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Clarence Laws leads the Alabama Sympathy March through downtown Dallas to dramatize the murder of the Rev. James Reeb and to support voting rights. Courtesy the Dallas Public Library, PA83-42/1965-3-14.1.
The “Dallas Way”: Protest, Response, and the Civil Rights Experience in Big D and Beyond

BRIAN D. BEHNKEN*

Americans now almost universally think of the civil rights movement as a war waged between peaceful, supplicating black activists and violent, reactionary white racists. Turn on any news retrospective about the middle of January, or during Black History Month, and you will likely see scenes from Martin Luther King Jr.'s “I have a dream” speech or the March on Washington juxtaposed against images of whites attacking nonviolent African Americans with fire hoses, billy clubs, and German shepherds. While the factuality of these events cannot be disputed, the binary images of violence and nonviolence have come to represent the civil rights movement as a whole. But this is only a part of the story. Many communities witnessed a great deal of protests and black activism that did not generate a violent white response. The emphasis on violent confrontations has all but obscured the roles that many local people played in bringing civil rights to blacks across the country. Such a focus has skewed the larger picture of the struggle and left many heroes unsung.¹

* Brian D. Behnken received his Ph.D. from the University of California-Davis. His dissertation compares the African American and Mexican American civil rights movements in Texas. He would like to thank Monic Behnken, Beverly Bossler, Chris Danielson, Charles W. Eagles, Gregory D. Smithers, Clarence E. Walker, Simon Wendt, and the anonymous readers at the Southwestern Historical Quarterly for their helpful comments and criticisms on earlier drafts of this paper. He also wishes to gratefully acknowledge the staff at the Dallas Public Library’s Texas/Dallas History and Archives Division, especially Carol Roark.


The civil rights movement in Dallas, Texas, serves as an example of this phenomenon. Indeed, the histories of a few other cities have thoroughly overshadowed events that took place in Dallas, primarily because Big D did not experience the kind of sensational episodes that made the national news. The narrative of the struggle in Dallas demonstrates, however, that violent encounters did not have to occur for blacks to gain civil rights. Instead, direct action demonstrations forced white leaders to the bargaining table, where they frequently acquiesced to black demands. This essay attempts to broaden scholarly understanding of the civil rights movement by focusing on a city that experienced a struggle without violence. While black protest activism is highlighted throughout this paper, white responses to these protests are also examined. Demonstrations resulted in the negotiated desegregation of city buses, public facilities, and some schools; gave blacks victories in their struggle for rights; and encouraged further protests. Additionally, open communication between white and black leaders ensured a nonviolent movement in Dallas. As historian William Brophy has noted, desegregation "was a result of hard work and excellent communication between the city's black and white communities." Negotiated integration and open communication allowed Dallas to experience a movement free of violence.

By focusing on Dallas and comparing the struggle in Big D to several other local movements, I offer a dual argument about the civil rights struggle as a whole. First, much of the scholarship on the role of the business community in the desegregation process has taken a pessimistic view of business leaders and their motivations. Whether they had altruistic or
selfish intentions—and southern white leaders often held racist views of African Americans—they were able in many cases to accommodate black demands while keeping white violence at bay, an important accomplishment. Second, historians and the general public continue to perceive the movement as a struggle characterized by peaceful black protest and reactionary white violence. Such a perception derives in part from scholarly attention given to the cities that witnessed the most violent encounters during the period. This assertion is not meant to detract from the enormous sacrifices that black southerners made in the face of white resistance. Nor is it meant to imply that violence did not occur in the movement, or that blacks and whites always worked amicably during the struggle. But Dallas and many other cities confound the generally held view of a movement beleaguered by violence. By focusing on Dallas and comparing Big D to a number of southern cities, it becomes possible to suggest that historians have overemphasized the role of violent behavior in racial change in the urban civil rights experience.


racial, and business relations—the Dallas way. Much of the rhetoric of the Dallas way revolved around proper civic conduct, in short obeying the law in a spirit of “enthusiasm, cooperation, faith, courage, vision, perseverance, reverence, hospitality, and brotherly love.” The concept was similar to historian William Chafe’s explanation of “civility” in Greensboro, North Carolina. “Civility is the cornerstone of the progressive mystique,” Chafe writes, “signifying courtesy, concern about an associate’s family, children, and health, a personal grace that smooths [sic] contact with strangers and obscures conflicts with foes.” Both expressions operated as codes of conduct governing race relations in these cities. While Chafe also notes that civility had a dark underbelly, one that operated as a type of self-delusion that allowed whites to fundamentally misunderstand African Americans, Greensboro desegregated with a minimum of violence. This form of self-delusion was less problematic in Dallas because white and black leaders maintained good communication during the movement. Many southern cities also promoted a version of the Dallas way. In Greensboro it was called civility. Atlanta was the “city too busy to hate.” Tampa had the Tampa Technique. While these concepts did not ensure a painless integration, the Dallas way did help keep the peace in Dallas.

Many whites and blacks imbibed the ideals of the Dallas way. Although blacks rarely invoked the term, there were calls throughout the civil rights era for cooperation, nonviolent protest, and peace. These pleas for nonviolence proved all the more significant because Dallas was largely disconnected from the national movement. Instead, African Americans found their own local version of nonviolence via the Dallas way. Blacks and whites had a number of rhetorical phrases that reflected the Dallas way; the “Dallas plan,” the “Dallas program,” the “Dallas pattern,” along with frequent references to “peaceful desegregation,” “cooperation,” and “nonviolence.”

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6 Chafe, Civilities and Civil Rights, 7, 8 (quotation), 9, 38, 67–70, 98–99.

All of these concepts reminded Dallasites of the Dallas way, and while they were ambiguous, they helped open a discourse between blacks and whites during the movement.

The Dallas way could also be seen in the structure of the local government. The Dallas Citizens Council (DCC, not a white citizens' council) dominated politics in the city and served as the ideological fount of the Dallas way. The DCC was akin to a super chamber of commerce run by the city's business elite. These men had controlled the government since the late 1930s by nominating a slate of pro-business candidates for local offices every election year. The DCC was Dallas's version of Birmingham's Big Mules, and the campaign management of the group ensured that their candidates rarely lost. Elected officials on the Dallas City Council and the private DCC worked closely on important issues. This cooperation became especially important when the city's business growth was at stake, and Dallas followed the pattern of economic development consistent with the rise of the Sunbelt South. Dallas's leaders pursued a "good government" policy commonly referred to as a "city as a whole" strategy: problems in one part of the city affected the whole city, and their alleviation benefited the entire urban population. The government's council-manager structure, which promoted the city as a whole concept and downplayed sectional differences, was itself an articulation of the Dallas way.

The form of the city's government meant little to African Americans without white leaders who would accommodate black demands. For much...
of the city's history, elected officials largely ignored the black community. But an expanding black population, which in 1960 constituted about 20 percent of the total population of nearly 700,000, pushed leaders to negotiate with blacks during the civil rights period. Mayors Robert L. Thornton (1953–1961), Earle Cabell (1961–1964), and J. Erik Jonsson (1964–1971) proved amenable to working with local blacks to respond to their needs. These individuals, all of whom were members of the DCC, helped maintain the peace by ameliorating black civic problems and by keeping groups like the Ku Klux Klan and the Texas White Citizens' Council at bay. The form of the local government and the leaders in office during the civil rights movement allowed the city to remedy civic problems, and the city's ameliorative nature enabled it to acquiesce to African American demands. Rather than deterring blacks from demonstrating to achieve their goals, the city's governmental structure spurred blacks to protest to make the city as a whole concept work for them.

Direct action demonstrations began in 1955 when Juanita Craft's "kids," teenagers from the Dallas Youth Council of the NAACP, decided to picket a movie theater. Craft had headed the Youth Council since 1946 and was a fixture in the black community. When the Melba Theater's owners agreed to allow blacks access to the balcony for the first time they called this act of integration "Negro Night." Craft sent the youths to picket the theater to "dramatize segregation and leave the decision to attend [the theater] up to the patrons." The adult NAACP, however, sent a larger message. Craft advocated debate among the young people and close contact with the adult NAACP. The association's leaders joined the picket and presented the protest as an attack on segregation and as a quest for freedom. The

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NAACP had fired the first salvo of protest activity in Dallas.\textsuperscript{13}

While the theater refused to integrate, this demonstration laid the groundwork for other protests. The youths next targeted the Texas State Fair, which was held annually on the fairgrounds in Dallas. African Americans could only enjoy the fair on one annual Negro Achievement Day; on all other days Jim Crow reigned. Because of this injustice, young blacks nonviolently picketed the fair in 1955. They carried signs that read “Today is Negro Appeasement Day At the Fair, Stay Out!!” and “Don’t Trade Your Pride for a Segregated Ride.”\textsuperscript{14} While more than 1,300 people participated in the protest, the city’s response to the picket was subdued. The president of the fair board, Dallas Mayor Robert Thornton, stated simply that no segregation existed at the fair. He also maintained that all rides were open to blacks but contradictorily noted that “due to . . . legal commitments the eating concessions would remain as they are [i.e., segregated].”\textsuperscript{15}

By the end of the 1955 fair season the students had amassed enough support to stretch “picket lines around every gate leading into the fairgrounds.”\textsuperscript{16} The youths received broad assistance for the picket. Besides Juanita Craft and other local blacks, Houstonian Lulu B. White, the state director of NAACP branches, joined the protest. This support encouraged the Youth Council to plan for a new picket of the fair in 1956, but by then the climate had changed.\textsuperscript{17} The directors of the NAACP informed the Youth Council that they would allow no pickets that year. The young people’s actions seem to have shocked the adult leaders, but the association’s about-face also dramatized the problem central to the state fair protest issue. While local whites like Mayor Thornton attempted to accommodate black demands, they were not only bound by state law, as Thornton lamely


\textsuperscript{17} Minutes of Dallas NAACP Youth Council, Sept. 19, 1956, Juanita Craft Collection (DPL); Memo to All Local Branches from Edwin C. Washington, Sept. 17, 1956, \textit{State of Texas v. NAACP} papers (Center for American History, University of Texas at Austin); “State Fair Officials to Continue Segregation,” \textit{Dallas Express}, May 5, 1956, p. 1, 9.
The NAACP Youth Council pickets the State Fair in 1955. Juanita Craft, holding a stack of flyers, is third from the right. Courtesy the Dallas Public Library, MA81.5/3.
The NAACP pickets the Texas State Fair in 1955. Courtesy the R. C. Hickman Photographic Archive, DI number 01666, Center for American History, University of Texas at Austin.

explained in 1955, but also by the fact that the state funded the fair. Whites could only go so far in their concessions because Texans from outside of Dallas refused to support their actions. While the NAACP halted the protests, the young members of the organization remained active and played key roles during the sit-in movement.

Although they were technically failures, the Melba Theatre and state fair demonstrations did augment the level of interracial communication

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in Dallas. After these protests, Mayor Thornton arranged several meetings with black leaders like Juanita Craft and George Allen, a prominent black businessman and the first African American elected to the Dallas City Council, to discuss integrating public facilities. These negotiations resulted in a plan to send black patrons to downtown stores to test segregation. While this did not result in any desegregation, it was nonetheless a symbolic start. At about the same time, George Allen met with Mayor Thornton and threatened to initiate a boycott of the Dallas bus system. Because of the Montgomery bus boycott and the Supreme Court’s decision banning segregation on buses, Thornton acquiesced to Allen’s demands and desegregated buses in Dallas. Local officials and members of the Dallas Transit Company quickly removed segregation signs from 530 buses. Because of these efforts, Dallas, like Atlanta; Memphis; Columbia, South Carolina; Charlotte, North Carolina; and a number of other southern cities desegregated buses without the turmoil seen in Montgomery.

Desegregation did not always go as smoothly as the bus example indicated. In particular, school desegregation resulted in a long, drawn-out process that was never really completed. While officials like school board president Edwin Rippy claimed that Dallas would comply with the Brown v. Board of Education decision, little happened. Rippy believed schools would integrate effortlessly because “Dallas is a very proud city and has always done things in its own ‘Dallas way.’” His confidence was misplaced. But this situation was typical; throughout the nation, school integration hardened white resistance to the goals of the movement unlike any other aspect of the struggle. Much of the opposition stemmed from white anxiety that integration might lead to the much-feared bugaboo of racial amalgamation. Additionally, businesses had an economic incentive for integrating; schools did not. The city’s answer to school integration coincided with its response to the sit-in movement; therefore, both events will be discussed below.

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Contrary to what city leaders feared, mass protests did not develop out of the school desegregation issue. Instead, protests began over the matter of segregated lunch counters. Dallasites followed the example set by four Greensboro college students who began a sit-in at a Woolworth's lunch counter in 1960. The city's response to the sit-ins offers an important glimpse into how local leaders chose to accommodate black demands. As with other protests taking place throughout the civil rights era, the NAACP and other activist groups ensured that blacks adhered to the Dallas way and protested nonviolently.

Following the advice of Juanita Craft, the NAACP Youth Council initially targeted the H. L. Green drugstore for an interracial sit-in in March of 1960. In April the sit-ins spread to the S. H. Kress department store's lunch counter. On April 25 the H. L. Green lunch counter served three black students from Southern Methodist University (SMU). The next day two Baptist ministers, one black and one white, sat-in at the S. H. Kress lunch counter. To both men's surprise, the lunch counter staff served them. The ministers then left S. H. Kress to join the sit-ins at the H. L. Green drugstore. H. L. Green's management attempted to defuse the sit-ins by setting up a lunch counter for blacks in their basement. The two men instead took seats at the upstairs lunch counter, and the staff politely served them soft drinks. To many it appeared that the sit-ins had scored a victory at these two stores, but victory was not at hand. After these successes the managers became more stringent and returned to their practice of refusing service to blacks.

To assuage the protestors, the Dallas Citizens Council formed a private biracial Committee of 14, which consisted of seven blacks and seven whites, to investigate the prospects for desegregation in 1960. The biracial committee served as a bridge between white and black leaders and was a common vehicle used to negotiate desegregation during the civil rights period. For
example, officials in Memphis created a biracial committee in 1958 to work toward integration. The committee eventually helped desegregate buses, parks, restaurants and lunch counters, and local schools. In 1959 local black and white leaders in Tampa organized an interracial committee to negotiate the desegregation of local schools. A year later the committee desegregated lunch counters and other public accommodations. Mayor Lewis Cutrer created a biracial committee in Houston in 1960 that initiated communication between activists and the city. In Columbia, the local government formed a fifty-member biracial committee in 1963 after a series of sit-ins. The group aided in the desegregaton of the city. Although Dallas’s Committee of 14 acted slowly, the black membership, which varied by year and included George Allen, Juanita Craft, Ernest C. Estell (pastor of St. John Baptist Church, the largest black church in Dallas), and William J. Durham (a prominent civil rights attorney and NAACP official), was selected by local African Americans and reported each week to the black community about the progress of the negotiations. This kept the lines of communication open. Meanwhile, the nonviolent sit-ins continued.

In August 1960 blacks formed the Dallas Community Committee (Community Committee) to better organize the sit-ins. The leaders of the Community Committee adopted social protest and interracial cooperation as tactics to desegregate local restaurants. The group elected conservative Rev. E. C. Estell president and also selected the more radical Rev. H. Rhett James, pastor of New Hope Baptist Church, as one of Estell’s subordinates. By October both the Community Committee and the NAACP had reenergized protests. The Reverend James led a large group in a picket of the H. L. Green and S. H. Kress lunch counters. The picketers hoped to integrate the stores, but James also attempted to begin an informal boycott. He told reporters, “H. L. Green and S. H. Kress integrate the Negro customer’s money and segregate its facilities. . . . This policy of segregated lunch counters . . . is not compatible to the American Way of Life.” “The time has come,” he argued, “for Dallas Negroes to unite together and refrain from buying from concerns who insult human dignity and use their customers


purely as economic gain."28 The pickets were well organized, and James acquired broad support from many civic organizations. The *Dallas Express* reported that each day a different group manned the pickets, "on Monday, the beauticians . . . on Tuesday, the Ministers Union." James expanded the protest's hours of operation in late October. Picketers arrived before the stores opened and remained until closing time.29

A new picket of the state fair occurred at the same time as the sit-ins in 1960. NAACP officials reported that they had completed plans to encircle all entrances to the fair with picketers. They reminded Dallasites of the 1955 pickets, and one official borrowed a line from the earlier protest by saying, "We urge parents of children throughout the state not to sell their pride for a segregated ride." The 1960 picket exceeded the NAACP's expectations. Hundreds of blacks participated in the protest, and numerous others refused to patronize the fair.30

While these protests received broad community support, the Dallas Community Committee canceled the lunch counter sit-ins and pickets a few months after they had started. The conservative Reverend Estell felt the protests were too radical. He believed that groups like the Committee of 14 could best achieve integration, a stance that frustrated many activists.31 Nonetheless, the Community Committee made an about-face in early 1961 when it issued a January 14 deadline for the abolition of restaurant segregation and warned that if the deadline passed it would sponsor new sit-ins. The Reverend James, who had resigned from the group over Estell's decision to cancel the sit-ins, released a statement saluting the group's action but warned that if the Dallas Community Committee failed to act he would engage in protests himself.32 When the January 14 deadline came

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31 Much has been made about the leadership divide between conservatives like Rev. E. C. Estell and activists like H. Rhett James. I, however, do not see the division as significant since both types of leaders were committed to ending Jim Crow in Dallas. They simply had different tactics. Indeed, as a member of the Committee of 14, Estell pointed to the protests as sources of contention in the city and used the demonstrations to push local white leaders to desegregate or face further demonstrations. Hence, the divide can be viewed as ultimately beneficial to the movement. See Dulaney, "Whatever Happened in Dallas . . . ," 80–88, for a description of the divided leadership structure.

due, the Community Committee did nothing. Therefore, James initiated new sit-ins. He led a group in a short-lived protest at the Titche-Goettinger department store. On the same day, local students began sit-ins around Southern Methodist University. Earl Allen, a theology student at SMU, initiated this protest. Allen first engaged in sit-ins in 1960 when he and students from Texas Southern University sat-in at lunch counters in Houston. In 1961 he arrived in Dallas and began protesting segregation. Allen and classmate Carroll Brown sat-in at the University Drug Store, a hot spot directly across the street from SMU. When the manager requested that Allen leave (Brown was white and not Jim Crowed) both men left—and returned with sixty of their friends. The manager closed the store, only to reopen with the lunch counter shut down. In response, the SMU cohort picketed the business.

After these protests began, the Dallas Community Committee finally decided to act. After giving stores a deadline to desegregate, which had passed more than a month before, the group called an Easter boycott of downtown businesses that operated lunch counters, including H. L. Green, S. H. Kress, Neiman Marcus, Sanger Brothers (Sanger-Harris), Titche-Goettinger, and others. Planning well in advance of the holiday, the Community Committee hoped that Dallasites would refrain from buying Easter Sunday clothes and goods. The group also popularized a boycott slogan: “Sorry Mr. Bunny these downtown stores will not get my money.” One of the main organizers, NAACP attorney W. J. Durham, stressed continuing the boycott beyond Easter Sunday. Durham attempted to unite the forces of the Community Committee with those of the NAACP and its youth group. In cooperation, hundreds of NAACP youths attended a prayer demonstration downtown in support of the upcoming boycott and then, under the supervision of Juanita Craft, marched throughout the city for stand-in demonstrations at local theaters. The Youth Council held another prayer rally a week after the first. Nearly two hundred blacks attended the rally, and the youths participated in another march and had coffee at the Union Terminal Bus Station, integrating the facility. The Community Committee continued to promote its upcoming Easter boycott.

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53 Cole, No Color is My Kind, 69.
54 Allen and James’s protests are chronicled in “New ‘Sit-In’ Demonstrations Strike in Dallas,” Dallas Express, Jan. 14, 1961, p. 1.
57 “DCC Urges ‘Old Clothes’ for Easter; Plans ‘Call in Charge Plates’ Drive,” Dallas Express, Mar. 4, 1961, p. 1, 8. In 1961 the Dallas Express periodically called the Dallas Community Committee the Dallas Citizens Committee. It is unclear if an actual name change occurred. For the sake of consistency I will continue to refer to the organization as the Dallas Community Committee or, more simply, the Community Committee.
However, the Easter Day boycott never materialized, although numerous blacks participated informally, including three hundred women who pledged not to shop in the targeted stores.38

The threat of the boycott proved enough to force the local government and the Committee of 14 to act. The biracial committee had worked on desegregation for nearly a year. Some, like H. Rhett James, felt that the committee specialized in delaying tactics and a go-slow approach.39 However, the Committee of 14 had negotiated regularly for desegregation. Even though conservatives like the Reverend Estell served on the group, more radical blacks like W. J. Durham and George Allen pressed forcefully for change. As Allen remembered, the picketing of blacks like himself, Juanita Craft, and Durham “built a little fire under some of the members from the [Dallas] Citizen’s Council to work at this [desegregation] a little more rapidly.”40 In short, the continued sit-ins, pickets, and a looming boycott forced the Committee of 14 to respond to black demands. The reason for their response was simple—boycotts threatened business. Their solution was more complex; the desegregation of downtown lunch counters, department stores, and other facilities.

Through careful negotiations behind the scenes, the city hoped to achieve racial change without white violence or loss of business. In late June, the government along with the Dallas Citizens Council announced a far-reaching plan designed to achieve partial desegregation of hotels, restaurants, the state fair, Love Field Airport, and, perhaps most surprising to local citizens, schools. The Dallas Times Herald described the effort as “a vast public conditioning program, believed the first of its scope in the nation . . . to pave the way for peaceful desegregation of the city’s schools next month.” Some called the integration plan “a community effort,” while others equated “good citizenship” with “peaceful compliance” to remind citizens of the Dallas way.41 City officials prepared a propaganda film, Dallas at the Crossroads, and a pamphlet version of the film, also titled Dallas at the Crossroads, to prime the city for school desegregation, the most sensitive issue. Officials distributed 100,000 copies of the Dallas at the Crossroads pamphlet, showed the film at a variety of locations and eventually on local television, placed messages in the paychecks of public

40 George Allen, interview with Yvonne Johnson, Mar. 29, 1985, 5-7.
and private employees to warn them against riotous behavior, placarded the city with posters to promote nonviolence, and distributed another booklet known simply as the blue book to encourage the local and national media to promote peaceful desegregation. Much of the press coverage reminded Dallasites that good citizens complied with the law.

*Dallas at the Crossroads* illustrated how city leaders planned to manage desegregation and avoid violence. Narrated by Walter Cronkite, the film took children as its central motif and analyzed how violence affected the young. While reminding Dallasites of the problems that had plagued New Orleans after that city attempted to desegregate schools, Cronkite offered a lesson in civic duty and responsibility. Reiterating this message, Mayor Earle Cabell told Dallasites that by sustaining good citizenship “together we will show America the ‘Dallas way.’” *Dallas at the Crossroads* reminded Dallasites of the Dallas way, but an emphasis on law and order exposed city leaders’ paranoid preoccupation with white reactionary violence. Indeed, in a twenty-two-minute film about school integration, the word “desegregation” was only uttered twice. Instead, officials referred to desegregation as “the problem,” or more basically as “the change.” While the film downplayed integration, references to “law,” “law and order,” “violence,” and “violent behavior” received overwhelming emphasis. The film’s message of proper civic duty was directed solely at whites, and blacks did not appear in the film.

Despite the invisibility of African Americans in *Dallas at the Crossroads*, they had much to celebrate. The most propitious occurrence for local blacks was the announcement that more than forty businesses would desegregate their facilities. These establishments included the much-protested H. L. Green’s lunch counter, the Sanger-Harris tearoom, Titche-Goettinger’s tearoom, Woolworth’s, and others. To demonstrate the desegregation of these eateries, the city enlisted the help of 160 local people, mainly “carefully chosen Negro couples,” to patronize the establishments. The Dallas Community Committee also agreed to call off another boycott to give the city’s desegregation plan time to work.

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42 Carmack and Freedmen described the blue book as a guide to instruct reporters on how they should go about reporting the desegregation efforts. See William R. Carmack and Theodore Freedmen, *Dallas, TX: Factors Affecting School Desegregation* (New York: Anti-Defamation League B’Nai B’rith, 1963), 14; “Dallas Starts Move Toward Peaceful Desegregation,” *Dallas Times Herald*, Aug. 6, 1961. The *Dallas Express* noted that “thousands of posters presenting the face of a happy Dallas and urging that its citizens avoid violence” were placed throughout the city (“City Girds to Accept Desegregation Honorably,” *Dallas Express*, Aug. 12, 1961, p. 1).

43 *Dallas at the Crossroads*, produced by Sam Bloom and narrated by Walter Cronkite, 1961 (available at DPL). See also *Dallas at the Crossroads* pamphlet (DPL).

The *Dallas Express* lauded the efforts of W. J. Durham, George Allen, and E. C. Estell for their work on the biracial Committee of 14. The *Express* also reiterated the Dallas way by saying that "the project's aim, from its inception, has not been to advocate either segregation or desegregation, but simply to stress the absolute necessity of good citizenship and peaceful compliance with the law." Several black leaders like George Allen credited the desegregation program to Mayor Cabell. Allen explained that in the behind-the-scenes negotiations to desegregate the city, "Cabell would let them [Committee of 14 members] argue ... but when he got tired of it, he just put his foot down and usually got things moving." H. Rhett James made similar remarks about Cabell. He supported the city's desegregation efforts and continued to remind local blacks of the Dallas way by advising the "Negroes of Dallas [to] work for a smooth, peaceful desegregation." Many waited to witness a violent white response after this initial integration. Because Dallasites followed the Dallas way, none ever came.

The peaceful desegregation in Dallas followed a pattern seen in many southern cities. For instance, in Houston local black and white elites began the process of desegregation in response to sit-ins and a Mother's Day boycott in 1960. In Greensboro desegregation began with the S. H. Kress department store in 1960. Soon other businesses, suffering from sit-ins and a prolonged boycott, followed suit. In Atlanta, city leaders negotiated a settlement to end the numerous sit-ins and boycotts that occurred between 1960 and 1963. The compromise resulted in piecemeal integration of about fifty downtown businesses and began the process of school desegregation. In Tampa, the biracial committee began integrating lunch counters in September 1960. Steven Lawson stated that "Tampa voluntarily talked over its difficulties until a calm settlement was reached between the races." The violence over school integration in New Orleans in 1960 pushed the Crescent City to begin business desegregation in 1961. Adam Fairclough noted that by 1962 "businessmen in New Orleans had already quietly desegregated their lunch counters." Leaders in Memphis began integrating public facilities in 1961. Benjamin Muse, an activist working for the Southern Regional Council (SRC), an interracial group committed to integration, reported that in Memphis "the desegregation of public cultural and recreational facilities, of places of amusement and of public

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46 George Allen, interview with Gerald Saxon, Mar. 13, 1981 (DPL), p. 78. Emmett Conrad, the first black Dallasiite to win election to the school board, said he "felt that Earle [Cabell] was the kind of person who 'got along and let alone.' You know, he was an easygoing sort of fellow." See Emmett Conrad, interview with Alan Mason, Nov. 18, 1980 (DPL), p. 21.
47 "Dateline Dallas ... ," *Dallas Express*, Apr. 29, 1961; "Dateline Dallas ... ,"*Dallas Express*, July 22, 1961 (quotation).
accommodation . . . has gone well beyond the token stage.” Another SRC reporter, Pat Waters, noted that in Charlotte the mayor and black leaders decided integration should happen in late 1960. “Desegregation followed,” Waters stated, “first, the hotels and motels; then the restaurants, then the theaters.” This process of nonviolent desegregation occurred in numerous cities throughout the South.48

For many blacks in Dallas the events of the early 1960s represented clear victories. Lunch counter desegregation took place as planned, and in September eighteen black first graders began desegregating schools. President Kennedy even praised the city for its “peaceful” desegregation efforts.49 But much work remained to be done. The success of nonviolent protest activism in achieving desegregation led to new demonstrations, and protests again flared up in late 1961. In December a group of fifty students from Southern Methodist University, led again by Earl Allen, staged a stand-in demonstration at the Tower Theatre. The theater premiered the blockbuster movie The King of Kings, so students carried placards that read “Would Christ Discriminate?” and “The King is for Whites.” The irony that the theater denied a group of theology students admission to a film about Jesus Christ was not lost on Allen and his cohort. The protest continued for several months.50 Additionally, a few weeks after Allen’s protest began, the NAACP initiated a job opportunities drive, the brainchild of the association’s new president H. Rhett James. He also pushed a massive voter registration and poll tax drive.51 James, Earl Allen, and others awaited further accommodations from the city government, and they were prepared to protest, negotiate, and summon the national civil rights movement’s leadership to Dallas to achieve their goals.

In January 1963 Martin Luther King Jr. addressed a crowd of four thousand in Dallas to support the NAACP’s voting and poll tax drive. Introduced by the Reverend James, King electrified the audience. “Segregation is wrong,” King said, “it is a new formula of slavery, covered up with nice

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complexities." He encouraged Dallasites to vote to defeat segregation and stated, "There is power in the ballot." King's visit put pressure on the white establishment to continue negotiating desegregation. In response, the local government agreed to integrate all parks and swimming pools. Again the city quietly achieved peaceful desegregation through careful negotiations. In a report to the Dallas Community Committee, black members of the Committee of 14 averred that the desegregation was due to the "self-discipline so effectively demonstrated by all citizens of Dallas." In addition, due to Earl Allen's protest at the Tower Theatre, officials integrated all of the city's motion picture theaters.

In reciprocation for King's visit, Clarence Laws, the new southwest regional secretary of the NAACP, vowed that more than six hundred Dallasites would participate in the March on Washington. Laws managed the NAACP in Texas, Arkansas, Louisiana, New Mexico, and Oklahoma, but he spent a majority of his time in Dallas because of the local NAACP's activist commitment. He forecast that the march would "easily be one of the most significant and dramatic peaceful efforts for human freedom in the recorded history of mankind." He was not far off the mark. But the progressive activism witnessed in Dallas throughout the early 1960s was silenced a few months later when President Kennedy visited the city. Kennedy's assassination on November 22, 1963, halted protests as Dallas and the nation succumbed to a period of collective grief. Blacks chose to close ranks with whites and refrained from demonstrations after the assassination.

In early 1964 the Reverend H. Rhett James cautiously began again to call for civil rights in Dallas. James and a number of other blacks formed a new civil rights organization, the Dallas Coordinating Committee on Civil Rights (DCCCR), to organize the movement. Uniting a variety of civic groups, including the NAACP, the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), and a number of other local organizations, the DCCCR operated as an umbrella organization similar to the Council of Federated Organizations in Mississippi. The group proceeded cautiously and initially passed out flyers that asked, "Are demonstrations needed in Dallas?" The answer was "yes . . . unless" the city equalized educational opportunities. When city leaders failed to respond, the DCCCR began picketing the downtown school administration building.

55 "Are Demonstrations Needed in Dallas?" DCCCR flyer, Apr. 1964 (DPL).
Earl Allen, who had graduated from SMU, accepted the pastorate of Highland Hill Methodist Church, and served as the local president of CORE, led the protest with Clarence Laws. Nearly seventy picketers marched around the school building for several weeks.56

The DCCCR became more vocal in 1964, when it claimed that the Dallas Independent School District defrauded black students of their right to attend nonsegregated schools. The group also averred, "We want peaceful desegregation," to remind white leaders that they continued to respect the Dallas way.57 At the same time, Earl Allen led a group of CORE and DCCCR activists in an integrated protest of the Piccadilly Cafeteria in May. The Piccadilly had not been included in the restaurants desegregated by the city government and refused to serve blacks. Consequently, eleven protestors stood-in at the cafeteria, blocked the foyer, and ignored police requests that they leave. Allen tied the stand-in at the Piccadilly to the DCCCR's school integration efforts and stated that the protest was an "outgrowth of our failure to reach some type of agreement with the Dallas Public School Board."58 For Allen, both protests were closely linked.

Earl Allen and other leaders awaited further accommodations from the city. But while the protests continued, cafeteria lawyers unsuccessfully attempted to obtain a restraining order banning protests inside the eatery.59 This was not the response Allen had hoped for, so members of CORE and the Dallas Coordinating Committee on Civil Rights augmented the protest. The same day the restaurant filed the restraining order, twenty-five protestors knelt in front of the cafeteria, blocked the entrance, and sang freedom songs. A few days later, fifteen more activists picketed the cafeteria. Another thirty protestors joined them a week later and tried to enter the Piccadilly and sit-in. They failed, but police arrested Earl Allen and several others for the picket. These were the first arrests to occur as a result of the civil rights movement in Dallas. The next day, protestors slipped into the cafeteria and finally sat-in.60

The demonstrations at the cafeteria lasted nearly thirty days before they came to an end. The city had difficulty desegregating the restaurant because

it was part of a chain managed from New Orleans and not locally owned. By late June, CORE and the DCCCR reached an agreement with the owners of the Piccadilly Cafeteria and the local government for total integration. Four days later, President Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act of 1964 into law. The owners of the cafeteria surely knew that the bill approached its final passage, and they acquiesced shortly before LBJ signed the bill into law. Because of the work done by the Committee of 14 in desegregating downtown restaurants, and the agreement between the Piccadilly Cafeteria, CORE, the Dallas Coordinating Committee on Civil Rights, and the city government, Dallas’s leaders patted themselves on the back for desegregating before the federal government mandated they do so.61

Many other southern cities implemented desegregation before the passage of the Civil Rights Act. Like Dallas, Houston proceeded to integrate public accommodations from 1960 to 1964. For example, students forced Houston’s leaders to integrate theaters, the Astrodome, and local hotels in 1963. As noted above, Atlanta continued its desegregation progress in 1961 and 1963. Columbia’s biracial committee agreed to desegregate almost all downtown businesses in 1963. “It all happened so quickly and quietly,” historian Paul Lofton writes, “that many were surprised by the lack of commotion and the ease with which whites accepted the changes.” Steven Lawson noted that Tampa saw continued desegregation of public facilities and schools between 1960 and 1966. After Memphis’s initial desegregation efforts, further protests of theaters and restaurants in 1962 and 1963 resulted in the desegregation of seventy-five businesses. William Chafe showed that desegregation continued in Greensboro in 1963 and 1964 due to black protests, which forced the mayor to accede to black demands. All of these cities implemented desegregation measures before the federal government took action in 1964, and all did so without the violence usually attributed to civil rights demonstrations.62

Nothing inspires confidence like victory. The continued triumphs of the struggle in Dallas inspired local blacks to continue their activities. Clarence Laws, for example, engineered a new protest in 1965, and this proved unlike any in the city’s history. On March 14, 1965, Laws coordinated a massive march to decry the murder of James Reeb, a white Unitarian minister killed in Selma, Alabama, for supporting civil rights. A crowd estimated at three to five thousand people emerged from downtown churches, and H. Rhett


James led them to a rally at Ferris Plaza. Dubbed the Alabama Sympathy March, the *Dallas Express* reported that “it was a peaceful demonstration which tugged at the heart strings of bystanders and marchers alike.” The NAACP youths led the rally in freedom songs, and Laws summed up the march’s purpose as offering “moral and inspirational support to the voter registration drive in Alabama and elsewhere and to call upon all agencies concerned to take every legal and constitutional action to secure the Constitutional rights of all citizens NOW.” Part of his message encouraged President Johnson to remove barriers to voting in the United States. “While we applaud their [LBJ and the members of his administration] promises,” Laws stated, “we are getting weary of promises.” Dallasites awaited word that the government intended to protect black voting rights. They did not wait long.

One day after the rally, which coincided with demonstrations across the nation, President Johnson appeared before Congress to preview legislation that would protect voting rights in America. The continued victories of the civil rights movement were confirmed with the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Johnson’s actions proved for many blacks that protests could be met not only with a local response but also with a federal one. Black Dallasites proclaimed the victory as their own, but they did not rest on their laurels. Instead, protests continued. For example, a new generation of leaders affiliated with the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) appeared in the late 1960s. Marion “Ernie” McMillan led SNCC in Dallas. The group set up shop in the city in 1968 when, nationally, the organization barely functioned. In 1969 Rev. Peter Johnson of the SCLC arrived in Dallas to present the documentary *King: Montgomery to Memphis.* Johnson decided to stay in Dallas. Both Peter Johnson and Ernie McMillan protested nonviolently. But McMillan, a longtime Dallas resident, was treated like an outside agitator and hounded by the police. The city more readily accepted Johnson, a Baptist minister and a member of a respected civil rights group, even though he was an outsider. In the vagaries of protest and response, the experiences of these individuals reveal the nature of what the city was prepared to accept. To white leaders the outsider followed the Dallas way, while the Dallasite refused.

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64 Carson, *In Struggle*, 291–293.

Ernie McMillan brought SNCC to real prominence in Dallas. In Big D, SNCC was an organization in name only before 1968, but McMillan helped the local group grow to more than two hundred members. He found many of SNCC’s activities unwelcome, however, and the organization suffered from continual police harassment. Police arrested McMillan for the first time in March 1968 after he and four colleagues had driven around the city shouting Black Power statements through a loudspeaker. McMillan nevertheless persevered and in June led SNCC in a picket of the OK Supermarket. The store operated as a typical “ghetto gouger”; it was white-owned but located in a black neighborhood, charged exorbitant prices, and often sold rotten food. SNCC hoped the picket would force the market’s owners to sell to a black buyer, and McMillan offered to purchase the business himself. The white owners refused to sell, so the picket continued.

Events escalated at the OK Supermarket in early July. Ernie McMillan, along with another SNCC activist, Matthew Johnson, pressured the store’s owners by filling grocery baskets with items, taking them to the checkout counter, and then leaving. Activists were told to tell the cashiers, “Oh, I’m late. I was supposed to be at work,” or “My babysitter’s supposed to get off now. I have to go.” They intended to disrupt the store’s business by leaving the supermarket with the task of restocking the items. On the night of July 1, thirty to fifty blacks, including McMillan and Johnson, entered the store and proceeded to break bottles and smash eggs, fruit, and other items. They caused damage estimated at approximately $150. McMillan returned to the store later that night and mockingly told the cashier, “These white people sho’ keep a nice clean store.” The Dallas Police Department singled out and arrested McMillan and Johnson.

While freed on bond, Ernie McMillan and Matthew Johnson continued to picket the supermarket. At the same time, SNCC approached the owners of the store in another attempt to convince them to sell to a black buyer. By early August SNCC appeared to have succeeded. The owners agreed to sell the grocery for $600,000 if a black buyer came forward in sixty days. The group could not find a buyer, however, and a short time later McMillan and Johnson each received an excessive ten-year prison sentence for vandalizing the OK Supermarket. The two men’s travails slowed SNCC’s activity

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in Dallas.70 Although the store’s owners agreed in late 1968 to allow black employees to own 60 percent of the company’s stock, thereby granting black control of the business, the protests had long since petered out and SNCC received no credit for concluding the situation.71 Meanwhile McMillan and Johnson appealed their ten-year prison sentences. Their cases lingered until 1971, when the appeals court upheld the sentences. Meanwhile, McMillan had fled Dallas after authorities issued an arrest warrant for draft evasion. Police caught up with him in late 1971, and a federal court sentenced him to three years in prison at Fort Leavenworth.72

Clearly SNCC was unwelcome in Dallas. Although Ernie McMillan and Matthew Johnson did not advocate that blacks should resort to violence, SNCC nationally endorsed Black Power and dismissed nonviolence as a tactic in the late 1960s. McMillan, however, continued to promote nonviolence and told the Dallas Morning News in 1968 that “Dallas’ Snick has never advocated or wished to incite a riot.”73 Nevertheless, McMillan and Johnson’s Black Power rhetoric made them enemies of police. Consequently, the two were harassed, arrested, jailed, and eventually driven from the city. SNCC continued to protest meekly throughout 1969 and into 1970, changing its name along the way to the Black Revolutionary Action Party and joining forces with the Black Panther Party. The group disbanded in late 1970.74

Peter Johnson and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference met with more success in Dallas than did SNCC. Shortly after his arrival in 1969, Johnson became interested in the issue of slum clearance in the almost all-black Fair Park neighborhood in South Dallas. Homeowners in Fair Park began protesting the city’s attempts to evict them and demolish their homes to make way for a new parking lot to serve the state fair. Johnson and a group of homeowners descended on the Dallas City Council in July 1969 to protest the city’s offer to buy their houses for $1 per square foot, which for most residents amounted to a trifle. They desired a fair price for their

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homes, $3.75 per square foot, which the city seemed unwilling to pay. The local government made no response to the residents' demands.

By late 1969 Johnson and a group of "concerned citizens" engaged in what they called a "ghetto pilgrimage" to dramatize the pitiable conditions in the city's poor neighborhoods. At the same time Johnson threatened the city, and particularly Mayor Erik Jonsson, by promising that if the government failed to negotiate a settlement with the Fair Park homeowners then six hundred marchers would block the Cotton Bowl Parade, a New Year's Day celebration in Dallas and a nationally televised event. On New Year's Eve five hundred people gathered at a local church for the protest. A few minutes before midnight, the deadline Peter Johnson set for Mayor Jonsson to meet with homeowners, the mayor capitulated. He could not stop the demolition of the neighborhood, but he did offer residents more money, which was what they had asked for all along. Peter Johnson continued SCLC activities in Dallas after the conclusion of the Fair Park controversy and led several marches in the early 1970s.

Although the Southern Christian Leadership Conference recalled Johnson in 1972, his efforts rallied the local black community to defy the city's slum clearance program. Johnson's association with the SCLC and his credentials as a minister gave him a certain respectability in Dallas. Unlike Ernie McMillan, Johnson proved willing to negotiate with city leaders and ultimately forced them to act by threatening protests. Indeed, McMillan eschewed interracial communication, while Johnson utilized the communication networks established by George Allen, Juanita Craft, and other black leaders. Despite the fact that Johnson was an outsider, he conformed to the concept of the Dallas way and thereby found greater access to the city's leaders, and consequently greater success. Mayor Jonsson and Rev. Johnson seemed to have respected each other. Of Dallas's mayors, local blacks most fondly remember J. Erik Jonsson. Emmett Conrad, the first African American elected to the Dallas school board, noted that "of all of the mayors, I think that the short time [Jonsson] was in service he did more to enhance the living qualities of people in Dallas than anyone else." George Allen remarked, "I'd rate Erik [Jonsson] as the number one man in my judgment for fairness, for even-handed handling of his people, of

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75 Schutze, The Accommodation, 165; Barr, Black Texans, 224; "City: 'Take it or Turn it Loose,'" Dallas Post Tribune, July 5, 1969, p. 1.
showing respect for everybody.” This evenhandedness allowed Mayor Jonsson to work directly with the SCLC. And unlike SNCC, the SCLC continued to operate in the city after 1972. Dallas saw protests throughout the early 1970s. But the movement slowed precipitously as blacks gained the rights for which they had long fought: desegregation of the public sector, voting rights, access to better housing, and at least partial integration of schools. Consequently, the years of protest activism ended.

The Dallas story offers many insights that expand scholarly knowledge of the civil rights movement. For example, the prominence of locally led, grassroots organizations demonstrates the strength of local leadership. While the NAACP operated nationally, the Dallas branch, and numerous other chapters throughout the nation, functioned as vibrant indigenous organizations. Dallasites also created numerous organizations to advance the movement, including the Dallas Community Committee and the Dallas Coordinating Committee on Civil Rights. When national groups like CORE, SNCC, and the SCLC appeared, Dallasites usually led these organizations, which gave them local appeal. CORE offers the best example of this phenomenon. Earl Allen, a native-born Texan, headed CORE as if it were an indigenous organization. While Peter Johnson and the SCLC were more openly accepted than SNCC, a Dallasite also led the SNCC group. National leaders chose not to direct the movement in Dallas, which left the struggle in the hands of local people.

The movement in Dallas also sheds light on the more cooperative nature of this local movement. Throughout the civil rights period, blacks protested and whites responded. One reason the movement evolved without violence was because local whites followed the Dallas way. Juanita Craft observed that desegregation and Kennedy’s assassination changed white perceptions. These events, Craft argued, “caused people to take a new look at their own communities, and a lot of people were saying, ‘we’ve got to do something about conditions around here.’ There were more dialogues started at that time and things have been much easier.” Craft correctly noted that communication proved essential to the movement. Like whites, African Americans also maintained respect for the Dallas way by protesting nonviolently. The government and business establishment, therefore, submitted to black demands on many occasions. White leaders in Dallas were clearly motivated by their own self-interest. They hoped to prevent violent encounters that might damage the city’s reputation.

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and stifle business growth. Black leaders knew they had an advantage in this regard. They could, and did, use protests to force city leaders to the bargaining table to make the "city as a whole" philosophy work for them. City leaders had few options. They could integrate or face a rising, and possibly violent, white reaction—a reaction that in places like Birmingham had been provoked by protests. Based on the example of Montgomery and Birmingham, white and black leaders in Dallas chose to integrate peacefully and avoid violence.

The pattern of desegregation in Dallas may seem unusual, "but white leaders," Bruce Schulman observes, "desired civic harmony, federal aid, and continued economic advance so strongly that, if necessary, they would accede to racial change in order to secure them. And black southerners soon forced those concessions." Such was the case in Dallas and many other cities. To maintain the positive image of the city and to promote business growth, Dallas's leaders proved willing to negotiate with blacks and implement desegregation measures. Compromise resulted in the integration of buses, lunch counters, hotels, the state fair, parks and swimming pools, theaters, and eventually holdouts like the Piccadilly Cafeteria and local schools. Blacks also received encouragement when the Voting Rights Act was passed. And blacks and whites negotiated a settlement to the Fair Park controversy. But once the city corrected problems affecting the African American community, blacks redirected protests to focus attention on other areas. White leaders then had to deal with new issues, acquiesce to new demands, and then face more protests.

As this study of Big D indicates, the civil rights movement in an urban setting did not always bog down in white resistance or violence. Scholarship on Dallas, Houston, Greensboro, Atlanta, Memphis, New Orleans, Tampa, Charlotte, Columbia, and other cities has begun to demonstrate the more peaceful and diplomatic nature of the civil rights struggle. Whites in the Sunbelt South feared that protests would damage their city's image and the business community. White and black leaders removed racial barriers rather than face destructive violence. As the Fisk University sociologists Lewis Jones and Herman Long observed, white and black leaders in Dallas and nine other southern cities appeared to be "pragmatists rather than being idealists. Desegregation seemed to have been to them the decent personal position to take and at the same time a policy that would insure domestic tranquility and bring economic gain." As a result, many cities experienced the movement without white resistance and violence.

81 Schulman, From Cotton Belt to Sunbelt, 209.
82 Jones and Long, "The Negotiation of Desegregation in Ten Southern Cities," 96. The nine other cities examined were Atlanta, Charlotte, Durham, Greensboro, Houston, Knoxville, Memphis, Raleigh, and Richmond. These cities duplicated the "peaceful" integration that was seen in Dallas.
But historians and laypersons still perceive the movement as a struggle characterized by black protest and white violence. Certainly media attention during Black History Month, or films like Alan Parker's *Mississippi Burning*, contributes to this perception. So too do historians. Indeed, historians encourage the idea that violence was necessary for the success of the movement. For example, in one of the few published essays on the civil rights movement in Dallas, historian W. Marvin Dulaney contends that blacks “never used tactics of direct action or violence to win the more substantial gains of political and economic power that the movement brought African Americans in cities such as Atlanta, New Orleans, and Birmingham.” The result, he argues, was that “the movement in Dallas did not fulfill its promise” because there was no violence.83 In a similar vein, Stephen Tuck criticizes the struggle in Atlanta, a city with a vibrantly successful nonviolent protest movement, for its moderation. “The years of protest can be described as successful,” Tuck argues, “only from the perspective of the white power structure or in that violence was avoided.” Tuck avers that the movement would have succeeded more if protests had generated violence.84 But nonviolence did win civil rights and was a successful strategy. And in the most violent cities, particularly Birmingham, violence did not beget black freedom. This makes Dulaney and Tuck’s assertions overly simplistic.

Some historians have found a convenient reason to explain why violence did not appear in certain cities. They blame those pesky business leaders for stifling the initiative of black activists. David Goldfield, William Chafe, Michael Phillips, and others castigate the business community for co-opting and undermining protests.85 By meeting and cooperating with blacks, historians argue, white leaders took violence off the negotiating table, which many scholars view as a terrible injustice. But if blacks fought to have their demands met, even at the most basic level, and white leaders gave in to those demands, how then can one argue that whites undermined the movement? Dallas continued to experience significant protests after city leaders acquiesced to the black community, and so too did the other cities mentioned in this essay. So what was co-opted? What was undermined? While I do not desire to rehabilitate the legacy of business leaders, certainly they must be given some credit in accommodating the black community and keeping violence at bay.

Beyond the historiography, documentaries, and motion pictures, common perceptions about the civil rights movement continue to reflect the violence vs. nonviolence framework. Many of these ideas are formed in the


84 Tuck, *Beyond Atlanta*, 126.

classroom. Step into any undergraduate American history survey course and you will likely witness a version of the civil rights movement that focuses on big events and leaders, and on nonviolent black protest and white retaliatory violence. This tale has led to a bipolar understanding of the struggle (good vs. evil, violence vs. nonviolence) that reinforces the perception that the civil rights movement involved only black protest and white violence. The movement, as I've suggested, clearly entailed more than this.

The lack of violence in Dallas, and the existence of less violent struggles elsewhere, suggest at the very least that scholars have overemphasized the role of violent behavior in racial change in the civil rights movement. As historian David Chappell has wryly noted, "The triumph of civil rights was an omelette that broke miraculously few eggs." The movement, in a number of local settings, clearly forced change without provoking violence. When examined in this light, a place like Birmingham appears exceptional, while Dallas, Greensboro, Houston, or Atlanta appear more representative of the struggle as a whole. These cities show the movement in a multifaceted light. The struggle was not characterized by bipolarities like violence vs. nonviolence or white vs. black because in many cities violence was absent and whites and blacks worked together. And whether violence erupted in one movement and not another, the eventual results were often the same—slowly won civil rights and the desegregation of the public sector. Of course, that desegregation and the removal of de jure racial separation could not, and did not, eliminate racism. In most southern cities vestiges of racial separation remained—in housing, jobs, education, and access to the political machinery—that might have helped to alleviate the remnants of Jim Crow. Nonetheless, the rights won via nonviolent protest and negotiation went far in destroying segregation. When scholars compare the movement in different cities, the history of protest and response reveals a story quite different from the commonly held conception of the movement. The hope is that experts and laypersons can make room for the cities that experienced a more cooperative, and less violent, civil rights movement. Dallas offers a good example of one of these relatively harmonious movements.

Dallasites continued to reflect on the tolerant nature of the movement years after the struggle ended. As a 1985 Dallas Morning News retrospective on the civil rights movement noted, black and white cooperation "could be traced back more than two decades to the spring of 1960 when some of Dallas's most powerful men decided it was time to integrate the city—peacefully, quietly, through negotiation." The overall tone of the article suggested that these negotiations were hardly surprising. After all, the paper stated, "That was the Dallas way."

5 Chappell, A Stone of Hope, 153.