," a secretary wrote the mayor. But homes were only part of the picture. "We also have our churches near us," she continued, "and don't want them to be taken over by negroes." "If we are force out we will loose our church and school," worried an elevator operator, "and we caint ford to do that." WSMDC planners agreed. "While the problem is difficult, the stakes are very high," Bob Stuart noted. "It is inconceivable that the fine community life and spirit now existing in the Moreland Heights area should be wiped out through a scattering of its present residents."¹⁶

To determine which community institutions were most important to the integrity of Moreland Heights, the WSMDC surveyed residents in October 1957. "We are asking questions about schools, churches; and so forth which indicate your attitude toward the neighborhood in general," the committee wrote, "because this attitude often has a direct influence on a property owner's decision to sell or stay." Because a majority of Moreland Heights residents were elderly, it was not surprising that relatively few had ties to local schools. A third of those surveyed did have children enrolled and were themselves active in local parent-teacher Associations. One such parent, an auto mechanic, worried that he would have to remove his children from the schools if the neighborhood's racial composition changed. "I have 3 girls," he wrote. "And I would not want them walking to and from school through negros settlers on this street."¹⁷

Although such ties to schools were limited, the bonds to area churches were quite strong. When asked "Do you attend church in this neighborhood?" more than 70 percent said yes, pointing to one of the many Protes-

tant churches in the area.¹⁸ For congregationally controlled churches like these, neighborhood concerns were church concerns. Not only did the congregations live in contested areas; in almost all cases, their pastors did too.¹⁹ Keeping Moreland Heights white was, therefore, both a pastoral and personal activity for many ministers. For instance, the minister of Southeast Christian, "A Church of Friendly Christians," urged his congregation to discuss "the housing problem" with WSMDC officials. But it was too late. The rush to sell was on, and the neighborhood underwent swift racial succession. By 1960 three-fourths of the homes in Moreland Heights were occupied by blacks. Just as WSMDC planners and local residents had feared, the churches were "wiped out" by the racial transition. The First Church of the Nazarene and Southeast Christian both sold their buildings to black buyers and fled the neighborhood with their congregations. The Whitefoord Baptist Church and an evangelical Christian Fellowship Center closed their doors as well, moving miles to the east, beyond the "transition troubles." And as far as city planners could tell, Bethany Primitive Baptist just disappeared. For many of these congregations, relocation was a financial nightmare. McKendree Methodist Church, for example, claimed an investment of \$120,000 in its Moreland Heights property, but hoped to recoup just half that amount after its relocation. Racial transition, by their accounts, proved costly.²⁰

As the course of black expansion continued toward the heart of Kirkwood, whites eyed the changes with alarm. "We have enjoyed our modest homes," one white man worried in 1960. "Now a vast flood of Negroes are coming East ward & threaten to swamp the area." Like the residents of most borderline areas, these were working-class families. Along Montgomery Street, for instance, stood the homes of a policeman, a firefighter, a cab driver, a baggage handler, a few truck drivers, some railroad men, assorted mechanics and repairmen, and assembly line workers for Ford, General Motors, and General Electric. Much like the working-class whites of Mozley Park and elsewhere, they counted their home as their only investment of note. They too understood racial transition as a threat to property values and reacted accordingly. For instance, when a black family bought the house at 1408 Woodbine Avenue, arsonists set fire to the home before it could even move in. Flammable liquids were poured under the house and ignited, torching the entire back side and burning holes through the roof. Next door to the gutted home stood a sign which simply read: "WHITE AREA." When a black woman and her daughter moved into a home at 1500 Woodbine just weeks later, a similar scene unfolded. As with the rest of the region, huge signs stating "This is a White Area" were scattered up and down the street, including the house next door. Just in case the new occupants missed those warnings, white residents showed up to let them know in person. Only hours after the

moving van arrived, knots of people gathered around the small, shingled home. Shortly past sunset, a long caravan of cars wheeled onto the street and swelled the crowd to several hundred strong. Mostly young married couples and teenagers, they shouted insults for hours at the blacks inside. Only after someone shattered the kitchen window with a rock did the police finally order the crowd to disperse.²¹

Although such hostility once remained "hidden violence," incidents such as these have been increasingly brought to light in recent years.²² But part of this story remains hidden, for white hostility was not simply directed at "Negro invaders." Just as significantly, whites in this apparently united "community" also directed their anger and violence at their fellow whites. This intrawhite hostility stemmed from the fact that whites responded to residential transition in very different ways. When confronted with the fact—not simply the "threat"—of black homeowners in their neighborhoods, whites reacted according to their proximity to racial change. Almost without exception, those nearest the front lines of transition wanted to flee, while those further back wanted to fight. The inherent conflict in those two goals soon surfaced, and a supposedly solid "community" succumbed to bitter infighting. On one side, whites who wanted to sell their homes blamed the others for holding them back. "A few diehards are attempting to interfere with legitimate transactions between home owners and honest real estate salesmen," complained a man from Woodbine Circle. "Many home owners have suffered lost sales because of rabble rousers." Those on the front lines of the transition resented the "interference" of those further back. "From all the discussions I've heard," a plumber wrote, "all of the hell being raised is mostly by people not directly concerned." "They do not want to live next to colored people, but they want us to," fumed another man. "I feel that if they want to control my house, they should buy it themselves. I will be happy to sell it to any of these people who are nailing up the 'WHITE AREA' signs." At the same time, those hoping to stay accused their fleeing neighbors of betraying the "community." Many spoke of Kirkwood as the only neighborhood they had ever known. Several cited hardships of age or infirmity, which made it impossible for them to move, while others feared financial losses. Those who wanted to stay blamed their neighbors for undermining their collective security. "How unfair can things get," a clerk asked, "when you put all you can make and scrap to try and have a home. Then some few who have money and can do better sell you out." Some became so angry they warned neighbors "if they sell to Colored, the house will either be burned or blown up." Tempers quickly reached a boiling point. One resident warned that the transition troubles had "plunged our people to near Riot Stage."²³

As in other neighborhoods, the white resistance in Kirkwood focused

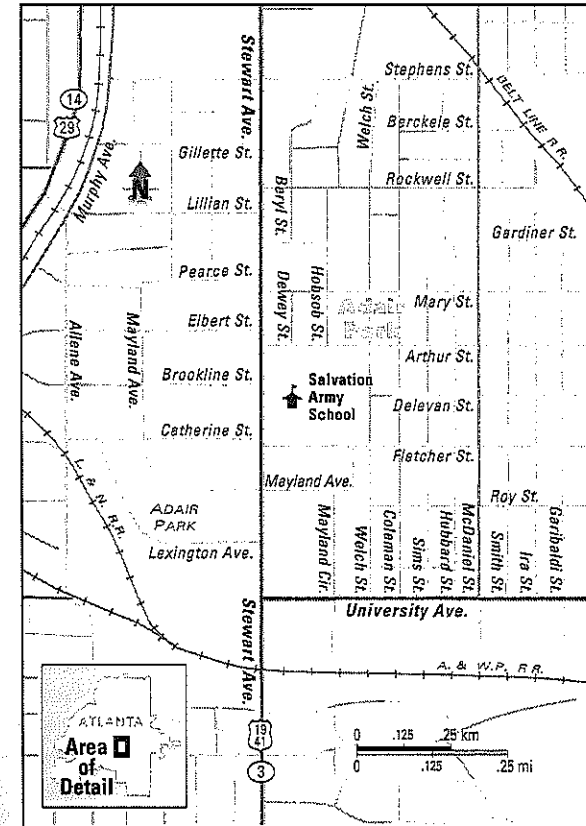
ried about what would happen to local schools if blacks moved there. "They have almost surrounded the Whiteford School," noted a railway worker dejectedly. "The school will go to negroes," another man warned, "with-out white children to fill it up." But, much like Moreland Heights, residents in Kirkwood worried more about the future of local churches. "The churches want to sell if they can get a good price," a homeowner on Boulevard lamented. "They can't keep going much longer without members to keep them up." If the churches caved in, whites rationalized, they would have no choice but to leave as well. "I do not want to live in a community where one church has been Sold to the Colored and the other two are for Sale to them," a Vinson Drive resident worried. "Would you want to live on one white block in what probably will be surrounded by colored by Sept.?"²⁴

Hoping to save their churches, Kirkwood residents rallied around Eastern Atlanta, Inc., a corporation formed to repurchase homes and keep "undesirable neighbors" out of the area. Like other homeowners' groups, the organization presented a respectable public face. "We don't have any wild-eyed people in this group," assured Alderman Robert E. Lee Field, a director in the corporation. "We all live here, we own our homes, we're church people. We're just trying to preserve all that." To fund the neighborhood defense, the group reached out to church leaders, asking them to help save the white neighborhood and, thereby, their own churches. The appeal was a natural one, since several in their congregations already had ties to Eastern Atlanta, Inc. The Sunday school teacher at Kirkwood Baptist acted as the corporation's treasurer, for instance, while one of Kirkwood Methodist's stewards served as both a director for Eastern Atlanta and president of the South Kirkwood Civic Club. These overlapping relationships yielded clear results. An October 1960 rally, for instance, featured more than eighty pastors and lay people, representing nine of the fourteen white churches of Kirkwood. B. M. Huggins of the East Atlanta Civic Club reminded the crowd that all the combined church property represented "several millions of dollars in investments," which could only be protected by keeping Kirkwood white.²⁵

As the transition "threat" continued to spread, these church leaders assumed ever-greater positions of leadership in their neighborhood's "defense." First, in February 1961, the six main churches of the region—Kirkwood Methodist, Kirkwood Presbyterian, Kirkwood Baptist, Kirkwood Seventh Day Adventist, Trinity Baptist, and St. Timothy's Episcopal—banded together to form the Kirkwood Churches Committee. Each of the six churches lent five members to the cause, usually the pastor and the top lay officials, to create a core of thirty members. Although the group soon changed its name to the Kirkwood Community Committee (KCC), its membership continued to be dominated by the six founding congregations. From the start, the KCC wholeheartedly supported the

drive against “undesirable neighbors.” At first, it simply “went on record as being willing and anxious to assist the Eastern Atlanta Corporation in the selling of stock subscriptions” to its congregations. It originally allowed others to lead, but soon the KCC decided to spearhead the “defense” itself. For instance, when local aldermen prepared to meet black realists and work out a new “gentlemen’s agreement,” the churchmen issued directives from behind the scenes. To underscore the scope of previous white losses and black gains, the aldermen were instructed to note that “the (conceded) Moreland [Heights] area contains 7 churches, the Whitefoord school and over 600 houses.” The churchmen also wanted the aldermen to stress the current “plight” of their own churches, “with their white congregations moving out of the area” and “the financial losses due to so many religious type buildings going on the market practically at the same time in a relatively small area.” Just as the religious leaders directed discussions with the outside world, they also tried to maintain white solidarity within the neighborhood itself. When residents on Paxon Avenue began to list their homes with black realists, for instance, the churches’ organization sent out chiding letters. A “(Negro) Real Estate Company” was soliciting sales in the neighborhood, the religious leaders noted disapprovingly. “We trust the postal cards were returned marked ‘NOT INTERESTED.’” Likewise, ministers and lay leaders tried to calm the local whites about their community. “If everyone simply refuses to sell to colored,” the pastors assured residents, then everything would be fine. “Please help us ‘Keep Kirkwood White’ and preserve our Churches and homes.”²⁶

In spite of the KCC’s defensive campaign, the pressures behind black expansion were simply too much. The transition that had overtaken Moreland Heights soon spread through all of Kirkwood. By late 1964 observers commented that the area was already “becoming an all-Negro community.” The repurchasing program had delayed the transition but only for a short while. Even with the active participation of local institutions, yet another “white community” rapidly disintegrated. There were multiple reasons for this, of course, but a significant one was recognized by the WSMDC staff long before Kirkwood witnessed its own struggles of race and residence. Community institutions depended on the constant support of individual members for their sustenance. As much as they might try to lead a neighborhood’s “defense,” the relationship between the institution and the individual was one in which the former was always more dependent on the latter. Once individual whites decided to abandon the “community” or, worse, turned against each other and proved that “community” had been an illusion all along, there was nothing community institutions could do to stop white flight.²⁷



Map 3.3 Adair Park, 1950

IMAGINING COMMUNITY: ADAIR PARK

While the residents of Adamsville and Kirkwood made plausible efforts to define and defend their “white communities,” Adair Park in south Atlanta lacked any semblance of “community integrity.” For one thing, the neighborhood was quite small, only three city blocks wide and six long, with just a handful of short streets. Furthermore, unlike other working-class regions, Adair Park had few illusions of its own upward mobility. With the exception of the Salvation Army School, the streets were only filled with thin land lots and very modest homes. One resident ran a trucking business from home, parking trucks everywhere—on the front lawn, behind the house, and down the street. Another neighbor followed suit, selling used cars. The neighborhood’s crude appearance was echoed in the attitude of its residents. “I couldn’t sit on my porch for cusing and

fighting across the street from me and the police running over there two or three times a week," complained one woman. For most residents, Adair Park's disrepair was only aggravated by the "encroachment" of blacks. Indeed, by the mid-1950s, blacks surrounded the small white enclave on every side, except for a tenuous western connection to white neighborhoods on the far side of Stewart Avenue. As a result, black Atlantans were a constant presence. "This is a negro neighborhood," one white woman noted dejectedly; "their funerals go by the front of the house all the time and negros are in all of the cars passing by."²⁸

In light of the neighborhood's decline, many whites sought to flee. As in other neighborhoods, the transition began with the sale of a single home, on Beryl Street in the fall of 1955. Three homeowners on neighboring Hope Street assumed that complete racial transition was now inevitable and rushed to list their homes with a black realtor. "Some day they will get it & they ought to have it," reasoned one resident. "So why not let them have it." As neighbors saw the "For Sale" signs, reports began circulating that those streets had been "zoned for colored citizens" by the city. To dispel rumors, the WSMDC polled homeowners. According to that survey, eighty property owners were "not desiring to sell" and three were "desiring to sell to whites only." With the exception of the three Hope Street homes already listed, no one else noted they were "willing to sell to Negroes." With this evidence in hand, the Adair Park Civic Club tried to stop the panic. "Negroes are not trying to force you out of the area," the homeowner's group advised. "Do not let your own neighbors force you out with unfounded rumors."²⁹

Some residents vowed they would never sell to blacks. As a firefighter from Hobson Street put it, "No body on this St. is trying to sell to nobody." His neighbors agreed. "My home is conveniently located within reach of churches, transportation, school, good neighbors and near shopping area," wrote an area widow, echoing the concepts of community seen in Adamsville and Kirkwood. Selling one's home to a black buyer, many of these working-class whites claimed, would be a betrayal of that community. "We are very interested in our neighbors, and if [our house] was for sale, *we will never sell to a negro*," wrote a paint store salesman. "We are one hundred per cent for our white people to live & stand by each other." Helping blacks move into the area was not merely unconscionable but unpatriotic. "My house is not for Sale," a saleswoman with a home decorating outfit informed the committee. "I am a *red blooded American* and a *true Southerner*." But those nearest the new black residents were not so sure. The whites on Dewey Street, for instance, feared that the racial transition would engulf their street and ruin their property values. One was a widow, living on her own. The rest were working-class families in which, more often than not, both the husband and wife

worked. Despite the feelings of the rest of the neighborhood, these whites on Dewey wanted out. They signed a compact the following summer promising to "stick together" by selling their homes on the black real-estate market together and then fleeing the neighborhood en masse. Oddly enough, it was in deserting their "community" that they most acted like one. Soon afterward all of Dewey, along with the remainder of Hope and Beryl, shifted from white to black occupancy.³⁰

The streets to the south stayed white for the next two years under an uneasy truce. But in the fall of 1958 familiar rumors spread through Mayland Circle and Mayland Avenue that "the City has zoned these streets for Negro occupancy." Some claimed there was a map in the mayor's office showing as much. The WSMDC tried to dispel the new round of rumors but to no avail. A number of white homeowners panicked and rushed to list their homes with black realtors. Only a year later, the neighborhood had a considerable black presence. "There are now seven Negro families living on Mayland Circle," reported city planner Jim Parham in 1959, with "one home owned, but unoccupied, by Negroes on Mayland Avenue, and some 8 to 10 homes throughout the area with signs indicating for sale to Negroes." As the panic began again, the WSMDC urged the Adair Park Civic Club to do what Adamsville and Kirkwood had done—raise money to repurchase homes already sold to black buyers. Seizing the idea, the homeowners' group established the Southwest Development Company, Inc., for the purpose of buying back the black-owned homes and stabilizing their neighborhood. All interested property owners could fund the company and thereby help save the "white community" of Adair Park. "The certificates are in \$10.00 denominations," the Civic Club announced, "and to keep this a community and democratic operation, no one may apply for more than \$100.00 for each piece of property owned." The community could save itself, it said. "The plan developed by the ADAIR PARK CIVIC CLUB, INC., is the only way left for us to maintain our Homes, Churches, Schools and Playgrounds," an announcement read. "If you wish to maintain the integrity of your home it now means you and all your neighbors must work together harmoniously to prevent the destruction of our section as a community of white people."³¹

The flaw in this plan of community action was that there was, in truth, little "community" there. Before the racial transitions, Adair Park had been a small area without any strong local institutions akin to the churches of Kirkwood. But by this point, the white area was less than half its former size and shrinking fast. In a bold move, Adair Park tried to enlarge its "community" by simply declaring that it was part of other white neighborhoods to the west and south. It hoped to persuade these whites that the defense of the Mayland Circle area was their fight too. "Don't be misled by the idea you can stand meekly by and do nothing

until a negro buys a house in your block," the Adair Park Civic Club warned. On flyers and letters, it included a map outlining their newly defined "community." "The natural boundaries as shown on the map which have evolved through the years without friction," it argued, "can be taken by all right thinking and fair minded people of both races as a guide so that peace and harmony might be maintained in this section." But as the accompanying map made clear, the boundaries of this imagined community were anything but "natural." First and foremost, the areas to which Adair Park laid claim were nearly fifty times the size of the tiny neighborhood. Second, this sprawling region stood separated from Adair Park by the major thoroughfare of Stewart Avenue on the west and the tracks of the Belt Line Railroad on the south. On the other side of those dividing lines, the contested streets of Adair Park seemed a small and insignificant outcropping that could easily be abandoned. "Adair Park had hoped to get financial support from white communities such as Capitol View and Sylvan Hills, located south beyond the railroad tracks," Parham later recalled. "This support never materialized." Adair Park was on its own.³²

As bad as this inability to forge a larger community was, the lack of "community integrity" in the original Adair Park area was much worse. White residents there could not agree on a common approach. As in other transition neighborhoods, those living near the new black homes, on Mayland Avenue and Mayland Circle, wanted out. Sara Snead, for instance, had been trying to sell her home on the white real-estate market for three years. "I put my house in the hands of three different agents," she explained, "and they would say, well you know you can't get very much for these houses as they are so close to the negroes." Finally, she gave up and listed the house with a black realtor. Neighboring whites were outraged. They cursed the elderly widow and made angry phone calls at night. "Neighbors have threatened to 'burn the house down,' " a report noted, "and warn her not to leave the house 'or it might not be there when you get back.' " But Snead was not the only one who had given up hope. Farther down Mayland Avenue lived R. E. Nichols, an employee of the Ruralist Press. When racial transition first "threatened" the neighborhood, he and his wife stood fast. "Our house is not for sale," they insisted in 1955, "and we wish our street and our community to remain for white people only." But four years of uncertainty had changed their minds. They had since moved out of the neighborhood, renting their home to a white tenant and waiting to see what happened. Now they felt it was beyond hope. "There are already too many Negro families living around on Mayland Circle," Nichols wrote in 1959. "I think it will be almost impossible to collect enough money in the area involved to buy back these homes from the Negroes." Although these residents had given up, others still wanted to fight. Homeowners on Hobson Street, for in-

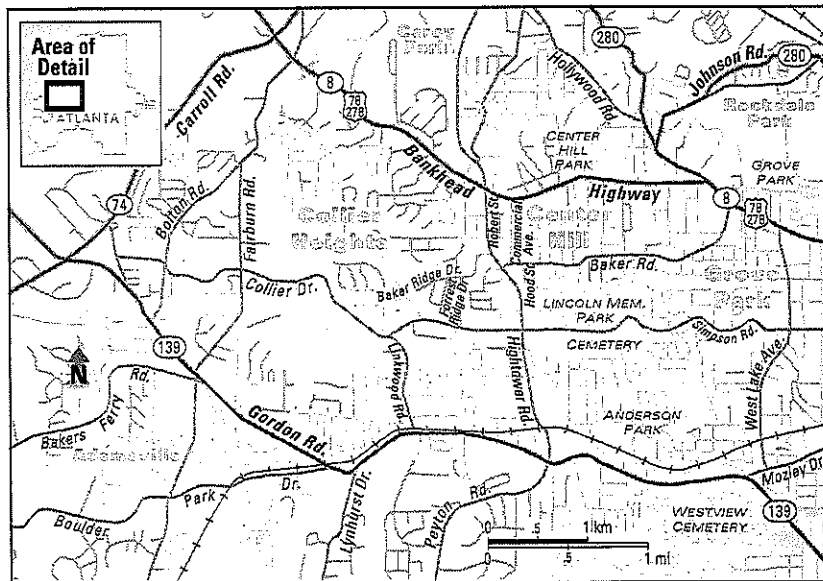
stance, voted to support the repurchasing program of the Adair Park Civic Club, while those along Fletcher Street were even more adamant about holding their ground. "All we want is to get the colored out of Mayland Circle give us our street back white, to the old people of that section," wrote one elderly woman. "Cant there be something done for us white people *Please* Help us to keep our street white." To undermine sales, they racked up "Disputed Area" signs along Fletcher and elsewhere. In addition, they called banks and mortgage brokers, asking them "not to loan money to colored people who are buying around here." A familiar pattern of white flight surfaced: as some residents tried to flee, their neighbors refused to let them.³³

With the neighborhood externally abandoned and internally divided, the Adair Park Civic Club became paralyzed. Lacking funds to buy back all the homes, it tried to forge a compromise with black real-estate agents. Properties on Mayland Avenue would be repurchased by the white homeowners' organization, and, in exchange, blacks would be granted a "free hand" along the rest of Mayland Circle. But, as Jim Parham observed, the negotiations were "undermined" by die-hard resisters "who criticize every move to compromise short of 'saving' the entire area." With this minority refusing to make even the slightest concession, the bargain fell through. "Although the leadership tried, it could never shake this millstone," Parham noted a year later, "and the result was its complete inability to negotiate with Negro leadership." A new wave of whites, including some on Hobson and Fletcher streets, put homes up for sale the next spring. The white homeowners even lobbied white banks and mortgage brokers, in an effort to ease the way for prospective black buyers. "Inasmuch as our *only* prospective clients are Negroes," they wrote, "we ask that you grant loans to them so that we may negotiate the sales of our properties." At that, the resistance crumbled.³⁴

Without assistance from either the city or other white neighborhoods, Adair Park proved unable to maintain any semblance of "community integrity," even in an artificial way, as Adamsville had. And without any strong internal institutions upon which whites could rely, Adair Park was likewise unable to prolong the campaign of residential resistance. Forced to fend for itself, yet another "white community" disintegrated.

COMMUNITIES AT ODDS: COLLIER HEIGHTS, CENTER HILL, AND GROVE PARK

Unlike the older neighborhoods of Adamsville, Kirkwood, and Adair Park, Collier Heights had a short history. Well into the 1940s, its lands along the northwestern edge of the old city limits remained undeveloped and unclaimed. Soon after World War II, however, a wave of white Atlan-



Map 3.4 Collier Heights, Grove Park, and Center Hill, 1950

tans, unable to find housing inside the city, began building a new community there from scratch. Modest homes, priced in the \$6,000 to \$10,000 range, soon dotted the newly laid out streets. "The thing about Collier Heights that no one in the neighborhood realized at the time," an observer later noted, "was that it lay astride the corridor out which the city's expanding Negro population was moving. Separated from the Negro section by main traffic arteries, no one had given the racial problem a thought."³⁵

But the "problem" was, indeed, headed the neighborhood's way. In the fall of 1953 the National Development Company, a black-owned corporation, purchased a thousand acres of undeveloped land west of Collier Heights. In a panic, some whites spread rumors that the whole area would "go colored" soon, rumors they attributed to the Collier Heights Civic Club. When the group's members found out, they became furious and fought back. Indeed, the campaign to dispel the rumors revealed a good deal about the homeowners' organization. Its opponents' means were underhanded, it charged, but their ends were even worse. Selling to blacks meant selling out whites. "It is recommended before you sign," the Civic Club warned, "that each of you take the time to thoroughly think through and consider just what you as an individual stand to lose both *financially* and *morally* by the action of several people in the community selling to colored and leaving you or your neighbor in a predicament created by this selfish few." The powerful Southwest Citizens Association also at-

tacked the "selfish minority" who undermined the community. "We believe that a few persons have deliberately agitated the situation by spreading false rumors," wrote its president, Sid Avery. "We ask you, as a fair-minded individual, to refuse to make a fast dollar at the expense of the majority of the 150 or more home owners in this always white community." Noting that black realtists were not soliciting sales themselves, Avery appealed to the residents' racial pride. "If our Negro real estate people can play fair, certainly our white real estate men can do as much," he chided. "Please refuse to have anything to do with sales of white owned homes in Collier Heights to colored."³⁶

In a more concrete way, the homeowners' groups launched an ambitious plan to "save" the neighborhood. Through negotiations with the National Development Company, they secured a new "gentlemen's agreement" that would use a creek as a temporary boundary line between whites to the east and blacks to the west. To cement the line, a highway access road would be constructed along similar lines. In exchange, whites would support the developer in securing sewers, water lines, street curbs, and road paving for the new black community. "The company intends to build *only* in the area to the West of the creek at present and West only of the access road when it is definitely established," the Collier Heights Civic Club informed residents. "All other lots that the company owns outright to the East are for sale to *white people only*." Southwest Citizens echoed these statements, promising that the new black development "will not infringe on Collier Heights."³⁷

Although the plan had the endorsements of the mayor, the WSMDC, the Metropolitan Planning Commission, the National Development Company, and the Empire Real Estate Board, it lacked support of one key group—the white residents themselves. Some had sensed this during the negotiations. "I think we can keep the negroes in line," attorney Stephens Mitchell wrote the WSMDC, "but someone else will have to keep the white people in line." Indeed, the ranks of the "selfish minority" who wanted to sell steadily grew. A February 1954 survey showed that 40 percent of white residents planned to sell their homes "as soon as possible." "We sure do want to keep our property for white," a Hightower Road woman lamented, "but there are negroes all around us now. Our home is going up for sale." "Since so much has been said about this section going colored," wrote a railroad electrician from Forest Ridge Drive, "then it might as well, because white people will be afraid in it." The Collier Heights Civic Club did not speak for them, they said. "We have had a self appointed committee working to further their own interests," complained a pipe fitter from Baker Ridge Drive. "I will make my own decision when it is necessary to do so." But most had already decided. Virtually all of Baker Road, for instance, noted that they would "sell to

colored regardless" of what happened. On another street, a Proctor and Gamble salesman summed up his "personal plans" by snapping he would "Get [the] Hell out!"³⁸

Despite this groundswell of dissent, the various organizations pushed ahead with the buffer plans anyway. "We have felt that there existed a sizable group of you who wanted Collier Heights to retain its present white status and have worked to preserve the integrity of your community," the WSMDC wrote in March. In the survey of resident attitudes, 60 percent preferred that Collier Heights "remain white." Likewise, when asked about their personal plans, another slim majority stood against selling; 30 percent swore they would stay put no matter what, while another 25 percent voted to "wait and see what happens." Furthermore, the WSMDC reported that 78 percent agreed to abide by the majority will, whatever it was. Because "a considerable number" in Collier Heights "wish to stay and prefer the community to remain white," the WSMDC assumed the neighborhood would stay that way. It was wrong. The committee failed to appreciate that, for any program of "community defense" to succeed, absolutely everyone—without exception—had to act together. A lone dissent, a single sale to a black buyer, and the rest of the street and, indeed, the whole neighborhood, would follow suit.³⁹

Without unanimous support for staying, the alternative of selling gained strength as 1954 wore on. While white homeowners wished to sell their homes to buyers of the same race, they realized that no white buyer would pay full price for homes in a "transition neighborhood" like theirs. Ultimately, financial concerns trumped racial ones. "I will not take a loss on my home," noted a typical resident of Collier Drive. Therefore, much of the neighborhood turned to the black real-estate market, where the homes would sell at much higher prices. In hopes of maximizing profit and minimizing panic, the residents of Collier Heights decided to put all of their properties up for sale at the same time. For three months, they circulated the idea, trying to bring the entire neighborhood on board. "Group captains" were assigned eight houses each, keeping personal contacts with homeowners to assure that everyone stuck to the plan and no one jumped the gun. Finally, when 87 percent of the neighborhood supported the idea of selling, the group decided to list their homes with black brokers. (Absolute unanimity was *not* needed in this instance for the same reason it had been needed for the plan of defense. If a single sale could start a domino effect of white flight, everyone understood, then a vast majority of sales would quickly overwhelm any holdouts.) Indeed, the transition was swift. Within three months, all 135 homes in Collier Heights changed ownership from white to black.⁴⁰

The Collier Heights transition, however, did not take place in a vacuum. Whites in nearby neighborhoods, Center Hill and Grove Park, were

stunned to discover that blacks now occupied the entire region to their west. For them, Collier Heights had not been a separate area but an extension of their own community. When racial transition first "threatened" Collier Heights in 1952, for instance, Grove Park and Center Hill took it personally. "The leaders I talked with," noted Philip Hammer of the Metropolitan Planning Commission, "are still strongly of the opinion that the Collier Heights area is definitely tied in with the Grove Park–Center Hill area and should be regarded as an integral part of that community." Other city planners agreed. When the WSMDC set up an advisory panel to try to "save" Collier Heights, for instance, it made sure to include a representative from Grove Park and Center Hill each. And when city planners proposed the access road "buffer plan" to seal off Collier Heights, they also had the neighboring areas in mind. "As you probably know," Mayor Hartsfield wrote his construction chief, "the bi-racial committee is trying to assure residents of Center Hill and Grove Park that the proposed access road will be a boundary which will protect them as Negro citizens move farther out." Both sections felt endangered by the flight of Collier Heights whites; both wanted to stay and fight any similar transition in their neighborhoods. Indeed, the two communities acted in such agreement that observers spoke of a single "Grove Park–Center Hill neighborhood" or even simply the "Grove Park area," which was understood to encompass Center Hill.⁴¹

Their joint "defense" began soon after the "loss" of Collier Heights. In September 1954 the Grove Park Civic Association pled with the Empire Real Estate Board for a new "gentlemen's agreement." The realtists were reluctant to help support segregation, but they agreed to meet the homeowners' group halfway, setting Hightower Road as the latest boundary line. Blacks would occupy everything west of the road; whites would keep everything east in Center Hill. Whites were thrilled. The Atlanta Baptist Ministers Union, for instance, issued a special commendation praising the Empire Real Estate Board "for refusing to help dispose of the old homes in the old neighborhood of Commercial Avenue to members of the nonwhite population." What these whites failed to understand, however, was that such boundary lines were rarely permanent. "Black involvement in any discussions of this type represented an attempt to avoid the violence that they faced from whites while securing land," historian Ronald Baylor has noted. "Although white leaders saw these boundary lines as final statements on the black land and housing issue, blacks viewed them as temporary and expedient; they expected to eventually cross the boundaries and barriers."⁴²

Indeed, the Hightower Road boundary was soon crossed. As in countless other cases, a few whites living along the borderline decided to sell their homes the only place they could—the black real-estate market. "Be-

cause of [the] agreement that Hightower Rd would be used as a dividing line between white and black development," a realtor with Alexander-Calloway recalled, "we refused to take listings." But after a black buyer breached the boundary line, apparently without an EREB member's help, white residents on Commercial Avenue, just behind the property, "called incessantly to list their homes." The realty company waited until a strong majority along Commercial—fifteen out of seventeen—wanted to sell before taking the listings, and even then it demanded white homeowners issue "signed statements to the effect that the real estate firm had not solicited the listings, but were accepting them at the insistence of a majority of the residents."⁴³

As so many times before, the white community proved to be less than unanimous in its decision to sell. When realtors arrived one Sunday afternoon in November 1955 to show the listed homes to black prospects, they were quickly surrounded by three hundred angry whites at the corner of Commercial and Old Know. Mostly women and teenage children, the crowd carried signs—"Don't Sell to Colored," "Protect Our Neighborhood," "Niggers Must Not Come In." The mob scene only sped the panic, as those on the next block of Commercial Avenue quickly put their homes up for sale. "The problem seems to be getting out of hand," a resident warned. "Seven or eight signs are now posted on Robert's Street, and an additional seven or eight signs are displayed on Baker [Road] below Hood St." Things soon turned ugly. In late February 1956 another mass protest took place, outside an open house off Baker, and this time the crowd numbered nearly seven hundred men, women, and children. A few days later, after a black buyer had actually moved into 2540 Baker Road, his house was bombed. Four days after that, two sticks of dynamite blew up the cellar of another black-owned house at 2431 Baker Road. After the police started round-the-clock patrols, whites turned their rage against them. When a police captain came to inspect the bombings, he returned to find his windshield shattered by a rock. Two patrolmen left their car for a moment and came back to a flattened tire.⁴⁴

As in other borderline neighborhoods, the residents of Grove Park and Center Hill formed a corporation to repurchase those homes sold to blacks. By 1960 it owned nearly thirty homes, making it, in the words of housing expert Jim Parham, "the most successful such organization in the city." Though whites were thrilled with their stabilization efforts, blacks were not. As Robert Thompson noted, "In most, if not all, cases, the repurchase price was less than the price paid by the temporary [negro] owners." Blacks who refused to go along with the program were given new incentives. A widow and her daughter, for example, had balked at selling her home back to whites. Shortly thereafter, a bomb was thrown at the house. By chance, it bounced off the wall of the front bedroom and

rebounded into the street, where it blew a hole in the pavement, shattered windows, and drove nails through a wall. Soon thereafter, the widow decided to sell.⁴⁵

Although the repurchasing program had succeeded, the truce was still a fragile one. In late 1959 whites discovered a new "threat" on Holly Street to the southeast. Blacks had bought two homes there; more problematic, however, a 112-unit apartment complex for blacks was underway, too. Representatives of Grove Park and Center Hill begged the developer to restrict the project to whites only. "Your decision is so crucial to the welfare of our community, that we refrain from contemplating the disastrous effects of an adverse report," the Grove Park Civic League wrote the builder. "The rental of these apartments to colored would cause an immediate break-through and loss of our community with hardship, financial and personal loss of immeasurable proportions." The residents even enlisted the mayor's help but to no avail. The developer sympathized with their plight but refused to budge. "We certainly have no desire to upset the neighborhood," he wrote Hartsfield, "and we would be glad to rent the apartments to white tenants if it could be done successfully. However, due to the proximity of negro dwellings and negro owned property, it is very doubtful." It was a lost cause, he said, because "the Grove Park Civic League has already let the area go colored." Despite years of cooperation between the two white neighborhoods, accompanied by hard work and financial strain, their successful defense meant nothing. Surrounding areas had given up, and that had crippled them.⁴⁶

THE MYTH AND CONSEQUENCES OF "WHITE COMMUNITIES"

As these four studies demonstrate, "community integrity" was a much more complicated concept than city planners first realized. On the surface, the principle appeared to work well. Neighborhoods with a cohesive identity and strong local institutions (such as Adamsville and Kirkwood) were able to hold back residential desegregation, for a few years at least, while a place without such identity and institutions (Adair Park) underwent swift racial transition. By the early 1960s, however, with the advent of the civil rights movement and the continued pressure on the part of blacks seeking homes, all of these "white communities" underwent racial transition, regardless of their "integrity." But even in the 1950s the concept's significant shortcomings were becoming clear. When city planners spoke with pride of "protecting the integrity of communities," they assumed that white neighborhoods could be easily defined and defended by the city. But the threat of racial transition wreaked havoc with any such attempts. The fundamental flaw with the stress on "community" was that

city planners sought to impose the boundaries of a community from above, when in reality a community could only be created in the minds of local residents. Whites on the fringes of a defended neighborhood—those living on Del Mar Lane in Adamsville, for instance—often rebelled against their inclusion in a “protected community.” The reverse process also happened, when borderline whites attempted to latch onto another community, as in Adair Park’s unsuccessful appeal to neighboring whites. In practical terms, a “white community” was impossible to define with precision or permanence.

Even if a “community” were successfully defined, keeping it successfully defended was another matter. A key problem here was the lack of white solidarity. Too often, the threat of “Negro invaders” created cracks in the wall of white solidarity. In places without “integrity,” such as Adair Park, these cracks widened rather quickly. But even in areas with supposedly strong institutions and a solid sense of “community,” these splits appeared as well. The white residents of Kirkwood, for instance, presented a united front for segregation at first but soon succumbed to bitter internal squabbling. Divided against itself, a “white community” quickly disintegrated. Furthermore, as the example of the Grove Park, Center Hill, and Collier Heights area shows, fissures in white solidarity could appear on a much larger scale, with larger repercussions. The combination of these internal flaws and the constant external pressure for black residential expansion meant that even the strongest defense was eventually overcome. Ultimately, neighborhoods with a demonstrably high level of “community integrity”—Adamsville, Kirkwood, and Grove Park—underwent the same racial transition that consumed more obviously divided areas like Adair Park. The intense planning of and financial strain on whites there did not stop the process but only delayed the inevitable.

For working-class whites in these neighborhoods, and in many more Atlanta neighborhoods like them, the campaign for “community integrity” had accomplished none of its goals. Indeed, if the movement had any lasting legacy, it was the fact that whites in these neighborhoods only came to believe in the importance and, indeed, the existence of their supposed “communities” precisely as those same “communities” crumbled around them. In every one of these white working-class neighborhoods, these Atlantans learned that their fellow whites couldn’t be trusted to stand by them, whether it be the whites on the next street or the whites in the next neighborhood. Believing that “community” was meaningless when it mattered most, they moved toward a new ideology that was its antithesis—individuality. As the course of desegregation spread from their neighborhoods to their neighborhood institutions, the trend toward isolation and individualization would only increase.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Abandonment of Public Space: Desegregation, Privatization, and the Tax Revolt

IN JANUARY 1959 Police Chief Herbert Jenkins found a poem tacked to a bulletin board at his departmental headquarters. Tellingly, the anonymous author had titled it “The Plan of Improvement,” in sarcastic tribute to Mayor Hartsfield’s 1952 program for the city’s expansion and economic progress. The poem looked back over a decade of racial change and spoke volumes about the rising tide of white resentment. It began with a brief review of the origins of residential transition and quickly linked the desegregation of working-class neighborhoods to the desegregation of the public spaces surrounding them:

Look my children and you shall see,
The Plan of Improvement by William B.
On a great civic venture we’re about to embark
And we’ll start this one off at old Mozeley Park.

White folks won’t mind losing homes they hold dear;
(If it doesn’t take place on an election year)
Before they have time to get over the shock,
We’ll have that whole section—every square block.

I’ll try something different for plan number two
This time the city’s golf courses will do.
They’ll mix in the Club House and then on the green
I might get a write up in Life Magazine.

And now comes the schools for plan number three
To mix them in classrooms just fills me with glee;
For I have a Grandson who someday I pray
Will thank me for sending this culture his way.

And for my finale, to do it up right,
The buses, theatres and night spots so bright;
Pools and restaurants will be mixed up at last
And my Plan of Improvement will be going full blast.

The sarcasm in the poem is unmistakable, of course, but so are the ways in which the author—either a policeman himself or a friend of one—clearly linked the city’s pursuit of “progress” with a litany of white losses.

In the mind of the author, and countless other white Atlantans like him, the politics of progress was a zero-sum game in which every advance for civil rights meant an equal loss for whites.¹

As the poem suggested, this phenomenon was perhaps clearest in the case of the desegregation of public spaces, which became the focal point of local civil rights activists in the mid-1950s. Emboldened by successes in individual neighborhoods and the growing momentum of the civil rights movement, they pressed for the desegregation of public spaces across the city, especially the bus lines and the municipal golf courses, parks and pools. In each case, a familiar pattern unfolded. First, black leaders would stage a cautious challenge to the racial status quo. City officials would then wait until they were confronted by court orders to desegregate. Then, claiming an inability to do otherwise, they would carefully orchestrate the actual desegregation. Little by little, Atlanta's public spaces were thus desegregated—peacefully, publicly, progressively. And with every successful desegregation, Atlanta's reputation as the "city too busy to hate" grew as well.

Many observers, of the time and since, have accepted the city's claims that it largely obeyed the law and, in doing so, helped close the racial divide. In truth, of course, the story is more complicated. First and foremost, the actual distance between the races remained, even as the legal barriers between them were struck down. Although the two terms are commonly conflated, "desegregation" did not, in practice, mean the same thing as "integration." To be sure, many whites acquiesced to court-ordered desegregation, but that did not mean they were themselves willing to share public spaces with blacks. A majority of white Atlantans recoiled at the thought of social contact between the races, which they more commonly disdained as "interracial intimacy."² Accordingly, as public spaces desegregated, whites abandoned them, effectively resegregating those places in the process. In the end, court-ordered desegregation of public spaces brought about not actual racial integration, but instead a new division in which the public world was increasingly abandoned to blacks and a new private one was created for whites.

The second complication of Atlanta's seeming success story is related to the first. Court-ordered desegregation, instead of closing the old divide between blacks and whites, actually aggravated a new one between classes of whites. In the eyes of working-class whites, the desegregation of public spaces was nothing short of a disaster. The thought of sharing public spaces with blacks was anathema to them, as it was to most whites of this time and place. But unlike the upper class, Atlanta's working-class whites long held a close connection to neighborhood parks and pools, municipal golf courses, and modes of public transportation. They used those facilities regularly and had, under the auspices of legalized segregation, come

to think of these municipal services as "their" buses, "their" golf courses, "their" parks, and "their" pools. Upper-class whites had no similar attachment because, unlike the poor, they had plenty of private alternatives. They belonged to private country clubs, had access to private pools, and drove private cars. Accordingly, they knew the desegregation of public spaces would not affect them in any meaningful way. To the shock of working-class whites, who had long assumed that all white southerners stood united in support of segregation, these upper-class whites not only went along with court-ordered desegregation but then had the gall to brag about it.

In reaction, working-class whites were furious. Throughout the late 1950s they held bitter protests to prevent the "loss" of their buses, golf courses, parks, and pools. In the end, however, the combined power of the courts, the city's upper-class whites and the civil rights community overwhelmed their "defensive" efforts. Within a few years, all of the city's public spaces were thoroughly desegregated. Ultimately, the failed fight over these spaces showed working-class whites that there was a growing chasm between their own commitment to segregation and the commitment of wealthier whites. In the immediate sense, the class divide sparked by desegregation was felt in local politics, as working-class whites rebelled against the drive for civic improvements which they assumed would solely benefit blacks. In a broader sense, however, their anger over the desegregation of public spaces dovetailed with their anger over the desegregation of their neighborhoods to prompt their flight from the city. Their withdrawal was physical, of course, as working-class whites abandoned the city for the still-segregated suburbs. But their retreat also took place in a larger sense, as working-class whites withdrew their support—financial, social, and political—from a society that they felt had abandoned them. Just as the desegregation of their neighborhoods had led them to reject the concept of "community," the desegregation of the public spaces around those neighborhoods led them to rise up against Atlanta's plans for progress, too.

THE DESEGREGATION OF CITY BUSES

As a rule, public space in the South was strictly segregated, parceled out in distinctly separate and decidedly unequal ways. This pattern was perhaps clearest in the physical nature of public space, in that municipal authorities generally granted each race distinct spaces to call its own. Public transportation proved to be the exception to this rule, because transit companies found it impractical to provide completely separate vehicles for each race and decided to separate the races within a single vehicle instead.

Thus, trolleys, streetcars, and buses stood as the public space in which whites and blacks came into the earliest and closest contact.³

Although blacks were allowed on streetcars, their interior movement was strictly controlled. If the two races came into "intimate contact" there, whites believed violence would be inevitable. An Atlanta judge, for instance, admitted that contact between the races could enrage even a patrician such as himself. "If a big black man got into the streetcar and pressed up against my wife," he confessed, "I would brain him." To prevent such contact, Georgia had passed segregation statutes for streetcars in 1890, the first such laws in the South. Under the legislation, conductors of private transit companies had almost unlimited police powers. They could order paying customers to move anywhere they chose, eject them from the trolley, and, if they deemed it necessary, resort to physical force. The pattern of segregation that conductors enforced, however, was ill-defined. To be sure, signs indicated that the streetcars ran segregated. "White People Will Seat from Front of Car toward the Back," passengers were reminded, "and Colored People from Rear toward Front." But the precise dividing line remained fluid, to be moved forward and back at the driver's discretion.⁴

For many white Atlantans, such arrangements were not enough. No matter how rigidly or ruthlessly the segregation statutes were enforced, the simple act of sharing public space with blacks was too much for them. In 1920, for instance, an angry Atlantan wrote the president of Georgia Power, the company that ran the streetcar lines, to voice his neighbors' objections to the line running through their "very desirable residential section" off Ponce de Leon Avenue. "Especially during the rush hours of 7:00 to 8:30 A.M. and 5:00 to 7:00 P.M., this car is continually crowded with negroes, and it is very displeasing to have to ride in a car filled with this 'aroma,'" he noted. Rather than put up with the presence of black passengers, he and his neighbors wanted the entire line discontinued. Other whites rejected the sharing of streetcar space as well. In 1926, for example, white residents of the Fifth Ward complained about the single-car trolleys used in their neighborhood, charging that "the manner of separation of White and Colored passengers on such cars is improper, and that the continued operation of these cars will ultimately result in personal injuries to passengers, and serious racial friction." Upset at having to share public space with blacks, however strictly segregated, they petitioned city commissioners to ban all such streetcars "on any line serving Fifth Ward."⁵

Although many whites boycotted the streetcars, large numbers continued to ride, taking comfort in the knowledge that the racial code would be strictly enforced by the conductors. Under their watch, any black who challenged the rules of behavior was dealt with swiftly and harshly. In-

deed, the violent behavior of Georgia Power's drivers became so pronounced that company officials worried it would hurt business. "We just can't have men who are not able to control themselves and handle the negro passengers," lamented the president. Often, white drivers could control neither. A black Atlantan, for instance, recalled a wartime incident between a white driver and a black rider. "At one of the stops a working man got on the car, which was extremely crowded," he remembered. "He was in overalls, . . . covered with the dirt of his trade." When the car started, he failed to move back. The motorman slammed on the brakes and ordered him to the rear. But the worker quietly replied that he was too dirty to "move through all those people." Furious, the driver wrenched loose an iron tool and struck the man on the head. The passenger, however, wrestled the tool away from him. As the rest of the car looked on in horror, he beat the driver nearly to death and then fled the scene. Shortly afterward, all Atlanta motormen were deputized and armed with revolvers.⁶

But arming the drivers only made matters worse, as they became prone to use deadly force against even verbal infractions of the racial code. For instance, in March 1946, three young blacks asked a driver on the West Fair-Magnolia line for a free ride into town. After he refused and they cursed him, the driver shot one in the stomach. Two weeks later, more blood was spilled on an Irwin Street car. Madison Harris, a black veteran, exchanged "remarks" with the driver, T. H. Purl, but left the trolley. As Harris walked away, Purl pulled out his gun and flung open the doors. "When the victim saw the motorman's gun," a witness told reporters, "he put his empty hands in the air. And as he did so, the motorman shot him." On a downtown line, another exchange of words between a white driver and a black veteran led to similar bloodshed. Again, the passenger walked away from the argument, only to be followed out of the car by the driver, W. D. Lee, who pulled his pistol and dared the man to "repeat those remarks." As the unarmed man stood there with his hands at his side, Lee killed him. Still not satisfied, the driver moved closer to fire more shots at the corpse, stopping only when his pistol jammed. Several white men from neighboring businesses rushed onto the street with their own guns drawn. Too late to aid the motorman, they followed his victim's friends down the street and forced them to bring the dead man's body back to the scene.⁷

In all of these shootings, the city sided with the drivers. The police classified Purl's murder of Madison Harris, for instance, as merely "disorderly conduct—shooting another." The courts were even more lenient, dismissing the case without trial. "To me," Judge A. W. Callaway ruled, "this is nothing but a case of justifiable homicide." Likewise, when W. D. Lee appeared in Callaway's court, his incident was also dismissed, despite

Lee's own admission that he stopped shooting only because his gun jammed. The driver, who laughed during several witnesses' descriptions of the shooting, was set free and sent back to work. Officials at Georgia Power also sided with their drivers. A letter of protest from a black veteran, for instance, merely received a polite note that the company looked upon such shootings "with a great deal of disfavor." "We do not intend to excuse the issue," the manager continued, "when we say that a few of our passengers, either through ignorance or a premeditated desire to rob, make it necessary for the operators on some of our lines to protect themselves, and I believe you will agree that in a few instances this has been justified." In all, the motormen felt vindicated. "Now," Purl gloated, "I guess they'll see where we stand."⁸

This was Atlanta of the mid-1940s—before the rise of Bill Hartsfield's biracial coalition and before the city started to worry about the impact that racial conflicts had on its image. The Klan and the Columbians were still roaming the streets of Atlanta and, in some instances, operating the very streetcars where these shootings took place. In their eyes, such shootings were not only necessary but praiseworthy. For instance, Vester Ownby, a member of both the Klan and the Columbians, wrote the *Atlanta Constitution* to praise the streetcar operators for their "defense" of whites' public space. They were good men, he wrote, heroes forced to do battle with "serpents in human form, bipeds, drunk or doped, bearing death-dealing weapons, dangerous to all humankind." White Atlantans, he insisted, owed them their thanks. But black Atlantans, then beginning their campaign for political inclusion, refused to back down. The Atlanta Baptist Ministers Union wrote to Georgia Power, protesting the "outrageous shooting and killing" of black trolley patrons. Representing more than two hundred black ministers, the group expressed its "fear that if this situation is allowed to continue [it] will lead to more serious crises." Others tried to rally the community in protest. "Two Negroes within 3 weeks have been shot by Street Car operators," an announcement warned. "Your boy, brother, or husband may be next."⁹

As the Hartsfield coalition took shape, brutal acts of violence gave way to subtler suppression. At the most basic level, drivers seemed to delight in the power they had to order black riders to move back or stand at the driver's whim. In 1948, for instance, a white passenger complained of how a driver on the Marietta Street trolley had treated a black passenger in "a most humiliating and ungentlemanly manner." Even though he was already sitting behind the color line, the passenger was ordered to move farther back. Likewise, on several lines, drivers moved the color line back during rush hours, but refused to readjust it when whites left. While most of the seats before them remained empty, blacks had to huddle in the aisle. "It breaks my heart to see white people act so rude," one woman wrote. "I

am white and not what is known as a 'nigger lover' but I do like common decency." Others agreed. "I have found trolley drivers consistently rude, inconsiderate, and in many cases just plain mean," another complained. "They seem to despise all their customers and take a delight in passing them whenever possible—especially their Negro customers." Other insults faced by blacks were actually part of the transit company's policy. While all passengers paid and entered by the front door, for instance, blacks alone were required to exit at the rear.¹⁰

While segregation turned individual streetcars into contested terrain, it had an equally important impact on the city at large. Service patterns of the private transit companies often reinforced residential segregation, helping to isolate black communities further. The Southern Regional Council, for instance, reported in 1945 that "no outlying Negro sections are served by trackless trolleys and buses, nor are there any of these sections served by feeder bus lines. These services are made available to many, although not all, outlying white sections of the city." Specifically, Georgia Power had "refused service to the colored people in the new Dixie Hills and Pine Acres section," the report continued. "The company said the Negro population of this area did not warrant its extension of services." As demonstrated in Mozley Park, neighborhoods that underwent racial transition were often denied bus service for years. And once transit companies finally did provide service to these areas, black riders had to pay high prices. "Many steady, hard-working colored couples have long wanted to buy lit-new clean houses instead of living at a rental of over fifty dollars monthly in half of a dilapidated house discarded by white people," one black Atlantan wrote the mayor. But now that their dreams had been realized, many were finding it impossible to pay the high fares needed to get to work. What were they to do? "A high official in another group answered my query with: 'Let the negroes either give up the new houses they have bought or give up their present jobs and get others near [the downtown district of] Five Points.'" As an added problem, the few buses that did make it out to their neighborhood were woefully overcrowded and getting worse. "I am afraid that when many more negroes move into the completed houses," he continued, "there will be racial trouble on the little Gray Line bus, negroes filling the seats."¹¹

Black leaders in Atlanta tried to address these problems through the city's traditional approach of private negotiations. At first, their efforts focused on the small indignities. In 1949, for instance, the local NAACP chapter met with officials of Georgia Power to discuss "relieving congestion in busses serving Negro areas and restrictions to exit from rear doors only." Thereafter, the NAACP maintained polite and open communication with Georgia Power and, after the company changed hands in 1950, the Atlanta Transit System. President Robert Sommerville spoke proudly

of his "harmonious meeting with local negro leaders." Ultimately, however, communication did little to solve the problems. Transportation segregation, company officials repeatedly pointed out, had been legislated by the state assembly and upheld by the courts. As a private business, they were obligated to live by these laws.¹²

Unable to negotiate a change, black leaders decided on another course of action, inspired by Atlanta's own Martin Luther King Jr. A pastor's son from Ebenezer Baptist Church and a graduate of Morehouse College, King had since moved to Montgomery, Alabama, where he famously led protests against that city's segregated bus lines in 1955–56. Six months into the Montgomery boycott, Atlanta ministers made tentative steps of their own. On the first week of June 1956, a group of black activists, led by Rev. John Porter, spread out in the front seats of an Irwin Street bus. At the next stop, several whites boarded, paid their fares, and stopped dead in the aisle, stunned by what they saw. The operator whirled around and shouted at Rev. Porter, "Boy! Get up, move to the back, and let those folks sit down." The minister refused to move. "Boy! I am talking to you!" the driver yelled again. Rev. Porter said he heard him, but stayed in his seat. For several minutes, the two sides remained motionless, as the driver "glared in mounting anger and fury." Ultimately, the protestors backed down and left the bus without further incident. A few weeks later, Rev. Porter tested another of the segregation statutes—the rule that blacks had to leave by the back door. When the bus he was riding reached the corner of Walton and Broad, Rev. Porter got up and walked to the front exit. The driver told him to leave by the back, but the minister proceeded out the front. Outraged, the driver suddenly closed the mechanical doors as Rev. Porter was halfway through them, pinning the preacher. Only through his own efforts was he able to free himself.¹³

These initial challenges gained strength and support when the Supreme Court settled the Montgomery boycott in November 1956 by striking down segregation on its buses and other modes of public transportation. Emboldened by the ruling, Rev. William Holmes Borders and other ministers launched the Love, Law, and Liberation Movement to apply the decision in Atlanta and thus end segregated transportation there as well. In keeping with the Atlanta approach to race relations, the ministers met with Mayor Hartsfield to discuss their plans in advance. All they wanted to do, they told him, was secure grounds for challenging the state's segregation statutes in court. Always mindful of his city's public image, Hartsfield asked if there was any way it could be done without arresting the ministers. "Impossible," they replied. Without arrests, they would lose face in the black community.¹⁴

Confronted with the inevitability of their challenge and convinced of the likelihood of its success, Mayor Hartsfield carefully orchestrated the

desegregation of his city's buses. The first step involved a peaceful test. Together, the Love, Law and Liberation Movement and the Atlanta Transit System carefully arranged the challenge beforehand. "We are going to ride until these buses are desegregated," Rev. Borders announced to a crowd of twelve hundred at his Wheat Street Baptist Church. "If they take the bus to the barn, we'll ride it to the barn and then get another. We'll take every bus in Atlanta to the barn if necessary." Despite these bold words, the challenge was meant to be as conservative as possible. Ministers alone would ride the buses, they announced. Public support was not sought and, indeed, directly discouraged. In addition, while they would be breaking the rules of segregation, the ministers promised not to violate taboos of racial intimacy. "We will not sit by a white person," Rev. Borders cautioned. "Under no circumstances will any of us sit by a white woman."

The next morning, January 9, 1957, twenty ministers boarded a bus, paid their fares, and, as the driver remembered, "took seats in my trolley coach wherever they pleased to sit." The incident did not take him by surprise, however. "I was aware," he attested, "that there had been talk of an attempt by certain colored persons to board a vehicle of my employer and ride such a vehicle on a 'desegregated' basis." The young driver said nothing to the ministers but refused to move the bus. "It's not going anywhere," someone shouted from outside, and all the white passengers filed off the bus, except one. An Atlanta Transit System manager soon arrived, telling the driver to switch the sign to "Special" and drive the bus straight to the barn—just as Rev. Borders had predicted. As the driver carried the singing and praying ministers away, one reporter remembered, a "cavalcade of press and television cars" stretched out behind the bus, saving every moment for public scrutiny. Once at the barn, the ministers exited—by the front door—and left the scene without any ugliness. In fact, the only clash occurred when a white passenger tried to take a camera away from a white reporter who had just taken his photo.¹⁵

After the challenge, the ministers' arrest was just as carefully scripted. At Hartsfield's direction, Police Chief Herbert Jenkins went through the formality of obtaining warrants for their arrest, even though no one—not the mayor, the police chief, the county solicitor, not even the judge himself—thought the ministers should be punished. "He said that he did not believe the warrants would be worth the paper they were written on," Jenkins said of the judge, "but if I believed it would help defuse a potentially explosive situation, he would issue them." Jenkins hoped the ministers could quietly come to the police station on their own; Hartsfield even offered to send city limousines. But Rev. Borders insisted on the spectacle of being carried away in the paddy wagon. Obliging, the police chief asked him for a convenient time and place for the arrest and arranged for two of his most level-headed men, Captain J. L. Moseley, white, and

Detective Howard Baugh, black, to lead the detail. The arrest was an even bigger event than the ministers' ride the day before. Huge crowds came out to Wheat Street to watch. "The people knew why we were there, why the police were there," Rev. Borders recalled. "People quit work. They stopped cooking meals. They left beauty shops. They came out of stores. They thronged the streets." So many turned out, however, that the paddy wagon was unable to leave until Rev. Borders climbed out and asked the crowd to part. Moseley and Baugh chatted amiably with the ministers all the way to the station, and a representative from Time-Life rode along with them, chronicling his trip in the South's first integrated paddy wagon. At the station, the ministers were booked, bonded, and released within two hours. Their brief visit included time in a detention cell, but the door was never even closed.¹⁶

By the end of the day, everyone involved was satisfied. The ministers had secured grounds for a test case against state segregation laws and were satisfied to fight it out in the courts. "We've accomplished our objective," Rev. Borders told his supporters. "The fight will be in the courts and we won't attempt to ride the buses integrated again until it's settled." At the same time, the mayor safeguarded the positive public image of his city. "Atlanta has an excellent record before the nation for its good race relations," Hartsfield crowed. "We in Atlanta have felt that this was a desirable thing, not only for the sake of decency but from the standpoint of business as well." After the ugliness of the Montgomery boycott, the nation marveled at how smoothly, almost effortlessly, Atlanta had desegregated its buses.¹⁷

Unlike other spots in the South, where whites responded to bus desegregation with violent attacks, Atlanta witnessed little in the way of violence. To be sure, Rev. Borders soon grew accustomed to answering phone calls for "that damn bus preacher" and heard that whites would dynamite his Wheat Street church in retaliation. But nothing happened. Instead of attacking the activists behind bus desegregation, Atlanta's segregationists struck back by boycotting the buses themselves. Many whites had long promised that desegregation would drive white patrons away and bring the end of public transportation altogether. "In our opinion," the *Metropolitan Herald* noted after the initial challenges, "the eventual sufferers will be those who will be left with no means of public transportation to get to and from their jobs, as transit systems are forced to go out of business." Once the court case had been won, segregationists again urged whites to abandon the buses. Georgia's attorney general Eugene Cook, for instance, praised the white passengers for leaving the bus when Rev. Borders and the other ministers first arrived. Likewise, the director of the segregationist States' Rights Council of Georgia encouraged white flight. "White people should refuse absolutely to be integrated on the city



Figure 4.1 Rev. William Holmes Borders. As a leader of the Love, Law, and Liberation group, Rev. Borders orchestrated the desegregation of Atlanta's city buses. Working closely with city officials, the organization secured a test case in January 1957 for challenging the segregation statutes. His jail cell, which he is here seen leaving, was never locked during his brief stay at the police station.

busses of Atlanta," he urged. "In no event should white people remain seated when these NAACP agitators become disorderly and unruly in sitting by them." These leaders' revulsion resonated deeply with their fellow whites. "There is nothing more intimate and integrated," one Atlantan wrote disgustedly in 1959, "than a black nigger sitting beside a white girl on the trolley." A northern man warned Chief Jenkins about what would happen to Atlanta's desegregated buses as whites fled in fear. "As of today, Detroit, Chicago, Cleveland public transportation systems are mere shells of their former place in public utility," he noted. "They are almost abandoned to the private car—bumper to bumper, one man to a vehicle—definitely to avoid integration." Whites and blacks simply could not coexist, the writer insisted. "Too many toes were stepped on with no apologies, for it is noted that negroes do not apologize for a

social error," he sneered. "Too many women were molested; too many men were knifed, too many bus drivers were attacked in trying to maintain order on public vehicles."¹⁸

Indeed, white patronage on Atlanta's buses *did* plummet after the January 1957 challenge to desegregation. The Atlanta Transit System compared its usage from the previous year and found significant and steady declines across the board. By that May, passenger fares had dropped off 7 percent; by November, they were down 13 percent. "It was felt," the board recorded, "that this decline was definitely influenced by publicity on desegregation and by the recent court suit filed by the NAACP in respect to segregation on Atlanta buses." The drop-off in white usage, however, was not due to the *actual* desegregation of the buses but their *threatened* desegregation. The ministers' lawsuit took two years to work its way through the court; meanwhile, they urged blacks to abide by segregated seating patterns. Apparently, they did. An Atlanta University sociology student rode the buses in April and May 1957, for instance, and found that the old patterns of segregation persisted. "Of the total number of white passengers riding the buses, the largest number preferred to sit from 'front to center,'" he noted on a rush hour bus. "Whites did not change their seats for Negroes. Most of the white passengers boarded by the front entrance and departed by the front exit." That might have been expected, but the observer found that blacks also abided by the old codes. "Negro passengers elected in the majority of the cases viewed to sit from 'center to rear,'" he observed on a residential line. "Most of the Negroes boarded by the front entrance and departed by the center exit." In the three weeks he rode the buses, he witnessed only a single conflict between blacks and whites, a verbal one at that.¹⁹

Even after the Supreme Court ruled in favor of the ministers and forced the official desegregation of Atlanta's buses in January 1959, blacks rarely challenged the old concepts of race and place. "You are free to ride anywhere you choose," Rev. Borders told a rally of twenty-five hundred after the decision. But he cautioned restraint. "We don't want one single incident, and that is what we are working for," he announced. Blacks should be neat, be orderly, and never sit next to white women. In all, Borders and his fellow ministers did little to encourage the exercise of that newly found freedom. "There will be no concentrated mass effort to ride desegregated," noted Rev. B. J. Johnson. Therefore, months after the decision, city buses remained effectively segregated. "So far, here in Atlanta, I have not seen a single negro on the street cars sitting by a white person," a white man wrote in March 1959. "I don't think they, in the mass, are anxious to mix with us anywhere." White riders, however, were even less anxious to "mix" with blacks. Census reports from 1960 demonstrate that, as some had predicted, whites had indeed fled the system and taken

to private cars in large numbers. In several neighborhoods, working-class whites now used private cars to get to their jobs instead of public transportation, by a 2-to-1 margin. Meanwhile, blacks in neighboring tracts—sections that were likely to share bus routes with these white areas—trended in precisely the opposite direction, choosing public transportation over private cars by a 2-to-1 margin. A private survey of bus usage from 1960 echoed the fact that blacks were becoming a predominant presence on the lines as working-class whites fled. Although African Americans represented only a third of the city's population, the report noted, they made up "59 percent of the bus patronage during the rush period." And over the next decade, as desegregation picked up speed, so too did white flight from the lines.²⁰

THE DESEGREGATION OF GOLF COURSES, PARKS, AND POOLS

The anger of working-class whites over the "loss" of bus lines was nothing compared with their outrage over the desegregation of Atlanta's municipal parks. Unlike the buses, which had always been contested terrain, these public spaces had been reserved for whites since the days of Reconstruction. Indeed, it was only after the First World War that the city established any "colored" park space at all. And even then, the small lands conceded for black use were woefully underfunded and underdeveloped. A 1954 report from the Atlanta Urban League noted that, though blacks represented more than a third of the city's population, they could use just 3 of 132 park areas operated by the Atlanta Parks Department. The distribution of recreational facilities, the report pointed out, was just as bad. There were ninety-six tennis courts in the city, for instance, but blacks could only play on eight, none of which was lighted. The city ran eight community centers, but blacks could use just one; likewise, only one of the city's seven gyms admitted blacks.²¹

The most glaring discrepancy in the distribution of these services, however, stood in the municipal golf courses. While blacks had at least some access to other sites, they were barred completely from the city's five golf courses. Nearly a quarter million white golfers visited these courses a year. But if Atlanta's blacks wanted to play a round, they had to haul their equipment beyond the city limits, to the privately owned Lincoln Country Club. Realizing that the unequal distribution of Atlanta's public spaces was most evident in this area, those seeking the desegregation of city services thus targeted the golf courses first. On July 19, 1951, a foursome arrived at the Bobby Jones Municipal Golf Course: Dr. Hamilton Holmes, an elderly physician; his sons Alfred, a former Southern Amateur champion, and Oliver Wendell, a seminary student; and Charles T. Bell, a friend

and real-estate agent. They were a respectable, middle-class group. However, as the golf pro pointed out, they were also black. Because of that detail, he refused to let them play, citing a city ordinance barring blacks from "public areas designated for whites." Although the golf pro had the law on his side, Atlanta's leaders understood the foursome's challenge presented a serious problem. Nervous officials in the Parks Department announced that plans were "in the blueprint stage for a Negro golf course." Years passed, however, with no steps made toward creating a course for blacks. Meanwhile, two new ones were built for whites.²²

Accordingly, Hamilton Holmes filed a federal suit in June 1953, seeking \$15,000 in damages and demanding that all of Atlanta's courses be opened to blacks. A year later, Judge Boyd Sloan of the U.S. District Court ruled that there was "no legal obligation" for the city to set up public courses. But if it did, it had to allow everyone access. Although Judge Sloan found in favor of the black plaintiffs, he left room for continued separation of the races. "Segregation," the *Atlanta Journal* assured its readers, "can be maintained." Black leaders, however, were not satisfied. Several of the NAACP's leading legal minds, including Thurgood Marshall and Robert Carter, were brought on board to handle the appeal. Emboldened by *Brown*, they pressed the case to the Supreme Court, in hopes that the justices would strike down any semblance of segregation. On November 8, 1955, the Court did just that. In a ruling of just fifty-eight words, the justices decided unanimously that lower courts had been wrong to apply the "separate but equal" doctrine to public facilities. Blacks had to be admitted to Atlanta's golf courses on a completely equal basis.²³

Segregationists were outraged. Blacks did not want equality, they charged; they wanted social intimacy. "They do not want to play on golf courses where only Negroes are playing," spat an angry Herman Talmadge. "They want to play with White men and women and they are determined to force themselves on the White players." Blacks should have respected whites' wishes for separate facilities. "Instead," the former governor and future senator complained, "they yell for the Supreme Court like spoiled brats." Governor Marvin Griffin, Talmadge's successor, likewise charged that the lawsuit had been brought by "a handful of disgruntled Negroes, manipulated by the NAACP." He predicted the ruling would be "a definite disservice to their own people."²⁴

In what would emerge as a recurring theme of segregationist resistance, these political leaders offered a drastic solution. Unwilling to let municipal spaces be integrated, they instead urged the city to abandon its public lands altogether. Talmadge, for instance, suggested the city sell its parks and playgrounds to private interests who could keep them white. The Supreme Court's ruling, he predicted dourly, would "probably mean the end of most public golf courses, playgrounds, and things of that type." Governor

Griffin agreed. "I can make the clear declaration that the state will get out of the park business before allowing a breakdown in segregation in the intimacy of the playground," he announced. If he had been in charge of the courses when the ruling came down, the governor said, he would have "plowed them up next morning and planted alfalfa and corn."²⁵

But Mayor Hartsfield was in charge, not Governor Griffin, and he took a quite different approach. "Atlanta has a good reputation before the nation, and we hope to preserve it," the mayor announced. "I have no doubt that Atlanta, as usual, will do the right thing." Publicly, he refused to say what "the right thing" would be. Privately, however, he carefully prepared for peaceful compliance with the court's orders. Hartsfield first convinced Judge Sloan to delay the delivery of the desegregation order until the Christmas holidays, to give the city time to comply. In the meantime, Hartsfield again worked to engineer peaceful desegregation. First, he met with leading members of the black community to secure their cooperation. "The Negro leadership was agreeable to any plan that would desegregate the golf courses without incident," Police Chief Jenkins recalled, "and agreed to make no move to integrate the courses until the city had an opportunity to work things out." Next, the mayor met with the nearly one hundred employees of the golf courses. There were just two choices, he told them—comply or close. Reminded that closing the courses would mean losing their jobs, the employees voted unanimously for compliance. As a final touch, Hartsfield shut down the locker rooms and shower facilities, hoping that might lessen whites' fears of "interracial intimacy." To the press, he claimed with a straight face that the lawsuit had nothing to do with it: "We decided that since most people travel to and from the courses today, the showers just weren't needed any more." By the time Judge Sloan finally handed down the decree to desegregate on December 23, 1955, Hartsfield had thus carefully laid the groundwork for calm compliance.²⁶

Now faced with the order, Hartsfield said Atlanta would "accept [it] without question." Still, he tried to downplay the importance of the ruling. "Golf, by its very nature, is a segregated game," he rationalized. Even if a black foursome appeared on a course, white players would have little personal contact with them, if any. Hartsfield listed similar southern cities that had already desegregated courses without trouble and reminded whites that other public facilities, such as playgrounds and swimming pools, would still be segregated. Following Hartsfield's recommendations, the same group that had first sought to play golf on the Bobby Jones course four years earlier announced they would finally play the next day. "It was Christmas Eve," the mayor later explained, "and we counted on everybody being full of the Christmas spirit, not to mention tired from all that shopping and going to parties." Not everyone was in the holiday

mood, however. During the night, a number of angry whites snuck onto several courses and scrawled obscenities in yellow paint across the pavilions and benches. But Hartsfield was prepared. He had work crews out before dawn, painting over every word. When reporters arrived at the Bobby Jones course, there was no trace of the vandals' work. However, there was also no trace of the Holmes family. Fearing an outbreak of violence, the mayor convinced them to play on another course. "They had promised the television people they would appear," Hartsfield recalled. "I said, 'Those TV boys aren't interested in watching you hit the ball. They want to get pictures of you getting beat up!'" In the end, his careful preparations paid off. When the foursome arrived at the North Fulton course to play, there was no ugliness.²⁷

Although the desegregation seemed to go smoothly, whites in neighborhoods near the courses were outraged. The conflicts over race and residence, which had already consumed Ashby Street and Mozley Park and were even then raging in Adamsville, Collier Heights, Center Hill, and Grove Park, had not affected these neighborhoods to the north. Thus, the desegregation of "their" golf courses stood as their introduction to the battles over race and place. Originally, they thought it would never happen. When the desegregation order came down from the Supreme Court, the local *Northside News* sarcastically addressed the likelihood of black golfers coming to "their" courses. "Oh, we'll be able to tell when the invader's really coming, in person," the editors scoffed. "He'll have a big crowd, coming north on North Side Drive from down there by the West By-Pass! This'll be a live show. The road's all paved. They'll be yelling 'Fo', white boy! Don't you heah me yellin' fo' at you? The saints is marchin' in.'" Ultimately, these whites believed they could stop the "invasion" of the golf courses just as their fellow whites seemed to be stopping "invasions" of the neighborhoods to the south. Indeed, they drew explicit comparisons between the two forms of resistance. "We held them back last Sunday in Center Hill when they started crowding in there with their open house stunt," the editors noted with pride. "We'll hold 'em off at the golf course, too. Shucks, they won't even cast their eyes toward Malon Court's tennis court over there on the edge of the golf course and run complaining to Judge Warren that we don't want nobody for tennis, either."²⁸

But when desegregation really did arrive, the *Northside News* interpreted it as a personal attack. "There are seven public golf courses in Atlanta," they pointed out. "Only two are in the North Side, the other five being much more convenient to the Holmes boys and their friends who live in southwest Atlanta." Blacks had targeted the Bobby Jones and North Fulton courses not because they were the city's finest, the paper charged, but because the "NAACP wants nothing short of all-out war." The Northside courses had been chosen because they stood in neighbor-

hoods that were still all white. "Under the NAACP strategy," the editors warned, "the Negro invading forces strike first at the Pearl Harbors and not at the nearby Asiatic islands. The first attack must humble the self-satisfied whites who believe that the Negro problem will never strike close to their homes. That, itself, is an incident Northsiders need to note."²⁹

Tellingly, the paper charged that the city's moderate coalition would, in time, dismantle segregation in all public spaces. "With a smugness that would be laughable were it not so alarming," they wrote bitterly, "the *Atlanta Journal* declares that the admission of Negroes to white golf courses does not mean that Negroes will be permitted to use the swimming pools with white people. That is like saying the infant who learns to crawl will not learn to walk." No, the golf courses were just the first step. In less than a year, they warned, the mayor would announce that "he and the merchants welcome the integration of whites and blacks in swimming pools, in all restaurants, on all buses—and maybe, in the public schools." The *Northside News* reminded whites that many of them had been recently annexed by the city because Hartsfield wanted to suppress the rising percentage of blacks in the population. " 'The Negroes,' he said, 'are taking over the City of Atlanta as it is today. The whites have got to put those Negroes in their place and see that Atlanta continues under a white mayor,' " they remembered angrily. "The North Side came to his help. Now the North Side finds Mayor Hartsfield surrendering, without even a mild protest, the North Side's playgrounds to the South Side's Negroes he once wanted to keep in their place." They were disgusted: "That is really the lowest one could expect from an elected caucasean in the betrayal of public trust."³⁰

Because of white outrage, the golf courses remained contested terrain for years after their official desegregation. In the summer of 1959, for instance, working-class whites in the city's southwest learned that black golfers were planning to hold a "National Negro Golf Tournament" on the eighteen-hole course at Adams Park. They were furious. A "large contingent of aroused residents" marched to the mayor's office, demanding he stop the tournament. "The whites were by no means the rough element that bothers trouble," judged the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*; "they were people of middle income, living in a nice section." But the mayor dismissed them. "City officials (which in Atlanta means the mayor) refused to take a stand, pleading impotence," one resident remembered with disgust. So whites "defended" the course themselves. "With dogged determination," he noted with pride, "the white people publicized plans to clutter the course from daybreak until dusk, for the duration of the tournament, and the Negroes backed down. The National Negro Golf Tournament was called off."³¹

White resentment over the desegregation of golf courses, though potentially explosive, never reached a state of true crisis. Whites could, of course, simply refuse to play desegregated courses. But if they did play, they would rarely encounter any black players. As the mayor liked to point out, golf was by nature a "segregated game" in which there was little or no contact between groups. With no contact, there could be little conflict. In other spaces of public recreation, however, such as park facilities and swimming pools, the degree of personal contact would be much more pronounced. And, accordingly, so would the resistance of segregationist whites.

After the golf courses had desegregated, little else changed in the distribution of park space for black Atlanta. To be sure, as the 1950s wore on, there were small improvements, especially when black homeowners took over white communities and inherited the neighborhood parks. The transfer of Mozley Park, for instance, added thirty-two acres of land, two unlit tennis courts, a swimming pool, and much-needed playground equipment to the park space open to blacks. But such gains were haphazard and, in any case, did little to erase the real disparities in provisions made by the city for its black and white citizens. A study from 1960 showed that municipal facilities were still offered on a decidedly unequal basis: 20 football fields for whites, none for blacks; 22 baseball diamonds for whites, 3 for blacks; 16 recreation centers for whites, 3 for blacks; 119 tennis courts for whites, 8 for blacks; and 12 swimming pools for whites, 3 for blacks. The major municipal parks were still predominantly white spaces, with 42 reserved for whites, but just 3 for blacks. Accordingly, in 1961, civil rights activists launched a legal campaign to desegregate the city's parks.³²

As with the golf courses, the city tried to evade the issue. Its attorneys stalled for time, challenging everything from the class-action nature of the lawsuit to the fact that the plaintiffs were representing themselves. Once the case received serious attention from district court judge Boyd Sloan, the jurist who had desegregated the city's golf courses in 1955, the city's attorneys suddenly claimed the issue was moot. The parks were already desegregated, they said. Park officials and police officers denied enforcing the segregation statutes and insisted that it was merely "by custom and practice" that the races in Atlanta tended to "segregate themselves in the use of the public facilities and otherwise." Despite the official claims of innocence, Atlanta's parks and recreational facilities were still very much segregated, if in subtler ways. At the Bitsy Grant Tennis Center, for instance, blacks were turned away in May 1961 on the grounds that they had failed to sign up for courts in advance. When another group appeared there in August, they found the courts full of white players, including Georgia Tech's famed football coach Bobby Dodd. They walked downstairs to register, but in the short time it took to get there, the manager

cleared the courts and announced they were now "closed for repairs." The district court saw through the city's subterfuges, however, and ordered Atlanta's parks, pools, recreation centers, and tennis courts to desegregate, fully and officially, in 1962 and 1963.³³

Again, large numbers of working-class whites fiercely opposed the desegregation of public parks. More than anything, they were outraged that the city's public pools would be desegregated in June 1963. "That summer people talked about the integration of the swimming pools and little else," Police Chief Herbert Jenkins remembered. "Frankly, the police hoped for a rainy summer, for there were more eyeballers and agitators driving around trying to see how many Negroes were using the pools than there were people swimming." Indeed, on the first desegregated day at Piedmont Park, between 40 and 60 people swam in the pools, while a crowd of 250 whites stood outside the fences and watched. Hoping to cut down on the number of clashes between white and black teenagers, the city employed high school coaches to manage the pools that summer and kept uniformed police and plainclothes detectives on hand as well. Aside from a few fistfights, the early weeks of pool desegregation went by calmly.³⁴

In truth, pool desegregation went smoothly not because whites accepted the decision, but because they had decided, once again, to flee from these desegregated spaces. For many whites, integrated pools represented a level of "interracial intimacy" they simply could not stomach. Indeed, the image of black and white children swimming together was so repugnant for them that some segregationist groups sent photographers to Atlanta's pools to get pictures for future propaganda. Such a reaction from hard-core segregationists was to be expected, but even those who embraced integration in other areas refused to support shared use of pools. Even biracial religious groups, for instance, drew the line at integrated swimming. "They had quite a few negroes at Lake Junaluska last year and they took part in all the activities," one man noted of a retreat held by the Methodist Church. "However, when four or five of the negroes decided to go in the pool one afternoon, they immediately drained the pool." Many whites—segregationists or not—believed that blacks carried diseases that might be spread in shared waters. "For the protection of all swimmers," one woman proposed, "would it not be possible for the City to require health cards for admission?" Likewise, a segregationist outside the Piedmont Park pool handed out leaflets to everyone entering. "The negro race is a reservoir of venereal infection," they read. "Will you expose yourself and your children to the deadly threat? Keep your children, especially, out of the public pools." The rumors of health hazards became so prevalent that the *Atlanta Journal* had to remind its readers that syphilis and gonorrhea "are not spread by water, food, or air."³⁵ In all likeli-

hood, however, such warnings only reinforced whites' assumptions that a great number of blacks really did carry such diseases. Not surprisingly, white attendance at the pools plummeted that year. Even Chief Jenkins, who had prayed for a rainy summer, was alarmed at the "noticeable drop" in attendance. On opening day the year before, for instance, the popular pools at South Bend and Oakland City took in 400 visitors each; on the first day of desegregated use, attendance was down to 155 and 259 respectively.³⁶

As whites abandoned the pools, they asked the city to follow suit. And in many ways, Atlanta did. The next summer, for instance, hours of operation were cut back at most public pools. The change had been made, Mayor Ivan Allen Jr. noted, "so as to lessen racial tension wherever possible." But the city did more than simply reduce the operating hours of its pools; it also reduced their size and scope. Instead of the old system, in which large pools served broad sections of the city, Atlanta launched a new "neighborhood pool policy," which relied on smaller "walk-to" pools enclosed in individual neighborhoods. Given the segregated nature of those neighborhoods, such a move could easily be seen as a way around the order to desegregate. For some whites, however, these changes in policy were still not enough. They demanded an end to public pools altogether. In Candler Park, for instance, 850 whites signed a petition calling for the closing of their neighborhood pool, which they claimed had been "a menace to the peace and tranquillity of the community" ever since it had been desegregated. "This community is mad as hell," noted the head of the local civic club. When pools such as the one at Candler Park were closed, segregationists delighted in it. In 1966, for example, a tour bus driver entertained visitors with a joke about the changes at Grant Park. "There used to be a swimming pool here," he announced, "but when the integrationists made us let Nigras in we fixed them by filling it in and now it's a bear pit." His riders laughed appreciatively.³⁷

Unwilling to share public spaces with blacks, white Atlantans once again looked for a private alternative. In the case of the public parks, some whites hoped to move municipal lands into private hands. Citing "social changes . . . largely due to the racial situation," the head of the Atlanta Council of Civic Clubs called for the privatization of the entire park system. Community civic clubs, neighborhood churches, and "patriotic and historical organizations" could take ownership of the parks, he suggested, and thereby maintain the racial patterns in them. Ultimately, privatization of large city parks was simply not feasible. But private pools were a realistic alternative and many whites rushed to start construction in their own backyards. Indeed, the demand for private pools was so sudden and severe that a number of fly-by-night construction crews cropped up in the city, fleecing desperate customers. Eventually, Atlanta's legiti-

mate builders had to form a new organization, the Greater Atlanta Swimming Pool Association, just to clean up the industry's reputation.³⁸

Working-class whites, of course, could not afford their own pools. For them, the only alternative to swimming at an integrated pool was not swimming at all. And thus, while almost all whites complained about the self-imposed "sacrifices" they were making in their flight from desegregated public spaces, once again only the working class had no real alternative. They angrily attacked the white members of the moderate coalition as hypocrites who pushed a social policy on the poor but escaped its ramifications themselves. "Don't forget to report on how many of the Atlanta Mayor's official family did or did not attend the opening of the city swimming pools for a nice integrated swim," complained one man to the *Atlanta Constitution*. As he and many others realized, neither the mayor nor his allies in the white business elite would be affected by the desegregation of public parks, pools, or golf courses, because they held memberships in exclusive, still-segregated private clubs. (Indeed, the most exclusive of these, the Peachtree Golf Club and Piedmont Driving Club, did not accept black members until well into the 1990s.) "Integration for everyone but the *Rich* high & fancy," is how one angry white put it. "When the black horde (masses) start banging on the doors of your fine homes & segregated districts & segregated clubs & pools you will sing a different tune. Oh yes & how you will. Integration is just fine as long as it doesn't touch (*in your* opinion) God's chosen few and their Ivory Castles."³⁹

Thus, as Atlanta desegregated its parks and pools, working-class whites once again reacted in a now familiar pattern. First and foremost, they believed that these public spaces, which they considered their own, had been "stolen" from them and "given" to another race. As before, working-class whites once again understood the process of court-ordered desegregation not as one that brought down barriers to black citizens but, rather, as one that erected new barriers for themselves. Second, in their anger, they blamed not just black Atlantans but the upper-class whites who had aided and abetted the entire process of desegregation. That anger quickly took the form of a full-fledged tax revolt inside Atlanta and, in time, greater white flight from it.

RACE AND THE TAX REVOLT

White flight from these public spaces was made all the more bitter because whites felt that these public spaces were "theirs" and theirs alone. This resulted partly from the history of segregation. For most whites in Atlanta, these spaces "belonged" to them as a racial birthright. But whites'

sense of ownership of these public spaces went much deeper than that. As they saw it, whites paid the vast majority—or, in some interpretations, all—of the taxes in the city. Whites alone had paid for these public spaces, they argued, so whites alone should be allowed to use them. When the city opened these public spaces to blacks, whites felt that their belongings and their birthright had quite literally been “stolen” from them.

The perception that whites paid more taxes than blacks was quite common in Atlanta during the late 1950s and early 1960s. To be sure, because of discriminatory policies of public and private lending institutions and real-estate agencies, comparatively few black Atlantans owned their own homes. In direct terms, therefore, only a small portion of Atlanta’s black population paid property taxes. But indirectly, through often exorbitant rental payments on their homes and businesses, blacks did contribute their full share to the city’s tax base. Still, white Atlantans assumed that they alone shouldered the vast majority of the tax burden. In some cases, this assumption was expressed in a benign, though paternalistic, way. “The white people have paid lots more taxes for schools, highways, and the other necessities of life than the colored people have paid,” one Atlantan claimed, “but we have no regret about that because we have tried to be a help to them.” Many of his fellow Atlantans, however, expressed plenty of regret. “Where would the Negroes be if it were not for the taxes of the white people?” one woman wanted to know. “Very few of them pay any taxes.” “Do you know that Atlanta’s population is one-third niggers?” read a typical segregationist pamphlet. “They are paying five per cent of the taxes and receive a strong margin of seventy-five per cent of the tax for their race.”⁴⁰

This supposed disparity between the tax burdens of whites and blacks took on a strongly racist tone, as whites charged that they unfairly bore the financial burden for a welfare system that catered to blacks. “I believe in them having good things but in their own *negro sections* and I believe in them working by the sweat of their brow as ‘God’ states in the Bible instead of hand-outs from White organizations,” one man complained. “Welfare office, etc. give them about \$50 of white peoples tax money for every illegitimate ‘youngster’ they have & do they breed fast?” “A majority of negro women have no morals and breed like swine,” another agreed, “and the white people of the city are taxed to keep them and their illegitimate offspring up.” Segregationists used this popular sentiment to disparage blacks’ calls for desegregation and other civil rights measures. A mock application for membership in the NAACP, for instance, appeared in Atlanta in 1957. “I believe in equality that niggers is better than white folks is,” the pledge read, “and that the White folks should pay more taxes and us Niggers should have more and more welfare.” In a similar vein, this segregationist poem made the rounds in the city:

Po’ white folks must labor, ’tween sun and sun,
To pay welfare taxes whilst we has de fun,
We doan pay no taxes, we doan make no goods,
We just raise little niggers, way back in the woods.

Dey pay us to vote and rewards us to sin,
While dem sweet demmycrates keeps de checks cumming in,
We waits every month for the slips and de figgers,
An dats all we do—we is damn lucky niggers.

For angry whites, the implication was clear. “SHALL YOU CONTINUE TO PAY FOR THEIR PLEASURE?” one segregationist sheet asked. “While they sit in the shade and spoon in the moon light, multiplying like rats, we continue to bleed ourselves with heavy taxes to carry the socialistic burden of feeding and clothing them. They do not remain as slaves and therefore are certainly not your wards.”⁴¹

When white neighborhoods were “threatened” by the approach of black buyers, resistance groups often tapped into the resentment over taxes to rally angry whites. Many, for instance, called themselves “taxpayers’ organizations,” “taxpayer leagues,” or “property owners’ associations.” Even those which went by other names still stressed the rights of white taxpayers in their propaganda. “We are faced with the problem of encroachment upon our community, by the Negro race,” warned one group in 1958. “If our community is lost, then who will be the loser, except you the property owners and taxpayers. You can not as a property owner, taxpayer, man, woman, or child, sit by and let this situation go as it appears. You must have the intestinal fortitude to stand up and fight these battles wherever and whenever you can.” Now, with the desegregation of public facilities, these whites invoked their beleaguered role as taxpayers even more. “Common use of recreational and sanitary facilities supported by taxation—of which the Negroes pay about one-thirtieth—together with all forms of public transportation, seems inescapable,” one Atlantan lamented in 1958. “But the die-hard segregationist can still claim and retain his prerogative of strap-hanging in the crowded trolley, wisely holding his temper and tongue. Similarly, he can exercise, for himself and his progeny, the option of staying away from contaminated swimming-pools and bathing at home.” Because of their refusal to share these public spaces with blacks, whites essentially made their old complaint come true. Their taxes *were* being used to fund services enjoyed largely by blacks. Whites refused to acknowledge that this was a result of their own racism, however, and instead blamed the city for “surrendering” these public spaces to blacks.⁴²

White anger over desegregation and the tax revolt soon made itself felt in Atlanta politics. The Hartsfield administration and its admirers in the

national press often cited Atlanta's successful desegregation of neighborhoods and public spaces as proof of the city's progress. Increasingly, local segregationists equated the two as well. In the eyes of working-class whites, the "progress" that the mayor and his allies often bragged about had come at their expense—in the "losses" of their neighborhoods and their public spaces, as well as in the price they paid in taxes. One Atlantan, for instance, told Hartsfield that he and his neighbors were sickened by what the mayor called "progress." They saw it another way: "Many of the progress viewers now live in the county [outside] of the city. You see, their neighborhoods were taken over by the negro race. Their neighborhoods became slums." Another angry woman shared this assessment. "I will certainly give the mayor credit for giving one of the largest swimming pools in West End to the Negroes," she complained, referring to Mozley Park, "and replacing it with a pool about the size of a pocket handkerchief." For such Atlantans, the city's growth meant nothing alongside their own perceived losses. Municipal services offered by the city meant nothing either. In 1953 one of Hartsfield's supporters described a conversation he had with a neighbor, in which he tried to stress the civic improvements Hartsfield had championed. "I asked my next door neighbor how often her Garbage was taken up under the old plan," he reasoned, "and if she had ever seen a street sweeper before." But there was only one thing on her mind: "Her cry is 'nigger, nigger, nigger.'" In the end, the woman became so enraged that she and the Hartsfield supporter had to be pulled apart.⁴³

As such stories made clear, many white working-class Atlantans believed that their losses had actually been *caused* by the city's pursuit of "progress." Increasingly distrustful of the city's moderate leadership and increasingly resentful of the course of racial change, they soured on the talk of "progress" that was central to both. In the early 1960s, as Atlanta's leadership proposed a new slate of civic improvements, these whites decided to draw the line. The new spaces would be desegregated as well, they reasoned, and they would therefore stay away. So why should they fund them? The growing white backlash on issues of race and public space became clear in the battles over two bond initiatives in 1962 and 1963. The first bond issue called for \$80 million for a number of improvements on schools, streets, sewers, and other public works, as well as proposals for a new civic auditorium and a new cultural center at Piedmont Park. Whites, angry over the "loss" of their old public spaces, refused to pay for two more spaces that would be used by blacks. Although Mayor Ivan Allen Jr. touted the auditorium as a way for the city to attract national conventions and hold large events, working-class whites saw it as another space exclusively for blacks. A crude cartoon circulated by the Klan, for instance, depicted a black speaker, labeled "Martin Luther Coon," addressing an integrated audience. "I's been advised by de mayor dat de

white folks is going to raise dere bond taxes and build us a new auditorium for future NAACP meetings," the caption read. "We is making progress." The proposal for a cultural center caused even greater controversy. Located in the heart of the city, Piedmont Park was perhaps the most prized public space in Atlanta, one originally landscaped by the famed Olmsted Brothers. Hoping to add to its value with a new cultural center, Mayor Allen soon found that the politics of race and space were more complicated than he had imagined. Prior to the bond vote, the Woodruff Foundation, a charitable group founded by Coca-Cola magnate Robert Woodruff, donated \$4 million to the project, but with the provision that the foundation's name be kept out of it. "The redneck elements started screaming that the Piedmont Park plan was really an effort to integrate the park," Mayor Allen later recalled, "and that the \$4 million anonymous gift was 'nigger money.'" Meanwhile, real-estate agents warned surrounding neighborhoods that the cultural center would spark a mass migration of blacks to the area, rumors that only increased white anger. "Piedmont Park suddenly blew up in my face," Allen remembered, "and became a raging racial issue."⁴⁴

The bond went down to a stunning defeat. As the *Atlanta Journal* noted, nearly 58,000 turned out at the polls, "a record number as far as bond referendums go." Basic improvements in schools and street works lost narrowly, but plans for the auditorium and cultural center died in a "smothering defeat." The latter proposal, for instance, was rejected by a margin of almost two-to-one, with the vast majority of opposition coming from working-class and even middle-class whites. In their minds, the reason was clear. The tax burden for the projects, one man complained, would rest on "90 per cent of the white people" while blacks would get most of the benefits. Others agreed. "I think that this is another step," one man reasoned, "where the taxpayers are tired of paying hard-earned money for things that they will not be able to enjoy because of the prospect of forced integration, which means that the facilities would be used almost entirely by the Negroes." After the recent changes in the political and social scene in Atlanta, he continued, "the white people who pay all the bills have decided to stick a little closer and vote accordingly." Mayor Allen tried again the next year, introducing a second bond referendum pared down to the "bare essentials." Although most of the controversial aspects from the year before had been excluded, whites still fought the proposals. A letter from Allen to the local NAACP, for instance, was doctored to make it seem as though the mayor took orders from civil rights groups. Copies appeared across the city, with a warning at the bottom. "Don't give the 'CAPTIVE MAYOR' of the Minority Bloc a blank check to use against the OTHER voters and tax-payers of Atlanta," the sheet warned. "VOTE AGAINST BONDS!" Allen responded by pouring \$25,000

into a public relations campaign for the measure and marshaling the votes of upper-class whites and the black community. Only then did the bond pass, and still, there was sizable protest. "The negative vote came from sections of the city and county where white segregationist sentiment traditionally is strongest," the *Atlanta Journal* noted. "And the vote went heaviest against projects where integration or benefits for Negroes might have appeared to be involved—urban renewal, parks, libraries, the auditorium." Indeed, as the bond vote demonstrated, for many whites, public works and "benefits for Negroes" now meant the same thing.⁴⁵

The white revolt over the "loss" of their neighborhoods, their golf courses, their buses, their parks, and their pools represented only the beginning of the white backlash. Notably, the desegregation of these spaces had largely affected only working-class whites. They were the ones living in neighborhoods like Mozley Park, Adamsville, Kirkwood, and Adair Park, where the "transition troubles" had been unfolding for well over a decade. They were the ones who relied on public transportation to get from those neighborhoods to work; they were the ones who needed public golf courses, parks, and pools to relax outside of work; and thus they were once again the ones most impacted by the desegregation of those public spaces. The next stage in Atlanta's desegregation, however, centered on another public institution, the public school, which was just as close to the hearts of middle-class whites as it was to working-class ones, if not more so. As the city's struggles over segregation entered the realm of education, white middle-class Atlantans found themselves flirting with resistance for the first time.

CHAPTER FIVE

The "Second Battle of Atlanta": Massive Resistance and the Divided Middle Class

WHEN THE SUPREME COURT delivered its landmark decision against segregated schools, Herman Talmadge stood in the small town of LaFayette, Georgia. As the governor started his speech—on the state's successes with separate-but-equal education, no less—he learned the *Atlanta Journal* had been frantically trying to reach him. "I immediately knew what had happened," he recalled. "Within minutes, I had borrowed a DC-4, and in less than an hour I was back in Atlanta." Soon thereafter, Talmadge was on the lawn of the governor's mansion staring into rows of newsreel, television, and newspaper cameras. He denounced the decision in no uncertain terms. "The court has thrown down the gauntlet," Talmadge thundered. "Georgians accept the challenge and will not tolerate the mixing of the races in the public schools or any of its tax-supported public institutions." His statement delivered, the governor strode back into the mansion, settled into an overstuffed armchair, and started taking calls from across the nation. He chatted with reporters for a while, defending segregation strongly but with as much southern charm as he could muster. Soon tired of it all, he told his wife to inform future callers that the governor was busy outside, reviewing the Confederate troops.¹

As Talmadge and his political machine set Georgia on a course of "massive resistance," they combined their defiance with an equally apparent confidence in the structures of white supremacy and their own abilities to defend it. Lieutenant Governor Marvin Griffin, already anointed as Talmadge's successor, promised the races would never be "mixed" in the state, "come hell or high water!" Likewise, Attorney General Eugene Cook boldly claimed the *Brown* ruling did not apply to Georgia and insisted the state's schools would remain segregated "until we are forced to abandon it by legal action applied to every school in the state." Georgia's leaders, of course, were not alone in their resistance. Similar statements of defiance came from statehouses and governors' mansions across the South, with each echoed and amplified by hundreds more like it. When the cries of resistance made their way to Washington, they found expression in the "Declaration of Constitutional Principles" of March 1956. Better known as the "Southern Manifesto," the declaration was a joint statement from 101 of the region's 128 representatives in the Senate and