

FRAMING ATLANTA:
LOCAL NEWSPAPERS' SEARCH FOR A
NATIONALLY APPEALING RACIAL IMAGE (1920-1960)

By

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ABSTRACT

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By 1920, the city of Atlanta had long struggled with its white supremacist reputation, and its newspapers were fighting to present the city's obsession with white heritage in a positive light. The growing popularity of the Stone Mountain Confederate Memorial throughout the South, as well as Atlanta's reputation as the national home of the revived Ku Klux Klan, caused problems for the city's racial image. In 1921, the *Atlanta Constitution* began to attempt to present a new vision of Atlanta's relationship to race, emphasizing the city's growing diversity. Integral to that vision was the launching of a new weekly column written by the city's black leaders, in which they discussed the city's black intellectual and cultural events. At the same time, reporting on federal anti-lynching legislation from Atlanta's white newspapers illustrated their racist failure to adequately represent black perspectives. By 1936, the growing popularity of *Gone with the Wind* threatened to reveal white newspapers' need to appeal to white supremacist readers, but white newspapers ignored and mocked—sometimes even outright denied—the growing popularity of white supremacist activities in and around the city, attempting to focus on the novel's representation of white heritage instead. In the shadow of World War II, as more racially progressive voices were beginning to be heard throughout the nation, Atlanta's white newspaper editors and journalists, already struggling to bridge the growing divide between competing economic interests, found themselves trying to straddle white and black readership interests as well. This gave Atlanta's black newspaper editors and journalists the opportunity to

advocate for the advancement of Atlanta's black community. By 1940, all of Atlanta's newspapers found themselves wielding powerful anti-Nazi rhetoric to promote a more racially moderate and, ultimately modern, vision of Atlanta, attempting to recast the city as an enemy to both racism and fascism. By the late 1950s, the city's editors and reporters were so good at framing Atlanta's struggles with racial and religious tolerance, that even when the city was rocked by the bombing of the Hebrew Benevolent Congregation Temple, few questioned Mayor William B. Hartsfield's claim that the perpetrators must have been from outside the city. This is the story of how Atlanta's newspaper industry was able to reshape the city's national reputation from the home of the Ku Klux Klan to a "city too busy to hate" in the span of only forty years.

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This dissertation is dedicated to Mary, Wilbur, Claudia,
Steve, and Alice, without whom it would never have been conceived.

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In many ways, any study is the product of a community of scholars, and this dissertation is no different. While the roots of this project go all the way back to my studies at the University of Louisiana and Lafayette, it was the support I received at Michigan State University that made this dissertation a reality. In many ways, this project's origins lay within the FCC archives, as I flipped through complaints from audience members across the nation about television news coverage. I was shocked when I found no evidence of Georgian viewers angry at WSB's coverage of racial issues. This was the single most important decision I made during this project: that I would try to understand the silence within that archive. Under Michael Stamm's guidance, I shaped that question into a fully formed answer. My research made me realize that southern television reporters were doing the same things that Atlanta's newspapers had been doing for decades. What began as a study regarding television coverage bloomed into an investigation of many different cultural artifacts and their racial biases. Stamm has always challenged me to examine the nature of how media connect us, and how the individuals who shape that media do so with individual biases. Stamm has helped me see consumers as independent entities who pick and choose the media formats that fit best with their own lives. And he has helped me produce a piece of scholarship of which I am proud. Similarly, Pero Dagbovie has been there for me since the beginning, challenging me to reexamine key assumptions I had about racial bias within southern society, and even the nature of the civil rights movement itself. He has particularly challenged me to reexamine assumptions I held about W.E.B. Dubois and Booker T. Washington, along with the larger role of the black press as a unifier for the black community. Under the guidance of Kirsten Fermaglich, I have examined white communities within the South as well, examining the role of privilege in regional identity. Fermaglich was an early believer in

this project, particularly with its initial focus on television. And finally, Helen Veit has helped me to interrogate this project's role within the larger field of history, including but not limited to understanding the limitations to technological influence. While each of these scholars have helped me develop this project in unique directions, they have also aided me in achieving a level of scholarly rigor I had not previously attained. This project stands a testament to their guidance.

While this specific project will always be a product of the Michigan State University historical scholarly community, I personally owe many others for helping me in the earlier stages of my career. Mary Farmer-Kaiser, who served as my Master's thesis advisor at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette, has always been a staunch supporter of my scholarship. She helped me foster a level of intellectual curiosity that is probably unhealthy to some degree, but she also helped me understand the competing forces that arise within primary source materials. Michael Martin helped me grapple with the larger issues of southern identity and challenged me to re-examine my understanding of mediated influence. Jordan Kellman has always been an immense supporter of my career. He was the first scholar to introduce me to Michel Foucault, and he helped me foster my interest in political, social and cultural change within society. Thomas Aiello challenged me to consistently find the story within the argument, helping me to develop a better understanding of narrative.

Beyond these individual scholars who have aided me in understanding the nature of my field, there are a great many others. There is my wife, Mary McMyne, who has helped me build a life dedicated to satisfying my intellectual curiosity. She has always challenged me to do more than I considered possible. She has championed my ideas at times when I have felt uncertain, and as a reader, she helped me tame the wild sentences that often fail to submit to my authority. There is my daughter, Alice Bennett-McMyne, who has shown me over these last nine years the

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INTRODUCTION—A HISTORY OF ATLANTA’S RACIAL IMAGE

On October 12, 1958, fifty sticks of dynamite blew open the entryway of the Hebrew Benevolent Congregation Temple on Peach Street in Atlanta, Georgia. The next day, Atlanta’s mayor William Berry Hartsfield stood between the destroyed remains of the temple’s entrance and a WSB television camera, telling viewers, “Atlanta has always been a lighthouse of racial and religious tolerance in the [S]outh... [W]e are shocked and amazed that this awful thing could happen in our midst, and we prefer to believe that it is the work of people outside of our city.”¹ With this statement, Hartfield joined the long line of urban boosters and newspaper editors who had worked for decades to try to portray Atlanta as a southern icon of racial progress. This portrayal, however, was predicated on a lie. As Charles Rutheiser has argued, the myth of Atlanta as a racially progressive city ignored the “conflicts and contradictions” of the different groups in the city who tried to portray it as a “symbol of the antebellum South, as self-proclaimed capital of the New South, as Black Mecca, and as... ‘the world’s next great international city.’”²

Urban studies scholars of Atlanta have argued that, after World War II, the city’s politicians worked with a coalition of white elites and black middle-class leaders through organizations like the Atlanta Chamber of Commerce to help shape the city’s progressive political policies on race. During World War II, sociologist Floyd Hunter wrote an influential study of the city, *Community Power Structure*, which described how Atlanta’s economic elites

¹ WSBN41356, WSB Newsfilm collection, reel WSBN0890, Walter J. Brown Media Archives and Peabody Awards Collection, The University of Georgia Libraries, Athens, Ga., as presented in the Digital Library of Georgia.

² Charles Rutheiser, *Imagineering Atlanta: The Politics of Place in the City of Dreams* (New York: Verso Books, 1996), 13.

helped shape the city's most divisive political issues.³ Hunter noted that “newspapers, radio, and other channels of communication in American society [were] constantly telling the citizenry what [was] right, just and good.”⁴ He argued that newspapers were selective in shaping public opinion by covering the stories that they found “authoritative” and ignoring the ones that they wanted to silence. However, Hunter argued that the influence of newspapers was limited because he believed that community structures radiated power down, and newspaper editors and radio commentators existed on the third-tier of power brokers, only transmitting the news sanctioned by the owners of large corporations and “operations officials” on the tiers above them. In other words, Hunter believed that Atlanta's media industry was a tool used by business leaders to transmit their opinions to the general populace.⁵ Political scientist Clarence Stone similarly views Atlanta's media industry as a monolith, noting that after 1946 the rivalry between Atlanta's two major white newspapers “diminished.” He notes that by 1950, both newspapers were merged under one owner, but maintained two separate daily editions that were “essentially two editions of the same newspaper.” For Stone, the *Atlanta Constitution* simply provided a recounting of what Atlanta's business and political elites were doing for Atlanta's reputation.⁶ Larry Keating goes further, arguing that Atlanta newspapers were instrumental in providing the city's “network of analytical and public-opinion-molding” organizations a direct connection to

³ Although Hunter referred to the city he studied only as an anonymous “regional city” in the hopes that his conclusions would have broader applications to other urban centers, the city he studied has been identified as Atlanta for some time. Immediately after the publication of his study, scholars like Robert A. Dahl in his work *Who governs? Democracy and Power in an American City* argued that Atlanta was far too unique for Hunter's conclusions to have much applicability to other urban centers. However, scholars like Clarence Stone in *Regime Politics* have since argued that the study is significant to understanding what happened within Atlanta itself.

⁴ Floyd Hunter, *Community Power Structure: A Study of Decision Makers* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1963), 4-10.

⁵ Floyd Hunter, *Community Power Structure: A Study of Decision Makers*, 110-130.

⁶ Clarence Stone, *Regime Politics: Governing Atlanta 1946 – 1988* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1989), 259.

the broader public.⁷ Each of these urban studies scholars assume that Atlanta's media industry was simply a tool used by business elites to shape public opinion.

In attempting to characterize how power has been transmitted through Atlanta, urban studies scholars have neglected to take the decision-making role of the media industry seriously. Their focus has been on major public policy organizations, local corporations, and major political figures, or what Floyd Hunter called the "first rate tier" of power. This argument neglects the kind of decisions media figures made when framing key issues for public consumption. Like many of those same "first rate tier" business owners, Atlanta's newspapers were owned by powerful political elites, who had strong investments within the city's reputation. When the local business community engaged in city-shaping public relations campaigns, Atlanta's newspaper editors and owners were, in fact, active participants in that decision making. Newspapers are businesses. Their owners and editors are part of the business elites who shape the news, going all the way back to Henry Grady, the *Atlanta Constitution's* co-owner and editor, who embedded the paper's role as an urban booster within his influential New South editorial policy during the 1880s. Atlanta's newspapers needed to promote the city's economic interests, because as businesses, they needed the city to thrive.

Atlanta's newspapers were profit-seeking ventures that relied heavily on attracting larger readership numbers to entice advertisers. Their reliance on advertising revenue caused them to produce narratives that appealed not only to urban and rural readers, but also to the newspaper's advertising interests. And Atlanta's newspaper industry was intensely competitive. By 1920, the city had three major daily white newspapers—the *Atlanta Constitution*, the *Atlanta Journal*, and the *Atlanta Georgian*—with all three attempting to compete for the title of Atlanta's most

⁷ Larry Keating, *Atlanta: Race, Class, and Urban Expansion* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2001), 5, 69-73.

popular white daily newspaper. As adherents to Jim Crow politics, Atlanta's white readership expected their newspapers to reflect their racist values, and Atlanta's newspapers did not disappoint. As is explored in chapter two, the nature of Atlanta's readership changed in 1920 as well, with the city's black community growing at a much faster rate than the city's white population. This growth led to the growth of two major black newspapers: the weekly *Atlanta Independent* in 1903 and the *Atlanta Daily World* in 1928. Atlanta's changing demographics challenged the way that the city's newspaper industry covered issues of race. Over the next four decades, these five newspapers struggled to frame Atlanta's national reputation, shifting the city's racial image away from white supremacist narratives toward "white moderate" narratives.

In his oft quoted "Letter from Birmingham Jail," Martin Luther King Jr. argued that these "white moderate" narratives were actually obstructionist, because they were "more devoted to 'order' than to justice." By promoting an incrementalist agenda that took decades to be manifest, these "white moderate" narratives ensured that the South would never change, and would change at a glacial pace, that excluded progressive black voices from politics.⁸ When white Atlanta newspapers began promoting "white moderate" visions of the city, they did so more with the intention of distancing themselves from the Ku Klux Klan and preserving their racial reputation than with the intention of actually seeking black equality. Atlanta's newspapers took a very real economic divide between rural and urban Georgians and shaped it to include moral stances on black equality. By first obscuring the political influence the Klan had on Georgia politics and later outright denouncing the Klan, Atlanta's newspapers created a "white moderate" vision for the city that allowed only incrementalist progress toward black equality. This inaccurate racial image, which only promoted black equality when it was beneficial to economic growth, became

⁸ Martin Luther King, Jr., "Letter from the Birmingham Jail," in *Letters to a Birmingham Jail: A Response to the Words and Dreams of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.*, ed. Bryan Loritts (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2014), 25.

Atlanta's the racial identity that William Hartsfield praised and many within the black community found hypocritical. It was even enshrined within V.O. Key's 1949 study of southern politics, which Ralph McGill called "fascinating and remarkably accurate." McGill agreed that the single party system's use lay within its ability to disenfranchise black southerners. However, in 1949, McGill also notes that southern politics can be more complicated. He notes that sometimes southerners unify in support of racist candidates because the "opposition" racism is much worse than the result.⁹ This notion of an urban moral progressive is always weighed down by the "white moderate's" demand for order. When opposing the extremist politics of the Ku Klux Klan, the "white moderate" was an ally, but only in so far as it was economically viable.

Before 1920, with a few notable exceptions, white Southern newspapers had treated the original Ku Klux Klan as having a mythic quality, portraying the organization and its trappings as "a series of symbols of virtue."¹⁰ The standard policy for many early Southern newspaper editors was to report the Klan's positive actions while obscuring the organization's more destructive vigilantism. This afforded the first Klan the motto of the "invisible empire," which relied heavily on the cooperation of local newspapers to provide anonymity.¹¹ When the Klan was revived in 1915, this editorial policy was revived in Atlanta's newspapers. In 1921, the *New York World* published twenty articles designed to expose the Klan's internal workings, but the effects of the *New York World*'s article series have been debated extensively by scholars. The standard historical argument, put forth by historian David Chalmers, establishes that the exposé provided the Klan with "priceless publicity."¹² Building on this argument is cultural historian

⁹ Ralph McGill, "Myth of 'The Solid South,'" *Atlanta Constitution*, October 14, 1948, 22.

¹⁰ Charles Reagan Wilson, *Baptized in Blood: The Religion of the Lost Cause, 1865-1920* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1980), 38.

¹¹ "Washington," *Atlanta Constitution*, May 9, 1872, 2.

¹² David J. Chalmers, *Hooded Americanism: The History of the Ku Klux Klan* (New York: F. Watts, 1965), 38.

Felix Harcourt who notes that immediately following the publishing of the 1921 articles a number of white supremacist presses were created, looking to build more friendly platforms for shaping the Klan's politics.¹³ However, there is an alternative interpretation of the exposé's effects held by media historian John T. Kneebone. Kneebone argues that across the nation, the exposé created a new public precedent for openly criticizing the Klan's national politics. Kneebone goes even further to conclude that even in Atlanta, which hosted the national headquarters of the Ku Klux Klan, the white newspaper industry openly criticized the Klan. But this does not explain the full story of the city's media's relationship with the Klan, as Atlanta's white newspaper coverage of the Klan was far more complicated.¹⁴ A much more nuanced interpretation of the Atlanta's newspaper coverage of the exposé suggests that white newspaper editors were actively engaged in fighting religious intolerance from organizations like the Klan. This is important because when examining the *Atlanta Constitution's* editorial, "A Challenge to Our Good Name," Clark Howell argues that religious intolerance is not good for business, and that "Atlanta must get away from it."¹⁵ Howell does not actively denounce the Klan, which makes sense as the city already hosted the Ku Klux Klan's 1921 Annual convention just in May.¹⁶ The city was immensely invested in the organization, and could not risk making an enemy of the Klan. Beyond this, Atlanta's major white newspapers still openly advertised for the Klan as late as 1925. The city's media industry relied to some degree on Klan money, even if they denounced the organization's iconic racist statements.

Ultimately, the Klan's national popularity did grow after 1921, leading them to argue that

¹³ Felix Harcourt, *Ku Klux Kulture: America and the Klan in the 1920s* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017).

¹⁴ John T. Kneebone, "Publicity and Prejudice: The New York World's Exposé of 1921 and the History of the Second Ku Klux Klan," *VCU History Publications* (2015), https://scholarscompass.vcu.edu/hist_pubs/12/.

¹⁵ "A Challenge to Atlanta's Good Name!" *Atlanta Constitution*, September 25, 1921, d4.

¹⁶ Extension Committee of Atlanta Chamber of Commerce, "Conventions Slated for Meetings in Atlanta in Month of May," *City Builder Magazine*, April 1921, 15, Kenan Research Center, Atlanta History Center.

their time in the shadows was over. In fact, the Klan grew so quickly that the organization began to buckle under its growth. Local chapters, or Klaverns, were not uniform across the nation. As the organization grew, founder William Simmons was toppled as leader by Hiram W. Evans, a dentist from Texas, and Evans in turn lost several chapters to competing demagogues. Yet the Klan had become such a political force by 1924 that during the national Democratic presidential primary election, the Klan attempted to take control of the party to nominate William Gibbs McAdoo as the candidate for president. In 1925, The Klan marched openly through the streets of Washington D.C. without masks.

Many other scholars have examined the Klan's growth and splintering into regional factions during the early 1920s.¹⁷ One of the most prolific scholars of the Klan, Michael Newton, wrote a number of smaller studies dedicated to mapping the Klan's growth within Alabama, Florida, and Mississippi.¹⁸ Shawn Lay traced the story of one of these regional factions in 1920s Buffalo, New York.¹⁹ Nancy MacLean undermined the persistent assumption that the Klan grew out of from poor and ignorant farming communities, arguing that the standard Klan member was a middle-class white southern populist who disliked how much economic growth urban elites obtained during the period.²⁰ But no one has studied how newspapers in Atlanta, the home of the revived Klan, covered the organization outside of the *New York World* controversy.

¹⁷ Linda Gordon, *The Second Coming of the KKK: The Ku Klux Klan of the 1920s* (New York: Liveright Publishing, 2017); Michael Newton, *The Ku Klux Klan: History Organization, Language, and Influence* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland et Company Inc., 2014); Southern Poverty Law Center, *Ku Klux Klan: A History of Racism and Violence* (Montgomery: Southern Poverty Law Center, 1997); David J. Chalmers, *Hooded Americanism*.

¹⁸ Michael Newton, *The Invisible Empire: The Ku Klux Klan in Florida* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2001); Michael Newton, *White Robes and Burning Crosses: A History of the Ku Klux Klan from 1866* (Jefferson: McFarland, 2014); Michael Newton, *The FBI and the KKK: A Critical History* (Jefferson: McFarland, 2009); Michael Newton, *Ku Klux Terror: Birmingham, Alabama from 1866-Present* (Atgen: Schiffer, 2013); Michael Newton, *Ku Klux Klan in Mississippi: A History* (Jefferson: McFarland, 2019).

¹⁹ Shawn Lay, *Hooded Knights on the Niagara: The Ku Klux Klan in Buffalo, New York* (New York: New York University Press, 1995); John Craig, *The Ku Klux Klan in Western Pennsylvania 1921 – 1928* (London: Lehigh University Press, 2015).

²⁰ Nancy MacLean, *Behind the Mask of Chivalry: The Making of the Second Ku Klux Klan* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).

Current Klan scholarship oversimplifies southern newspaper coverage of the revived organization during the 1920s, giving the impression that there were only two approaches southern newspapers took to covering the Klan. Scholars either describe how southern white newspapers shielded the Klan from outside scrutiny by cloaking members' identities or ignoring their destructive actions, or scholars praise the few local editors or journalists who attacked the Klan. Sid Bedingfield's work is in the former group, and he argues that South Carolina's white newspaper editors "played a key role" in framing former Klan members as members of what he called "so-called 'respectable' groups" like the white citizens' councils that spearheaded the massive resistance to the integration of southern public spaces. Bedingfield noted that these white newspaper editors attempted to argue that white citizens' councils differed dramatically from the Klan because they relied on "economic retribution" as their tool for resisting integration, rather than threats of physical violence.²¹ On the other hand, the scholars in the latter group studied editors like Ralph McGill of the *Atlanta Constitution*, who has a reputation as a southern progressive on race, and Julian Harris of the *Columbus Enquirer-Sun*, who won the Pulitzer Prize for openly attacking the growth of the Klan in Georgia.²² When southern editors and journalists criticized the Klan—or the South as a whole—that criticism was often rewarded with the praise of national publications. The *Memphis Commercial Appeal* (1923), the *Columbus Enquirer-Sun* (1926) and the *Virginian Pilot* (1929) all won Pulitzer Prizes for openly attacking their local Ku Klux Klan chapters, although each of those publications faced significant outcries from local readers. The *Charleston News and Observer* (1925) also won a Pulitzer for an

²¹ Sid Bedingfield, *Newspaper Wars: Civil Rights and White Resistance in South Carolina, 1935 – 1965* (Urbana: University of Illinois, 2017), 157-161.

²² Leonard Ray Teel, *Ralph Emerson McGill: Voice of the Southern Conscience* (Knoxville: University Tennessee Press, 2001); Gregory C. Lisby and William F. Muiglestone, *Someone Had to Be Hated: Julian LaRose Harris, a Biography* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2002).

editorial arguing that the South influenced “virtually no national program and virtually no national leadership,” claiming that the region could contribute in no way to national “political thought.”²³ However, this binary interpretation of southern newspaper coverage of the Klan ignores the economic realities of southern journalism. What happened in Atlanta’s white newspapers was much more nuanced: white newspaper editors could not sit idly by while racial hate and religious intolerance threatened the city’s national reputation, but they also could not overtly attack the Klan without losing massive quantities of readers. Their response was to stay silent on the Klan and critique racial hate and religious intolerance only abstractly, as if that hate and intolerance was not being perpetrated by a national organization headquartered in Atlanta.

It was not until Europe descended into World War II that Atlanta’s white newspaper editors began openly attacking the Klan and even outing key members. Once Atlanta’s white newspapers began to turn their back on the Ku Klux Klan, they found it difficult to mount a campaign against incrementalist appeals for black political equality. The scholarship on Atlanta’s long civil rights movement narrative described by historian Tomiko Brown-Nagin confirms this idea. Brown-Nagin argues that the Atlanta struggle for civil rights began much earlier than other cities, giving support to Jacquelyn Dowd Hall’s vision of the long civil rights movement.²⁴ Brown-Nagin argues that there were two phases to the movement in Atlanta, with the “pragmatic” phase originating in the early 1940s with the local NAACP’s A.T. Walden’s negotiating with Hartsfield behind the scenes.²⁵ This places the origins of Atlanta’s civil rights movement in 1946 with a Walden and Hartsfield’s biracial coalition of business and political

²³ “The Plight of the South,” *Charleston News and Observer*, November 5, 1925.

²⁴ Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, “The Long Civil Rights Movement and the Political Uses of the Past,” *The Journal of American History*, 91, no. 4 (March 2005): 1233–1263.

²⁵ Tomiko Brown-Nagin, *Courage to Dissent: Atlanta and the Long History of the Civil Rights Movement* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

elites, which sought to turn voting power into civil rights progress. As the white primary system was ruled unconstitutional in 1944 with the Supreme Court's ruling in *Smith v. Allwright*, which ruled that it was unconstitutional for political parties to restrict access to the primary system based solely on race. For Atlanta, this ruling meant that the black community could leverage its considerable political power to push for an expansion of civil rights within the state. Urban historian Ronald Bayor has argued that this was an integral step in structuring Atlanta's black community.²⁶ Stephen G.N. Tuck expands this spatial argument further by grounding the Atlanta's civil rights struggle into a larger conflict between urban and rural visions of race within Georgia. Mirroring many of Atlanta's media figure's arguments, Tuck concludes that Georgia's urban and rural communities actively sought to shape the state's response to federally-led integration to meet their different needs.²⁷ My study seeks to interrogate Tuck's assumptions on rural and urban differences to focus on the role local white supremacist organization's overt racist ideologies played in pressuring Atlanta's newspapers into rethinking their stances on black equality before and after World War II, a period which Karen Ferguson argues was "a crucial era" that favored "the members and program of a group of black reformers who aimed to incorporate African Americans fully in American society through the vast social reordering promised by the Roosevelt administration."²⁸ In specific, my study examines how white newspapers shaped the struggle for black equality to serve their white audience's expectations, and it seeks to highlight the actions that black reformers took before 1946 to promote change within this heavily mediated framework.

²⁶ Ronald H. Bayor, *Race and the Shaping of Twentieth Century Atlanta* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2000).

²⁷ Steven G. N. Tuck, *Beyond Atlanta: The Struggle for Racial Equality in Georgia, 1940 – 1980* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2003).

²⁸ Karen Ferguson, *Black Politics in New Deal Atlanta* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press), 2.

While this is not a narrative about protestors in the streets pushing for change, this study examines the mediated nature of urban identity and the role media, in all of its varied forms, plays in justifying political change. Atlanta has long straddled two distinct identities. While white southerners have often discussed the city's economic and social growth, black southerners have often heard that the city "offered opportunity to all." As Maurice Hobson argues, Atlanta's reputation as a "black Mecca" has its roots in the era just after the Civil War, and it relied heavily on an image of the city's "thriving black upper and middle classes." The goal here is to understand why the argument for "moderation and incrementalism in race relations" found support within both white and black newspapers during this period.²⁹ To do that, this study examines local newspapers' role in shaping race for Atlantans. Julian Bond has called for scholars to examine "the personal biases and economic agendas of the people who reported, edited, and bankrolled" American newspapers during the civil rights movement.³⁰ Several other scholars have turned their attention to the role journalists have played in promoting racial change within the South. Historians Gene Roberts and Hank Klibanoff explain that World War II challenged northern journalists to reevaluate their focus on northern politics and begin investigating southern racism firsthand. Roberts and Klibanoff argue that northern journalists began presenting southern horrors to a national audience ready for these stories. However, within this larger narrative, Roberts and Klibanoff do not really pay much attention to Atlanta, instead arguing that the city's newspapers were lethargic in covering issues of race, often even framing civil rights struggles as "docile." They do note, however, that Atlanta's white citizens were aware of the struggle for black equality, even if they were never motivated enough to join the

²⁹ Maurice Hobson, *The Legend of the Black Mecca* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2017), 2.

³⁰ Julian Bond, "The Media and the Movement: Looking Back from the Southern Front," in *Media, Culture, and the Modern African American Freedom Struggle*, ed. Brian E. Ward (Gainesville: University Press Of Florida, 2001), 24.

fight.³¹ For Roberts and Klibanoff, it was northern journalists, not local black and white newspapers, who were key in promoting the push for black equality.

This argument, that northern news coverage played a key role in shaping southern coverage of the civil rights movement, has pervaded media and civil rights scholarship especially when that scholarship involves journalists recording accounts of their experiences. At the 1987 symposium entitled “Covering the South: A National Symposium on the Media and the Civil Rights Movement,” CBS news reporter Robert Schakne argued that “Little Rock was the first case where people really got their impression of an event from television.” He noted that television “nationalized a news story that would have remained a local story if it had just been a print story.”³² Similarly, NBC correspondent John Chancellor argued that television showed white southerners how “red” and “overweight” they were.³³ In short, the widespread conception of civil rights reporting from journalists is that their coverage of the movement played a key role in persuading white southerners to become embarrassed about racism and become more moderate.

These journalists’ arguments are what my study calls, using Simeon Booker’s words, the “stories and pictures” argument for rhetorical change within civil rights movement coverage.³⁴ A journalist who worked for the Baltimore *Afro American*, the Cleveland *Call and Post*, *Jet*, *Ebony*, and even the *Washington Post*’s first black reporter, Booker argues that journalists’ popularization of “stories and pictures” from the civil rights movement “brought such a hue and

³¹ Gene Roberts and Hank Klibanoff, *The Race Beat: The Press, the Civil Rights Struggle, and the Awakening of a Nation* (New York: Knopf, 2007).

³² Julian Bond, “The Media and the Movement: Looking Back from the Southern Front,” in *Media, Culture, and the Modern African American Freedom Struggle*, ed. Brian E. Ward (Gainesville: The University Press Of Florida, 2001), 17, 27, 29.

³³ Allison Graham, *Framing the South: Film, Television and the South* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), 1.

³⁴ Simeon Booker, *Shocking the Conscience: A Reporter’s Account of the Civil Rights Movement* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2013), xii.

cry from around the world, an embarrassed White House was finally shamed into action.”

William L. O'Neill argues that television “shamed and embarrassed Americans and was immensely helpful to the cause of civil rights” by demonstrating the stark contrast between “ugly white racists” and “neat, anxious, resolute black students.”³⁵ Michael Klarman argues that “distinctive[ly] regional mores, such as Jim Crow, were difficult to maintain in a nation that watches the same movies and television programs.”³⁶ He argues that violence “when communicated through television to national audiences, transformed racial opinion in the North, leading to the enactment of landmark civil rights legislation.”³⁷ Calvin Mackenzie and Robert Weisbrot argues that “Americans, who had long been complacent about mistreatment of blacks, despaired at the images appearing on television.”³⁸ However, as widespread as it is, the “stories and pictures” argument does not withstand scrutiny.³⁹

The “stories and pictures” argument overemphasizes the activist nature of “white moderate” journalists, ignores the economic realities of the American media industry, and fails to acknowledge the role that black journalists played in social and political change before white journalists even paid attention to what they were doing. Media history has shown that rhetorical change comes at a fairly slow rate, which cannot be challenged by the way a single journalist or editor tells a story. Atlanta journalists and editors took over four decades to change the city’s reputation as the home of the Ku Klux Klan, and many voices contributed to that change. There were numerous black voices within the weekly *Atlanta Independent*, a few black voices writing

³⁵ William L. O'Neill, *American High: The Years of Confidence, 1945-1960* (New York: The Free Press, 1986), 255.

³⁶ Michael J. Klarman, *From Jim Crow to Civil Rights: The Supreme Court and the Struggle for Racial Equality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 188.

³⁷ Michael J. Klarman, *From Jim Crow to Civil Rights*, 364.

³⁸ G. Calvin Mackenzie and Robert Weisbrot, *The Liberal Hour: Washington and the Politics of Change in the 1960s* (New York: The Penguin Press, 2008), 150.

³⁹ Simeon Booker, *Shocking the Conscience: A Reporter’s Account of the Civil Rights Movement* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2013), xii.

within the *Atlanta Constitution*, a chorus of black voices printed within the *Atlanta Daily World*, and another black voice within the *Atlanta Journal*, as well as the white editors and journalists who argued for incrementalist political positions because of economic pressures. Over the four decades of this study, Atlanta's white newspapers began to cover the city's struggle with racial conflict, inviting white readers to complicate their imagined visions of the local black community. And as these steady and subtle changes were introduced to white newspaper coverage of the local black community, it became possible in the 1940s for the *Atlanta Constitution* to promote incremental social political change like the hiring of black police officers and the dismantling of the white primary system.

This study seeks to examine how Atlanta's newspaper editors and journalists struggled to shape the city's national reputation on race and sought to change white newspaper coverage to reflect the reality of Atlanta's diverse population. From coverage of the Ku Klux Klan, white heritage projects and federal anti-lynching legislation during the 1920s and 1930s to coverage of public demonstrations in the late 1940s and 1950s, Atlanta's white newspaper editors and journalists were regularly involved in making key decisions about how to frame Atlanta's racial image, and those decisions reflected the biases inherent within their respective communities. Influencing their stances, however, were several national events that cast new light on southern racism. These events include the 1920s census that showed a marked decline in black southern population numbers, the fall in popularity of the national Ku Klux Klan organization, the national phenomenon of *Gone with the Wind*, the Nazi movement within Germany, and the return of black soldiers from World War II. At each stage, Atlanta's newspaper industry was faced with a choice about how to present these events to their readers. Over time, their coverage and editorials slowly shifted away from promoting white supremacist ideologies to promoting

“white moderate” positions and ultimately even incrementalist change toward black equality.

Atlanta’s Newspaper Industry Before 1920

Atlanta’s newspapers have struggled with shaping the city’s reputation since the Civil War, but it was during the late 1880s that the *Atlanta Constitution* and *Atlanta Journal* first became embroiled in a debate over whether the city’s newspapers should promote a vision of the region as a “New South” that encouraged economic innovation and industrialization, or an “Old South” that maintained the region’s historic agrarian foundations. Many scholars have questioned the exact meaning of the phrase “New South,” because it was a “propagandistic slogan” rather than a true economic vision.⁴⁰ C. Vann Woodward lamented the use of the term in his classic 1951 book, *Origins of the New South: 1877-1913*, arguing that the term needed to be “disinfected as much as possible.”⁴¹ Paul M. Gaston notes that the conflict within New South historiography is actually much more indicative of a conflict within the larger field, as historians “have never agreed on the central characteristics of Southern history.”⁴² For Henry Grady, the editor-in-chief of the *Atlanta Constitution* starting in 1883, promoting the “New South” meant maintaining white supremacy while encouraging economic innovation modeled after the North’s industrialization. Grady argued that the North needed to allow the South “to settle the social relations of the races according to her own views of what is right and best.”⁴³ He believed that Southern newspapers should promote “the inferiority of the Negro race” but also uphold the paternalist vision that “some Negroes were doing well.”⁴⁴ Overall, the policy assumed that a

⁴⁰ Reiko Margarita Hillyer, *Designing Dixie: Landscape, Tourism, and Memory in the New South, 1870-1917* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia, 2007), 2.

⁴¹ C. Van Woodward, *A History of the South: Origins of the New South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana University Press, 1951), ix

⁴² Paul M. Gaston, *The New South Creed: A Study in Southern Mythmaking* (Montgomery: New South Books, 1970), 27.

⁴³ Henry W. Grady, *The New South, Writings and Speeches of Henry Grady* (Savannah: Beehive Press, 1971).

⁴⁴ Henry W. Grady, “Mr. Grady on the Negro,” *Atlanta Constitution*, April 12, 1885, 6.

Southern newspaper editor's primary responsibility was to undermine the north-south sectional divide and help frame Southern society as more appealing to Northern industrial investors.

Grady turned the *Atlanta Constitution* into the city's most vocal urban booster and used his editorial position to exercise political power. In 1881, Grady used his newspaper offices to hold organizational meetings for the International Cotton Exposition and turned the *Constitution* into the campaign's "unofficial organ" by "solicit[ing] local funds and moral support by inundating its readers with news and promises of the harvests that the city would reap." As Tera Hunter argues, Grady used the front pages of the *Atlanta Constitution* to attack the 1881 Washerwomen Society strike, by arguing that if they "persist[ed] in their exorbitant demands they [would] see house rent going up so rapidly that they [would] have to vacate." His threats fell on deaf ears though, as the International Cotton Exposition ground to a halt with over 20,000 African American strikers locking up the streets for three weeks. While the Exposition was still a success, the event showed just how much of a white supremacist Henry Grady was. His criticisms of the Washerwomen Strike were racist and destructive. And yet, the Exposition's success garnered Grady significant popularity within the Georgia Democratic Party. He even used his editorial spaces to promote white supremacist politicians like John B. Gordon, former Confederate general and original Grand Dragon of the first Ku Klux Klan.⁴⁵

Henry Grady's white supremacist ideals also carried over in his editorial policies toward lynching. He was a vociferous defender of punishing alleged black crimes, although he claimed to be against the public display of violence. On May 2, 1888, for example, Henry Pope was lynched for the alleged rape of a white girl in Summerville, Georgia. Grady called the accusations "heinous" and argued that Pope "deserved his fate," but attempted to qualify his

⁴⁵ Tera W. Hunter, *To 'Joy My Freedom: Southern Black Women's Lives and Labors after the Civil War* (Harvard Press, 1997), 88,92.

defense of lynching with a statement that “a great many good people of the country regret the triumph of mob law.”⁴⁶ This was the struggle of the New South ideal, which demanded that Atlanta’s editors defend the city from the negative publicity while continuing to promote white supremacy.

Grady’s New South vision was exceedingly popular. Two years after Grady died, the city constructed a prominent statue of him in downtown Atlanta. Between 1892 and 1947, a hospital, the University of Georgia School of Journalism, a hotel, and a high school would all be named in his honor, although there has recently been controversy at the high school about their namesake.⁴⁷ Of course, Henry Grady represented just one newspaper editor’s vision of the city. Like the *Constitution*, the *Journal* was dedicated to the Democratic Party, and like Henry Grady, *Journal* owner and editor Hoke Smith used his editorial position to exercise political power, which he would ultimately capitalize on in his campaign to become governor of Georgia. By 1887, Hoke Smith had bought controlling interest in the *Journal*, sculpting the paper to promote the editorial vision of the “Old South,” a competing conservative vision aimed at maintaining white supremacy while rebuilding the region’s agrarian economic foundations as opposed to encouraging industrialism. By 1888 the *Journal* reached 7,500 subscriptions as compared to the *Constitution*’s 10,000.⁴⁸ Smith used the paper’s sponsorship of the Grover Cleveland presidential campaign to propel himself into a position on Cleveland’s cabinet, but returned to edit the *Atlanta Journal* in 1896, by which time the paper had 18,033 subscriptions, compared to the *Constitution*’s 20,000.⁴⁹ By 1899, the *Atlanta Journal* surpassed the *Constitution*’s 18,633

⁴⁶ Harold E. Davis, *Henry Grady’s New South: Atlanta A Brave and Beautiful City* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 1990), 149.

⁴⁷ Raisa Habersham, “Grady High School Students Call for School Name Change,” *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, February 10, 2020, <https://www.ajc.com/news/local/grady-high-school-students-call-for-school-name-change/fEV4GL25rqnpGrUxNEIF9O/>.

⁴⁸ N.W. Ayer & Son’s *American Newspaper Annual* (Philadelphia: N.W. Ayer & Son, 1882).

⁴⁹ N.W. Ayer & Son’s *American Newspaper Annual* (Philadelphia: N.W. Ayer & Son, 1896).

subscriptions by almost ten thousand with 27,893 subscriptions.⁵⁰

During the late 19th century, as the *Journal* and *Constitution* competed for white readers, black Atlantans searched for other sources to represent their interests. Earlier years had seen the circulation of outside black newspapers like the *Augusta Georgia Baptist*, the paper W. E. B. Du Bois called “probably the most universally read Negro paper in the South.”⁵¹ The first black newspaper in Atlanta, the *Weekly Defiance*, was launched in 1881 by William A. Pledger, the founder of the *Athens Blade*, to “demand more rights for blacks.” By and large, late 19th century Atlanta was an unfriendly environment to black newspapers. Emerging black newspapers struggled with poor circulation rates, threats of violence from whites, and the dominance of white newspapers within the region that made profitability difficult. In response, many of Atlanta’s black newspaper owners “used their papers primarily to promote the elevation of blacks” and “challenge the white press’ false” images of Atlanta’s black community.⁵² The *Athens Blade* reached 600 circulation before it collapsed, but the *Weekly Defiance* reached a peak circulation of 4500 in 1882, before it collapsed in 1889.⁵³

When Henry Grady died in 1889, Clark Howell took over as the *Atlanta Constitution*’s editor-in-chief. Howell had been studying under Henry Grady and perpetuated many of Grady’s ideals. Where Howell differed most from his predecessor, however, is in his vision of the newspaper’s responsibility toward Atlanta’s black community. On September 8, 1895, Howell published Dr. Henry Rutherford Butler’s weekly news article entitled “Matters concerning the progress and development of the colored race.” Butler represented what Howell wanted the black

⁵⁰ N.W. Ayer & Son's *American Newspaper Annual* (Philadelphia: N.W. Ayer & Son, 1899).

⁵¹ Edward J. Cashin, Glenn T. Eskew, “Standing on a Volcano: The Leadership of William Jefferson White,” *Paternalism in a Southern City* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2012); Donald Lee Grant, *The Way It Was in the South* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2001); Sarah H. Case, *Leaders of Their Race* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2017).

⁵² Donald Lee Grant, *The Way It Was in the South* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2001), 257–258.

⁵³ N.W. Ayer & Son's *American Newspaper Annual* (Philadelphia: N.W. Ayer & Son, 1882).

community to be represented as. Dr. Henry Rutherford Butler was a black Atlantan physician who received his bachelor's degree from Lincoln University and his M.D. from the Meharry Medical College.⁵⁴ Butler had begun practicing medicine within Atlanta, Georgia immediately upon his graduation, becoming one of the first black physicians within the city. Over the next few years, Butler even helped found the local Atlanta medical society, the Georgia State Medical Society, and the National Medical Association.⁵⁵ Butler was a prolific writer, having published letters to the editor in the *Atlanta Constitution* numerous times, offering his opinion about the city's struggle with fraudulent medicines.⁵⁶ Through his correspondence with Butler, Howell became convinced that Butler could validate Howell's readers assumptions of what white paternalism has done for the city's black community.

Clark Howell's support—as early as 1895—for what would later become known as the “Jim Crow column, labeled and identified as ‘Colored or Negro News,’” as civil rights scholar Katie G. Cannon describes it, is important to the city's struggle for race.⁵⁷ Scholarly discussion of the Jim Crow column phenomenon is sparse. But in 1928, the *Atlanta Independent* called the helpfulness of the *Constitution's* Jim Crow column into question, arguing that the publication of such columns in white newspapers threatened the very existence of the independent black press.⁵⁸ By 1944, Baltimore *Afro-American* reporter Elizabeth Meijer would argue that she was unsure about such columns' value: “the papers carrying these Jim Crow columns are more apt to

⁵⁴ Henry Rutherford Butler, “What the Negro is Doing: Matters Concerning the Progress and Development of the Colored Race,” *Atlanta Constitution*, September 8, 1895, a5.

⁵⁵ More about Henry Rutherford Butler's work as a cutting-edge physician during the development of Jim Crow can be found in Thomas J. Ward, *Black Physicians in the Jim Crow South* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2003), Nancy Tomes, *The Gospel of Germs: Men, Women, and the Microbe in American Life* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998).

⁵⁶ Henry R. Butler, “That Doctors' Bill Discussed,” *Atlanta Constitution*, November 26, 1894, 4.

⁵⁷ Katie G. Cannon, “Race, Sex, and Insanity: Transformative Eschatology in Hurston's Account of the Ruby McCollum Trial,” in *Liberating Eschatology: Essays in Honor of Letty M. Russell* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1999), 79-80.

⁵⁸ “Negro Leaders Advocate Jim Crow Columns in White Papers,” *Atlanta Independent*, May 3, 1928.

spell ‘Negro’ with a capital ‘N’ and use courtesy titles, but is that enough progress to condone the perpetuation of a segregated way of life in people’s minds?”⁵⁹ By 1949, the “Jim Crow column” would be a major weekly feature in almost all white southern newspapers.⁶⁰ But in 1895, a weekly column by an African American in a white newspaper was a rare phenomenon, and Butler’s column persisted against all odds for eight years. By 1904, however, the column had become sporadic, with Butler issuing his final column on August 8 of that year, two years before the city’s most violent race riot. It is unclear why Butler stopped publishing his column in the *Atlanta Constitution*, but since he immediately began publishing the column within Atlanta’s new major black newspaper, the *Atlanta Independent*, Atlanta’s media spaces became even more segregated after the turn of the century.

Apart from Butler’s column, at the turn of the century, Atlanta’s white and black newspapers were producing racially biased content aimed at reflecting their respective communities. This meant that Atlanta’s white newspapers began churning out more and more content alleging black criminality, which put a massive strain on the city’s race relations. To add to this tension, Atlanta’s newspaper owners also set their sights on the Georgia governorship. In 1900, Hoke Smith sold his shares in the *Journal* to James Gray, so Smith could focus on building up his political connections and allow the *Journal* to report independently. At the *Constitution*, Clark Howell bought out William Hemphill’s shares after he passed away on August 17, 1902, which made him the sole owner of the paper. This meant that each of Atlanta’s two major white newspapers were owned and operated by their respective editors. The independence of the *Journal* was an illusion, however, because even though Hoke Smith had sold his interests in the paper, it would become clear that James Gray would promote Smith’s arguments unquestionably.

⁵⁹ Elizabeth Meijer, “White Viewpoint As I See It,” *Afro-American*, February 7, 1948, M-4.

⁶⁰ Southern Regional Council, Inc, *Race in the News* (Atlanta: Southern Regional Council, Inc, 1949).

By the turn of the century, Atlanta's newspapers had come, largely, to represent their editors' visions for the city, and Clark Howell's *Atlanta Constitution* represented the "white moderate" perspective on race. When African American Sam Hose was accused of murdering his white boss Alfred Cranford with an axe after Cranford refused to pay him his wages, Clark Howell organized a monetary award through the *Atlanta Constitution* for the arrest and fair trial of Hose, with the intention of avoiding mob violence. However, salacious rumors began circulating that Hose had also raped Cranford's wife, and Hose was lynched before W.E.B. Du Bois was able to send his written editorial in defense of Hose to Howell. DuBois recounts that he learned of the mob violence by hearing that Hose's "knuckles were on exhibition at a grocery store farther down on Mitchell Street." For Du Bois, this seminal moment challenged his ability to be objective. He argued that "one could not be a calm, cool, and detached scientist when Negroes were lynched, murdered, and starved." But this moment also demonstrates how Clark Howell's *Atlanta Constitution* had become seen as the more moderate voice on race within the city, if W.E.B. Du Bois believed that there was a chance the paper might publish his editorial.⁶¹

Clark Howell's reputation as a racial moderate became scarred during the 1906 gubernatorial election, however. Hoke Smith's former newspaper, the *Atlanta Journal*, represented the fear and anger of white supremacist Atlanta, and the former editor based his entire campaign for Governor on his supporter's fear of black equality. The first step of this process was securing the support of Thomas E. Watson and his white supremacist *People's Party Paper*. Smith achieved this by agreeing to Watson that he would support the amend the state

⁶¹ To find more information on Sam Hose's lynching and the *Atlanta Constitution's* role in covering it, see W.E.B. Du Bois's accounting of the events in W.E.B. Du Bois, *Dusk of Dawn: An Essay Toward an Autobiography of a Race Concept* (New York: Harcourt, 1940); other accounts appear in a number of biographies, including Ryan P. Randolph, *W.E.B. Du Bois: The Fight for Civil Rights* (New York: Rosen Publishing Group, 2005), Tonya Bolden, *W.E.B. Du Bois: A Twentieth-Century Life* (New York: Penguin Group, 2008), etc.

constitution with the inclusion of a Grandfather Clause stating that the only Georgians who could vote were individuals whose relatives before 1865 could vote. With Smith's support for the amendment, Watson began immediately promoting Smith's candidacy and publishing scandalous accounts of possible black violence. The city also saw two new papers begin circulation that summer, the *Atlanta Evening News* and the *Atlanta Georgian*. Their editors, Charles Daniels and John Temple Graves, respectively, were just as prolific as the *Constitution* and the *Journal* at publishing racist editorials portraying Atlanta's black males as violent rapists. That summer saw white southern women report several accusations of rape referencing often anonymous black men, as Rebecca Burns reports, with Allie Laurie Poole in June, Georgia Hembree and Ethel Lawrence in August, and Knowles Kimmel in September. Clark Howell even joined the debate, arguing that the uptick in black violence was due to the highly racist campaign run by Tom Watson and Hoke Smith aimed at disenfranchising the black community. The *Atlanta Journal* argued the exact opposite, saying that Clark Howell's attempts to give "the negro encouragement to believe he can ever be a factor in politics" was responsible for giving them "dreams of a mixture of races." By September of 1906, both the *Atlanta Journal* and the *Atlanta Constitution* began blaming Atlanta's black community for harboring alleged rapists. Even the *Atlanta Independent*, the city's major black newspaper, agreed that Atlanta's black community was "humiliated... and disgraced" by "the recent fiendish and inexcusable outbreaks and assaults by certain inhuman black brutes who happen to be connected to our race." As more reports surfaced, Atlanta's newspapers began releasing extra single sheet late editions, feeding into this growing panic.⁶²

The city finally snapped on Saturday, September 22, 1906, when crowds of white men

⁶² Rebecca Burns *Rage in the Gate City: The Story of the 1906 Atlanta Race Riot* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2009), 13, 53-54, 104-108, 141-142.

began congregating near Peachtree Street. By the next day, the state militia was mobilized to patrol the streets, and black Atlantans armed themselves to protect their neighborhoods. The resulting violence lasted three days. By the end of the riot, as historian David Fort Godshalk notes, the deaths were “grossly underreported.” Reports during the period kept surfacing that many of the bodies simply vanished from the streets. At least six black Atlantans were killed, including William Henry Welsh, a barber, and Annie Laurle Shepard.⁶³ And Atlanta’s newspaper industry was clearly seen as connected to the violence by white rioters, who left the bodies of three black citizens at the foot of Henry Grady’s statue. The city’s economic and political elites called town hall meetings, where they tried to seek solutions to avoid this kind of violence in the future. The riot had such an effect on the city’s newspaper industry that *Constitution* editor Eugene Patterson would later argue that “white civic leaders never allowed journalists to forget their role in sparking the 1906 riot.”⁶⁴ After the meetings, Atlanta’s newspapers agreed to stop running extra late editions, instead letting the information come out in the normal cycle of news.⁶⁵ As historian Rebecca Burns argues, Howell “correctly assumed that observers in other parts of the country would look to what happened in Atlanta as a harbinger of violence throughout the South.” Publishing multiple editorials that openly criticized the city’s handling of the riot, the *Constitution* became an integral part of the conferences and petitions that tried to stop future riots from happening.⁶⁶

After the 1906 riot, Atlanta’s black newspapers faced immense economic and political pressure from white elites to protect the city’s reputation, and even from other black leaders who argued that criticizing the violence might cause the violence to return. *The Voice of the Negro*, an

⁶³ “Many Killed, Many Injured,” *Atlanta Constitution*, September 24, 1906, 1.

⁶⁴ David Fort Godshalk, *Veiled Visions*, 263.

⁶⁵ David Fort Godshalk, *Veiled Visions*, 260.

⁶⁶ Rebecca Burns, *Rage in the Gate City*, 141-142.

Atlanta-based literary journal, garnered a significant amount of popularity outside of Atlanta until the journal started criticizing the city's white elites for letting the violence start. Following the publication of this criticism, Booker T. Washington spent considerable resources trying to gain control over the *Voice*, which ultimately shut down by 1907. The black Republican newspaper, *Age*, did not survive very long after 1907 either. However, the city's larger black newspaper, the *Independent*, did survive, growing from 7,125 circulation in 1906 to 19,000 by 1913. The *Constitution* even declared the *Independent* "one of the ablest negro papers published in the South" and its editor B.J. Davis "intelligent." The *Constitution* praised Davis for recognizing "that the enfranchisement of the negro without qualification was a monumental wrong inflicting more permanent injury upon the very people congress was seeking to protect."⁶⁷ In this way the *Independent* and B.J. Davis walked the fine line of receiving broad advertisement and support from both white and black communities, while maintaining a financially stable position within Atlanta's increasingly racially biased newspaper coverage. Davis' approach worked, as the paper stayed in print, reaching a reported 19,000 run circulation rate by 1913.⁶⁸

Another effect of the 1906 riot was to make local white and black newspapers painfully aware of how much national attention racialized violence would bring the city. After 1906, Atlanta's white and black newspapers became sensitive to their ability to stoke emotions and began putting into place editorial policies to try to mitigate future violence. But, Atlanta's newspapers were still profit-driven enterprises, aimed at attracting large readerships. Clark Howell's *Atlanta Constitution* was built to be more politically flexible after the riot, taking

⁶⁷ "The Negro and Politics," *Atlanta Constitution* July 31, 1904, A4.

⁶⁸ *N.W. Ayer & Son's American Newspaper Annual* (Philadelphia: N.W. Ayer & Son, 1907); *N.W. Ayer & Son's American Newspaper Annual* (Philadelphia: N.W. Ayer & Son, 1913); *N.W. Ayer & Son's American Newspaper Annual* (Philadelphia: N.W. Ayer & Son, 1915); *N.W. Ayer & Son's American Newspaper Annual* (Philadelphia: N.W. Ayer & Son, 1922).

chances promoting industry and the railroad systems, while James Gray's *Atlanta Journal* promoted more conservative agrarian policies that helped Hoke Smith maintain a lengthy career within politics.⁶⁹ In many ways, this was how Atlanta's white newspapers survived, by dividing white readers into New South and Old South political supporters. But soon, white Atlanta readers would be covered by a third major white daily newspaper that threatened to disrupt the market.

In 1912, William Randolph Hearst, owner of the *New York World* and several other newspapers across the nation, purchased controlling ownership of the *Atlanta Georgian*.⁷⁰ The purchase fundamentally changed the nature of Atlanta's newspaper industry by injecting the very same sensationalist reporting that the 1906 riot had tamped down.⁷¹ The sensationalist nature of the *Georgian's* reporting became particularly relevant on April 27, 1913, when thirteen-year-old Mary Phagan was found dead in the National Pencil Company factory. Even though Phagan had been laid off just six days earlier, she visited the site to pick up her last check on April 26. The murder of Mary Phagan became a major story within the city, and the drama Hearst's newspaper began to shape started attracting negative national attention for the city once again.

The *Atlanta Constitution* actually broke the story, but it was the *Atlanta Georgian's* lurid headlines that shaped how much of the story unfolded. As historian Clement Charlton Moseley writes, "There can be little doubt that the public sentiment which slowly took shape... was the result of the news reporting policies of two of the leading Atlanta daily papers."⁷² Police found themselves struggling to identify the culprit, running through various possibilities before settling on Leo Frank, the factory's Jewish-American manager. On May 23, 1913, Leo Frank's trial

⁶⁹ C. Vann Woodward, *Tom Watson: Agrarian Rebel* (New York: MacMillan Company, 1938); David Fort Godshalk, *Veiled Visions*.

⁷⁰ David Nasaw, *The Chief: The Life of William Randolph Hearst* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2001), 233.

⁷¹ Clement Charlton Moseley, "The Case of Leo M. Frank, 1913-1915," *The Georgia Historical Quarterly* 51, no. 1 (1967): 41.

⁷² Clement Charlton Moseley, "The Case of Leo M. Frank, 1913-1915," 43.

began. Just like the investigation of Mary Phagan's death, Atlanta's newspapers went to great lengths covering the Leo Frank trial. By this time, Leo Frank's trial had already become a national sensation, with the *New York Times* running multiple stories. The *Georgian* dramatized the trial by playing up racial conflict in sensationalist narratives, per the usual Hearst approach to news coverage. The *Georgian* produced "maudlin news reports, effective drawings of courtroom scenes, and provocative editorials" that proclaimed Leo M. Frank, the Jewish factory manager accused of the crime, as guilty.⁷³ In a bid to not be left behind, Clark Howell's *Constitution* also began publishing evidence from the trial, including a stunning affidavit from a local madam destroying Leo Frank's reputation. Later, the affidavit was proven false with evidence that police coercion was integral to achieving the testimony.

After the Supreme Court's rejection of the appeal, the *Atlanta Journal* began to openly question Frank's guilt. After the final argument was heard, the *Atlanta Journal* requested that the judge postpone the case by a day to let tempers settle, "because it was known that verdict of acquittal would cause a riot such as would shock the country and cause Atlanta's streets to run with innocent blood." The fifth Georgia Infantry regiment was mobilized to protect the jury during the final deliberations but after less than four hours of deliberation, Leo Frank was found guilty with a date of execution set of October 10, 1913. The *Atlanta Journal* announced, "Leo Frank has not had a fair trial... he has not been fairly convicted, and his death without a fair trial and legal conviction will amount to judicial murder." Even the judge admitted to ignorance as to Leo Frank's guilt. Over the next few years, Frank's lawyers appealed the verdict, but finally on April 19, 1915 the US Supreme court denied hearing Leo Frank's appeal. Georgia Governor John Slaton ultimately commuted Frank's sentence to life in prison, but fervor behind the case

⁷³ Louis Turner Griffith and John Erwin Talmadge, *Georgia Journalism, 1763-1950* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1951).

was too extensive. On August 16, 1915, a group of twenty-five men attacked the penitentiary and lynched Frank.⁷⁴

Facing national criticism yet again for stoking the flames of ethnic hate, Atlanta's white newspapers found themselves again facing the ramifications of white supremacist violence. This time though, their own newspaper institutions were directly connected to the violence. As Steve Oney argues, the three major newspapers never "ventured even a comment on the perfunctory finale to the affair that had captivated the city for two and a half years." Clark Howell, owner and editor of the *Atlanta Constitution*, was outed by northern publications because his first cousin, Robert E. Lee Howell, was seen whipping the crowd up in a fervor and dancing "a jig on Frank's face." Oney argued that "so sensitive were Atlanta publications to Howell's part in things that his name did not appear in any of their accounts." Similarly, the *Georgian* dedicated a significant portion of its post-trial coverage to arguing for the commutation of Leo Frank's sentence, which ultimately resulted in the loss of "a substantial number of readers and suffered a corresponding decline in advertising revenue." The trial and lynching of Leo Frank became the second devastating rejoinder to Atlanta's newspapers against the sensationalist news coverage that erupted at the beginning of the trial. After the lynching of Leo Frank, Atlanta newspapers became more outspoken in their criticism of mob violence, although the white newspapers continued to promote white heritage projects and confederate ideas. They consistently argued that the city's national reputation was important to maintain.⁷⁵

The Focus of This Study

Like many other cities after 1920, Atlanta saw the rise of the Ku Klux Klan within its

⁷⁴ Clement Charlton Moseley, "The Case of Leo M. Frank, 1913-1915," 47.

⁷⁵ Steve Oney, *And the Dead Shall Rise: The Murder of Mary Phagan and the Lynching of Leo Frank* (New York: Vintage Books, 2004), 589, 590.

borders, but for the Klan Atlanta was home. This left Atlanta's editors in a complicated position as they shaped the city's national reputation around this new threat of white supremacist vigilantism. And all this growth occurred during an era when the United States media industry was both expanding its reach, all the while consolidating its diversity. In 1920, as radio stations began broadcasting national programs, Atlanta's newspapers found their news coverage and editorials appearing side by side with northern mainstream content. As Associated Press dispatches were read verbatim over the air, and radio operators invited newspaper editorialists into the station to discuss their arguments, Atlanta's newspapers found themselves shifting their news coverage and editorials to fit a more national perspective. Much of this early broadcasting system augmented rather than replaced the city's newspaper coverage, because in many ways Atlanta's newspapers were in direct control of the burgeoning radio industry. The very "competitive environment" and "struggle for local control" that economic media historian Elizabeth MacIver Neiva describes as a national phenomenon in the early 1950s was already underway in Atlanta by 1920 with William Randolph Hearst's purchase of the *Atlanta Georgian*.⁷⁶ James Middleton Cox would continue the trend in 1939 with the purchase of the *Atlanta Journal*, *Atlanta Georgian*, and WSB-Radio in 1939, and then again in 1950 with the purchase of the *Atlanta Constitution*. While the Atlanta's white newspaper industry consolidated during the early twentieth century, the city's black newspaper market grew with the founding of the first black daily newspaper in 1928. The dynamic nature of Atlanta's media industry during this period directly reflected the growth of the city. Between 1920 and 1930, Atlanta added close to seventy thousand residents, which increased the city's population by 35%. Between 1940 and 1950, the city added another 156,141 residents, growing 47%.

⁷⁶ Elizabeth MacIver Neiva, "Chain Building: The Consolidation of the American Newspaper Industry, 1953-1980," *The Business History Review*, 70, no. 1 (Spring 1996): 3, 4.

The growth of the city, the expansion of the city's media industry, and the dynamic nature of Atlanta's racial image are all interrelated. After the Civil War, The *Atlanta Constitution* worked to foster a faith in New South economics and perpetuate the city's dedication to white heritage. Their work became encoded not only within the city's white newspapers, radio programs, and television shows, but also within the city's literature, film and monuments. As historian Reiko Hillyer argues, Atlanta's urban elites were dedicated to divorcing the city from the image of southern cultural backwardness, and they dedicated an immense amount of resources to accomplish this. Monuments, Hillyer argues, played an integral role in advertising the New South message to northern advertisers.⁷⁷ The Stone Mountain Confederate Memorial still stands as a testament to such efforts to shape white supremacy into a nationally appealing message. Atlanta newspapers' focus on freely publicizing the city's economic interests helped boost the city's national appeal. Moses W. Harris, Georgian president of Hancock National Bank of Sparta, recounted in 1923 the fervor he received when visiting other cities, noting that Atlanta's newspapers had done well producing "advertisements for Atlanta, and the state."⁷⁸ In 1928, Stiles A. Martin, manager of the Southern Press Clipping Bureau and contributor to the Atlanta Chamber of Commerce's monthly magazine *City Builder*, argued that the newspapers were "everlasting boosters" for Atlanta's image, the "one thing that contributed most to the [city's] success... printing any item of news, no matter how short" that promoted Atlanta's economics, "giving full particulars without any thought as to who [was] getting publicity or advertising out of it."⁷⁹

⁷⁷ Reiko Hillyer, *Designing Dixie*, 4.

⁷⁸ Harris, Moses W., "The Meaning of the Stone Mountain Memorial to Atlanta---and To State," *Atlanta Constitution*, October 21, 1923, C4.

⁷⁹ Stiles A. Martin, "What the Newspapers Have Done for Atlanta," *City Builder Magazine*, March 1923, 3, Kenan Research Center, Atlanta History Center.

This relationship between Atlanta's newspapers and the city's business interests complicated the city's coverage of racial issues during this period. There have been several local media histories focused on studying issues of race in other southern cities, but most of these focus on a very short period of time, do not discuss the cultural tradition that led to the editorial policy in question, and gloss over the economic pressures faced by the newspapers during the period of study. Sociologist Naomi Thorpe describes the *Constitution's* editorial policy during the Great Depression "as liberal," even though it also promoted the "proper and adequate racial distinction" necessitated by the South.⁸⁰ Journalism scholar Joan Zitzelman argues that WSB-TV's desire to serve "the principle of public interest" made their coverage of contemporary news events significantly progressive, as the station crafted documentaries on school and neighborhood desegregation in order to stave off the kind of communal discord experienced by many other southern cities, listing the many different awards won by the organization.⁸¹ Historian Eugene P. Walker reconsiders the *Constitution's* liberal reputation, by arguing that their coverage before World War I was heavily restrictive in shaping Atlanta's black community, so restrictive that it assumed the "limitations of [black] potential" in order to explain why white southerners were so stable.⁸² Historian Gloria Blackwell tells the story of the city's black-owned media outlets between 1960 and 1970, arguing that the struggle black-owned media operators experienced competing within Atlanta's larger white dominated media industry for popularity was far more difficult than previous scholars have explained.⁸³ Historian Felicia Bowens

⁸⁰ Naomi Thorpe, "The Editorial Policy of the Atlanta Constitution on the Negro 1931-1940," (master's thesis, Atlanta University, 1942), 54, <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/30604782.pdf>

⁸¹ Joan Zitzelman, "Programming in the Public Interest: a Perspective of WSB-Television, 1948-1963," (master's thesis, University of Georgia, 1961).

⁸² Eugene Pierce Walker, "Attitudes towards Negroes as reflected in the *Atlanta Constitution*, 1908-1918," (master's thesis, Atlanta University, 1969).

⁸³ Gloria Blackwell, "Black Controlled Media In Atlanta, 1960-1970: The Burden of the Message and the Struggle for Survival," (PhD diss., Emory University, 1973).

Anderson expands on Blackwell's argument, by comparing and contrasting the *Atlanta Constitution* and the *Atlanta Daily World's* editorial policies on covering sit-in movements during the early 1960s, noting that both newspapers adopted very similar editorial policies.⁸⁴ Historian Thomas Aiello expands the analysis of the *Atlanta Daily World* far beyond the city's borders, to tell the story of the Scott Newspaper Syndicate, which he calls *The Grapevine of the Black South*. More than these other scholars, Aiello's argument gives a much more cohesive understanding of how Atlanta's black media struggled to grow within the South, and it also gives a much more clear understanding of how integral black newspapers were to narrating the black experience.⁸⁵

All of these scholars select particular moments to examine, and each often only examines one aspect of the newspapers' struggle with race. Almost all of these scholars focus on how newspapers discuss the growth of the black community, but none of them compare this perspective with newspaper coverage of white supremacist ideals in order to get a holistic view of the newspapers' coverage of issues of race. This is a costly oversight, since focusing solely on the newspapers' coverage of either of the issues plays into the very narratives propagated by Atlanta's newspaper industry. By constructing this a "white moderate" vision for progress, Atlanta's media industry was literally silencing those views that did not fit within their own vision of the city. It kept the city's identity fluid and gave its politicians the evidence necessary to respond to the changing national landscape on race. The two sets of issues are related and examining them together illustrates just how focused Atlanta's newspapers were on building a "white moderate" image for the city, an image that ironically obstructed progress toward real

⁸⁴ Felicia Bowens Anderson, "A Comparison of the Treatment on the Atlanta Sit-Ins (1960-1961) of the editorial pages of two Atlanta newspapers," (master's thesis, Atlanta University, 1984).

⁸⁵ Thomas Aiello, *The Grapevine of the Black South: The Scott Newspaper Syndicate in the Generation before the Civil Rights Movement* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2018).

black equality. By influencing the way their readers saw the city's struggle with race, Atlanta's newspapers were able to reconstruct the city's image as a haven of racial accord, but this "negative peace" as Martin Luther King Jr. might call it, came at the expense of real justice.

The reality is that Atlanta's white newspapers often worked hand in hand with the Atlanta Chamber of Commerce to sculpt the racial image most preferable to the business community, which meant shaping issues of race for a national audience, so that business owners could attract northern investors. Since Atlanta's white newspapers also needed to appeal to local readers in order to maintain their subscription numbers, this meant that they were forced to try to combine nationally and locally appealing narratives. While the Atlanta Chamber of Commerce argued that both racial violence and black migration away from the city would damage its economic growth, it was Clark Howell and other newspaper owners and editors who decided how to cover these issues. Contrary to Floyd Hunter's theory that newspaper owners and editors are third tier power brokers, newspaper owners and editors did not simply parrot the ideas brought up in the Chamber of Commerce meetings. They were active in the Chamber's decision-making. They argued about the stances the city should take on economic and political issues. In one meeting, Clark Howell offered a resolution in support of the formation of a regional export company.⁸⁶ In another, Ralph McGill argued before the Chamber that the city needed to "provide education and economic opportunities to the negro."⁸⁷

Although they did not have a voice in the Chamber of Commerce, Atlanta's black newspapers faced many of the same challenges as the city's white newspapers. They knew that even though the city's black economy was much smaller than its white counterpart, the larger

⁸⁶ Atlanta Chamber of Commerce Meeting Minutes for December 4, 1936, Box 3, Folder 6, Metro Atlanta Chamber of Commerce Records, Kenan Research Center, Atlanta History Center.

⁸⁷ Atlanta Chamber of Commerce Meeting Minutes, May 3, 1943, 3, Box 4, Folder 3, Kenan Research Center, Atlanta History Center.

city's economic growth inherently boosted their own communities. This is why Benjamin Davis of the *Atlanta Independent* and C.E. Scott of the *Atlanta Daily World* publicly sympathized with white heritage projects like the *Stone Mountain Confederate Memorial* and *Gone with the Wind*, while openly opposing the Ku Klux Klan. This is also why when there were rumors of public protests within the streets, C.E. Scott used his editorial clout to shut the protests down. Although Atlanta's newspaper coverage was racially biased, with white and black newspapers representing coverage in ways that appealed to their separate readerships, this singular vision of race and economics unified seemed to permeate all of Atlanta's newspapers. From the *Atlanta Constitution's* claim to be the largest southern newspaper, the *Atlanta Journal's* advertisement that it "Cover[ed] Dixie like the Dew," to WSB's claim that it was both the "Voice" and "Eyes" of the South, Atlanta media imagined the city as the iconic southern city. While this reputation has some merit, with the newspapers carrying large regional circulation rates and WSB launching both the first radio station and television station in the South, the claims are more telling as evidence of the city's need to reflect its own cultural and economic importance.

This study seeks to illustrate four key points that have not been argued previously regarding the development of Atlanta's newspaper industry. First, this study seeks to show that after 1920, Atlanta's newspapers saw the city beginning to develop a national reputation as the home of the Ku Klux Klan, which meant significant criticism from the national press. Because this new reputation evoked memories of the 1906 Race Riot that did not sit well with the city's business interests, newspaper editor Clark Howell forged a "white moderate" stance on race for the *Atlanta Constitution*, which would become the standard editorial policy of the city's major white newspapers including the *Atlanta Journal*. Second, this study seeks to prove that this stance was constructed to meet Atlanta's newspapers' competing interests, which were heavily

invested in both the city's economic growth from northern investment and in maintaining and growing their local and regional readership. This meant that Atlanta's white and black newspaper editors were often in awkward positions trying to bridge all of these different diverse communities. Third, this study argues that over time Atlanta's newspapers treated arguments from both white and black communities on racial issues in similar, but racially biased, ways. Using racially biased news coverage and editorials to discuss socially acceptable racial issues, and silencing what they thought were socially unacceptable viewpoints, Atlanta's newspaper editors struggled to frame the city's stance on race in as positive a light as possible to meet both social and economic pressures. Fourth, this study seeks to complicate the vision that journalism scholars have about coverage of the Atlanta civil rights movement by highlighting how integral southern newspapers were in undermining true black equality in the region. Throughout this period, black southerners used all the tools they had to push for change, but the "white moderate" media industry was slow to embrace even incrementalist change. In 1920, African American sociologist and early civil rights leader Jesse O. Thomas was able to pen a weekly column within an almost uniformly white publication, the *Atlanta Constitution*. And yet, Thomas was only able to use that column to promote incrementalist rhetorical change for Atlanta's black community. In many ways, Thomas was an early promoter of what Tomiko Brown-Nagin argues was the pragmatic civil rights movement.⁸⁸ This study validates the larger argument that black southerners found it incredibly important, if not also difficult, to control their own community's image within white newspapers. The study spans four decades, beginning in 1920 when Atlanta's newspapers struggled to frame the Stone Mountain Confederate Memorial in as positive a light as possible, and ending in the late 1950s with Ralph McGill's "One School, One

⁸⁸ Tomiko Brown-Nagin, *Courage to Dissent: Atlanta and the Long History of the Civil Rights Movement* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2012).

Temple” editorial that challenged the white southerner’s understanding of racialized violence. Every step of the way, Atlanta’s newspapers made clear decisions that presented an exaggeratedly positive vision of the city’s relationship with race, which does not hold up when measured against the experience of its black residents.

This study begins in chapter one by examining the *Atlanta Constitution* and the *Atlanta Journal*’s role in promoting the Stone Mountain Confederate Memorial project. The project itself was massively popular throughout Atlanta’s business community for the tourism dollars it promised to bring to the city’s economy. Attracted to the prestige, Atlanta’s newspapers began promoting the project unabashedly, calling for Atlantans to invest their own money in donations to the project. At the project’s inauguration, Atlanta’s three major white newspaper editors, Clark Howell of the *Atlanta Constitution*, James R. Gray of the *Atlanta Journal*, and James B. Nevin of the *Atlanta Georgian*, joined as members of the board of directors. Clark Howell even became a member of the organization’s board of directors. What followed was one of the largest free publicity campaigns the city’s newspapers had ever been involved in. Each of Atlanta’s white newspapers dedicated their editorial and news coverage columns to detailing the vision and progress of the monument, all the while requesting their readers donate money to help make the project a reality. Behind the scenes, the Stone Mountain Confederate Memorial Project became intertwined with Klan politics and much of that led to massive mismanagement of the project’s money, which ultimately led to the project’s bankruptcy. It was a delicate moment for Atlanta’s newspapers, because they had already shaped the project as the pivotal example to disprove the South’s reputation for cultural “backwardness.”⁸⁹ For many southerners, the monument was supposed to be a technical achievement no northerner could have achieved, but by 1925 the

⁸⁹ John T. Kneebone, *Southern Liberal Journalists and the Issue of Race, 1920-1944* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2011).

monument had become a financial disaster. The internal debate became an external one, fought on the front pages of the newspapers and within Atlanta's local courts. Atlanta's white newspapers became split on who they supported, and each stage of the process led further and further toward national embarrassment, as the city's dedication to Ku Klux Klan ideals made the national headlines.

Chapter two describes how, as the *Atlanta Journal* remained loyal to the Memorial project and the Klan, the *Atlanta Constitution* became much more worried about what white southern editors were calling the "Negro Exodus." The 1920 census had shown that black southerners were moving to the north at an alarming rate, so the *Atlanta Constitution* worked with the Atlanta Urban League to publish a weekly Bulletin trying to provide its readers with as positive an image as possible of Atlanta's black community. However, the *Atlanta Constitution* was steadily losing subscribers to both the *Atlanta Georgian* and the *Atlanta Journal*, and the only reason the *Constitution* was surviving was due to the sale of its tri-weekly paper, which was predominantly sold to rural readers. This created a complicated line the *Constitution* had to walk appealing to both groups, as Atlanta's black community began to support its own black newspaper, the *Atlanta Independent*. Coverage of federal anti-lynching legislation from this period shows how important it was for the *Constitution* to promote a positive image of the city's black community, as the newspaper attempted to balance two distinct populations, the white supremacist audiences that opposed the passage of federal lynching legislation and the city's growing black community.

Chapter three tells the story of how white and black newspapers unified to promote *Gone with the Wind*, both as a novel and then later as a film. The publication of Margaret Mitchell's racist and historically inaccurate novel motivated all of the city's newspapers to cover the

phenomenon, though the city's new black newspaper, the *Atlanta Daily World*, called into question the book's inaccurate representation of southern slavery. All of Atlanta's white newspapers heavily promoted both the film and book, mistakenly concluding that both were factually representative of the Civil War. Atlanta's white newspapers even found themselves dedicating editorial space to argue against northern publications who called into question those conclusions, citing reader responses as key parts of their evidence. *Gone with the Wind*'s popularity grew, bringing attention from national figures like Eleanor Roosevelt and several key Hollywood stars. Working behind the scenes, Atlanta's white newspaper editors convinced Atlanta's Chamber of Commerce to reshape the city's public streets to represent the Atlanta envisioned in the novel. Working with local historical organizations, Atlanta's newspapers and business committees began constructing historical markers highlighting major places of white heritage. These spots often privileged the city's white economic centers, inviting tourists to visit the locations and support local white industries. By 1939, the mayor had finished negotiating with Hollywood director David Selznick to allow Atlanta to host the film's world premiere, which became a major celebration that showed many Atlantans embracing their white southern heritage. With horse-drawn buggies being led down the streets and massive parades, *Gone with the Wind*'s premiere became a racist and inaccurate historical recreation event that reenacted and reimagined the city's white heritage.

If *Gone with the Wind* proved one thing to Atlanta's newspapers, it was that their complicated relationship with the Ku Klux Klan was hurting the city's national reputation. As the city celebrated the film's popularity, Ku Klux Klan members openly paraded in the street before journalists and photographers. Chapter four tells the story of how Atlanta's newspapers unified together to attempt to promote a much more diverse racial image of the city in the years

leading up to World War II. Starting in 1938 after experiencing firsthand the military expansion of Hitler's fascism into Vienna, *Constitution* editor Ralph McGill launched the city's newspaper industry into a full-scale fight against growing Ku Klux Klan sentiment within the city. Harnessing the anti-Nazi rhetoric being used by national publications, McGill openly attacked the Klan as an un-American institution aimed at destroying the very fabric of civilization. McGill was not alone, as the *Atlanta Journal* and the *Atlanta Daily World* also began publishing vehement attacks against the Ku Klux Klan, calling the organization destructive to the city's peace. The fight against the Klan ended in 1941 with all of Atlanta's newspapers unifying together to endorse the anti-Klan candidate for Governor, Ellis Arnall. This fight is integral to understanding the changing perspective on race within the city, because it overshadows to some degree a much deeper shift on race as the *Atlanta Journal* finally started publishing a weekly Bulletin written by the Atlanta Urban League executive secretary James C. McMorries called "News of Atlanta's Negro Community." In this way, 1938 became a pivotal point of transition when the city's "white moderate" campaign against white supremacy shifted into a campaign for incrementalist acceptance of black political equality.

After Ellis Arnall became governor in 1943, the state of Georgia saw numerous progressive changes with regard to black equality, which included the dismantling of the white primary system. Chapter five tells the story of how Atlanta's newspapers came face to face with a new form of public protests during and after World War II that they began trying to shape to fit their more positive vision of the city. Starting with the 1943 race riots that spread throughout the nation and frightened many urban centers, Ralph McGill began warning the city's civic leaders about growing discontent within Atlanta's black community. Not long after these warnings, Detroit experienced its own devastating riot, and Ralph McGill published editorials about the riot

to call attention away from the South as home to the nation's racial strife. This struggle on the national stage helped Atlanta's urban elites build a plan for covering their own struggles with public protests, which finally erupted three years later as soldiers began returning to the city from World War II. As the city began to buckle under the housing demands of these returning citizens, Atlanta found itself subject to public political demonstrations by not only civil rights activists, but also a newly formed group of white supremacists. These demonstrations were not as violent as the Detroit riot, and Atlanta's newspapers used their editorial spaces to downplay the violence and denounce public protest as a valid route to political change. In so doing, Atlanta's newspapers created new editorial policies for handling racial public protests, policies which would come into play later when the Atlanta civil rights movement shifted away from its pragmatic roots toward more activist protests.

What each of these chapters describes are newspapers struggling to balance varied readership interests, as they worked to keep up with changing national perspectives on race. The result was a shifting landscape within Atlanta where the newspaper industry slowly redefined the city's stances on racial issues in order to please as many audiences as possible. The ultimate effect of these shifts was that Atlanta moved more in line with northern interests, abandoning the bulwark of its southern defenses. Starting with the token integration of black voices into white newspaper coverage, Atlanta's newspapers struggled to reshape the city's racial reputation to fit national, regional and local demands. When covering white heritage projects like the Stone Mountain Confederate Memorial and *Gone with the Wind*, the city's newspapers framed them with the interests of both their readers and the city's economy in mind. These contradictions in both supporting white supremacist ideologies and promoting incrementalist progress toward black equality bring to light the newspaper editors' internal racial biases. To truly understand

how Atlanta's newspapers changed the city's racial image—from a symbol of the Lost Cause during the 1920s to Mayor Hartsfield's "lighthouse of... racial tolerance" during the late 1950s—one must understand all of the various social pressures that went into framing the city's reputation.

CHAPTER 1—SYMBOL OF THE LOST CAUSE: THE STONE MOUNTAIN CONFEDERATE MEMORIAL

Between 1894 and 1899, the *Atlanta Constitution* had lost 1,367 subscribers, which at the time was seven percent of its base. During that same period, the *Atlanta Journal*, the paper's major competitor, had gained 9,860 subscribers, which amounted to a growth of fifty-five percent. The *Atlanta Constitution* saw the writing on the wall: it was losing readers far too fast to be able to survive. By 1905, the newspaper's numbers had fallen further still, and *Constitution* editor Clark Howell began offering a tri-weekly subscription model designed to attract rural readers from outside of Atlanta, lowering the subscription price to \$1.15 a year and tailoring that subscription's content toward farming news. This was a massive bargain for new subscribers, since a daily and Sunday subscription cost \$9.50, a daily subscription cost \$7.50, and a Sunday subscription cost \$3.25. Howell also needed an entirely new delivery infrastructure, so he hired delivery drivers who helped him build "rural mail routes."⁹⁰ For Howell, the solution to the paper's dwindling local support was to begin courting a wider readership.

The new subscription model worked. By 1907, Howell boasted that the tri-weekly *Constitution* had 350,000 subscribers, with "post office receipts to prove circulation."⁹¹ Five years later, the *Constitution* reported that the tri-weekly paper was still exceedingly popular, calling it "practically a 'Farmer's Daily.'"⁹² The *Atlanta Journal* attempted to follow suit, offering a Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday edition, but its 87,000 circulation couldn't compete.⁹³ By 1920, the *Constitution's* tri-weekly subscriptions far outpaced its daily subscriptions, by close

⁹⁰ "Route-Building and the Tri-Weekly Paper," *Atlanta Constitution*, July 15, 1909, 6.

⁹¹ *N.W. Ayer & Son's American Newspaper Annual* (Philadelphia: N.W. Ayer & Son, 1907), 118.

⁹² *N.W. Ayer & Son's American Newspaper Annual* (Philadelphia: N.W. Ayer & Son, 1912), 129.

⁹³ *N.W. Ayer & Son's American Newspaper Annual* (Philadelphia: N.W. Ayer & Son, 1912), 129.

to ten thousand. By 1920, the *Constitution's* tri-weekly subscription had declined to a little less than half of its original numbers, but Howell still proclaimed it the greatest “paid-in-advance circulation,” advertising readers in every county or parish in Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, Tennessee, Arkansas, North Carolina, South Carolina, Kentucky, Virginia, Florida, and Louisiana. Carrying such a large regional readership meant that the *Atlanta Constitution* had to sculpt its coverage within that tri-weekly edition to emphasize regional values including the assumptions of white supremacy.

This was a lesson Clark Howell had learned years before when he ran for governor. For rural Georgians, there was no such thing as a law that was too racist. When Clark Howell argued that the white primary system, which only allowed whites to participate in the Democratic primary system, was strong enough to block the black southern vote, he watched as Hoke Smith won the election and immediately passed literacy tests, land ownership provisions, and even amended the state constitution to include a grandfather clause. Howell learned quickly that racial issues dominate Georgia's politics. In 1905, Thomas Dixon Jr's novel, *The Clansman: A Historical Romance of the Ku Klux Klan*, had reached best-seller status, but it also divided the nation. As northerners attacked the book, southerners openly defended it as an accurate representation of the South's experiences with the Civil War. By 1915, the book has been made into a movie by D. W. Griffith, *Birth of a Nation*, and all of those debates would again reach a fervor in both northern and southern publications. Some cities banned the film, and the NAACP sponsored protests around the country.⁹⁴ For Howell, the film represented a much darker vision for Atlanta, as it hinted at a new Ku Klux Klan that would soon be calling the city home. In 1915, William Joseph Simmons and several other southerners climbed to the top of Atlanta's

⁹⁴ “The Clansman’ Tabooed,” *Washington Post*, September 25, 1906, 1.

Stone Mountain to perform a ceremony where they revived the organization and Howell knew he was stuck.

This renewed popularity of the Klan was a problem for southern editors like Clark Howell. If he openly supported the organization, he feared he would lose the support of more racially moderate readers. He even feared a reprisal of the 1906 Race Riot that had torn Atlanta apart. However, the *Constitution* was by this point reliant on the regional tri-weekly subscription model, and openly attacking the Klan would alienate many of those readers. In addition, the Klan's financial investments within Atlanta industry also made dissension costly to his urban readership. Howell's dilemma was shared by Atlanta's other white-owned newspapers. The Klan represented the very idea of what the northern press called the "southern problem," which emphasized the region as an economic and cultural burden on the nation.⁹⁵ Although the Klan was becoming more popular, its reliance on violence as a tool for intimidation threatened to destroy Atlanta's reputation, with the city's business elites, its black community, and some northern economic interests. All three of these groups had made it clear by 1915 that white racial violence would be met with a loss of economic growth. The solution that Atlanta's major white newspapers constructed with the city's business elites was a "white moderate" approach that promised to limit its coverage of negative Klan activities. There was never a question that white newspaper editors and journalists of this period would promote white supremacist political policy, because they were themselves white supremacists. Clark Howell and other white urban elites believed that white southerners needed to remain in control of government, but they also understood that openly promoting white supremacist violence would be economically

⁹⁵ Dick Lehr, *The Birth of a Nation: How a Legendary Filmmaker and a Crusading Editor Reignited America's Civil War* (Philadelphia: PublicAffairs, 2014); David Mark Chalmers, *Hooded Americanism: The First Century of the Ku Klux Klan, 1865-1965*. (Garden City: Doubleday, 1965); Wyn Craig Wade, *The Fiery Cross: The Ku Klux Klan in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).

destructive. Thus, they constructed a “white moderate” editorial policy that promoted the symbols and trappings of white heritage and confederate ideology, while denouncing racialized violence in an attempt to maintain peace within the city. This “white moderate” editorial policy taught white readers how to express their racism in nationally socially acceptable ways. Atlanta’s newspapers knew that the Klan was too powerful locally to openly challenge, but they realized that catering to national sentiment was an integral part to promoting Atlanta’s economic interests. That is why they avoided publishing Klan identities, because it threatened to embarrass the entire region. Even Clark Howell’s *Atlanta Constitution* struggled with the fact that the paper’s managing editor Francis Clarke was the brother of Edward Y. Clarke, Klansman in charge of fundraising for the Stone Mountain Memorial Association.⁹⁶

This was why six of Atlanta’s most prominent newspaper figures convened on April 24, 1916 to discuss the construction of the Stone Mountain Confederate Memorial with the Chamber of Commerce. At this time, Atlanta’s newspaper industry was dominated by three major white newspapers, the *Atlanta Constitution*, the *Atlanta Journal*, and the *Atlanta Georgian*, and members of all three organizations were present at this meeting. Clark Howell attended along with *Atlanta Constitution* society editor Isma Dooley and literary editor Lucien Knight. Also there were James R. Gray, owner and chief editor of the *Atlanta Journal*, and *Atlanta Georgian* editors John Temple Graves and James B. Nevin.⁹⁷ Framing the potentially controversial project in a nationally socially acceptable way was critical to ensuring that the project had a positive effect on the city’s national reputation. At this time, Atlanta’s urban elites were dedicated to combatting the image of southern cultural backwardness. Mayor James G. Woodward had

⁹⁶ Natalie J. Ring, *The Problem South: Region, Empire, and the New Liberal State, 1880-1930* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2012), 18, 40.

⁹⁷ Stone Mountain Bound Book #95, 1916-1923, Bound Volume 1, Stone Mountain Papers, Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University.

recently fought to get Atlanta the right to host the Southeastern Fair, an event that would showcase Atlanta's growing technological achievements.⁹⁸ The Chamber of Commerce would soon tout the city's manufacturing base as being among those "in the front rank of the important industrial centres of the country."⁹⁹ The Chamber would even promote the city's opera and music concerts as integral cultural achievements and help to develop a "tourist and automobile bureau."¹⁰⁰ As Reiko Hillyer argues, Southerners also used monuments to bolster their national image.¹⁰¹ Promoted in the right way, the Stone Mountain Confederate Memorial promised to boost the south's cultural and technological reputation. The monument appealed to the New South ideals of the era, combining the promise of economic revitalization with a coded appeal to white supremacy. As New South historian Paul M. Gaston argues, white heritage projects allowed the South to adopt new urbanization patterns and build more industrial development, all the while still honoring the white supremacist ideologies that dominated southern politics at this time.¹⁰²

Newspaper editors were not the only Atlanta citizens who showed up to discuss the Stone Mountain Confederate Memorial at that Chamber of Commerce meeting. Other attendees were included the Daughters of the Confederacy, a group in which members like Alice Baxter and Helen Plane had been discussing the covert actions the Ku Klux Klan took during the Civil War.

⁹⁸ Extension Committee of Atlanta Chamber of Commerce, "Opening Day Southeastern Fair – 30,000 Attendance," *City Builder Magazine*, October 1916, 19, Kenan Research Center, Atlanta History Center.

⁹⁹ Extension Committee of Atlanta Chamber of Commerce, "What is Made in Atlanta and Who Makes It," *City Builder Magazine*, July 1919, 11, Kenan Research Center, Atlanta History Center.

¹⁰⁰ Extension Committee of Atlanta Chamber of Commerce, "Tourist Bureau to be Established," *City Builder Magazine*, January 1920, 6, Kenan Research Center, Atlanta History Center.

¹⁰¹ Reiko Margarita Hillyer, *Designing Dixie: Landscape, Tourism, and Memory in the New South, 1870-1917* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia, 2007), 4.

¹⁰² The core component of this conception of the New South is focused on the idea that "New South" was a basket of a number of ideals intended to erase the sectional divide between north and south. This is first pointed to by Paul M. Gaston's work *The New South Creed: A Study in Southern Mythmaking* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1970), but his work owes a number of predecessors like C. Vann Woodward's view of New South Politics as a focused interest on new industrial interests, explored in *Origins of the New South, 1877-1913* (Baton Rouge, Louisiana State Press: 1951).

The few non-newspaper men who attended the meeting included Samuel Venable, owner of Stone Mountain, and Hollins Randolph, both of whom would later be linked to the Klan. There was also Hooper Alexander, the U.S. District Attorney who refused to investigate when the Klan targeted Julian Harris' *Enquirer-Sun* after the paper began its editorial reporting on the Klan's political activities.¹⁰³ Not only were many members at this meeting openly friendly to the Klan, but some would also later be outed as actively involved with the organization. And yet, the "white moderate" editorial policy established by Howell compelled the editors to ignore the influence of the Klan within the project's infrastructure.

While the Stone Mountain Confederate Memorial has been studied by several historians, most focus on the organization's mishandling of finances that ultimately tore apart the project's leadership by 1925. None have given a thorough explanation as to what role Atlanta's newspapers played in the project.¹⁰⁴ First and foremost, Atlanta's newspaper editors and journalists were often involved in administering the project. Before World War I, both Clark Howell and James Gray served as directors. After the war, these responsibilities slipped to John S. Cohen, the new editor of the *Atlanta Journal*, who helped the project's administrative body navigate major public relations issues. By 1925, much of the internal staff for the project had strong connections to the *Atlanta Journal*, with the main publicity director Roger Winters having served as the *Atlanta Journal's* reporter for its Leo Frank coverage. In many ways, this led to major conflicts of interest for Atlanta's newspapers when they agreed to promote the project within both their news and editorial sections. If they brought to light the Klan's involvement

¹⁰³ Arnold Shankman, "Julian Harris and the Ku Klux Klan," *The Mississippi Quarterly* 28 no. 2 (Spring 1975),: 149.

¹⁰⁴ To see more on Stone Mountain's internal story please consult Hudson, Paul Stephen, and Melora P. Mirza, *Atlanta's Stone Mountain: A Multicultural History* (Charleston: History Press, 2011); David B. Freeman, *Carved in Stone: The History of Stone Mountain* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1997); and Grace Elizabeth Hale, "Granite Stopped Time: The Stone Mountain Memorial and the Representation of White Southern Identity," *The Georgia Historical Quarterly* 82, no.1 (Spring 1998).

within the project or even the project's failing financial stability, they knew it would ultimately damage the project's reputation. Not only did Atlanta's business community strongly support the project, but Atlanta's readership did as well. In many ways, Atlanta's newspapers faced real complications once the project sank so deeply into debt that they began taking out loans from local banks. It was only after Sam Venable vouched to expose the project's failing health, that Clark Howell felt comfortable enough to begin attacking the project's president, Hollins Randolph. Even then, the *Atlanta Constitution* sent its readers mixed messages, denouncing the project's leadership but still promoting the project's vision and worth to the city.

More than anything this struggle came to represent the complications Atlanta's white newspapers faced implementing Howell's "white moderate" editorial policy. That meeting on April 24, 1916 represents the moment when Atlanta's major white daily newspaper editors came face to face with the growing strain of white supremacy within the city. Mimicking the white newspapers in South Carolina, Atlanta's "white newspaper editors" became the front line for defending "white rule in the South," but the way these editors applied their craft was dramatically different than in South Carolina.¹⁰⁵ Shouldering the burden of Atlanta's business interests, all of Atlanta's white newspapers openly rejected the more violent rhetoric of this new Ku Klux Klan. Instead of focusing on the memorial's reflection of white supremacist ideals, Atlanta's newspapers shaped the monument to represent the South's most expensive and dramatic answer to northern criticisms of the region's economic and cultural "backwardness."¹⁰⁶ Atlantans argued that the project would be unique, and they argued that no one would be able to

¹⁰⁵ Sid Bedingfield, *Newspaper Wars: Civil Rights and White Resistance in South Carolina, 1935 – 1965* (Urbana: University of Illinois, 2017), 3.

¹⁰⁶ Natalie J. Ring, *The Problem South*, 18, 40.

deny its technical grandeur. They argued that people from all over the globe would want to visit the city and bask in its beauty.

Building A Coalition of Support

The first mention of the Stone Mountain Confederate Memorial came right from the pages of the *Atlanta Constitution* in a letter to the editor by William H. Terrell.¹⁰⁷ Terrell, an Atlanta based attorney, held several local political appointments as a city councilman and a member of Atlanta's Board of Education. He was an avid writer for the paper, espousing opinions on a variety of diverse topics ranging from the city's role in garbage collection, the problems with municipal funding for schools, and even the historical accuracy of the legend of Paul Revere. His articles were popular enough to garner him several paragraphs worth of space and even an embossed heading over time, even though his bylines never moved from the letters to the editorial page. His Stone Mountain Confederate Memorial proposal came on May 26, 1914, and it was simple: the memorial's goal would be to honor the soldiers who died for the "Lost Cause."¹⁰⁸ Terrell knew his audience, and the *Atlanta Constitution* editor was an avid supporter of the "Lost Cause" narrative during this period, and to that end he was able to get his letter published.¹⁰⁹

It was Terrell's letter that inspired Helen Plane, then organizing member of the Atlanta-based United Daughters of the Confederacy (UDC), to fight for the project. During the Daughters' next meeting, she began pitching the memorial as a Grecian temple, with Robert E.

¹⁰⁷ Ticknor, Francis Orray, *The Poems of Francis Orray Ticknor* (New York: The Neale Publishing Company, 1911), 147-148; David B. Freeman, *Carved in Stone: The History of Stone Mountain* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1997), 55-56.

¹⁰⁸ William H. Terrell, "W. H. Terrell Writes on Garbage Question," *Atlanta Constitution*, June 4, 1911, 8; William H. Terrell, "School System Discussed By William H. Terrell," *Atlanta Constitution*, October 16, 1913, 6; William H. Terrell, "Urges That Atlanta Build For The Future," *Atlanta Constitution*, February 28, 1913, 6.; and William H. Terrell, "Paul Revere No Myth," *Atlanta Constitution*, April 7, 1913, 4., etc.

¹⁰⁹ William H. Terrell, "Stone Mountain, Eternal Temple to Confederacy, is Terrell's Suggestion," *Atlanta Constitution*, May 26, 1914, 8.

Lee riding on horseback in a relief on the mountain, all of which would become integral parts of the monument.¹¹⁰ Plane received positive responses from the group, and they agreed to outline the memorial at the state meeting of the UDC. On June 7, 1914, the idea gained more momentum, when the *Atlanta Journal* ran an “illustrated article” in its magazine, imagining in colorful detail Plane’s proposal to the UDC and outlining the UDC’s “cordial response.”¹¹¹ One week later, John Temple Graves added to the growing discourse within the *Atlanta Georgian* by arguing that the memorial was “perfectly simple, perfectly feasible,” and adding that “if realized will give to the Confederate soldier and his memories the most majestic monument, set in the most magnificent frame in all the world.” It was Graves who connected the project to Atlanta’s historical legacy, noting that the project emphasized Atlanta’s struggle as both “Phoebus and Phoenix—holocaust and miracle of the Civil War.” Graves argued that the memorial would “attract the attention of visitors all over the world.” He argued that it would set Atlanta apart, not only from all other southern cities, but also from the great artistic centers like Rome, Versailles, and Milan.¹¹²

Step by step, the project gained momentum, with the city’s newspapers serving as its main boosters. For its supporters, the memorial came not only to represent the memory of the Confederacy but also Atlanta’s national reputation. In August 1914, an *Atlanta Constitution* article praised Samuel Venable for approving the project.¹¹³ Samuel Venable was a longtime supporter of the Ku Klux Klan, and it was Venable who made it possible for the second Klan to stage their rebirth upon the top of Stone Mountain. Samuel and his brother William Hoyt

¹¹⁰ Historians Report, Box 5, Folder 2, Stone Mountain Papers, Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University.

¹¹¹ *Atlanta Journal*, June 7, 1914.

¹¹² John Temple Graves, “Editorial,” *Atlanta Georgian*, June 14, 1914.

¹¹³ “Venable Promises to Aid Memorial,” *Atlanta Constitution*, August 9, 1914, 6.

Venable owned the mountain and ran The Venable Brothers, an Atlanta-based business that operated the marble rock quarry near Stone Mountain and was therefore integral to the monument's success. Once they donated the escarpment, the only obstacle in the way of constructing the monument was financing the construction project. Within the press, Venable's donation was a massive windfall, as it meant Terrell's vision for the mountain could become reality. By September, the monument had garnered national attention, with mainstream press outlets like the Cincinnati *Enquirer*, the Philadelphia *Inquirer*, and the *Washington Post* all carrying similar stories heralding Atlanta's vision for turning the "biggest single rock formation in the world" into a "Confederate Memorial."¹¹⁴ By October, Helen Plane finalized her proposal at the annual meeting of the Georgia UDC annual meeting to resounding approval,¹¹⁵ and she was subsequently put in charge of a UDC committee focused on determining the viability of the project and raising external funds.¹¹⁶

After obtaining approval for the plan, Helen Plane began seeking out an artist who not only harnessed the technological skill to sculpt the monument, but also had the national appeal to draw financial support. Gutzon Borglum, a sculptor with growing national celebrity having just finished a Washington D.C. bust of Lincoln, fit this criteria perfectly. Born in Ohio, Borglum had the appearance of a northern voice and perspective, and supporters of the project knew that the project's focus on Confederate ideology was a possible barrier to attracting northern financial support. When Borglum toured Atlanta in early August 1915, his visit was a massive spectacle for local newspapers. In many ways, Borglum excelled at being the public face for the project. In

¹¹⁴ "Stone Mountain as Monument," *Cincinnati Enquirer*, September 19, 1914, 14; "Biggest Single Rock Formation in World May Be Used as Confederate Memorial," *Washington Post*, September 20, 1914, M4.

¹¹⁵ Historians Report, Box 5, Folder 2, Stone Mountain Papers, Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University.

¹¹⁶ "U. D. C. Want to Buy Stone Mountain," *Atlanta Constitution*, October 17, 1914, 1.

these early days, he knew that much national sentiment was aimed at ridiculing the South, so he made sure to present the project as a massive feat of unprecedented scope. The *Atlanta Constitution* devoted no less than three front page articles to the sculptor's visit, highlighting the project's vision and scope and announcing its overall value to the city. The *Atlanta Constitution* argued that the monument would allow "Georgia [to] boast her title" as holder of "one of the wonders of the world" over which visitors would "marvel" for "centuries to come."¹¹⁷ In similar fashion, Borglum argued that southern exceptionalism would become an international topic as "the pyramids" were a "small and insignificant" project compared to the Memorial, because the pyramids were "built of cut stone" which was not only easier to organize but also a target for "decay."¹¹⁸

After his visit, Gutzon Borglum immediately began courting the national press. His plan was simple. Borglum needed to emphasize the national appeal of the project, a strategy that would work in calling attention away from the project's southern roots. He argued that the monument was a "uniquely American monument" that would "put the Sphinx and the Pyramids to shame."¹¹⁹ He spoke to many different outlets, including the *Baltimore Sun* and the Massachusetts-based *Christian Science Monitor*, stating that the monument's construction would be tedious and innovative due to its "unique" nature.¹²⁰ The *New York Times* ran a lengthy two-

¹¹⁷ "Noted American Sculptor Inspects Stone Mountain for U. D. C. Monument," *Atlanta Constitution*, August 17, 1915, 4; "A Mountain Shaft," *Atlanta Constitution*, August 22, 1915, B1; "Daughters of Confederacy Showing Great Enthusiasm Over the Sculptor's Plans," *Atlanta Constitution*, August 22, 1915, C9.

¹¹⁸ "Stone Mountain and Pyramids Compared by Great Sculptor," *Atlanta Constitution*, October 03, 1915, 6.

¹¹⁹ Snyder, Brad, *The House of Truth: A Washington Political Salon and the Foundations of American Liberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2017), 204.

¹²⁰ While the original text is credited to the *Philadelphia Ledger*, a significant amount of the language has been reprinted in the *Baltimore Sun*, *The Boston Christian Science Monitor*, and *The Louisville Courier-Journal*. Examples of these articles include: "Borglum To Design South's Monument: Stone Mountain To Be Transformed To Honor the Confederacy," *Sun*, August 19, 1915, 6; "Mountain Art Monument to the Confederacy Aim," *Christian Science Monitor*, August 24, 1915, 9; "Gigantic Stone To Confederates: Georgians Plan To Commemorate Civil War's Dead at Mountain," *Courier-Journal*, September 19, 1915, 3.

page profile and interview of Borglum, with images of the design for Stone Mountain embedded in the article.¹²¹ The *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* ran a similar article, but focused primarily on an artistic representation of Borglum's vision rather than the lengthy interview provided to the *Times*.¹²² In some cases, Borglum even wrote his own articles, as he did for a January 2, 1916 *Washington Post* article.¹²³ After meeting with various print outlets, Borglum assured Helen Plane that "the project now has been thoroughly exploited, the world thoroughly informed about it."¹²⁴ And while most of this coverage was positive, Borglum knew that some coverage had to deftly navigate various controversies created by the monument's promotion of the Confederacy. For some, the monument celebrated "treasonous" behavior, because it was the South's secession that ultimately led to the Civil War. These dissenters argued that a monument dedicated to the "lost cause ... should find no response in the hearts of true patriots" as it promoted "disunion and secession."¹²⁵ Borglum was adept at navigating the press, however, when one reporter broached these concerns, he pointed out that the project's sheer technological achievement would ultimately bring acclaim to the United States. Borglum consistently walked the line of trying to promote the project's artistic uniqueness while downplaying its divisive and controversial nature.

While Borglum was courting the national press to cover the project, the Atlanta-based marketing took a different direction, as Helen Plane invited key members of the press like Clark Howell to join the Executive Committee. This move paid off when the project threatened to collapse during its early phase. The first real hurdle the project faced in the news was when it

¹²¹ "Mountain a Monument," *New York Times*, January 2, 1916, SM1.

¹²² "Carving a Confederate Memorial Out of a Mountain of Solid Granite," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, Jan 16, 1916, B16.

¹²³ "Famous Sculptor Tells How He Will Carve Giant Memorial to Heroes from Living Rock by Gutzon Borglum, the Distinguished American Sculptor," *Washington Post*, January 02, 1916, MT1.

¹²⁴ "Letter from Gutzon Borglum to Helen Plane," January 27, 1916, Folder 2, Box 16, Stone Mountain Papers, Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University.

¹²⁵ "Opposes Memorial Idea," *Detroit Free Press*, November 17, 1915, 4.

came out that Sam and William Venable were not the only owners of the mountain. Sam and William had three siblings with their own claims to the mountain: Elizabeth Venable Mason, Coribel Venable Orme, and Robert Venable Roper. This would not be a huge problem except that, on April 26, Roper filed an injunction against the project and refused to sign over the rights to the mountain's escarpment. The newspapers, quoting Samuel Venable, made it clear that the injunction was a technicality and that Roper would ultimately "sign deeds to this property, and the carving of a great and everlasting monument to the confederacy" would proceed.¹²⁶ The press was never clear on what happened to secure the Roper's signature, but by the next month the dispute vanished, the paperwork was signed, and the Association announced a massive dedication ceremony. There would be bands playing "Dixie," and Gutzon Borglum would host, leading the crowd through a flag-lowering ceremony at the site.¹²⁷ Coverage of the dedication ceremony exploded, with predictions of a record-breaking crowd congregating before Stone Mountain.¹²⁸ In total, close to 20,000 people swarmed the dedication, with 2,500 war veterans in attendance and the newspapers covering every inch of the festivities.¹²⁹ Huge photographic displays appeared prominently upon their pages documenting the major figures integral to the project, with the *Atlanta Journal* even including drawings of the memorials final form by Gutzon Borglum.¹³⁰ So fervent was the city about the project that the mayor declared the dedication of the mountain a "Half Holiday" to ensure that all who wanted to attend could.¹³¹

¹²⁶ "Stone Mountain Settlement Near: S. H. Venable Believes That All Opposition to Deeds to Memorial Association Will Soon Be Ended," *Atlanta Constitution*, April 27, 1916, 9.

¹²⁷ "Stone Mountain Program Announced by Committee," *Atlanta Journal*, May 16, 1916, 3.

¹²⁸ "Expect Record Crowd on 'Stone Mountain' Day," *Atlanta Journal*, May 19, 1916, 9.

¹²⁹ "Dedicated Today," *Atlanta Constitution*, May 20, 1916, 1; "Stone Mountain is Dedicated to Cause of the Confederacy," *Atlanta Journal*, May 20, 1916, 9.

¹³⁰ "Dust and Dixie Reign at Formal Dedication of Stone Mt. Memorial," *Atlanta Journal*, May 21, 1916, 1.

¹³¹ "Half Holiday Declared: Mayor Urges Atlantans to Attend Stone Mt. Dedication," *Atlanta Constitution*, May 18, 1916, 4.

The memorial captured the imagination of the South, but the project's sheer scale made it also seem daunting. Borglum consistently talked about how the memorial would surpass all other modern artistic works, and that he was integral in its completion. He argued that the project's scope was its most valuable attribution to the nation, because it evoked memories of ancient wonders like the Pyramids of Giza and the Colossus of Rhodes. He argued that the project however needed money, and so most interviews included appeals for the financial support of his audience. Even with Atlanta's newspaper industry supporting the project, its financing was immensely slow. Time and time again, the newspapers brought the project up in their columns. On January 28, 1917, the *Atlanta Journal* used its new *Sunday Journal Magazine* to illustrate a beautiful rendering of the kinds of new technological developments Gutzon Borglum would use in constructing the monument.¹³² On February 25, Clark Howell argued in an editorial that the project would provide the South with a cultural cornerstone that it had been missing since the Civil War.¹³³ He argued that the monument would "preserve for posterity the civilization and the culture of the Old South" and that the monument would be on par with the "Grecian Temples on the Acropolis."¹³⁴

While Borglum was good at making the project seem grandiose and above ideology, Atlanta's journalists focused on reminding southern readers of the memorial's political and social meanings. When Isma Dooly wrote about the project in the *Constitution*, she framed it as a monument to honor white southerners, whom she believed held the "richest racial heritage," "so great it [was] stupendous."¹³⁵ The journalists also apparently believed it was their responsibility

¹³² "How the Stone Mountain Will be Built," *Atlanta Journal*, January 28, 1917.

¹³³ "World's Greatest Memorial," *Atlanta Constitution*, February 25, 1917, B4.

¹³⁴ "Stone Mountain Memorial Will Preserve for Posterity the Civilization and the Culture of the Old South: Memorial Is Likened to Grecian Temples on the Acropolis," *Atlanta Constitution*, February 25, 1917, 19.

¹³⁵ Isma Dooly, "The Woman's World," *Atlanta Constitution*, May 28, 1916; Beyond this example, there were also a number of Dooly's articles that focused on promoting the monument as well embedded in her regular "The Social Whirl" society articles.

to make their readers understand the project's financial needs. When the UDC contracted Admiral W.O. Wright to give lectures on the Confederate Navy, Atlanta newspaper articles made it clear that the lectures were aimed at raising money for the project's first five-thousand-dollar goal.¹³⁶ One article even advertised that the lectures would be appropriate not only for adult readers, but also for children.¹³⁷ And this information was embedded within the news sections of the newspapers, where it would not be seen as biased appeals for financial funding but as accurate factual reporting of events.

White newspapers were so integral to the project at these early stages that when Samuel Venable put together a board consisting of "men of character and influence" who could "enable" the project "to get contributions," it was filled with white male journalists, including Clark Howell, James R. Gray, and James B. Nevin.¹³⁸ Venable noted that the board's power would be in using these men's names to support the project; all the Association would need to do is construct a letterhead where those names were visible. Immediately after the meeting, Atlanta's newspapers started a campaign to raise money for the memorial.¹³⁹ The timing of the project was bad in the end, because not long after its announcement, the United States would send its soldiers across the Atlantic to fight in Europe. With the more pressing concern of war, the memorial project slipped from Atlanta's front pages, replaced with fundraising projects for the Red Cross. Internally, the Association suffered a significant number of losses during this period as well, with many members stepping down from the board of directors. With the passing of the *Atlanta Journal's* chief editor James Gray on June 25, 1917, John S. Cohen, the *Atlanta Journal's* new

¹³⁶ "Old Sea Warrior Aids Stone Mountain Plan," *Atlanta Constitution*, February 25, 1917, 19

¹³⁷ "Children to Hear Lecture on Navy of Confederacy," *Atlanta Constitution*, June 8, 1916.

¹³⁸ Venable's letter to Borglum, March 22, 1917, Box 15, Folder 1, Stone Mountain Papers, Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University.

¹³⁹ "Atlanta To Raise \$100,000 To Help Finance Memorial," *Atlanta Constitution*, April 1, 1917, 1.

editor, became a member of the Association's executive committee. In 1918, Clark Howell officially resigned his position on the executive committee and the project as a whole shuttered to a stop.¹⁴⁰ Even Helen Plane resigned her position as president in 1919, citing frustration "with so little sympathy from Atlanta people."¹⁴¹ Officially, the Association announced that the Memorial project was "wisely and patriotically" postponed until the end of the war.¹⁴²

Silencing Klan Support for the Memorial

By 1919, Walter Chambers, a white journalist for the *Atlanta Constitution*, reached out to Gutzon Borglum in a letter about the project's resurrection. Borglum had made it clear that a lack of money was the primary cause of the project's stalemate, and Chambers responded that he and "some of [his] journalist friends" thought he should engage in "an intensive media campaign patterned somewhat after the Red Cross" publicity drive, which he noted "secured such great results during the period of the war and since." Chambers argued that "an intensive campaign such as [he proposed] in this great era of prosperity" would cause "the people of the South" to donate "great sums."¹⁴³ Borglum agreed but noted that he would need someone else to organize it, and he believed that Samuel Venable, the owner of Stone Mountain and an integral force within the SMCMA, would back "any plan" like the one Chambers suggested. Borglum even noted that he was aware of "sources where large sums could be obtained," assuming of course there were "a group of men thoroughly in earnest" who would "take charge" of the fundraising project.¹⁴⁴ Borglum and Chambers never followed through on those plans, but this exchange

¹⁴⁰ 3rd Meeting Minutes April 24th, 1918. Box 5, Folder 1, Stone Mountain Papers, Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University.

¹⁴¹ 4th Meeting Minutes April 23rd, 1919. Box 5, Folder 1, Stone Mountain Papers, Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University.

¹⁴² "Postponed; Not Abandoned," *Atlanta Constitution*, April 29, 1918, 4.

¹⁴³ Walter Chambers to Gutzon Borglum, October 15, 1919, Box 115, Gutzon Borglum Papers, National Archives.

¹⁴⁴ Gutzon Borglum to Walter Chambers, October 18, 1919, Box 115, Folder Gutzon Borglum Papers, National Archives.

pushed Borglum to write to Helen Plane on December 10, 1919, asking where the project's plans remained as he wondered if the "South had forgotten her great men."¹⁴⁵

Having lost so many soldiers to World War 1 in Europe, the Stone Mountain Confederate Memorial Association started questioning the wisdom of honoring Civil War veterans. Some argued that the Memorial might be seen as dishonoring the World War I soldiers who died, which would ultimately lead to less donations. Borglum struggled to resurrect the Stone Mountain Confederate Memorial project after the close of World War I. It was only because the project interested the Ku Klux Klan that fundraising was even viable. With several of the original members of the Association, such as Hollins Randolph and Samuel Venable, as "active Klan members," and even Gutzon Borglum who was initiated after agreeing to do the project, the Klan became the project's lifeline.¹⁴⁶ With D. W. Griffith's blessing, Helen Plane used viewings of *Birth of a Nation* to generate financial support for the monument.¹⁴⁷ In early exchanges between Plane and Borglum, Plane even argued that the memorial should include the Klan "in their nightly uniform approaching in the distance" as a major part of the monument.¹⁴⁸ There was no equivocation within the association's meetings: success for the memorial would ultimately spell success for the Klan. They saw it as an integral part of their white supremacist message.¹⁴⁹ However, the Association all also agreed that the Klan's negative reputation would threaten the

¹⁴⁵ Letter from Gutzon Borglum to Helen Plane, December 10, 1919, Box 16, Folder 5, Stone Mountain Papers, Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University.

¹⁴⁶ Grace Elizabeth Hale, "Granite Stopped Time: The Stone Mountain Memorial and the Representation of White Southern Identity," *The Georgia Historical Quarterly* 82, no.1(Spring 1998): 33; Snyder, Brad, *The House of Truth: A Washington Political Salon and the Foundations of American Liberalism*, 339.

¹⁴⁷ "'Birth of a Nation' Coming to Atlanta," *Atlanta Constitution*, November 28, 1915, C13; "Birth of a Nation," *Atlanta Constitution*, December 2, 1915, C13; "'Birth of a Nation' Thrills Tremendous Atlanta Audience," *Atlanta Constitution*, December 7, 1915, 7;

¹⁴⁸ Letter from Helen Plane to Gutzon Borglum, December 17, 1915, Folder 2, Box 16, Stone Mountain Papers, Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University.

¹⁴⁹ "Mrs. Plane Calls Meeting of Confederate Patriots," *Atlanta Constitution*, September 21, 1915, 6.; "Stone Mountain Monument to Gray Veterans Discussed," *Atlanta Constitution*, September 23, 1915, 6.

success of the project itself, unless their support for the project was obscured from public scrutiny.

What had worried the Association's members most, was that the city had forever become linked to the Klan after William J. Simmons held the resurrection ceremony in 1915 on top of Stone Mountain. And as long as William J. Simmons called Atlanta the Klan's headquarters, its residents would be forced to live under the organization's shadow. The same thing could be said for Atlanta's newspapers. Back in 1915, the *Constitution* praised the Klan's resurrection, arguing that the ceremony was "impressive" and that the "secret organization" would be responsible for "taking an active part in the betterment of mankind."¹⁵⁰ However, in 1918 when the Klan burned a cross in Birmingham, Alabama as a "warning" to "idlers," Howell came to realize the kind of negative publicity the city might be facing in the future. At the time, he felt that he was at least safe to criticize the Klan for promoting "outlawry and mob violence" in other cities. During the first few years, the only editorial he wrote about the Klan came in opposition to the Alabama's cross burning. His fear though was still clear in his writing. He hedged his argument by confirming that many of the Klan's members were "men of character" engaged in "charitable and patriotic" activities.¹⁵¹ His defensiveness was warranted of course, because William J. Simmons immediately wrote a response to his editorial, which Howell felt compelled to publish.¹⁵² Simmons wrote that the *Constitution* had misunderstood the Birmingham ride, and that the cross burning was only their "anniversary celebration" and that these celebrations happened "every year." Howell did not write another editorial about the Klan until 1924. And when the Klan did appear in the newspaper's news coverage section, these articles read as

¹⁵⁰ "Klan is Established with Impressiveness," *Atlanta Constitution*, November 28, 1915, A1.

¹⁵¹ "The Idler's Hazard," *Atlanta Constitution*, May 9, 1918, 6.

¹⁵² "The Ku Klux Klan for Law and Order," *Atlanta Constitution*, May 12, 1918, 11.

propaganda pieces written by Klan members. These articles involved announcements of major Klan councils, or charity work done by the organization. When negative publicity began to rise to the surface like in 1919 when the Klan rode through “the streets at night” in Anniston, Alabama, the *Constitution* reconfirmed that the organization was “not a vigilance committee.”¹⁵³

This editorial silence became particularly important to the *Atlanta Constitution*, because it allowed Clark Howell to avoid the Klan’s ire, but it began to tarnish Howell’s journalistic integrity with his peers; Atlanta’s newspapers were starting to garner a reputation as Klan supporters. When on May 6, 1921, the Klan hosted its first annual convention, or as the Klan referred to it the Klonvocation, in Atlanta, the city’s newspapers promoted it heavily. As historian John T. Kneebone argues, before the 1921 *New York World* expose, Atlanta’s newspapers were one of the organization’s strongest allies.¹⁵⁴ After the expose hit the national mainstream press, Atlanta’s newspapers began to change their positions. *The Atlanta Journal* began producing contradictory perspectives, on the one hand publishing articles within its Sunday Magazine detailing the Klan’s propagandistic ideals, while using its editorials to condemn the Klan’s “harmful intolerance.”¹⁵⁵ Kneebone concludes that Atlanta’s newspapers’ criticisms were “conservative editorials and resolutions, expressing concern that the Klan, and the notoriety brought by the *New York World*’s exposé, threatened the city’s economic and social stability.”¹⁵⁶ When the *Atlanta Constitution* attacked “religious intolerance” in a September 25, 1921 editorial, the newspaper did not mention the Klan at all. Instead the editorial framed the argument as one about what Atlantans should do to protect their “good name.”¹⁵⁷

¹⁵³ “Modern Ku Klux Klan,” *Atlanta Constitution*, October 26, 1919, A7.

¹⁵⁴ John T. Kneebone, “Publicity and Prejudice: The New York World’s Expose’ of 1921 and the History of the Second Ku Klux Klan,” *VCU History Publications* (2015), https://scholarscompass.vcu.edu/hist_pubs/12/.

¹⁵⁵ “It Is High Time To End This Harmful Intolerance,” *Atlanta Journal*, September 25, 1921.

¹⁵⁶ John T. Kneebone, “Publicity and Prejudice,” 8.

¹⁵⁷ “A Challenge to Atlanta’s Good Name!” *Atlanta Constitution*, September 25, 1921, D4.

Meanwhile, work on the memorial resumed. Gutzon Borglum had found his “group of men thoroughly in earnest” within the Klan. Venable and Borglum were in contact, and Borglum was planning a major event to revive local interest in the project, inviting Prince Alfonso Louis de Bourbon, a friend of Borglum and the half-brother of the king of Spain. The goal was to create a big enough display to rejuvenate interest in the project. The prince’s visit was featured all across Atlanta’s newspapers, with the *Constitution* announcing the duo’s intentions of creating a film showcasing Helen Plane’s struggle with the project, and promoting the new attention that the Memorial was gaining on a national level.¹⁵⁸ Meanwhile, the *Atlanta Journal* ran a series of articles discussing Prince Alfonso Louis de Bourbon’s fascination with the Ku Klux Klan’s ability to “prevent or avenge outrages” against white southerners.¹⁵⁹ One year later, police in New York arrested an individual who called himself “Prince Louis Henri de Bourbon” for disorderly conduct, only to find that he was a “pretender to the French throne.”¹⁶⁰ In Atlanta, this caused rumors to circulate that Gutzon Borglum had brought a fraud into the city, but Borglum insisted that this was a different person altogether. Again, Atlanta’s newspapers found themselves protecting the project from even more negative publicity.

Just one month before news of the false Bourbon broke out, the *Atlanta Constitution* had begun promoting the City’s publicity campaigns for the project, with the goal to raise \$100,000 from Atlanta citizens. The *Constitution*’s tactic in promoting the project aimed to convince local businesses that investments in the project were in effect investments in the city. The paper ran a letter from Herbert Myrick, the Massachusetts based editor-in-chief of the Phelps Publishing

¹⁵⁸ “To Prince Louis De Bourbon,” *Atlanta Constitution*, January 14, 1921, 10; “Borglum to Carve Head of Lee on Stone Mountain,” *Atlanta Constitution*, January 14, 1921, 10; “To Prince Louis De Bourbon,” *Atlanta Constitution*, January 14, 1921, 10; “Borglum and Prince are Guests of Honor at Luncheon Friday,” *Atlanta Constitution*, January 15, 1921, 8.

¹⁵⁹ “Scion of Bourbons Views Prohibition, Ku Klux, Art and History Vivaciously,” *Atlanta Journal*, January 7, 1921, 17.

¹⁶⁰ “Prince, Who Paid Visit Here, Not One Police Seek,” *Atlanta Constitution*, August 8, 1922, 1.

Company, that argued this very point, titled “Stone Mountain Memorial will make tourist Mecca of Atlanta.” Myrick argued that the project would be a financial boon for the city through its promotion of tourism because the project connected natural “beauty” with historical “utility,” which was very popular for tourists. Myrick concluded with the claim that tourism was already America’s “third largest industry,” citing New England’s “shores and mountains, history and art,” which attracted “a revenue of \$100,000,000 annually from visitors, vacationists and tourists.” What Myrick neglected to discuss was the divisive nature of the memorial that would obviously set it apart from New England’s historical tourist attractions, and the role that this division would play in diminishing the monument’s appeal to tourists.¹⁶¹

The spectacle did work, however, as news began spreading again about the project’s popularity. Behind the scenes, Nathan Bedford Forest II, a member of the local Klan, agreed to offer the organization enough financial support to resurrect the project as long as the Association agreed to include his father, General Nathan Bedford Forest, the founding member of the first Ku Klux Klan, as one of the first cavalrymen carved on the mountainside. With this deal, the Klan became more than simple members of the Association, both in charge of financing the project and promoting it to correct much of the city’s neglect of the project. Since World War I, much of the monument’s construction scaffolding had, as the *Atlanta Constitution* described, been the target of “wanton vandalism... shameful mischief” and “neglect.”¹⁶² Another stipulation the Klan pushed on the Association was that it had to agree to use the Klan’s fundraising company, the Southern Publicity Association, to handle all fundraising for the project. During a January 1923 meeting, Samuel Venable shared a written proposal by the Southern Publicity Association

¹⁶¹ Hebert Myrick, “Stone Mountain Memorial will make Tourist mecca of Atlanta,” *Atlanta Constitution*, June 26, 1922, 4.

¹⁶² “Vandals Hamper Worked on Carving Great Memorial,” *Atlanta Constitution*, April 25, 1922, 6.

for their assistance in fundraising to the SMCMA's directors board, and it was accepted.¹⁶³

Borglum had little flexibility in disagreeing with the source of the funds. He wanted the project to continue, and Klan support appeared to be the only way forward. Furthermore, Borglum had been initiated into the Klan, even arguing in a 1922 letter to his friend Frazier Curtis that they were "a group of men that [were] worth something."¹⁶⁴ After the proposal was accepted, Forrest II was elected to the SMCMA board, and the Klan became directly and forever connected to the Association.

By March 20, 1923, Borglum was again on the publicity trail for the Memorial, giving a nationwide radio address on WGM's Late Program about the technological feats his project was achieving in the construction of the Memorial.¹⁶⁵ He explained on air how he would use a projector invented by S. E. Porter to display the image of Robert E. Lee onto the mountainside to be traced and then carved. He argued that "the greatest difficulty experienced... was in tracing the gigantic figures. It would be a herculean task to attempt to swing men in cages over the sheer mountain side and draw the pictures." When he first began working with other projectors, he had issues with the lenses burning up, but Porter was able to construct a projector with "water-cooled lenses" that had since functioned very well.¹⁶⁶

While Borglum pushed the project forward publicly, the Klan pushed the project within the Administration's headquarters. Hollins Randolph, an Atlanta attorney, noted Klan member, and an ambitious voice within Georgia's local Democratic party, became chairman of the

¹⁶³ Proposal to Venable regarding Southern Publicity Association, Box 15, Folder 2, Stone Mountain Papers, Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University.

¹⁶⁴ GB to Frazier Curtis, 5/26/1922, GBP, Box 12, Folder "Curtis, Frazier C." as found in Brad Snyder, *The House of Truth*, 339.

¹⁶⁵ Kenneth T. Jackson, *The Ku Klux Klan in the City, 1915 – 1930* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967), 9.

¹⁶⁶ "Borglum Calls Stone Mountain Conference Here," *Atlanta Constitution*, March 2, 1923, 1.

SMCMA.¹⁶⁷ Working with Clarke, Randolph pushed the Association to explore alternative funding mechanisms for the Memorial, such as a Capital City Club dinner organized on April 20, 1923. The Association argued that the project was too big to have only local support, so this dinner was planned to include many prestigious figures from across the nation such as President and Chief Justice William Howard Taft, Mississippi Governor Lee Maurice Russell, Virginia Governor Elbert Lee Trinkle, Missouri Governor Arthur M. Hyde, and several senators and representatives from various states. The Association also made it a point to invite many major figures from the media world as well, including Josephus Daniels, editor for the Raleigh, North Carolina *News and Observer*, and Atlanta media figures, recognizing their power as local influencers.¹⁶⁸ Randolph met with President Harding in Washington D.C., in an attempt to drum up national media attention on the dinner. It was clear to Randolph that he needed both print and radio behind the project in order for it to succeed. Securing President Harding's support for the project was an integral way to achieving that publicity.¹⁶⁹ Ultimately, however, many northerners that were invited to the dinner declined to attend.

Regardless, Atlanta's newspapers declared the dinner a resounding success, describing it as having attracted various "Dixie notables."¹⁷⁰ The *Atlanta Constitution* ran the misleading headline declaring "Leaders of Entire Nation Pledge Their Help in Making Memorial to Confederacy Success," but that praise only came in the form of letters formally rejecting their

¹⁶⁷ David Mark Chalmers, *Hooded Americanism: The History of the Ku Klux Klan* (Durham: Duke University 1987), 211.

¹⁶⁸ Various Letters Regarding Attendance to April Capital City Club Dinner with Various Dates throughout April, Box 1, Folder 1, Stone Mountain Papers, Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University.

¹⁶⁹ "Randolph Meets President Today," *Atlanta Constitution*, April 14, 1923, 4.

¹⁷⁰ "Dixie Notables To Assemble Here," *Atlanta Constitution*, April 15, 1923, 8.; "Stone Mountain Memorial Dinner Set for Tonight," *Atlanta Constitution*, April 20, 1923, 1.

invitations.¹⁷¹ The *Atlanta Journal* used these letters as proof that the project transcended “sectional sentiment,” arguing that President Harding’s “interest [was] typical of that which the memorial has inspired throughout America.”¹⁷² Several articles also treated the construction of the project as a source of amusement. Both the *Atlanta Constitution* and the *Atlanta Journal* wrote about the experiences their reporters had swinging out high above the city in the “safety swing” equipment that Borglum would use.¹⁷³ For the *Atlanta Journal*, that reporter was none other than Margaret Mitchell, the soon to be famous author of *Gone with the Wind*.¹⁷⁴

The 1923 fundraiser dinner placed the Stone Mountain Confederate Memorial under immense national scrutiny, but that attention was not all positive. Hollins Randolph’s open support of Nathan Bedford Forrest II, son of the first Ku Klux Klan founder and founding member of the new Ku Klux Klan, gave northern newspapers enough evidence to label the entire project an enormous monument to hate. The *Baltimore Sun* argued that the Klan had taken complete “charge of memorial plans,” and that they were going to put a “robed figure” next to the “famous southern generals” of the Civil War.¹⁷⁵ The *New York Tribune* reported that the “Confederate Memorial” had been “seized upon by Klan as dudge [sic] ‘ad’” for intolerance.¹⁷⁶

The Atlanta newspapers knew fighting against these reports would undermine their journalistic credibility, and so they simply remained silent. The memorial’s Klan relations had been reported on so negatively within northern newspapers. Borglum, who had just a few months ago prided himself on being the national figurehead for the project, found himself inundated with

¹⁷¹ “Leaders Of Entire Nation Pledge Their Help In Making Memorial To Confederacy Success,” *Atlanta Constitution*, April 21, 1923, 1; “President Gives High Praise To Stone Mountain Project,” *Atlanta Constitution*, April 23, 1923, 6.

¹⁷² “Stone Mountain Memorial,” *Atlanta Journal*, April 19, 1923, 8.

¹⁷³ “Safety Swing’ Assists in Work On Big Memorial: Special Apparatus Designed for Stone Mountain Project,” *Atlanta Constitution*, April 21, 1923, 9.

¹⁷⁴ Margaret Mitchell, “Hanging over Atlanta in Borglum’s Swing,” *Atlanta Journal*, May 23, 1923.

¹⁷⁵ “Klan takes charge of memorial plans,” *Sun*, April 22, 1923, 2.

¹⁷⁶ Brad Snyder, *The House of Truth*, 344.

questions as to whether he was a Klansman, and he would forcefully deny it. Even the *Atlanta Constitution* felt compelled to break its silence and argue that these reports were focusing on the wrong parts of the project. The *Constitution* noted that the scope and grandeur of the project is what should have been attracting northern support, because the project was “so colossal, so unique and of such overwhelming significance, that it [should not be] looked upon as a southern memorial in which [was] to be carved the imperishable heroism of the soldier in gray, but as a great development in art that shall belong to the South, but be cherished by the world.”¹⁷⁷

When news broke of the Association’s relationship to the Klan in 1923, the Klan was far from being a private organization. Many of its organizations had their own letterhead, and its original founder, William J. Simmons, was fighting a very public battle in court to “retake his title as Imperial Wizard” from an internal coup led by Hiram W. Evans.¹⁷⁸ These national fractures were spreading to all organizations touched by the Klan. As Felix Harcourt argues, new voices began to rise across the nation with their own publishing houses centered around spreading their white supremacist messages. Simmons had long relied upon the *Searchlight* magazine to keep his own members organized politically. In July of 1922, David C. Stephenson bought out a Catholic publication and transformed it into his own publication called the *Fiery Cross*. And in 1923, George Fleming Moore organized the *Fellowship Forum* magazine out of Washington, D.C., which he had tried to turn into a political device connecting key Klan members to powerful D.C. politicians. This was Hiram W. Evans’s favored publication, because it gave him access to major political power within Washington. But this undermined just how fractured the Klan had become, because there were many other publications like the *Jayhawker*

¹⁷⁷ “The Great Memorial,” *Atlanta Constitution*, April 26, 1923, 4.

¹⁷⁸ For more about the Klan court battles see: William Rawlings, *The Second Coming of the Invisible Empire: the Ku Klux Klan of the 1920s* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 2018); David Chalmers, *Hooded Americanism: The History of the Ku Klux Klan*; Kenneth T. Jackson, *The Ku Klux Klan in the City, 1915 – 1930*.

American in Oklahoma, *Protestant Herald* in Colorado, *Crank* in Arizona, *Dawn: A Journal for True Patriots* in Chicago, *Buckeye American* in Ohio, the *Hawkeye Independent* in Iowa, Seattle's *Watcher on the Tower*, and the *Fiery Cross Magazine* from Dallas. These publications were struggling to shape the nature of the Klan's message, and they were doing it through smaller opinion pieces readily consumed by their readers.

Within the Association, the division began to undermine the memorial's progress. Both factions were represented, with Samuel Venable supporting William J. Simmons, and Hollins Randolph supporting Hiram Evans. In many ways, Gutzon Borglum was stuck in the middle. He had only become a Klan member in 1916 when he was hired to work on the project, and his close friendship with D.C. Stephenson of Indiana, who himself was building on internal faction within the Klan, made it impossible for him to choose a side.¹⁷⁹ In the end though, Hollins Randolph was the president of the Association, so it was his vision that the project followed. In many ways, Randolph's vision for the Association mirrored that of Evans. The Association was a tool for Randolph to garner more political support within the larger Georgian Democratic Party. In order to do this, Randolph privately dedicated the Association's resources to supporting William Gibbs McAdoo's push for Democratic nominee. Capitalizing off of the popularity of the dinner, Randolph lowered membership fees for admission into the Association's Executive Committee and passed new policies that gave him more power over the project's finances as president, even allowing him to sign checks on behalf of the Association. He changed the organization's voting procedures, allowing him to pass Executive Committee policies with far fewer members present. As historian David Freeman notes, Randolph's actions amounted to a "brazen takeover" of the

¹⁷⁹ David H. Bennett, *The Party of Fear: From Nativist Movements to the New Right in American History* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1988); David M. Chalmers, *Hooded Americanism*.

SMCMA, and the organization's oldest members like Samuel Venable argued that this would destroy the project overall.¹⁸⁰

As the Klan was growing bolder in national politics, Randolph began to feel confident in his ambitious reshaping of the Stone Mountain Confederate Memorial Association. If the Association had remained successful, few of Atlanta's citizenry would have complained. However, the Association's debt started ballooning after Randolph took office, and its progress slowed down significantly as Borglum became more involved with fundraising. Atlanta's newspapers continued to support the Association, even though its fundraising projects started becoming more demanding. After the dinner in 1923, Hollins Randolph created a publicity directorship position and hired Rogers Winter, a former journalist for the *Atlanta Journal*, to fill it. Randolph's assumption was that Winters could help sway Atlanta's newspapers into further supporting the project, and he did that job admirably. In fact, many of the following fundraising goals relied on Atlanta's media industry directly supporting the organization's activities.¹⁸¹ But Winters' role served a dual purpose for Randolph, as Winters had also agreed to be William Gibbs McAdoo's local campaign publicity manager. In this way, Randolph was able to weave his political designs into the very nature of the Association itself. Using the Association's staff to promote both McAdoo's campaign and the Memorial spread the Association's resources too thin, although all of this was hidden by Atlanta's newspapers' massive publicity campaign for the project.

¹⁸⁰ David B. Freeman, *Carved in Stone*.

¹⁸¹ Letter to Morgan Blake from Harlee Branch, May 16, 1923, Box 1, Folder 9, Stone Mountain Papers, Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University.

Using Publicity to Mask Financial Difficulties

While Hollins Randolph took control of the Association, Atlanta's media industry was trumpeting the successes of the Memorial project. Local publicity was quite extensive, and it was almost entirely positive. Hollins Randolph needed this positive publicity because the Association was steadily losing money. Before the Association's internal schisms became subject to public scrutiny, Atlanta's white newspapers were wholeheartedly unified in support of the project. In fact, it was this massive publicity campaign originating with the hiring of Roger Winters in 1923 that masked the internal financial failures of the Association until the project's demise was all but absolute. In this way, the Stone Mountain Confederate Memorial project became an unsustainable bubble, where donation money funneled into the project was not actually used to bring the project to completion. Atlanta's white newspapers were largely to blame, for reinforcing this bubble because of their failure to investigate and accurately report the internal decisions being made by the Association.

In 1923, Hollins Randolph oversaw the creation of several publicity campaigns for the Association. The first of these, the Founder's Fund Subscription campaign, was simple in that it promised Atlantans who had paid at least one thousand dollars to the project that they would have their names carved into the mountain.¹⁸² Integral to this campaign's success was the subscribers' belief that the project was a safe investment, which was the responsibility of Atlanta's media interests. Since April 1923, Atlanta's radio stations had been promoting the campaign. The *Atlanta Constitution's* affiliate radio station, WGM, had broadcast the Stone Mountain Memorial Association fundraising concert in Atlanta's City Auditorium live over the

¹⁸² "Establish 'Founders' Roll' for Confederate Memorial," *Atlanta Constitution*, June 03, 1923, C2; "A Sacred Honor Roll," *Atlanta Constitution*, June 8, 1923, 8.

airwaves with clear advertising for the project's spectacle.¹⁸³ Similarly, in March, Gutzon Borglum went on WGM, making it clear that the project was being worked on as they spoke and that "within the next two weeks" he would be "projecting" the design on the rock's surface wherein he would begin sculpting. The radio program went into detail about the project's goals and made it clear that failure was not an option.¹⁸⁴ By the time Atlanta's newspapers announced the Founder's subscription program in June, Atlantans were flocking to join the project. Both individuals and businesses were quick to become founding members.¹⁸⁵ Atlanta's three major white newspapers immediately became founders and announced it to the public. From time to time, they would also announce the joining of the Founder's Roll by noteworthy individuals, like the children of "Gallant Captain S. S. Dunlap." This use of publicity to promote families support of the project became an even larger boon, as they were often carried on the front page of the *Atlanta Constitution*, making the families local celebrities.¹⁸⁶ Randolph reported quickly that the project had been an immense success, in that they received only a "few letters declining" the subscription.¹⁸⁷

Similar to the Founder's Fund for adults, the Children's Founder's Roll was created to use Georgia's school system to help generate free publicity. At the dramatically low cost of one dollar, a child could get his or her name immortalized in a book preserving his or her name for posterity.¹⁸⁸ Aimed at the "approximately 3 ½ million white school children in the public schools

¹⁸³ "Thousands Heard Ponselle Sing in Sunday Program Broadcast at Station WGM," *Atlanta Constitution*, April 31, 1923, 12.

¹⁸⁴ "Borglum calls Stone Mountain Conference here," *Atlanta Constitution*, March 2, 1923, 1.

¹⁸⁵ "Newspapers Add \$3,000 to Fund," *Atlanta Constitution*, July 5, 1923, 1.

¹⁸⁶ "Dunlap Memorial Gift from Macon," *Atlanta Constitution*, June 8, 1923, 1.

¹⁸⁷ Meeting Records dated June 20, 1923, Records Book 95, Bound Volume 1923-1924, Stone Mountain Papers, Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University.

¹⁸⁸ "Children to Aid Dixie Memorial," *Atlanta Constitution*, February 17, 1924, 9.

in the south,”¹⁸⁹ the project became immensely complicated, requiring volunteer “local chairmen” to work with local school systems in the hopes that the project could stretch all across the South. The Children’s Founder’s Roll launched in December 1923, garnering significant publicity within Atlanta’s media industry, even attracting the support of the mayor.¹⁹⁰

The most importance evidence of Atlanta’s white newspapers biased coverage of the project was their failure to report on the conflict that occurred, after the announcement of the date for Gutzon Borglum’s unveiling of Robert E. Lee’s carved head. Scheduled for Lee’s 107th birthday on January 19, 1924, the unveiling was designed to document the progress Borglum had made on the project.¹⁹¹ Once the media began publicizing the unveiling date, Borglum knew he had enough leverage to begin pressuring the Association directors to finalize his contract. It was a tense negotiation that ultimately soured the relationship between Borglum and Hollins Randolph. The project could not survive without donations, and every member of the Association including Borglum knew that the donations would cease if anyone ever understood that the project might fail. In fact, the reason Randolph had refused to finalize Borglum’s contract before then was because so much of the Association’s money was being utilized for its massive administrative infrastructure. A few months before Borglum’s request for a finalized contract, the Association had negotiated with southern banks for a loan utilizing future donations as collateral. Randolph sent members to the Georgia Bankers Convention in Savannah and the Alabama Bankers Association Convention, distributing pamphlets and magazines documenting their vision for the memorial.¹⁹² In Alabama, they secured a promise from Bibb Graves, the

¹⁸⁹ Meeting Records dated September 19, 1923, Records Book 95, Bound Volume 1923-1924, Stone Mountain Papers, Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University.

¹⁹⁰ “Children’s Founders Roll Names to Be Published,” *Atlanta Constitution*, March 30, 1924, 11; “Atlanta Mayor Urges Support of Memorial,” *Atlanta Constitution*, April 22, 1924, 6.

¹⁹¹ “Borglum Soon to Carve Head Of Lee on Stone Mountain,” *Atlanta Constitution*, January 14, 1921, 10.

¹⁹² Meeting Minutes May 15, 1923, Records Book 95, Box 5, Stone Mountain Papers, Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University.

governor, that the state would release funds to back the Stone Mountain, as long as he was able to secure the state legislature's approval.¹⁹³ However, these kinds of promises rarely manifested in successful donations, and on August 15, 1923 Randolph admitted in an Association meeting that the accounts were officially below one thousand dollars and that they would be unable to meet their \$1,800 monthly bills.¹⁹⁴ To allay concerns, Randolph told the directors that he had secured a five thousand dollar loan from the Atlanta National Bank utilizing the successful Founders Roll subscriptions as collateral for that loan. Despite the presence of several newspaper editors in the Association, these financial troubles were never explicitly reported in Atlanta's newspapers.

With the loan secured, Gutzon Borglum was able to get his contract finalized; the Association could not risk their debt to the sculptor becoming public.¹⁹⁵ The Association needed a success story, and the unveiling seemed to be the exact thing they could use. Atlanta's white newspapers and city officials promoted the date as a major historical event. Randolph and the Association pressured local businesses to back the project, and the *Atlanta Constitution* and the *Atlanta Journal* rewarded donations with positive publicity. The unveiling became yet another publicity event to mark the progress of the project. Alfred Newell, who was the president of the Atlanta Chamber of Commerce, praised the city's newspapers for their reach, noting that he was having long conversations about the memorial with fellow businessmen in New York. Newell argued that Stone Mountain turned "the eyes of the world on Atlanta"¹⁹⁶ and designed a

¹⁹³ Meeting Minutes, May 23, 1923, Records Book 95, Box 5, Stone Mountain Papers, Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University.

¹⁹⁴ Meeting Minutes, August 15, 1923, Records Book 95, Box 5, Stone Mountain Papers, Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University.

¹⁹⁵ Contract dated September 10, 1923, Records Book 95, Bound Volume 1923-1924, Stone Mountain Papers, Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University; "Plans to Finish Head of R. E. Lee By His Birthday," *Atlanta Constitution*, September 13, 1923, 7.

¹⁹⁶ "'Eyes of world' now on Atlanta, says Newell," *Atlanta Constitution*, September 30, 1923, 7.

\$250,000 dollar fundraiser aimed at Atlanta's local businesses, using the Chamber of Commerce to spearhead the project. The *Atlanta Constitution* quoted Atlanta Chamber of Commerce Chairman Albert S. Adams as saying, "the more you study this memorial and think of what it means to Atlanta the more enthusiastic you will become."¹⁹⁷ For Atlanta's white business interests, including the city's growing media industry, Stone Mountain was a lightning rod to attract national attention.

As the day of the unveiling the statue of Robert E. Lee's carved head approached, Atlanta's white newspapers generated significant publicity for Lee's birthday, with articles dedicated to historical retellings of Civil War events, articles outlining the Lost Cause interpretation of the war, and biographical features of Robert E. Lee as a southern icon and hero.¹⁹⁸ Each of these articles made it clear that the Memorial was integral to Atlanta's identity. The *Atlanta Journal* promoted the myriad political figures who would be in attendance for the viewing and ran editorial cartoons imagining the unveiling.¹⁹⁹ The *Atlanta Constitution* announced that former and contemporary governors, ambassadors, and various "Dixie leaders" were visiting the city for the reveal, and that this would just be the beginning.²⁰⁰ The real promise and dream of tourism dollars fed into the massive upsurge in fervor about the project. This created a massive publicity event where the reveal of Robert E. Lee's carved head would become the centerpiece. The event was so publicized that the mayor yet again declared the day a city-wide half-holiday so that everyone could attend.²⁰¹ The unveiling was designed as a great spectacle, with Borglum rigging two boulders so that they slammed together to signal the reveal.

¹⁹⁷ "Drive Launched to Raise Atlanta Memorial Quota," *Atlanta Constitution*, October 16, 1923, 1.

¹⁹⁸ "Robert Edward Lee," *Atlanta Constitution*, January 19, 1924, 6; "Plans Outlined for Unveiling of Head of Lee," *Atlanta Constitution*, January 10, 1924, 7.

¹⁹⁹ "Distinguished Visitors Arrive for Unveiling of Lee's Head on Mountain," *Atlanta Journal*, January 18, 1924.

²⁰⁰ "Notable Visitors," *Atlanta Constitution*, January 19, 1924: 6; "Governors of Dixie Pay Eloquent Tribute to Lee," *Atlanta Constitution*, January 20, 1924, 9.

²⁰¹ "Dixie Leaders Gather Here for Lee Exercises," *Atlanta Constitution*, January 19, 1924, 1.

Following the celebration, the *Constitution* made sure to continue pushing the project, announcing jubilantly that southern “bitterness [was] gone” and that “the lost cause” would long be remembered.²⁰² For Atlanta’s public, the unveiling was reported as an immense success, and the only coverage resulting from the financial insolvency of the Association was an appeal from Randolph for more funds.²⁰³

When Randolph met with four of the Association’s directors on January 31, 1924, he made it clear that the Association had been promised a significant amount of money. He argued that the Children’s Founder’s Roll and the upcoming campaign to mint a Stone Mountain Confederate Memorial commemorative coin promised to bring in even more money. But the Association’s debt was out of control, and Randolph admitted that they had to make a decision. Borglum was in Washington, D.C. using his popularity to negotiate the passage of the commemorative coin legislation within both the House and Senate, and he had telegraphed Randolph with a request for financial support. During his meeting with the directors, Randolph argued that, although they had nothing but “universal expressions of admiration at [Borglum’s] wonderful work,” the Association was “not in financial condition at this time to comply with his request.”²⁰⁴ The project was hemorrhaging more money than it was receiving, and either through “inadvertence and mistake... some of the amounts received by the Founders Roll subscriptions, and others which had been pledged to the Atlanta National Bank as collateral for the loans of the association from the Bank had become mingled with the general funds of the Association and used in its regular business.” What this meant was that the very collateral the Association had

²⁰² “Widow of Gallant Soldier Who Died for South Unveils Head of Lee, Carved on Mountain Side,” *Atlanta Constitution*, January 20, 1924, 9.

²⁰³ “Memorial Funds Greatly Needed, Randolph Says,” *Atlanta Constitution*, January 22, 1924, 3.

²⁰⁴ Meeting Minutes for January 31, 1924 Records Binder 1923-1924, Stone Mountain Papers, Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University.

used to secure the loans was depleted, and this meant that Randolph had to renegotiate new financial terms with the Atlanta National Bank. The new agreement required the creation of “a special trust fund” established through the donations of the Association’s directors to pay back the loans, which by this point netted around \$3,500 dollars. Randolph noted to the Association directors that the bankers “cleverly” had not “insist[ed]” that on the Association pay the cash back immediately, because they recognized how important the project’s success was to the city.²⁰⁵

Atlanta’s banks knew that the Memorial was pulling in money, because the newspapers had been regularly reporting these facts. In fact, the Association was just about to launch its largest fundraiser project yet, the minting of a commemorative coin that the banks would be asked to distribute. This campaign was first proposed by Harry Stillwell Edwards, longtime contributor to the *Atlanta Journal* and well-known editor, journalist, and short story writer. Commemorative coin campaigns had been successful in other projects during the early 1920s, with Alabama and Missouri issuing their own coins, along with the Grant Memorial gold and half dollar releases, so the coin fundraiser was promising. The Association immediately awarded Edwards a salary of \$250 dollars a month, which illustrates the kinds of bad decisions the Association had been making that left them unable to pay their bills. Borglum was sent to Washington D.C. to try and negotiate the passage of the bill, which was introduced by Senator Reed Smoot of Utah and by Representative McFadden of Pennsylvania.²⁰⁶ On February 28, 1924, Borglum reported to the press that the project was successful and that he would begin

²⁰⁵ Meeting Records dated January 24, 1924, Records Book 95, Bound Volume 1923-1924, Stone Mountain Papers, Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University.

²⁰⁶ Meeting Minutes for January 31, 1924, Records Binder 1923-1924, Stone Mountain Papers, Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University.

working on sculpting the coin itself.²⁰⁷ Again using funds that the Association did not readily have, Randolph went to Washington to finalize the process, which ended with the House passing the bill on March 6, the Senate approving it five days later, and President Coolidge signing it into law on March 17, 1924.²⁰⁸

Everything about the commemorative coin was contested in some way during this process. Borglum found himself debating with senators on a regular basis about the nature of the memorial and the question of whether it really did represent national unity or southern white supremacy. When Borglum submitted designs to Andrew Mellon, the Secretary of Treasury, rejected the coin close to nine times. Borglum, deft in navigating public opinion through the press, was stymied by this challenge to his artistic license. Mellon found the coin distasteful as it promoted a positive impression of the southern state's separation from the Union.²⁰⁹ The core complication was that Mellon saw the coin as a validation to the South's treasonous behavior, so Borglum's attempts to try and construct a middle ground seemed doomed from the start. Mellon's opinion reflected the growing realities of the era too, as these same objections were being made against the monument itself by major national organizations like The Grand Army of the Republic (GAR), an organization of former northern soldiers and their relatives. The GAR challenged the monument, and the coin's minting as well, as praising the treasonous behavior of the South. The GAR staged protests in Boston and New York, and pressure mounted for legislators to pull support for the coin.

Both Mellon and the GAR functioned as part of a larger plan to repeal congressional approval for the coin. They had considerable influence within Washington, and national

²⁰⁷ "New Coin Design for Big Memorial is Recommended," *Atlanta Constitution*, February 28, 1924, 1.

²⁰⁸ "Senate Approves Memorial Coins," *Atlanta Constitution*, March 7, 1924: 1.; Article 153, Box 5, Folder 3, Stone Mountain Papers, Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University.

²⁰⁹ Brad Snyder, *The House of Truth*, 404-405.

newspapers found their arguments compelling. The *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* published in-depth articles on the subject. One such example was the GAR's parade in Boston on August 12, 1924, where Gaylord M. Saltzgaber, head of the GAR, attacked both the project and the Secretary of Treasury for supporting it. On December 6, 1924, the *Wall Street Journal* reported that the GAR had secured enough support in Washington D.C. to produce a repeal bill within the House.²¹⁰ While the repeal bill did not pass, the GAR had generated a significant amount of resistance within the press to open debate about the efficacy of federal support for the campaign. That resistance carried over into the treasury itself, and Borglum described "very serious attacks made upon the Memorial" in Washington.²¹¹ Atlanta newspapers were consistently pushing him to explain the delay, and he consistently confirmed the coin's viability. In early August, Borglum tried to distract the public by heralding a new form of dynamite use that would "greatly help" speed the project up, but the attention at this stage was still focused on the coin.²¹² Borglum assured Atlantans through the *Atlanta Constitution* that it was "subordinate officials at Washington" that were responsible for the delay and not the GAR protests.²¹³ Borglum eventually submitted nine different revisions of the coin, and Treasury Secretary Andrew Mellon continued to challenge and delay his designs until November of 1924 when the coin's final design was approved. Finally, on November 9th, Borglum wrote an extensive article outlining his struggles in getting the coin designs accepted and promising the coin's final receipt next year.²¹⁴ The minting process would not begin until 1925.

²¹⁰ "G.A.R. Chief Assails Stone Mountain Coin," *Washington Post*, August 14, 1924, 4; "G.A.R. Chief Attacks 'Confederate' Coins," *New York Times*, August 14, 1924, 3; "May Repeal Coinage Bill," *Wall Street Journal* December 6, 1924, 8.

²¹¹ Brad Snyder, *The House of Truth*, 388-389.

²¹² "New Method of Dynamiting Speeds Stone Mountain Work," *Atlanta Constitution*, August 1, 1924, 4.

²¹³ "Delay in Coining Memorials Laid to Subordinates," *Atlanta Constitution*, August 30, 1924.

²¹⁴ "Significance of Great Stone Mountain Coin Issue Is Explained by Borglum," *Atlanta Constitution*, November 9, 1924, 9.

Even after Hollins Randolph's fundraiser dinner attracted national scrutiny, Atlanta's newspapers were fully invested in the project's success. But growing criticism from the national press, and Hollins' own political ambitions, started to threaten the viability of the project. As news began to break that the Association was facing immense debt, the very schism at the heart of the Association began to show publicly. The first scuffle came from Gutzon Borglum, who felt the Association's lavish waste of money on things immaterial to the success of the moment was a insult. Sam Venable became second, and then Clark Howell became the third. Time and time again, Hollins Randolph saw resistance rising within the Association's older members and those divisions were starting to undermine the positive publicity the Association had come to rely on. Had Randolph not taken Howell's position as the Georgia state Democratic Party chair, much of this would have remained out of the headlines. Howell would have thought better of undermining the project's viability. But, Hollins only saw the Association a way to "enhance his standing at the upcoming Democratic convention," to quote historian David Freeman.²¹⁵ Despite all his work, the McAdoo campaign still lost the 1924 Democratic nomination, and Randolph was about to face one of the most destructive public attacks ever.²¹⁶

The Association's Public Schism

As the Memorial garnered more negative national publicity, the Association began fragmenting internally, which became difficult for Atlanta's local newspapers to ignore. Time and time again, these internal schisms would put the entire project in jeopardy, and it all began in June of 1924 when Samuel Venable heard that the Association was in debt. Venable took his complaints to the only friend he had in Atlanta's media industry, Clark Howell. Howell was also

²¹⁵ David Freeman, *Carved in Stone*, 76.

²¹⁶ Robert Keith Murray, *The 103rd Ballot: The Legendary 1924 Democratic Convention That Forever Changed Politics* (Harper Paperbacks, 2016).

not a friend to Hollins Randolph, who had been stripped of his position within the Georgia Democratic Party. When Venable came with complaints, Howell made the *Atlanta Constitution* a foundation of debate for undermining Hollins Randolph's leadership of the Association. This public debate transpired on the front pages of Atlanta's two major newspapers. Samuel Venable and Clark Howell published their arguments in the *Constitution*, while Randolph published his in the *Atlanta Journal*. What resulted from this chaos was negative publicity that not only brought embarrassment to all parties involved, but also led to the Atlanta public's disillusionment with the project. After Hollins Randolph took control, Clark Howell and the *Atlanta Constitution* had begun to slowly pull away from the project, and the *Atlanta Journal* moved in to take up its place, introducing four new members to the Association's board of directors: John S. Cohen, Inman Gray, John A. Brice, and John Paschal. Not only that, the Association was directly employing several former *Atlanta Journal* employees.²¹⁷

Samuel Venable's public resignation from the project in June 1924 sent a shock through the community, especially when Venable erected fences on his land restricting workers from accessing the site. Randolph responded by calling an emergency meeting on June 10, 1924, officially accepting Venable's resignation, and filing an injunction against Venable the very next day aimed at keeping the Memorial progressing.²¹⁸ Venable responded by publishing a lengthy account of the Association's financial failures in Clark Howell's *Atlanta Constitution*. He charged that the Association was using memorial funds for "wild-eyed extravagances," arguing that Randolph and his supporters within the Association were using the Memorial's funds not as a tool for promoting southern heritage as the original charter stated, but instead for their own

²¹⁷ "Venable Charges Randolph planned adroit conspiracy," *Atlanta Constitution*, March 17, 1925, 1.

²¹⁸ Meeting Minutes, June 10, 1924, Box 5, Folder 17, Stone Mountain Papers, Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University.

personal political aggrandizement. Venable argued that Randolph was spending exorbitant amounts of money taking “useless jaunts about the country, living in lavish style, and scattering funds with reckless hands.” He noted that, over the last few years, the Memorial project had been in jeopardy due to this extravagant spending, while the Association kept begging Atlanta’s citizens for more and more money. Venable noted that the Association’s “secretary” earns “a salary of \$10,400 per year,” which he noted was “outrageous” considering “the caliber of man then filling it.” He argued that the Association paid “\$8,600 per year to the publicity manager,” Roger Winters, which was “\$5,220 more a year” than he was making with the *Atlanta Journal*, not to mention that Winters’ wife also received a salary. Venable argued that Randolph had secured a cadre of his own fellows within the Association’s inner circle that let him do what he wanted, and Randolph had pushed original members out.²¹⁹ Venable noted that the only thing left was for the Daughters of the Confederacy to revoke the Memorial’s charter.

The schism within the Association was highly visible, playing out on both newspapers’ front pages, and newspaper editors soon waded into the fray to resolve it. Reuben R. Arnold, the Association’s lawyer, responded to Venable’s claims in a rejoinder that was originally published in the *Atlanta Journal* but that also ran in the *Atlanta Constitution* the following day. A notable part of his argument was that Venable’s complaints should be private and not published “in any newspaper controversy,” but he also claimed that Venable’s arguments were inaccurate as to the state of the Association.²²⁰ In the same issue of the newspaper, Clark Howell argued that his newspaper was a perfect space for such articles, because Venable and all members of the Association should be charged with the responsibility to “guard with zealous interest the operations, the mammoth details, the administration of the hundreds of thousands of dollars

²¹⁹ “Venable Charges 'Wild-Eyed' Waste To Memorial Heads,” *Atlanta Constitution*, June 11, 1924, 1.

²²⁰ “Arnold Answers Charges of Waste in Memorial Fund,” *Atlanta Constitution*, June 12, 1924, 1.

contributed, and to be contributed, for the sculptural and other work in building the memorial, as outlined and promised.” He noted that not only should this be rectified, but that given the sheer amount of money that had been donated, “work must proceed” on the project.²²¹ Soon, John Cohen, the *Atlanta Journal*’s chief editor, agreed with Howell in his own editorial that the Association had to move “forward with the splendid Stone Mountain Memorial” and take this infighting out of the public sphere. Cohen argued that Venable’s resignation was due to “reasons best known to himself... however, the matter of supreme concern to the people of the South is the work on this greatest of Confederate memorials may proceed without interruption or hindrance.”²²²

Despite these efforts, debates about the dispute spread like wildfire. Tourism agencies joined the discussion, arguing for either more investigation into the Association’s handling of the funds or going forward with the memorial, with each party demonstrating their bias clearly. The Atlanta Hotel Association, an organization deeply reliant on the tourism industry, announced on June 13, 1924 that it unanimously supported Randolph and the Association.²²³ Charles F. Crouch, secretary of the Golden Rule Club of America, came out in support of Venable’s critiques, bringing further information that Roger Winter on June 22, 1924 was actually accepting “two salaries... one from the McAdoo campaign managers and the other from the Stone Mountain Confederate Memorial association... with the full sanction of Mr. Hollins Randolph.”²²⁴ He argued that whatever work can be done for one salary, he does not imagine it would be of “high caliber” if the man was also forced to juggle a second full-time job, confirming that Randolph was using the Association to facilitate the McAdoo campaign.

²²¹ “The Work Must Go On!,” *Atlanta Constitution*, June 12, 1924, 6.

²²² “Forward with Splendid Work on Stone Mountain Memorial,” *Atlanta Journal*, June 15, 1924, 21.

²²³ “Confidence Voted Stone Mountain Memorial Heads,” *Atlanta Constitution*, June 13, 1924, 24.

²²⁴ “Venable Lauded in Memorial Row,” *Atlanta Constitution*, June 22, 1924, 11.

After both newspapers made it clear that the project must not fail, Venable agreed to work within the Association and hopefully try to mitigate the damage done. However, the hard feelings on both sides made meetings tense, the Stone Mountain Confederate Memorial's reputation was significantly damaged, and the Association's financial problems were still very real. Randolph announced to the SMCMA board of directors on June 18 that "it would be very hurtful, if not disastrous, if the general impression got abroad in the community that the Association was heavily indebted and was without funds to pay its obligations." Randolph reported that the "Association was indebted to various persons in the sum of approximately \$15,000.00: that it had on hand cash to the amount of \$2,000.00; that the County of Fulton owed the Association \$5,000.00, and sundry subscribers to the Memorial Fund owed past due obligations, voluntarily but bona fide subscribed heretofore, in the approximate amount of \$11,000.00." Randolph concluded that the Association needed money soon "to take care of its obligations." In response, the Association took on another loan endorsed by Mr. G.F. Willis for \$5,000 dollars to help finance the project.²²⁵ Over the next few months, the project's financial status would never truly improve, until the coins were finally minted.

After the coin's design was approved, the lucrative nature of the coin fundraising campaign compelled Venable and Randolph to cease the public fighting. However, it did not last long. By December 1, 1924, a new dispute began to ferment within the Association, but this time it was between Borglum and Randolph. Borglum wrote to Randolph requesting new funds. Borglum owed a lot of money that he had borrowed to help stabilize his shifting lifestyle between Washington D.C. and Atlanta, when the Association rejected his request for money. He wrote to Randolph arguing that "It [was] now a little more than two and a half months since I

²²⁵ Meeting Minutes, June 18, 1924, Folder 17, Box 5, Stone Mountain Papers, Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University.

received from the Chairmen of the Finance Committee most positive assurance that the arrears and payments due the sculptor would be promptly and completely settled.” He continued that “it [was] more than five weeks since I came to Atlanta, following the completion of the Coin and its approval, and arranged to establish residence here in order to be more closely in touch with the work,” and that if payment wasn’t made he would “be compelled to suspend... work on the mountain” until he could “secure other financial aid.”²²⁶ Randolph brought Borglum’s concerns up before the Association on December 3, 1924 and invited Borglum to voice his concerns in person, which he did. Borglum argued before the crowd that “you cannot abandon this work. You cannot carry it on without me. There is not another sculptor alive who can carry it on. But I must have your loyalty and support.” Randolph denied everything.

The Association’s lawyer, Reuben R. Arnould, responded that Borglum had in fact already served his purpose by securing the minting of the coin, and that at this stage, the Association was confident that they could move forward without him on that project. Arnould noted that they already had his sculptures of the project, and that Borglum’s pointed criticisms were actually aimed at “the only set of men who ever raised any money at all” for Borglum’s work. Arnould also argued that the Association had already paid Borglum \$100,000 dollars in “a little over a year,” and close to \$60,000 “in equipment,” and \$15,000 in “expenses.” Ultimately, Borglum was not only told that his request was rejected, but he was also informed that his utility to the project was in question. Arnold recommended that Borglum keep working on the project and keep getting the pay as he was contracted to receive it, and to stop pushing for anything additional.²²⁷

²²⁶ Letter to Randolph, December 1, 1924, Folder 1, Box 6, Stone Mountain Papers, Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University.

²²⁷ Meeting Minutes, December 3, 1924, Folder 1, Box 6, Stone Mountain Papers, Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University.

The Association turned their attention away from Gutzon Borglum as they believed he would return to work on the project. Borglum had other plans, however, after seeing the growing debt of the Association and questioning the project's financial viability. Unlike Venable, Borglum's pay was in jeopardy, and he was not interested in working for free. As a major public figure, Borglum knew how the newspaper industry functioned, and he immediately began working with the *Atlanta Constitution* to release a series of articles aimed at centralizing the monument's vision around Borglum. These articles were not exactly editorials, but instead heavily biased opinion pieces written from the sculptor himself. Borglum thought that if he got the public's will behind his vision of the monument, Randolph's administrative body couldn't hurt the project's chances for success. The series of articles began with a massive illustration of his artistic vision of what the Stone Mountain Confederate Memorial would look like. He wrote that the monument was a "dimensional wonder," and a "trick of genius," a "triumph," but most of all his project.²²⁸ He argued that the project was so revolutionary, nothing else existed all the way back to "the dawn of thought" in Italy with Michelangelo.²²⁹ He made it clear that the project itself was difficult, and the "terrors" that he faced in accomplishing a project would "raise artisan standard."²³⁰ But the real story he told was about how he, Gutzon Borglum, was integral to the project's success, as he prepared to challenge the Association's claim to the memorial. In Borglum's mind, the keeper of the project's vision was the artist, not the financiers.

Borglum never finished his fifth article because he had already brought his grievances to the Association, which had been met with resounding rejection. He accelerated his plans because

²²⁸ Gutzon Borglum, "Stone Mountain Memorial Called Trick of Genius," *Atlanta Constitution*, February 1, 1925, 1.

²²⁹ Gutzon Borglum, "Big Confederate Memorial Is Study in Great Struggle," *Atlanta Constitution*, February 8, 1925, 9.

²³⁰ Gutzon Borglum, "Confederate Memorial's Art Problem Told by Sculptor," *Atlanta Constitution*, February 15, 1925, A1.

he knew that once the Association began selling the coins, they would have too much power for him to challenge. In a way, the coins represented a tangible part of the monument that Borglum could not control. In the meeting, Borglum called “Rivers a liar” and observers reported that Rivers “had to be pulled off of him.”²³¹ After the meeting, the *Atlanta Constitution* reported that the the Association was thinking of ending its partnership with Borglum due to what they claimed to be his lack of progress on the monument. However, Borglum responded that the Association was failing the project by failing to pay him.²³² Borglum announced the Association was in debt, and that he was unsure they would ever finish the project. It was a publicity nightmare for the Association.²³³ By February 24, the story forced Georgia’s legislation to launch an investigation, and the Association released Borglum from the contract.²³⁴ Once Borglum learned of his release, he smashed the models he was using to for the project, burned his drawings, and ordered the plaster models of the Lee and Jackson heads to be thrown off the mountain. The Association tried to stop Borglum’s actions, but they were too late.²³⁵ Borglum fled the state, and by February 27 the UDC demanded that the Association give them a voice in the matter.²³⁶ Borglum’s travels across the South were covered in the national press, and when he was arrested in North Carolina for vandalizing the project’s models the following day, it made national headlines.²³⁷ While northern publications sided with Borglum as the artist, Atlanta’s

²³¹ Publicity Diary, Stone Mountain Papers, Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University.

²³² “Borglum’s Work May Be Ended by Association,” *Atlanta Constitution*, February 22, 1925, 1.

²³³ “Funds Exhausted, Borglum States,” *Atlanta Constitution*, February 22, 1925, 6.; “Says Borglum Is Out \$60,000,” *New York Times*, February 23, 1925, 3.

²³⁴ “Stone Mountain Quarrel Thrown into Congress,” *Atlanta Constitution*, February 24, 1925, 1.

²³⁵ “Borglum and Tucker Are Sought on Warrant Following Destruction of Memorial Models,” *Atlanta Constitution*, February 26, 1925, 1.

²³⁶ “Daughters of Confederacy Demand Voice in Control of Memorial Association,” *Atlanta Constitution*, February 27, 1925, 1.

²³⁷ “Gutzon Borglum Arrested in Greensboro, N. C., Freed on Habeas Corpus, Goes to New York,” *Atlanta Constitution*, March 1, 1925, 1.

local media industry split with the *Atlanta Constitution* backing the sculptor and Venable, and the *Atlanta Journal* backing the Association.²³⁸

The public debate was disastrous for the Association. Both major white newspapers made the controversy their front-page coverage. The bad publicity reached such a fervor that even the *Atlanta Independent*, Atlanta's major black newspaper, argued that the Association had to have the "charges dismissed, indictments squashed, and the association reorganized" so that Gutzon Borglum could "complete the job."²³⁹ On the disputed payment to Borglum, the *Atlanta Constitution* argued that the \$20,000 dollars were back payment for a loan, citing Lester P. Barlow as the source of this claim.²⁴⁰ In response, the *Atlanta Journal* ran an article, "Randolph Refutes Borglum's Claims," saying that the money was payment for services done. When the *Atlanta Constitution* demanded that the Association make amends with the sculptor and bring him back, the *Atlanta Journal* argued that local representative bodies were actively backing the Association and its release of the sculptor.²⁴¹

As the public furor persisted, the possibility of the project's success looked more and more bleak. Randolph argued that Borglum had failed to make any progress on the Memorial since the reveal of Robert E. Lee's head, which ultimately made Randolph himself look bad given that it was over a year ago. Randolph's argument was met by an article quoting local author Corra Harris, who demanded that Randolph resign his position in the hope that the Association could try to repair the damage. The *Atlanta Constitution* also ran another article quoting citizens who argued that the Association was stripping Borglum of his artistic vision,

²³⁸ "Largely Klan Matter, Declares Robinson," *Atlanta Constitution*, February 28, 1925, 12.

²³⁹ "The Stone Mountain Memorial," *Atlanta Independent*, March 12, 1925, 4.

²⁴⁰ "\$20,000 Was Payment of Loan, Says Barlow," *Atlanta Constitution*, February 23, 1925, 2.

²⁴¹ "'Steam-Roller' Tactics Are Charged in Statement Issued by Borglum," *Atlanta Constitution*, March 8, 1925, 1.

which was “unethical.”²⁴² While the *Constitution* made it clear that it supported Borglum, the *Atlanta Journal*’s decision to dedicated its front page to Hollins Randolph’s arguments afforded a dynamic public engagement that tanked the overall reputation for the project.²⁴³

By the middle of March, Samuel H. Venable joined the dispute and charged Hollins Randolph with “an intoxication from power and financial greed.” Venable argued that Randolph’s recent complaints about Borglum’s progress were all brand new, because according to previous meeting records Rogers Winters had reported that “work on the mountainside was progressing satisfactorily and that everything connected with the association was functioning fine.”²⁴⁴ In response, the *Atlanta Journal*, through the arguments framed by Hollins Randolph and the Association’s lawyer Reuben H. Arnould, tried to change the topic away from Borglum and the sustainability of the project, toward Clark Howell’s behind the scenes dispute with Hollins Randolph over Democratic politics. The dispute continued in the front pages for weeks.

Atlanta newspaper coverage of the Stone Mountain Confederate Memorial stands as a prime example of how integrated the city’s newspaper owners, editors, and journalists were with the city’s economic interests. Utilizing their front pages, and their editorial columns, they framed the memorial around its technical achievements and its support for white heritage, rather than reporting on its more controversial aspects like the growing Klan in other articles. While Randolph and Howell argued on their respective front pages about fiscal and social responsibility, Atlanta’s newspapers still continued to aggressively promote the memorial in other articles. When Randolph accused Clark Howell of lying on the front page of the *Atlanta Journal*, there was another article on the very same page promoting the commemorative coins as

²⁴² “Women Indorse Borglum in Memorial Differences,” *Atlanta Constitution*, March 15, 1925, 11A.

²⁴³ “Reasons for Borglum’s Dismissal Told by Committee in Statement to Public,” *Atlanta Journal*, March 15, 1925, 1.

²⁴⁴ “Venable Charges Randolph Planned Adroit Conspiracy,” *Atlanta Constitution*, March 17, 1925, 1.

pieces of white heritage.²⁴⁵ Another article praised the public's "approval for the memorial body."²⁴⁶ Similarly, as Clark Howell issued a "hot reply" on the front page of the *Atlanta Constitution*, it was published adjacent to an article detailing how Borglum would "rebuild models for the Association" and that he hoped to help with "restoring peace."²⁴⁷ And when Howell made his "answer to Randolph on March 20, it appeared directly beside an article illustrating how the Association was approaching the sale of the Memorial's commemorative coins.²⁴⁸ Neither side wanted the monument to be terminated, and for the project to succeed there had to be public faith within the project's administrators. The question really came down to whether or not Hollins Randolph was that individual to be trusted.

Conclusion

At every point, the Stone Mountain Confederate Memorial faced immense challenges in navigating the public's conceptions of race. Clark Howell's middle path worked in the beginning, because there were some northerners who supported the idea of honoring confederate soldiers. But the Klan's open support of the project challenged those ideas, because it illustrated how much the project reflected their creed of hate. The coin, in a much smaller way, came to reflect this very same relationship, and Gutzon Borglum's struggle to get the coin minted reflected just how unpalatable the confederate ideology was becoming as the Klan's notoriety grew. But for Atlanta's more traditional media outlets, they failed in their duty to serve the public's interests, placing the economic success of the memorial ahead of reader interests. By focusing on the memorial's meaning, they allowed the Klan to infiltrate the Association and

²⁴⁵ "Experts for Memorial Coin Drive: leaders secured for nation-wide sales campaign," *Atlanta Journal*, March 18, 1925, 1.

²⁴⁶ "Letters Received Voicing Approval of Memorial Body," *Atlanta Journal*, March 18, 1925, 1.

²⁴⁷ "Hot Reply Issued by Clark Howell to Randolph Card," *Atlanta Constitution*, March 19, 1925, 1; "New Borglum Models for UDC," *Atlanta Constitution*, March 19, 1925, 1.

²⁴⁸ "Hill Will Direct Campaign for Sale of Memorial Coins," *Atlanta Constitution*, March 20, 1925, 1.

undermine the monument's success. After the public dispute ended, both newspapers tried to return to praising the project, even calling for the Association to rehire Borglum. However, the damage was done. The Association's split from Borglum was final, and he would turn his attention toward a less controversial mountain carving, Mount Rushmore. The *Atlanta Constitution* even tried to promote the progress that the project had made over the years, but the public's interest was waning.²⁴⁹ Ultimately, the *Atlanta Constitution* argued that this should be Atlanta's "greatest monumental conception of all time" and that the project itself should "not be sacrificed to personal bickerings and dissenting influences from within or without."²⁵⁰ The *Atlanta Journal* argued that a "Memorial Boulevard" could be designed to allow people watch the monument being built, and perhaps later even more memorials could be built on the roadway.²⁵¹ By March 23, 1925, the *Atlanta Journal* was again publishing new members of the Founder's Roll, and on May 21, 1925, the *Atlanta Constitution* proclaimed the Association's success in beginning the sale of the memorial coins.

The Association was finally able to pay off its debts in December 1925 with the money raised from the commemorative coin sale, but the project itself would be in limbo for many years afterward. Sam Venable returned to the project to try and push for Borglum's return, but Randolph would only remove him later, along with many others who still harbored support for Borglum. After 1925, the project struggled to garner the same kind of national attention it had before. Many of the fundraising projects failed spectacularly, and even the coin campaign, which had garnered so much positive national publicity, was a failure: on April 1, 1926, the Stone

²⁴⁹ "Family of Mrs. Helen Plane Issues Formal Statement on UDC Memorial Work," *Atlanta Constitution*, March 22, 1925, 10.

²⁵⁰ "The Monument the Goal!" *Atlanta Constitution*, March 22, 1925, 34.

²⁵¹ "Memorial Boulevard," *Atlanta Journal*, March 22, 1925, 16.

Mountain Coins were recalled back to the Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta.²⁵² In 1927, Randolph would push for the State legislature to take land from Samuel Venable and use it for the Memorial's state park. Venable fought actively against this, and much like the Association's split with Gutzon Borglum, Randolph's attempt would garner him an extensive amount of negative publicity in Atlanta's press. Over the years, the Association's executive committee hired several different artists to finish the project, and the construction laid dormant more than it progressed. The project would not fully be completed until the 1970s, and there would even need to be a second commemorative coin campaign launched in order to facilitate funding the last leg of development. When the audit was finally released, as David Freeman notes, Sam Venable's position was vindicated as the project spent "only twenty-seven cents of every dollar" on the actual carving of the memorial.²⁵³

For Atlanta's newspapers, the project's failure was a marked reminder to Clark Howell how much power the newspaper had in shaping public opinion. Before Clark Howell backed Sam Venable's argument against Randolph, the project was seen externally as a unmitigated success. For Howell, the very public feud cost the Memorial project public confidence. In the end though, the project meant much more than that. It proved to Clark Howell that his middle path vision for Atlanta worked within national publications. For a brief moment, a memorial honoring the Confederate army's soldiers garnered national praise. It was only when the "white moderate" approach was abandoned and the project strayed toward Klan extremism that the Memorial's progress stalled. In many ways, Howell's campaign against the Stone Mountain Confederate Memorial Association became a major moment for his own journalistic integrity, as he began recognizing how poisonous the Klan's politics were to the city's public image. And this

²⁵² "Stone Mountain Coins To Be Recalled April 1," *Baltimore Sun*, March 20, 1926, 1.

²⁵³ David B. Freeman, *Carved in Stone*.

vision was popular with his readers because it would be in 1928 that Clark Howell's *Atlanta Constitution* was finally able to secure a higher subscriber count than all of Atlanta's newspapers.

CHAPTER 2—DIVERSE CITY: RACIALLY BIASED NEWSPAPER COVERAGE

On December 16, 1913, the *Atlanta Constitution* published an article about the arrest of three African American teenagers charged with murder in Jefferson County: Robert Paschal, George Hart, and William Hart. That article told a sensational story in which the three boys went to the Mrs. Seth Irby's home on the pretense of selling a bushel of potatoes, and when she refused to pay, the articles reported that they beheaded her with an axe from the woodshed. While much of the truth behind Mrs. Irby's murder is lost to history, the *Atlanta Constitution* article made it clear that these three young boys were guilty of the crime, and that they even "separately confessed the murder, going into details," many of which would later become questionable. For the *Constitution*, this case was open and shut. This was the manner in which Atlanta's white newspapers most frequently covered black Atlantans before World War I: focusing on criminality instead of community events and cultural accomplishments. Not only were these articles on black Atlantans often riddled with inaccuracies, but they were also shaped to emphasize the most negative aspects of black life possible. The first article on the murder of Mrs. Seth Irby named one of the boys "Sam Irby," and Ellie Irby's name was reported inaccurately for a month.²⁵⁴ As was common during this period, the article was clearly framed for white audiences, calling the teenagers "negroes" and not giving voice to their defense. Due to fears that the boys would be lynched, Georgia Governor Slaton transferred the prisoners in January "for safekeeping" to Atlanta, where the boys survived until their mid-January trial. When the case was heard, the all-white jury deliberated for only ten minutes before finding the

²⁵⁴ "Troops on Guard to Save Negroes from Judge Lynch," *Atlanta Constitution*, December 16, 1913, 1.

defendants guilty.²⁵⁵ Judge Ben Hill sentenced all three boys to death, and Paschal and the Hart brothers were scheduled to be hanged twenty-six days later.

However, Paschal and the Hart brothers were not executed by the first deadline. On January 31, 1914, Paschal began working with Solicitor General Moore in Jefferson County to re-open the case. Moore argued that the teenagers' confessions, obtained a day after being arrested for the murder, were obtained through fear and intimidation and were inaccurate.²⁵⁶ It was not until March that the *Atlanta Constitution* finally printed Paschal's full story, which explained that he saw two men murder Mrs. Irby and that he ran to the Hart brothers' home because he was scared of what he had witnessed. On May 15, Paschal and the Hart brothers' request for a new trial was denied.²⁵⁷ In June, the *Atlanta Constitution* dedicated a lurid, front-page account to the boys' final night before their execution. The boys were executed on June 19.²⁵⁸

If the Stone Mountain Confederate Memorial taught Clark Howell that Confederate ideology could be shaped to attract national appeal, then the threat of lynching reminded him that violence could invite federal intervention. After the execution, Clark Howell praised Atlantans for allowing the case to proceed to its legal end, writing that the "end of lynch law" was within sight.²⁵⁹ Howell argued that the execution was better than lynching because the boys were given a trial, even though by modern standards it is clear that trial was horribly biased. This is more evidence of Clark Howell's "white moderate" editorial policy. He argued that the "rescue" and transfer of Paschal and the Hart brothers into an Atlanta jail was a good thing, because they were

²⁵⁵ "Negroes Who Ended Life of Mrs. Irby to Hang for Crime," *Atlanta Constitution*, January 13, 1914, 1.

²⁵⁶ "Says Negroes Tried to Hang Him in Cell," *Atlanta Constitution*, March 8, 1914, A6.

²⁵⁷ "New trial Denied Paschal and Hart," *Atlanta Constitution*, May 15, 1914, 7.

²⁵⁸ "In Candle Lit Cell Three Negroes Pass Last Night on Earth, Refuse All Food Except Bananas and Oranges, and Beg for Ready-Made Cigarettes," *Atlanta Constitution*, June 19, 1914, 1.

²⁵⁹ "End of Lynch Law," *Atlanta Constitution*, January 13, 1914, 4.

able to have “justice.” However, the peace that Howell’s “white moderate” policy worked toward was a “negative peace,” to borrow Martin Luther King Jr.’s language.²⁶⁰ The “justice” of a ten minute all white jury deliberation was obviously hollow. The incrementalist change from lynching to state sanctioned execution for unproven crimes must have been little comfort to the black community. What the Paschal experience shows is that Clark Howell’s “white moderate” editorial policy meant not only redirecting white supremacist into nationally socially acceptable confederate imagery, but it also became the beginnings of institutional racism.

There were two key tenets to Clark Howell’s “white moderate” editorial policy during this period. First, white southerners must never engage in mob violence. For Clark Howell, this meant that he had a responsibility to use his editorial platform to denounce lynching. Howell devoted a significant amount of space attacking the practice of lynching throughout the early twentieth century. His stances garnered him a national reputation as an “optimistic” southerner who represented the South’s “intelligent element” who had “grown tired” of being represented by racists.²⁶¹ When Clark Howell praised black southerners for making “wonderful progress since emancipation,” *The Atlanta Independent* actually praised him for stating “the whole truth as we understand our emancipation.”²⁶² Howell was even heralded by the *Fisk University News* as “making known constructive aspects of race relations in the South” and taking “very positive attitudes against lynching.”²⁶³ Other black newspapers like the *Philadelphia Courier* and the *Baltimore Afro-American* also acknowledged Howell as a white southerner with favorable positions on race.²⁶⁴ And yet, Clark Howell’s prediction in 1914 that the “end of lynch law” was

²⁶⁰ Martin Luther King, Jr., *Letter from the Birmingham Jail*, ed. Bryan Loritts, *Letters to A Birmingham Jail: A Response to the Words and Dreams of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2014), 25.

²⁶¹ “Southern Sentiment,” *Chicago Defender*, May 10, 1913, 4.

²⁶² “Mr. Howell Hits the Bull’s Eye,” *Atlanta Independent*, January 10, 1914.

²⁶³ “The Southern Publicity Committee,” *Fisk University News* IX, no. 10 (1919): 38.

²⁶⁴ “Views of Other Editors,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, June 25, 1927, A8; “Mr. Harding Plays Golf,” *Baltimore Afro-American*, January 28, 1921, 9.

in sight was very wrong. Just one year later in 1915, not only would the Ku Klux Klan be resurrected in Atlanta, but twenty-two Georgians were lynched. In 1919, twenty-four Georgians were lynched.²⁶⁵ For Clark Howell and other Atlanta urban elites, these barbarous acts marred the city's national reputation. "White moderates" believed that lynching made southerners look uncivilized and chaotic, especially since black southerners had little ability to escape the law within Jim Crow.

There was a cost to the lynching scourge during this period, which is related to the second tenet of Howell's "white moderate" editorial policy. Clark Howell believed that white southerners had a responsibility to help uplift the black southern community through moral leadership, in order to keep black southerners from leaving the region. Since the 1870s, black southerners were steadily migrating from the South to seek opportunities in other regions. This mass movement has been called a number of names—the "Great Migrations," the "Exodus" movement, the "negro exodus"—and studied by historians as part of the larger black diaspora. Historian Bernadette Pruitt explains that "between 1890 and 1970, an estimated seven million African Americans uprooted to industrial centers across the country from rural, small town and urban centers throughout the South."²⁶⁶ By 1920, Clark Howell and many other southern white editors noticed the migration numbers from the South sharply increase, which caused northern and other southern publications to question the South's economic and social stability. For Clark Howell, this migration meant that white southerners were not doing their part to help better the plight of black southern communities.

²⁶⁵ "Known Georgia Lynching Victims," *Mary Turner Project*, January 1, 2020, <http://www.maryturner.org/>.

²⁶⁶ Bernadette Pruitt, *The Other Great Migration: The Movement of Rural African Americans to Houston, 1900-1941* (College Station: Texas A&M Univ. Press, 2013), 3.

Before 1920, Clark Howell's "white moderate" editorial policy pushed him to cover events in a racially biased fashion, as indicated with the Hart and Paschal story above. As previously stated, not only did the *Atlanta Constitution* rarely cover black community events, but when it did, that coverage was almost always framed from a white perspective and for a white perspective. As historian Eugene Pierce Walker argues between 1908 and 1918 the *Constitution* had a policy to "never interview" black leaders about events involving the black community, instead relying on white political leaders for their interpretations.²⁶⁷ In many ways, the *Atlanta Constitution*'s coverage of black southerners before 1920 mirrored what media scholar Ira B. Bryan, Jr. argues was endemic of white Texas newspapers. Texas papers framed black southerners as "habitually... criminal" and as "shiftless, superstitious, happy-go-lucky, childish, excitable, mentally inferior, lazy, [and] immoral."²⁶⁸ Like most white newspapers, the *Constitution*'s coverage of black citizens was largely limited to reporting antisocial behavior, "ignor[ing]" black southerners "except for [their] crimes."²⁶⁹ As previously mentioned, the *Atlanta Independent*, the only major newspaper devoted to serving the city's black community, was founded in 1903 to help give voice to black Atlantans. While the *Independent* praised some of the *Atlanta Constitution*'s attitudes toward black Atlantans, the paper argued that the *Constitution*'s overall policy toward black Atlantans "obscure[d] the virtues of Negroes and parade[d] their vices," highlighting "worthless, trifling, characterless Negroes and advertis[ing] them to the world as leaders, and pay[ing] no attention to the law-abiding, moral substantial black citizens." The most important complaint the *Independent* had about the *Constitution* was

²⁶⁷Eugene Pierce Walker, "Attitudes towards Negroes as reflected in the Atlanta Constitution, 1908-1918" (master's thesis, Atlanta University, 1969), Robert W. Woodruff Library.

²⁶⁸ Ira B. Bryant, Jr., "News Items about Negroes in White Urban and Rural Newspapers," *Journal of Negro Education*, 4 (1935): 169-178.

²⁶⁹ Southern Regional Council, Inc, *Race in the News* (Atlanta: Southern Regional Council, Inc, 1949), 1.

that the white paper so frequently announced the crimes black Georgians had enacted on white Georgians.²⁷⁰

In many ways, Clark Howell's coverage of black Atlantans changed significantly after 1921, and few scholars have recognized this pattern. Starting in 1921, Clark Howell began to publish a weekly column written by representatives from Atlanta's black community within his newspaper. Because the World War II period dominates so much of twentieth century media and civil rights literature, the integration of one of Atlanta's major daily newspapers during the 1920s has remained largely unexamined. One reason this has happened is that, with a few notable exceptions exploring segregationist thought, civil rights scholarship is predominantly focused on the nature of segregation within physical spaces. Both Tomiko Brown-Nagin's *Courage to Dissent* and Ronald H. Bayor's *Race and the Shaping of Twentieth Century Atlanta* focuses almost exclusively on how segregated public spaces became challenged by Atlanta-based civil rights organizations.²⁷¹ Brown-Nagin argues that the Atlanta black community's reliance on voter power to enact local civil reform was the "pragmatist" era of Atlanta's civil rights.²⁷² Bayor argues that during this period the city enacted legislation to shape Atlanta's physical spaces to alleviate growth pressures but also ensure the lasting effect of segregation.²⁷³ But an understanding of the city's civil rights rhetoric is incomplete without consideration of early changes to the city's racially biased newspaper coverage, which showed how the city's residents imagined their city's relationship to race.

²⁷⁰ "The Devil is Always Busy," *Atlanta Independent*, May 20, 1916, 2.

²⁷¹ Tomiko Brown-Nagin, *Courage to Dissent: Atlanta and the Long History of the Civil Rights Movement* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2011); Ronald H. Bayor, *Race and the Shaping of Twentieth Century Atlanta* (Durham: University of North Carolina Press, 1996).

²⁷² Tomiko Brown-Nagin, *Courage to Dissent*.

²⁷³ Ronald H. Bayor, *Race and the Shaping of Twentieth Century Atlanta*.

When *the Atlanta Constitution* covered the “negro exodus” it did so with a sense of alarm and panic. In December, 1916, Howell wrote that “the migration of negroes to the north and east... threaten[ed]” the southern agricultural market, and “the press and people of the state have become more aroused than ever to the necessity of sentiment and action.”²⁷⁴ Meanwhile, the *Atlanta Independent* explained that black southerners had been “driven from farm[s] because land owners [were] not feeding them.” The newspaper argued that the “rumor of work in the North ha[d] caused hundreds of them to leave the south.”²⁷⁵ The next year, Clark Howell began running articles on proposed solutions to the problem, like the improvement of Georgia’s education and health facilities, all the while raising wages for black southerners.²⁷⁶ When Georgia began trying pass city ordinances aimed at restricting blacks from leaving the South, Clark Howell argued that if the “negro migration... [were] continued at its present rate for any extended length of time, it [was] going to seriously affect labor conditions in the [S]outh.”²⁷⁷ The *Atlanta Independent*, in contrast, argued that “ordinances to stop the Negro exodus [would] only increase the exodus.” In a massive editorial piece, the *Independent* argued that while the editors were “opposed to the wholesale exodus of our people from the South to the North,” they also believed “in the principles of a free democracy” and “that every American citizen, without regard to race, color, or previous condition of servitude, ha[d] the God given right to move where he pleases and to wherever he pleases.” The *Independent* editors explained that the migration was understandable, because black life in the South was untenable. They argued that white southerners needed to “suppress lynching and lawlessness in the rural districts, pay the Negro living wages, give him a square deal on the farms, open the doors of the shops and factories to

²⁷⁴ “A Long-Needed Awakening,” *Atlanta Constitution*, December 10, 1916, C4.

²⁷⁵ “Distressing Condition of the Negro Race,” *Atlanta Independent*, December 23, 1916, 1.

²⁷⁶ “Exodus of Negro Race to North Discussed,” *Atlanta Constitution*, April 11, 1917, 4.

²⁷⁷ “The Negro Migration,” *Atlanta Constitution*, May 21, 1917, 4.

his prowess, and let him in the labor unions.”²⁷⁸ The *Independent* devoted many articles to African American migration, and most were aimed at illustrating how conditions for black southerners were untenable.

By 1921, Clark Howell faced three distinct problems. First and foremost, the *Atlanta Constitution*’s daily edition was steadily bringing in less subscribers than both the *Atlanta Georgian* and the *Atlanta Journal*. Howell knew that he needed a new source of readership if he wanted his paper to survive: his tri-weekly edition wasn’t making enough money for the paper. Second, Atlanta’s national reputation was getting hammered by the growth in popularity of the revived Ku Klux Klan. As was explained in chapter one, all of Atlanta’s white newspapers were struggling between denouncing religious intolerance and openly attacking the Klan, which was too powerful within the city. Third, Clark Howell knew that if he did not take the exodus of black southerners seriously, the region as a whole risked an economic collapse. Clark Howell and his son, Clark Howell Jr., had already scheduled a lecture circuit at several locations within Atlanta’s black community aimed at convincing them that “the white man in the South sympathize[d]” and “underst[ood] him” much better than the northerner. They argued that southerners were “more willing to work for [the black community’s] best interest.”²⁷⁹ Facing all three of these problems, Clark Howell agreed to publish a weekly Bulletin by Jesse O. Thomas, the field secretary of the interracial Atlanta Urban League. The weekly Bulletin promised to solve each of these problems by challenging northern arguments that Atlanta was a city dedicated to hate and securing an influx of new readers from the city’s black community, while providing a more positive image of the city to Atlanta’s black community that could help stem the tide of migration.

²⁷⁸ “The Negro Exodus,” *Atlanta Independent*, May 19, 1917, 4.

²⁷⁹ “Negro Migration Problem Discussed at Big Bethel,” *Atlanta Constitution*, September 10, 1923, 14.

While the weekly Bulletin had importance to Clark Howell, it was even more important to the Atlanta Urban League. Integral to the Urban League's mission was challenging the very nature of urban racism by bringing white and black communities together. A segregated media system undermined that process entirely, as it subconsciously reinforced the idea that both races were fundamentally different. To stop racism, the Urban League wanted to change the representation of the black community within white southern newspapers. Their plan to do this involved publishing a regularly released article within white newspapers promoting positive events within the community. This was the purpose of the Atlanta Urban League's Weekly Bulletin, which was designed to become a bridge between the races of the city. The column would afford Atlanta's black citizens a platform to help shape their community's image within the minds of white readers. In many ways, it would become the counternarrative to the very sensationalist stories of black crime in the other pages of the paper. While the Atlanta Urban League knew it would not easily change the *Atlanta Constitution's* support for the Confederacy, the Lost Cause, Jim Crow legislation, and its segregated physical spaces, these weekly Bulletins at least afforded the possibility of a new future.

It is important to note, however, that the *Atlanta Constitution's* shift to support a more diverse image of the city was far from absolute. Even when the paper did publish reports that cast black Atlantans in a more positive light, that change came at a glacial pace and it often contained inaccuracies that reflected its editor's racism. In 1920, the *Constitution* reported and that there were more white men arrested than black men, framing these numbers as a foundational change for the city. However, the article also concluded that the number of "negro women" arrested "far outshone" both white and black men with a total of 13,310.²⁸⁰ Urban

²⁸⁰ "White Men Exceed Negroes Arrested, Says Police Data," *Atlanta Constitution*, January 1, 1921, 12.

League Field Secretary Jesse O. Thomas recognized the strangeness of this statistic, and after investigating the claim he learned that it was inaccurate. He wrote to the *Constitution*'s editors, arguing that their article was inaccurate. When the *Constitution* did not republish his letter, Thomas wrote to the *Atlanta Independent*, and his letter was published five days later on January 6, 1921. In his letter, Thomas argued that "Chief Beavers' office" reported that "only 3,181" black women were arrested in 1920, far less than whatever number they were reporting in the article.²⁸¹ However, publication in the independent meant the message would only be read by the black community. That image of the black female criminal was already lodged within the white community's minds, fostering a very different image of the city.

Clark Howell's "white moderate" editorial policy only afforded enough space to allow Atlanta's black community a single column within his newspaper. As Howell dedicated a huge amount of space to promoting the Stone Mountain Confederate Memorial project, black southerners were engaged in their own donation drive to construct their own monuments, and the *Atlanta Constitution* was sparse on the details. In 1920, the Tuskegee Institute announced the planned creation of a monument dedicated to Booker T. Washington in Alabama. In contrast to the huge number of articles covering the Stone Mountain Confederate Memorial, the Tuskegee monument only received two notices within the *Atlanta Constitution*'s general news section and three mentions the Atlanta Urban League's Weekly Bulletin between 1920 and 1922. When Atlanta's black community made plans to have a duplicate of the Alabama Booker T. Washington statue cast in bronze and sent to Atlanta in 1925, the *Atlanta Constitution* only published three articles: covering the planning, the shipment, and the statue's unveiling to

²⁸¹ Jesse O. Thomas, "Letter to the Editor of the Atlanta Constitution," *Atlanta Independent*, January 6, 1921, 4.

thousands of people.²⁸² In contrast, on February 19, 1925 the *Atlanta Independent* dedicated an entire front page to the proposed construction of Booker T. Washington's monument in Atlanta, and much of its editorial space over the next few years would be dedicated to promoting and covering the monument's progress.²⁸³ When the local Paramount Theater donated funds to the Washington Memorial, it was the *Atlanta Independent* that made the announcement.²⁸⁴

What follows is a study of how "white moderate" editorial policies unfolded in Atlanta's white newspapers, and how the resulting coverage contrasted with black newspaper coverage from the era. What Clark Howell was trying to manufacture within his newspaper was a false image of racial peace within the city. It was an illusion that told white southerners to stop embarrassing the region with acts of lynching, a practice that Howell knew invited the passage of federally enforced anti-lynching laws. But it was also an illusion that told black southerners that Atlanta was different from other cities. It projected the image of supportive white Atlantans who knew the black condition far better than any northern community. It was an illusion that tried to convince the black community that lynching was not going to last. And the Atlanta Urban League's Weekly Bulletin did seem to do that. It afforded Atlanta's black community, a platform within white newspapers to help shape the black community's image. Atlanta's white and black newspapers still promoted two drastically different, racially biased versions of the city's urban identity, but the regular publication of Atlanta Urban League's Weekly Bulletin starting in 1921 was the beginning of a decades-long incremental shift toward change.

²⁸² "Monument to honor Booker T. Washington," *Atlanta Constitution*, April 21, 1920, 18; "Urban League Weekly Bulletin," *Atlanta Constitution*, March 26, 1922, C3; "Urban League Weekly Bulletin," *Atlanta Constitution*, April 2, 1922, C6; "Statue of Negro Leader Unveiled," *Atlanta Constitution*, April 6, 1922, 2; "Urban League Weekly Bulletin," *Atlanta Constitution*, April 9, 1922, B4.

²⁸³ "Proposed Monument to Booker T. Washington," *Atlanta Independent*, February 19, 1925, 1.

²⁸⁴ "Paramount Theatre Will Give Proceeds to Monument Fund," *Atlanta Independent*, March 5, 1925, 5.

Racially Biased Newspaper Coverage of the Volstead-Dyer Bill

At the same time that Clark Howell openly promoted Atlanta's black community and denounced lynching, he was outright antagonistic toward the adoption of federal anti-lynching legislation. This was remarkable: the *Constitution* openly praised black charity organizations, promoted scholarships aimed at attracting black students, and even recommended sermons telling Atlanta's black community to "have pride in race," but the paper refused to support the passage of federal anti-lynching legislation.²⁸⁵ For Howell, the "moderate editor of the *Atlanta Constitution*," lynching was morally wrong, but southern states would never allow federal anti-lynching legislation to be enforced within the region. For Howell, it all came down to a question of law enforcement. Howell argued that the state had the responsibility to enforce its laws, and the criminals were also bound by the state. Following the long southern tradition of states' rights ideology. Howell argued that it was the responsibility of white southerners to the local black community for breaking the laws. Any attempt to enforce federal legislation aimed at undermining lynching was overreach.²⁸⁶

Federal anti-lynching legislation first became a possibility in 1918, when the NAACP convinced Leonidas C. Dyer, a Republican House Representative from Missouri, to sponsor the Volstead-Dyer anti-lynching bill. During the initial public debate, the *Atlanta Constitution* remained silent on the issue. However, on January 7, 1920, Clark Howell assigned Sam W.

²⁸⁵ "Have Pride in Race, Negroes Are Advised," *Atlanta Constitution*, June 6, 1921, 4.

²⁸⁶ Other examples of the *Constitution*'s supposedly "moderate" political perspectives include Hugh Ruppersberg's blurb on the newspaper "Atlanta Constitution," ed. Joseph M. Flora, Lucinda M. Mackethan, and Todd Taylor, *The Companion to Southern Literature: Themes, Genres, Places, People, Movements, and Motifs* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2001), 76; Richard Wormser, *The Rise and Fall of Jim Crow* (New York: St. Martin's Publishing Group, 2014), 114; Alton Hornsby Jr., *Southerners, Too?: Essays on the Black South, 1733-1990* (Lanham: University Press of America, 2004), 26-27; Stephen G. N. Tuck, *Beyond Atlanta: The Struggle for Racial Equality in Georgia, 1940 - 1980* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2003), 29-30, 86, 132; Martha H. Patterson, *The American New Woman Revisited: A Reader, 1894-1930* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2008), 227, and many others.

Small an editorial that would discuss the federal government's role on lynching. The political implications of Howell's choice of editorialist is clear. Small, a Tennessean by birth who had served in the Confederate Army, was a longtime journalist for the *Atlanta Constitution* and author of "Old Si" dialect sketches, which would become the foundation for Joel Chandler Harris' Uncle Remus' stories. As has been argued by many scholars, these sketches made a mockery of black life and emphasized white superiority.²⁸⁷ Unsurprisingly, when Small wrote editorials, his political opinions toward Atlanta's black community were conservative. It must have come as no surprise to Howell that Small's editorial took a position against federal anti-lynching legislation, outlining a states'-rights argument that the federal government was "impotent" in challenging lynching. Small argued that "all projects to those ends proposed by federal anti-lynchers have been examined or tried and found futile." He noted that "the only remedy thinkable exists in the far future and will be applied by a new generation of men educated from their childhood" on law "both human and divine." In short, Small's argument was simply that white southerners would have to change their perspective on lynching organically, rather than relying on any federal legislation to compel that change.²⁸⁸

Meanwhile, the *Atlanta Independent* argued that the nascent bill was a potential solution to a problem that did not seem to be going away. During the 1920s, the *Independent* regularly called out in bold each and every reported act of lynching and mob violence within the South on its front pages.²⁸⁹ Often surrounding these articles were others aimed at warning its readers about

²⁸⁷ For more about Sam Small's work as "Old Si," see Thomas H. English, "The Other Uncle Remus," *Georgia Review* 21, no. 2, (Summer 1967): 210-217; Sam Small, "Old Si's Sayings," *Atlanta Constitution*, October 21, 1901, 6.

²⁸⁸ Sam Small, "Federal Impotence as to Lynching," *Atlanta Constitution*, January 7, 1920, 6.

²⁸⁹ For a few of these examples, see "Tennessee Negro Burned by Mob," *Atlanta Independent*, February 3, 1921, 1; "Richard James Negro Lynched by Kentucky Mob," *Atlanta Independent*, March 17, 1921, 1; "Arkansas Mob Lynches Negro," *Atlanta Independent*, March 24, 1921, 1; "Two Lynchings in the State of Mississippi in Two Days," *Atlanta Independent*, March 24, 1921, 1.

Klan activity within the region. The major distinction between white and black newspaper coverage of lynching was clear: white newspapers saw lynching as a challenge the region's reputation and a threat to state's rights, while black newspapers saw lynching as a threat to their survival. Black newspapers were much more invested in the outcome of the legislation. The *Atlanta Independent* argued that the only solution was for white law enforcement to take lynching seriously and prosecute the cases. On February 24, 1921, the *Atlanta Independent* argued that lynching was so extensive that the Athens jail, which has been "especially constructed to protect criminals from mob violence," failed to protect its prisoners.²⁹⁰ On March 17, 1921, The *Independent* wrote that law and order was fundamental to the solvency of civilization, and that lynching had plunged the South into a "largely criminal" era. The paper declared that the authors "ha[d] no more patience with the mob" and that the "lawless element of whites" was destroying southern society.²⁹¹ When the Volstead-Dyer bill was brought before Congress in November 1921, the *Atlanta Independent* published its entire text.²⁹² A large portion of this edition of the newspaper's eight pages was aimed at interrogating the nature of lynching and the bill itself. Its editorials took umbrage with "white moderates" hypocritical viewpoint that the law wouldn't change southern behavior. One editorial noted that this was exactly how government operated, because "punishment has two purposes in view: first, the protection of society; second the reformation and the gaining back to society of the lawbreakers."²⁹³

Later that year, white newspapers were still focused on preventing federal overreach. As the Volstead-Dyer Bill began gaining popularity within the legislature, the *Atlanta Constitution* aimed its editorials at taking it down. An October editorial in the *Atlanta Constitution* agreed that

²⁹⁰ "The Lynching of the Law," *Atlanta Independent*, February 21, 1921, 4.

²⁹¹ "Lawlessness Must be Suppressed," *Atlanta Independent*, March 17, 1921, 4.

²⁹² "Text of Dyer Anti-Lynching Bill Now before Congress," *Atlanta Independent*, November 3, 1921, 1.

²⁹³ "The Law has No Eyes; Justice Is Blind," *Atlanta Independent*, November 3, 1921, 4.

the Volstead-Dyer anti-lynching bill was a natural response by the federal government, in that “for years [they had] appealed to the conscience of the public to put an end to lynch law,” but the “pleadings [had] fallen upon deaf ears.” The editors claimed the *Constitution* had done “its level best to awaken public conscience... warning against the inevitable consequence—that is, federal interference!” But the editors argued that anti-lynching legislation was an ineffective way to curb the violence, and ultimately an “invasion of ‘state’s rights.’”²⁹⁴ As support for the bill increased, the *Constitution* ran regular articles updating the public about the bill’s progress on the front page. The *Constitution* reported that most federal legislators favored the bill’s passage, while a minority questioned the bill’s constitutionality. This article quoted one Texas senator as contending that the bill would “destroy the sense of local responsibility without adding to the protection of the people” and that it was “definitely and directly antagonistic to the philosophy of our system of government” and “destructive of that system.”²⁹⁵ By November 7th, the bill had stalled; the *Constitution* reported that status on the front page.²⁹⁶

When the Volstead-Dyer bill stalled, the *Atlanta Independent* went back to its original approach, highlighting the number of lynchings and the horrific nature of the practice. On December 15, 1921, the *Independent* offered an editorial on a lynching that had occurred in Oconee County, Georgia. The editorial noted that “nearly every day somewhere in the South a lynching [took] place,” and the Volstead-Dyer Bill only seemed to have increased the frequency. The editorial went on, saying that if lynching continued at the current rate, there would be few black southerners “left by the time the Dyer Bill against lynching [was] passed.”²⁹⁷ When the

²⁹⁴ “Anti-Lynch Bill Report Favorable,” *Atlanta Constitution*, October 21, 1921, 3; “The Whirlwind!” *Atlanta Constitution*, October 22, 1921, 8.

²⁹⁵ “Anti-Lynch Bill Out of Committee,” *Atlanta Constitution*, November 1, 1921, 1.

²⁹⁶ “Anti-Lynch Bill Is Giving Pause to G. O. P. Leaders,” *Atlanta Constitution*, November 7, 1921, 1.

²⁹⁷ “Lynching Still Raging,” *Atlanta Independent*, December 15, 1921, 4.

filibuster blocked the bill, the *Atlanta Independent* argued “that as many lynchings as [were] taking place and the disgrace it [was] bringing on the southern section,” it seemed strange that southerners “still continue[d] to protest against the passage of a law that would go a long way in redeeming the South’s good name.”²⁹⁸ The editorial ended with a plea that someone in Congress push this bill forward so that it could stop the tide of lynching.

When the House of Representatives passed the Volstead-Dyer Bill in 1922, the *Atlanta Constitution* ran an editorial denouncing it. On January 30, Clark Howell’s newspaper published an editorial praising “southern representatives in congress, who pitched their argument mainly upon the theory that the practice of lynching had its origin, and [found] what approval it [had], largely in the laudable, inherent determination of southern manhood to avenge outraged womanhood.” Howell concluded that such an argument was “unable to stand against the statistical fact that” in more “recent years there have been many more mob killings for any one of numerous other crimes.” Howell argued that senators needed to think of a new defense against the law, because that defense was untenable.²⁹⁹ However, within the *Atlanta Independent*, the bill’s passage in the House was seen as a major step toward progress. The newspaper devoted three large headlines to the news story: one announcing the bill’s passage by the House, another reporting Dyer’s congratulations to the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, and another aimed at detailing which senators would be determining the bill’s fate.³⁰⁰ The *Independent* also ran a major editorial critiquing the notion of lynching as a state’s rights’ issue, noting that “the purpose of the bill” was to “wipe out mob violence and lynching” and not

²⁹⁸ “The Fate of the Anti-Lynching Bill,” *Atlanta Independent*, December 29, 1921, 4.

²⁹⁹ “Cause and Effect,” *Atlanta Constitution*, January 30, 1922, 4.

³⁰⁰ “Dyer Anti-Lynching Bill which has passed House Is Now up to the Senate,” *Atlanta Independent*, February 9, 1922, 1; “Dyer Congratulates the NAACP on the Recent Victory of Anti-Lynch Bill,” *Atlanta Independent*, February 9, 1922, 1; “Senators deciding fate of Dyer bill,” *Atlanta Independent*, February 9, 1922, 1.

in fact to challenge the nature of southern autonomy. The editorial continued to argue that the “government of the United States [was] in duty bound to protect its citizens,” and when the South was unable to do so, that duty became a federal obligation.

As the bill gained support within the legislature, the *Atlanta Constitution* shifted tactics away from denouncing the bill as anti-southern, and toward denouncing the bill’s capacity to be successful. One editorial argued that lynching could only be solved through the passage of new education policies aimed at combatting mob violence.³⁰¹ Another editorial called the Volstead-Dyer bill a “federal usurpation of prerogative and authority which belongs to; and should rest with, the states.”³⁰² The *Atlanta Independent* argued that the *Constitution’s* logic was fundamentally flawed, considering the fundamental purpose of laws since the beginning of civilization was to change how society functions by suppressing the more base instincts of humanity. The *Independent* argued that it was absurd “that ten human beings could be put to death in this country and six of them burned at the stake within ten days” and still not have anyone go to trial for the criminal acts. The *Independent* argued that this “at least needs investigation.”³⁰³ Ultimately, however, the Volstead-Dyer bill never passed. Southern politicians were too powerful within Congress, and the bill was never allowed to come to vote in the Senate. Over time, support for it dwindled and America saw a brief period where lynching declined as well.

Early Integration of Atlanta Newspaper Coverage

During the early 1920s, the southern assumption of white supremacy was being challenged within national newspapers. As northern publications began openly denouncing the

³⁰¹ “The Lynching Evil,” *Atlanta Constitution*, April 4, 1922, 10.

³⁰² “Helping the Dyer Bill,” *Atlanta Constitution*, May 20, 1922, 6.

³⁰³ “The Plague of Lynch Law,” *Atlanta Independent*, May 25, 1922, 4.

Ku Klux Klan and by proxy attacking Atlanta as the headquarters of hate, Clark Howell became focused on shaping Atlanta's reputation in his paper, starting with the resurrection of a column covering black community events and accomplishments. This iteration of the column would be organized by Jesse O. Thomas, the field secretary of the Atlanta Urban League. Thomas was born in Pike County, Mississippi on December 21, 1885 to a sharecropper whose family was forced off their land by white plantation owners when he was very young. Thomas understood just how little stability and power black southerners had during this period. As an incrementalist advocate for black civil rights, Thomas had previously held positions like the field director of the Tuskegee Institute, principal of Voorhees Industrial School in South Carolina, and the State Supervisor of Negro Economics in New York, before he accepted the position as Field Secretary of the National Urban League in 1919.

The Atlanta Urban League was as a local affiliate of the National Urban League, and it was "the first branch of the urban league in the Deep South with a paid staff."³⁰⁴ The National Urban League was originally formed in 1910 by "a group of prominent citizens of both races" under the title "the National League on Urban Conditions among Negroes." When it merged with The Improvement of Industrial Conditions Among Negroes in New York and the National League for the Protection of Colored Women, the newly combined organization became the National Urban League. Their goal was "promoting and coordinating" changes within each city's urban landscape, rather than acting as a "direct service agency."³⁰⁵ At the national level, the Urban League's goals were improving the living and working conditions for African Americans in the nation's urban spaces. Because the League believed that every city was unique, the

³⁰⁴ Jesse O. Thomas, *My Story in Black and White; The Autobiography of Jesse O. Thomas* (New York: Exposition Press, 1967).

³⁰⁵ *A Handbook of Operations for Urban League Personnel*, (New York: National Urban League 1948), 2, Box 52, Folder 10, Atlanta Urban League papers, Robert W. Woodruff Library, Atlanta University Center, Inc.

organization prided itself on allowing each local affiliate to remain autonomous, and its local chapters were able to respond to each southern city's unique application of Jim Crow in a much more meaningful way than other national organizations. It was a policy of the Urban League to create relationships with local media outlets that could help bring more attention to key areas of discrimination like employment, health, and education. When Jesse O. Thomas oversaw designing the program to help improve the southern race problem, he did so with Atlanta itself in mind, not the South overall. His program became known as the "Atlanta Plan," which sought to bring together "forward looking white and colored people of Atlanta" to try and fix "mutual problems of the two races" to demonstrate the "efficacy of cooperation and good fellowship." If successful, Thomas believed that Atlanta could become "a model for the other cities in the [S]outh."³⁰⁶ An integral part of Thomas's plan to combat racism in the city involved challenging how white newspapers covered Atlanta's black community, and this is why he approached Clark Howell about publishing the Atlanta Urban League's Weekly Bulletin in 1920.

When Thomas approached Howell, the *Atlanta Constitution*'s subscription numbers were suffering. As discussed in the previous chapter, the newspaper's chief competitor had been the *Atlanta Journal* since the end of the 19th century. However, Fred Loring Seely had started the *Atlanta Georgian* in 1906, which brought the number of white daily newspapers in the city up to three. By 1910 the *Georgian* was commanding more daily subscriptions than the *Atlanta Constitution*, which made it the second most popular daily newspaper in the city. When William Randolph Hearst bought the *Atlanta Georgian* in 1912, he began inflating its subscription numbers by dropping its price below its costs and floating the paper with profits obtained from the newspapers he published in other markets. By 1914, the *Atlanta Georgian* was the most

³⁰⁶ *National Urban League, Annual Report 1920*, January 1921, 5, Box 4, Folder 2, Atlanta Urban League papers, Robert W. Woodruff Library, Atlanta University Center, Inc.

popular Atlanta-based daily, holding thirty-six percent of the subscription market.³⁰⁷ The popularity didn't last long, as by 1921 the Hearst's daily evening edition was again ranked third in daily subscriptions, finding itself with only 39,000 subscriptions, compared to 56,000 for the *Atlanta Journal* and 50,000 for the *Atlanta Constitution*. Hearst's *Sunday American*, however, was still commanding over 94,000 subscriptions, which dwarfed the *Atlanta Journal*'s 76,000 Sunday subscriptions and the *Atlanta Constitution*'s 57,000 Sunday subscriptions.³⁰⁸ The *Atlanta Georgian*'s Sunday edition dominated the region, sometimes even selling out of its editions. The *Atlanta Journal*, which began offering a Sunday edition in 1912, had begun pushing "The Atlanta Journal Magazine," a colorful insert brimming with big beautiful images and tons of different types of content ranging from promotional confederate stories to advice columns.³⁰⁹ The *Atlanta Constitution* needed something to help expand its Sunday subscription numbers; Clark Howell needed the Atlanta Urban League's Weekly Bulletin as much as the Bulletin needed a home in a white Atlantan newspaper.

The National Urban League's strategy was straightforward: changing a city's relationship to race began with changing how residents imagined their city. Thirty years later, the strategy the League employed in Atlanta would be formalized within the National Urban League handbook of Operations, which argued that "media should be fully utilized" to carry the message of the program to the people directly, and League members could only do this by "establishing contact with editors of daily and weekly press" while "learning the various sub-editors, i.e.: city, radio, music, etc."³¹⁰ By 1921, the National Urban League would report that over "ninety colored

³⁰⁷ David Nasaw, *The Chief: Life of William Randolph Hearst* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing Company, 2000), 233.

³⁰⁸ *N.W. Ayer & Son's American Newspaper Annual* (Philadelphia: N.W. Ayer & Son, 1921).

³⁰⁹ *N.W. Ayer & Son's American Newspaper Annual* (Philadelphia: N.W. Ayer & Son, 1912).

³¹⁰ *A Handbook of Operations for Urban League Personnel*, (New York: National Urban League 1948), 11, Box 52, Folder 10, Atlanta Urban League papers, Robert W. Woodruff Library, Atlanta University Center, Inc.

papers... carried weekly Urban League articles” and “the largest dailies in every city where the League has branches have done the same.” Beyond newspapers, the National Urban League also launched articles in many black magazines, including the *Crisis* and the *Competitor*.³¹¹ But the League knew that that it needed to change how white southerners viewed race before it could make any progress. Thomas wanted the Atlanta Urban League Weekly Bulletin to appear in the *Constitution* so that it would serve as a corrective to white Atlanta’s vision of Atlanta’s black communities.

On February 6, 1921, the *Atlanta Constitution* published the “Atlanta Urban League Weekly Bulletin No. 1,” and its byline was signed by Lemuel Foster, the Atlanta Urban League’s executive secretary. A graduate of Fisk University, Lemuel Foster held a “director for Negro Economics” position in Mississippi before moving to Birmingham to work for the war Camp Community Service and finally to Atlanta.³¹² It is important to note that not only did Foster write the Bulletin, but Clark Howell allowed his name to be within the byline. This gave the Bulletin a sense of an authentic black perspective that no white writer could ever achieve, but it also aligned the Bulletin’s political framework with Lemuel Foster’s incrementalist black politics. However, Clark Howell positioned the column in ways that diminished its impact. First, the weekly Bulletin only appeared within the *Constitution*’s Sunday edition, which at the time was the paper’s weakest and most expensive subscription model. Because the column did not come out in the tri-weekly edition, this meant that his white rural readers would likely never learn of the column’s existence. The Bulletin also never appeared on the first or second pages of any edition, instead often appearing around the back of the newspaper wedged between huge

³¹¹ *National Urban League, Annual Report 1920* (January 1921), 9, Box 4, Folder 2, Atlanta Urban League papers, Robert W. Woodruff Library of the Atlanta University Center, Inc.

³¹² “Alumni Department,” *Fisk University News* X, no. 10 (June 1920): 31.

image-based advertisements. By 1922, the column would even be shifted further back to the criminal reports within the “C section” of the paper, again surrounded by large advertisements. Whether Clark Howell intended it to be this way, publishing the Weekly Bulletin in this fashion still afforded his newspaper the ability to attract black readers, but limited the exposure that such a column would have to his primary white readership.

As for the content of the Bulletin, Lemuel Foster wrote the majority of the early editions that were granted a byline, but it should be noted that most were unattributed. The bulk of the Bulletin’s listed activities occurring within the black community, many of which were organized by the Atlanta Urban League. Whether it was advertising the “annual clean-up campaign” or various pageants and parent-teacher association meetings, the image projected by the Bulletin showed a peaceful and productive black community. The clear purpose of the Bulletin was racial uplift toward incrementalist social change, and the League delivered by highlighting black Americans who were making a difference from Atlanta and elsewhere. One such example is the National Urban League’s promotion of a black policewoman who was recognized as “one of the most efficient policewomen of New York City.”³¹³ By 1926, most of the Bulletins were structured around advertising local events within the Atlanta black community, which included lectures or talks that invited important figures from other parts of the nation. The articles included a diversity of topics, but very little of the information included was political in nature. On September 19, 1926, for example, the Bulletin announced the selection of R. E. Mayes to the Tampa Urban League, but then shifted to discussion of the Tuskegee Tigers game against Pennsylvania Lincoln University and a quartet contest set to take place on September 20.³¹⁴ The December 24, 1927 Bulletin was composed of three distinct paragraphs, one wishing their

³¹³ “Weekly Urban League Bulletin,” *Atlanta Constitution*, December 30, 1923, A7.

³¹⁴ “Weekly Urban League Bulletin,” *Atlanta Constitution*, December 19, 1926, 16.

readers a “joyous Christmas and prosperous New Year,” another aimed at advertising the “Mo So-Lit circle’s” charity work, and the third advertising the YMCA’s role as a good place for boys who were out of school.³¹⁵ The primary goal of the Bulletin seems to have been to normalize positive black activities within white newspapers. Whether the *Atlanta Constitution* editors censored the column, or its editors self-edited their opinions, the column would in this largely apolitical manner for decades.

There were, however, a few instances wherein the Bulletin’s authors took the risk of challenging segregationist thought.³¹⁶ On January 13, 1924, an unattributed write for the Bulletin questioned the dominance of white restrooms in large department stores. The writer argued that black customers shopped in these locations as well, but the stores did not provide restrooms for black patrons. This was absurd, the writer argued, especially since the white restrooms were not truly segregated, as “many of these rest rooms have a maid employed... to provide every comfort and extend courtesies to the mother and child.” Given that “there has been no provision made for colored women” to have a restroom in the store, the Bulletin writer argued that the restrooms be integrated. The writer asked “leaders and thinkers, both clergymen and laymen – business and professional, to give serious consideration to this question, looking forward to the providing of a rest room, centrally located for colored women.”³¹⁷ This article was only a few paragraphs long and was immediately followed by an update from the Chicago Urban League, information about the Standard Life Insurance salesman training, and other employment-related articles. But for a brief moment in 1924, the Atlanta Urban League Weekly Bulletin questioned the need for Jim Crow accommodations within the South—and in a white-owned newspaper.

³¹⁵ “Weekly Urban League Bulletin,” *Atlanta Constitution*, December 24, 1927, 14.

³¹⁶ “Weekly Urban League Bulletin,” *Atlanta Constitution*, January 6, 1924, 7.

³¹⁷ “Weekly Urban League Bulletin,” *Atlanta Constitution*, January 13, 1924, 8.

Another pattern of reporting within the Bulletin was the documentation of the activities of Secretary Jesse O. Thomas as he moved around the country helping to publicize the work of the Urban League. By 1929, the column, which had been largely anonymous before this point, was taken over by Thomas himself, and discussion of the social and political issues the black community faced became much more frequent. Several columns were published on questions of interracial co-operation within Atlanta. Thomas argued for the need for federal anti-lynching legislation.³¹⁸ In another column, Thomas admitted that while the Atlanta Urban League provided “an opportunity for unhampered, free and open presentation of the situations involving bi-racial relations,” there still existed “impediments that intimidate and impede the welfare progress of the negro.”³¹⁹ In his next column, Thomas called on Atlanta to reexamine the “number of alleged cases of burglary and banditry attributed to colored people,” noting that the true solution to the pattern was to remedy the unemployment in Atlanta’s black community.³²⁰

At the same time as the Atlanta Urban League Weekly Bulletin worked to change white readers’ impressions of the black community, Jesse O. Thomas was working to do the same through the burgeoning local radio industry. In 1922, Atlanta had become the first multimedia market in the South with the launch of the *Atlanta Journal*’s sister radio station WSB, short for “Welcome South Brother,” which launched only a few days before WGM, the *Atlanta Constitution*’s radio station.³²¹ Just as Atlanta’s newspaper industry was dominated by white perspectives during the 1920s, so was Atlanta’s radio industry. As mentioned in the previous chapter, white heritage projects like the Stone Mountain Confederate Memorial used WSB’s popularity to connect with potential sponsors. Radio promised an intimate connection to the

³¹⁸ “Weekly Urban League Bulletin,” *Atlanta Constitution*, March 1, 1925, D4.

³¹⁹ “Weekly Urban League Bulletin,” *Atlanta Constitution*, February 2, 1930, 7.

³²⁰ “Weekly Urban League Bulletin,” *Atlanta Constitution*, February 9, 1930, C8.

³²¹ “Constitution Begins Official U. S. Radio Market Service,” *Atlanta Constitution*, March 21, 1922, 1.

general public many black Atlantans would never otherwise have. For Thomas, the white living room was an impenetrable fortress, and radio was the only way in.

Jesse O. Thomas became the first black speaker on Atlanta radio during the early 1920s, although the exact airdate of his appearance is unclear. In Thomas' autobiography, he remembers that his initial appearance on the air was almost cancelled when he showed up to the Biltmore Hotel, where the radio station was located on the roof, and was restricted from riding the passenger elevator up. Instead, the attendant told him to use "the freight elevator." Thomas objected and used the house telephone to call the station. Lambdin Kay, the station's general manager and the host for the radio hour, told his audience that the show had to be postponed briefly, and rode down to the bottom floor and escorted Thomas back up through the passenger elevator. While Thomas' interview lasted only ten minutes, it was an incrementalist step in the right direction that could help change white perceptions of black Atlanta.³²² Again in late November of 1928, Thomas worked with the Eta Omega Chapter of the Omega Psi Phi fraternity, able to secure a full hour of broadcasting on WSB to promote "extraordinary achievements of negroes."³²³ This broadcast was promoted in both the *Atlanta Independent* and the *Atlanta Constitution's* Urban League Weekly Bulletin.³²⁴ In its final form, the broadcast operated similarly to the Atlanta Urban League's Weekly Bulletin. Thomas announced remarkable achievements in the areas of patriotism, contemporary literature, education, art, economics and industry, medical science, politics, religion, music, and race relations over the

³²² Jesse O. Thomas, *My Story in Black and White; The Autobiography of Jesse O. Thomas* (New York: Exposition Press, 1967).

³²³ "Urban League Weekly Bulletin" *Atlanta Constitution*, November 25, 1928, C6.

³²⁴ "Atlantan Speaks on Negro Activity over Station WSB," *Atlanta Independent*, November 22, 1928, 1.

year. The entire focus of the broadcast was aimed at dispelling the stereotype of black inferiority by highlighting the sheer scope and breadth of black achievement.³²⁵

Over time, the Atlanta Urban League became the major representative of Atlanta's black community within the *Atlanta Constitution* and on the radio, but the nature of its column was controversial within the black community. The *Atlanta Independent* argued that the "Jim Crow column," the term they used to describe the Weekly Bulletin, undermined the role that black newspapers played in their community. The *Independent* argued that the "leader who advocates Jim Crow columns in white newspapers advocates the breaking down of Negro newspapers." The unsigned editorial concluded that those who want to see their names Jim Crow columns "would trade [their] manhood to satisfy [their] vanity."³²⁶ And yet, for the Atlanta Urban League, the Jim Crow column was seen as a platform for progress. It established a foothold within the white newspaper that the league saw as integral in reshaping how white Atlantans imagined the city's black community. Jesse O. Thomas and his organization had always had a platform within black newspapers, but their platform within the white newspaper was seen as integral to race relations. And yet the column also promised to bring new readers to white newspapers. As a relatively inexpensive tool, the column made the *Atlanta Constitution* stand out when compared to the more racist content produced by other local white newspapers. At a time when Atlanta's black community was growing faster than the city's white community, this promised white newspapers more subscribers at little expense.

While it is difficult to quantify exactly how important the Atlanta Urban League Weekly Bulletin was to diversifying Atlanta's racial image, it is important to note that at this time the city itself was so divided that each community was left to build its own Chamber of Commerce. Both

³²⁵ "Atlantan Speaks on Negro Activity over Station WSB," *Atlanta Independent*, November 22, 1928, 1.

³²⁶ "Negro Leaders Advocate Jim Crow Column in White Papers," *Atlanta Independent*, May 3, 1928, 1.

the white and black Chambers reflected the ideals of their own communities, and there was little cooperation between them. In fact, the Atlanta's white Chamber of Commerce started its own publication in 1916, the *City Builder*, but rarely discussed what black economic activities meant to white industries until 1935, well into the Great Depression, when they admitted that the southern black community played an integral part within the region's economy and argued that white corporations needed to take into account the vast "purchasing power" of the black southern community, which they estimated to be over "two billion" dollars. They argued that any "enterprising business along many lines might do well to explore the American Negro market for expansion."³²⁷ That same year, the white Chamber even invited Theodore M. Alexander, the secretary for the Negro Chamber of Commerce and president of Alexander Insurance Co., to write to the white Chamber's members about the black community. For many who read the *City Builder*, the Negro Chamber of Commerce was new, even though it had been in operation since 1932. During his introductory article, Alexander wrote about the history of his organization and their official policies. He argued that the organization shared many similarities with the white Chamber by seeking to provide support for the larger Atlanta community. And yet, the circumstances facing Atlanta's black community were far different from those facing the white community. By the end of the article, Alexander argued that Atlanta's black community was in fact struggling with significant hardships, as their "general education and recreation facilities" were badly in need of further development.³²⁸ His gamble failed ultimately, because four months later the white Atlanta Chamber of Commerce ceased publication of the *City Builder*, acknowledging its popularity but citing its burdensome costs. Even after white businesses had

³²⁷ Extension Committee of Atlanta Chamber of Commerce, "Purchasing Power of Negro Two Billion," *City Builder Magazine*, April 1935, 14, Kenan Research Center, Atlanta History Center.

³²⁸ Extension Committee of Atlanta Chamber of Commerce, "Introducing the Atlanta Negro Chamber of Commerce," *City Builder Magazine*, August 1935, 16, Kenan Research Center, Atlanta History Center.

come to recognize how profitable a relationship would be between black and white citizens within Atlanta, they were ultimately threatened by accepting the black voices in their own publications.

Overall, Jesse O. Thomas' column was an immense success. The Atlanta Urban League's Jim Crow column not only persisted but also expanded its reach to other white newspapers in Atlanta, including the *Atlanta Journal*. This was a major development, as the *Atlanta Journal* had long been even more dedicated to white supremacy than the *Constitution*. In 1934, The *Journal* published a story called "A Son of the Old South Keeps His Word," which openly repeats "the opprobrious term, 'nigger' ... no fewer than six times," and Atlanta's black press questioned the newspaper's sensitivity to racism.³²⁹ The *Journal* responded to the criticisms by arguing that the term was not meant to be offensive, but that "to be true to history it must use the terms used in those days." Reverend Raymond Henderson immediately asked all readers to stop supporting *Atlanta Journal*. Henderson argued that this was not the first time the *Journal* had printed offensive terms, and the newspaper openly refused to use the terms "Mr. and Mrs." when discussing black citizens, saving them for whites. Additionally, Henderson argued that the *Journal* even "segregate[d]... funeral announcements." He concluded that the *Journal* was "prejudiced, haughty, egotistic, [and] deluded" if it expected black readers to sit idly by. The newspaper was simply not seen as a friend to the black Atlantan, and its Sunday magazine was particularly well known for printing large photographs celebrating the Civil War and the Lost Cause, not to mention running several in depth articles explaining how the modern Ku Klux Klan was a good thing for the South. And yet, in 1939, the Atlanta Urban League was even able to garner print space for a weekly article similar to the *Constitution's* Weekly Bulletin.

³²⁹ "May This Be Remedied," *Atlanta Daily World*, March 7, 1934, 1.

By this time though, the shape of the Bulletin had changed. By 1937, the *Atlanta Constitution*'s Urban League Weekly Bulletin was under the control of Jesse O. Thomas, now Southern Field Director for the National Urban League. On October 31, he made it standard practice for the Bulletin to include an explicit statement of purpose arguing that the article's goal was "to chronicle the worthwhile things done for, by and with the negro, as a basis for increasing interracial goodwill and understanding."³³⁰ By 1939, the *Atlanta Journal* finally introduced its own news article aimed at covering Atlanta's black community entitled the "News of Atlanta's Negro Community." Like the Weekly Bulletin, the Urban League had control of its contents, with James C. McMorries as its author. McMorries had been appointed the Executive Secretary of the Atlanta Urban League back in 1937, and he followed Thomas' structure for the column by illustrating key developments within Atlanta's black community. He also included a regularly published statement of purpose, arguing that the goal of the "bulletin [was] to reflect significant thought, cultural activity and creditable accomplishments of Negroes in Atlanta."³³¹ The column was a step in the right direction for the *Atlanta Journal*.

McMorries, however, was in a difficult spot because the *Atlanta Journal* was a much more racially biased newspaper than the *Atlanta Constitution*. McMorries knew that the *Journal*'s reputation of catering to white supremacist interests would come directly into conflict with his own vision of the black community, and so he was much more aggressive in framing a positive image of the city's black community than Thomas had been. He began his article with an entire paragraph describing the role of the article, arguing that Atlanta had "a dual nature—a small community within a large community." He noted that before now, white newspapers like the *Atlanta Journal* had spent too much time promoting the developments of Atlanta's larger

³³⁰ "Weekly Urban League Bulletin," *Atlanta Constitution*, October 31, 1937, 7.

³³¹ "News of Atlanta's Negro Community," *Atlanta Journal*, June 4, 1939, D5.

white community, that they had ignored the accomplishments of “approximately one-third” of the community. He noted that the *Atlanta Journal*’s weekly news article was necessary to manifest a “communal effort” between both white and black communities, and hopefully would succeed in promoting a “unity of purpose, mutual confidence, and the importance of co-operation.”³³² Although the role of the Jim Crow column was criticized in some black circles, incrementalist advocates for social change saw the column as a unique tool for introducing the black perspective. Thomas garnered popularity within the League for having built this bridge between the black and white communities of Atlanta and providing white readers with positive imagery of Atlanta’s black communities.³³³ It not only improved communication between both communities, but it also improved white newspapers’ opinions about the organization, who began openly “praising the League’s programs as well as its biracial leadership.”³³⁴ What it did not change, however, though is the stance white newspapers held on black political issues such as federal anti-lynching bills.

Clark Howell’s “white moderate” editorial policy meant rejecting federal intervention in lynching, but also shaping the newspaper to represent the city’s growing diversity. With Atlanta’s black communities growing bigger by the year, there was a much more diverse readership market. To complicate this more, Atlanta’s national reputation still reflected the city’s relationship with Ku Klux Klan along with all of its negative associations, as the Klan was still regularly advertising the city as its national headquarters. Clark Howell’s “white moderate” editorial policy placed him square in the middle of this shifting landscape. With so much

³³² “News of Atlanta’s Negro Community,” *Atlanta Journal*, June 4, 1939, D5.

³³³ “Annual Report 1937,” Box 4, Folder 7, Atlanta Urban League Papers, Robert W. Woodruff Library, Atlanta University Center.

³³⁴ Alton Hornsby, Jr. and Alexa Benson Henderson, *The Atlanta Urban League* (Lewiston, N.Y.: Edwin Mellen Press, 2005), 15.

historical scholarship being focused on how limiting pre-World War II southern society was, Howell's reflection of a positive black community perspective, even if it was for profit, was an incremental step in the right direction. However, Howell was not only challenging how newspapers should imagine black communities, but also changing how race should be covered by white newspapers overall. Howell's middle path vision for the South reinforced the antiquated image of white supremacist political policies being married directly to paternalist social policies maintaining segregated spaces. Howell was telling white racists to be proud of their white heritage but stop advertising their hate, while he was telling black southerners to trust white supremacist political policy. Long before 1946 and Atlanta mayor William Hartsfield was able to build a biracial coalition, Howell was teaching the city's white reading public to trade white supremacy for institutional racism.

The Limitations of Atlanta's "White Moderate" Image

No matter how much mob violence Clark Howell denounced, he never accepted the premise of federal anti-lynching legislation. And he had ample opportunity, because Congress debated many more bills over the years. By 1930, the *Constitution's* arguments had shifted substantively away from arguing whether the federal government had the power to prosecute lynching crimes. Now, Howell's paper reframed anti-lynching legislation as a fraudulent device crafted by northern politicians to help bolster their support from black voters. The narrative largely remained consistent within black newspapers as they focused on the lack of enforcement within the state. Three more federal anti-lynching legislation bills were offered, and three more times they were defeated. For Atlanta's newspapers though, the federal anti-lynching legislation debates became an insurmountable divide, with each newspaper framing the topic from within their own specific racially biased echo chambers.

In 1934, Colorado's Edward Costigan and New York's Robert Wagner sponsored a new federal anti-lynching legislation.³³⁵ Lynching had spiked in 1933 up to twenty-four murders from only six murders the year before, and senators feared there might be a resurgence.³³⁶ During the preceding five years, the Supreme Court had ruled twice that state law could not protect the white primary system because it sought to disenfranchise the black community from voting, which violated the Fourteenth Amendment. Because northern republican senators felt that lynching could be interpreted similarly as violating the Fourteenth Amendment, it appeared that lynching, too, might be federally abolished. The Costigan-Wagner Bill, designed to prevent state inaction against lynching crimes, was controversial to many southerners because it levied fines and jail time on state and local authorities who failed to prosecute past lynch mob participants. If state and local authorities were found to have aided the lynch mob in its actions, punishment could be between five years to life in jail. Additionally, the county in which the lynching took place would be fined \$10,000 to be paid out to the surviving family.

It was William F. Caldwell, the Southern News Division Editor for the Associated Press in Atlanta, who wrote the first article covering the potential complications of the bill for the *Atlanta Constitution*.³³⁷ Born in South Carolina, William F. Caldwell had previously reported for a number of newspapers including the *Marlboro Democrat*, the *Pee-Dee Advocate*, and the *Charleston News and Courier*; he was also previously the owner of the *Chester Lantern*.³³⁸ His article reported that the Association of Southern Women for the Prevention of Lynching

³³⁵ Robert L. Zangrando, "The NAACP and a Federal Antilynching Bill, 1934-1940," *The Journal of Negro History* 50, no. 2 (April 1965): 106-117.

³³⁶ "Lynchings: By State and Race, 1882-1968," Tuskegee University Library and Archives, reproduced online both at the Charles Chestnut Digital Archive, http://www.chesnuttarchive.org/classroom/lynching_table_year.html; and the Sheriff Joseph F. Shipp Trial of 1907 archive, <http://law2.umkc.edu/faculty/projects/ftrials/shipp/lynchingyear.html>.

³³⁷ W. F. Caldwell, "Letter to Martha Berry from W. F. Caldwell," eds. Schlitz, Stephanie A., Aaron Jackson, Meg Ratliff, et al, *Martha Berry Digital Archive* (Mount Berry: Berry College, 2013).

³³⁸ Farrell, L. A. "Caldwell Named A. P. Head In South," *Atlanta Constitution*, October 21, 1928, A1.

criticized the Costigan-Wagner bill, requesting that President Franklin D. Roosevelt step in and facilitate cooperation to eradicate lynching instead of allowing the legislation to pass. A core part of the Association's critique of the bill was that it "coerced the states" to enforce the bill.

Caldwell explained that the Association believed passage of an anti-lynching bill at this stage would "interfere with the campaign of education now being carried on in the South," and that Roosevelt should instead encourage "co-operation" between federal and state level officials by forming a commission designed to "enlist the cooperation of the president, the governors, and the congressional representatives in working out such a plan."³³⁹

By this time, the *Atlanta Independent* had shut its doors, with the *Atlanta Daily World* taking up the role of reporting for the city's black community. The *World's* arguments on anti-lynching legislation were very similar to the *Atlanta Independent's* during the previous decade. For the *World*, the recent growth in lynching "with no convictions [was] an open admission that local sentiment [was] either unable or unwilling to deal with the evil." The *World* argued that the Costigan-Wagner bill should be passed because "recent records of lawlessness, the poverty-stricken condition of the interdependent states and the immoral position awaiting those who would rise up in support of this inexcusable practice" made the bill much more preferable than the ramifications of persistent lynching.³⁴⁰

Later articles from the *Atlanta Constitution's* editorial staff continued to critique the Costigan-Wagner bill, attacking the need for any legislation at all, arguing that "lynching [had] almost disappeared, already, from the American picture." One editorial argued that Republicans saw the bill not as an active tool to stop lynching, but instead as a political tool to garner black

³³⁹ William F. Caldwell, "Women To Seek Roosevelt's Aid In 'Lynch' Drive," *Atlanta Constitution*, January 10, 1934, 1.

³⁴⁰ "The Costigan Wagner Bill Should Pass," *Atlanta Daily World*, January 18, 1934, 6.

votes for Republican candidates, raising the fear that the loss of a white primary system would change southern life. The bill, per the editorial, would have “provide[d] for federal prosecution of local officers of the law in communities where lynchings occur[red]... federal prosecution of the community itself with heavy fines... paid [to the] families of victims, and for other rank violations of the basic principles of statehood.”³⁴¹ Ultimately, like the Volstead-Dyer Bill before it, the Costigan-Wagner Bill would never become law, and the *Atlanta Daily World* used its failure to highlight the waves of lynching that followed as evidence of the failures behind the southern democratic party.³⁴²

In 1937, seven black southerners were lynched, and Representative Joseph A. Gavagan from New York again brought up a federal anti-lynching legislation before the House, and again Atlanta’s media began debating its merits. After the House passed the bill, the *Atlanta Constitution* called it “uncalled-for legislation.”³⁴³ The *Atlanta Constitution* argued that the very negative publicity generated from lynching was solving the problem itself. The *Constitution* was even starting to pull back from publishing articles dedicated to the topic. It published close to 130 different articles on lynching in 1938, while the *Atlanta Daily World* published twice as many, numbering over two hundred and sixty. In 1938, six black southerners were lynched. For white Atlantans, lynching was a threat to the region’s political autonomy. Newly appointed editor for the *Atlanta Constitution*, Ralph McGill, argued that the lynching issue was being overblown by northern politicians, as he notes that fewer and fewer people were being lynched

³⁴¹ “Fooled No Longer,” *Atlanta Constitution*, January 18, 1940, 6.

³⁴² For a few examples, see “We Faw Down and Go Boom,” *Atlanta Daily World*, June 18, 1934, 6; “The Drag of a Long Count,” *Atlanta Daily World*, October 10, 1934, 6; “Inchin’ Along,” *Atlanta Daily World*, April 25, 1934, 6.

³⁴³ “Uncalled for Legislation,” *Atlanta Constitution*, April 17, 1937, 4.

as time passed. McGill argued that it will ultimately solve itself.³⁴⁴ And yet, black southerners continued to face the threat of lynching.

By the end of 1938, Roosevelt was threatening to support anti-lynching legislation if southern senators did not support his New Deal policies, and those threats divided the region. On July 9, 1938, the *Atlanta Constitution* praised the South for being maintaining a full “six months” without one lynching. The editorial proclaimed that “such an improvement should be subject for devout gratitude.”³⁴⁵ And then, within five days, two lynchings occurred back to back: one in Rolling Fork, Mississippi and the other in Arabi, Georgia. It was not that the *Atlanta Constitution* was willfully ignorant of the pattern, but rather the paper simply argued that its journalists and editors wanted to combat the negative image being proffered by northern publications.

Responding to the Arabi lynching, the *Atlanta Constitution* called it “shameful,” and many within the black press called the response inadequate.³⁴⁶ Northern politicians demanded investigations into both lynchings, and within months the anti-lynching legislation hit the senate again.³⁴⁷ Ralph McGill wrote that anti-lynching legislation was “political sop” and argued that federal anti-lynching legislation “was entirely unconstitutional as its framers knew.” McGill then argued that he did not even know “why negro leaders didn’t protest against” these bills. He argued that such legislation was “intended to be a vote-getter and nothing else.”³⁴⁸ Ralph McGill was so focused on trying to challenge the negative image projected by Roosevelt and northern senators that he lost sight of what the black community truly did want. While anti-lynching

³⁴⁴ “One More Word,” *Atlanta Constitution*, August 8, 1938, 4.

³⁴⁵ “A Clean Page,” *Atlanta Constitution*, July 9, 1938, 4.

³⁴⁶ “The Shame of Arabi,” *Atlanta Constitution*, July 9, 1938, 4.

³⁴⁷ “Wagner Demands Lynching Inquiry,” *Atlanta Constitution*, July 9, 1938, 4.

³⁴⁸ Ralph McGill, “One More Word,” *Atlanta Constitution*, August 26, 1938, 4.

legislation may have been a tool that republican senators used to attract black voters, white supremacists used lynching to suppress the black vote in the South.

Many black newspaper editors and journalists openly denounced Ralph McGill's assumptions, indignant that he would try to speak on behalf of the black community. Walter White, the secretary of the NAACP out of New York, argued that the *Atlanta Constitution* was hypocritical in its stance. White argued that the paper was good for "taking pride" in the South's ability to maintain a streak of no lynchings, but their refusal to support anti-lynching legislation after a "60-year-old man John Dukes, at Arabi" was burned alive spoke volumes about their racial biases. He concluded that if the *Constitution* was a true support of the black community, then they would work to pass federal anti-lynching legislation so that the very criminals they were disgusted with received "punishment to the full extent of the law."³⁴⁹ Similarly, the *Atlanta Daily World* argued that the anti-lynching legislation was supported by Atlanta's black community. On January 4, 1938 when the bill was being pushed to Congress, they asked their readership, "Why all this opposition to proposed antilynching laws in the Congress of the United States?" The unsigned editorial continued, "Some way must be found to enact a Constitutional which will recognize in the Negro one who is made in the image and likeness of God."³⁵⁰ And when senators began filibustering the legislation, the *Atlanta Daily World* accused them of "doing some lynching or trying to do some lynching... what the country is invited to witness is the parliamentary lynching of a measure that has enough votes for its passage if they can be cast."³⁵¹ By February, the *Atlanta Daily World* was demanding the senate to vote on the measure,

³⁴⁹ "Pulse of the Public," *Atlanta Constitution*, July 15, 1938, 11.

³⁵⁰ "The Anti-Lynching Bill," *Atlanta Daily World*, January 4, 1938, 6.

³⁵¹ "The Anti-Lynching Filibuster," *Atlanta Daily World*, January 24, 1938, 6.

arguing that “it [had] been conclusively shown that a majority of American people want[ed] the bill.”³⁵² The bill ultimately failed in March.

After the bill’s failure, the *Daily World* wrote that in fact experience had shown that the bill’s failure was misleading, because the fact that so much had been achieved showed just how “organized political efforts among Negroes [were] capable of developing tremendous power” and that they had to “follow the results of that power if [they wanted] the results.” They argued that “concerted action between all Negro groups [would] get effective action as regards [their] political possibilities.”³⁵³ The article argued that the South’s failure to punish lynching participants was exactly what made federal legislation mandatory. They argued that “there were eight lynchings during 1937” and “not a single arrest of any suspected lynchers.”³⁵⁴ By January 30, 1938, the *Atlanta Daily World* praised Walter White, arguing that “whatever the fate of the anti-lynching bill, now or later, Walter White has thoroughly demonstrated his capacity for leadership and the NAACP ought from this day on be regarded by Negroes as the harbinger of what organization can do, and as the dependable champion of Negro rights in America.”³⁵⁵ In the end, the anti-lynching bill would have been a landmark achievement for black southerners, and it could have singlehandedly changed the landscape of the South’s racial condition reorienting the enforcement of race around federal intervention.

The most important thing lynching did for Atlanta’s white newspapers was to provide them with evidence for their argument that Atlanta was different. Because lynching was a phenomenon that existed within the rural counties of Georgia, Clark Howell and Ralph McGill mobilized a new kind of argument that reinforced its stereotype of a differentiated rural and

³⁵² “Come On With Cloture!,” *Atlanta Daily World*, February 19, 1938, 6.

³⁵³ “What Now?” *Atlanta Daily World*, January 24, 1938, 6.

³⁵⁴ “No Arrests In 8 Lynchings of 1937,” *Atlanta Daily World*, January 4, 1938, 6.

³⁵⁵ “Walter White and the NAACP,” *Atlanta Daily World*, January 30, 1938, 4.

urban southern view of race. They used the city's lack of lynching as a justification to praise their city as distinctively progressive on race. The *Nashville Banner* echoed this kind of mindset in 1938 when it wrote that southern newspapers were stuck between two distinct political forces, an urban population that was "ready to abandon the cotton economy and the single crop system," and a rural population launching a "crusade against such destructive legislation as the wages-hours bill, the ill-famed antilynching law, the policies of racial and sectional antagonisms fed by federal preachments."³⁵⁶ The *Banner* argued that racialized violence was a problem from the rural South, but the reality was that all of Atlanta's white newspapers argued against anti-lynching legislation. For Atlanta's newspapers, the rural southerner was a willing scapegoat for racism, because rural southerners were actively rejecting the Atlanta media industry's pleas to adopt more nationally socially acceptable forms of racist language.

Conclusion

During the 1920s and 1930s, the *Atlanta Constitution* found itself pulled in two divergent directions. The South's demand for white supremacist narratives compelled Atlanta newspapers to promote the city's white southern heritage, while Atlanta's growing diversity promised economic profits in representing the city's "white moderate" stance on race. Clark Howell's *Atlanta Constitution* courted both white and black readers with his "white moderate" editorial policy. By simultaneously upholding confederate ideology and incrementally expanding his paper's coverage of Atlanta's black community, Clark Howell was able to garner positive national publicity for his paper and for Atlanta while maintaining and growing the *Constitution's* subscriptions from its predominantly white southern readers.

³⁵⁶ "Editorial of the Day: The Southern Press," *Atlanta Constitution*, May 19, 1938, 8.

It is important to note, however, that the *Atlanta Constitution*'s "moderate" stance was largely a façade. Clark Howell's true interests were promoting the most positive image of Atlanta possible to whatever audience he could and thus helping to grow the city's economic base, and this can be seen through his interactions with Atlanta's black community. While he invited the Atlanta Urban League into his paper, allowing the interracial organization to make a small stride in diversifying Atlanta newspaper coverage, he consistently denounced federal anti-lynching legislation and promoted white supremacist ideologies such as preserving the white primary, limiting black voting power and advertising white heritage projects. There was a strict line separating white and black community affairs articles within the newspaper. Clark Howell had little interest in changing white reader's mind about the black community, at least before World War II when there was little financial incentive to do so. Regardless of the token integration of newspaper coverage in the *Constitution*, the paper had not come very far from imagining black Atlantans as they were represented in the lurid, front-page accounts in 1914 of Robert Paschal, George Hart, and William Hart's final day on earth, in which the newspaper described the teenagers as "skulk[ing]" in the "dark corner[s]" of their cells.³⁵⁷ Similarly, Ralph McGill did not truly understand the black community when he tried to represent a racially moderate vision on anti-lynching legislation. The white southern press catered to a large audience of white racist readers and they only wanted to attract black readers if they could do so without offending their white readership.

Understanding how Clark Howell came to see Atlanta's black community as a population worth representing within his newspaper speaks to the larger issues involved running a newspaper in a region struggling to respond to changing national and regional opinions on race.

³⁵⁷ "In Candlelit Cell Three Negroes Pass Last Night on Earth, Refuse All Food Except Bananas and Oranges, and Beg for Ready-Made Cigarettes," *Atlanta Constitution*, June 19, 1914, 1.

Much of Clark Howell's editorial space had been used to shape Atlanta's national racial reputation, so when the Ku Klux Klan and the mass migration of black southerners threatened that image in 1921, he responded in the only way he could. With a "white moderate" editorial policy that attempted to court black readers with token representation, the *Atlanta Constitution* continued their long tradition of supporting white supremacist politics, which taught white readers how to redirect their racism into more nationally socially acceptable channels.

CHAPTER 3—ICON OF THE SOUTH: *GONE WITH THE WIND*

Clark Howell's "white moderate" editorial policy became particularly effective in the late 1930s with the publication of Margaret Mitchell's novel, *Gone with the Wind*. Howell's editorial policy allowed him to promote the novel without promoting the more overt white supremacist ideologies of the Klan. Howell was still trying to maintain his black readership. By the 1930s, the *Atlanta Constitution* had been publishing the Atlanta Urban Weekly Bulletin for close to a decade, and Howell had even started to publish other articles under separate headlines highlighting key developments within Georgia's black community. Whether it was advertising the meetings of black church congregations or black veterans, or advertising the selection of a "Assistant Negro Agricultural Supervisor," these articles strayed substantively from the salacious criminality that had previously dominated the *Constitution's* coverage.³⁵⁸ More to the point, in 1930, the *Atlanta Constitution* even brought on Pulitzer Prize-winning editor Julian Harris, who had become well known for criticizing Ku Klux Klan activity in 1925. These changes, however, were not conducive to maintaining a strong readership within Georgia's more racist communities.

The Great Depression had fundamentally changed the relationship between Atlanta's newspapers and their rural readers. Before the crash, Clark Howell's tri-weekly subscription model was pulling in 105,922 subscribers. Even though the tri-weekly subscription model did not bring in as much money from its readership as its other models, Howell often used the subscription model's "widespread territory" as justification for his newspaper's success.³⁵⁹ The

³⁵⁸ "Assistant Negro Agricultural Supervisor Chosen for State," *Atlanta Constitution*, January 16, 1931, 8; "Negro Veterans to Meet," *Atlanta Constitution*, March 28, 1930, 26; "Pinkston Heads Negro Baptists," *Atlanta Constitution*, January 7, 1931, 3.

³⁵⁹ "Clark Howell's Open Letter," *Atlanta Constitution*, May 9, 1928, 7.

Depression changed this dramatically, dropping the total tri-weekly subscription model subscriber count to just 38,878 by 1930.³⁶⁰ After the crash, the model was no longer sustainable. With such low numbers Howell could no longer demand the kinds of advertising rates he had previously commanded, so he discontinued the regionally focused tri-weekly subscription. He was not alone, as the *Atlanta Journal's* Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday edition was also discontinued at the same time. There was good news for Clark Howell, as his daily subscription numbers grew more quickly than those of the other two white daily newspapers. In 1928, Howell wrote that his newspaper's subscriptions had crested over his competitors to "83,446 circulation."³⁶¹ By 1933, Howell claimed a lead of 12,000 daily subscriptions over his competitors. This meant that the *Constitution* held 39% of the daily newspaper subscription market, and it also meant that Clark Howell's "white moderate" racial image for Atlanta was popular.

Maintaining that image, however, would be difficult. Starting in 1930, the Ku Klux Klan was steadily securing more and more power within Georgia's rural counties, and Clark Howell found himself facing the same dilemma he had faced in 1921. Atlanta's "moderate" racial image was being threatened. In 1936, the *New York Times* reported that the Klan's "national executive offices," which used to be held in "a large ante-bellum mansion on Peachtree Road in Atlanta," were still claiming to hold a "few national Klan officers" who maintain "their membership figures to themselves."³⁶² Most northern publications had believed the Klan to be dead or at the very least useless. The *Chicago Tribune* and the *Boston Globe* wrote that the Klan was "greatly

³⁶⁰ N.W. Ayer & Son's *American Newspaper Annual* (Philadelphia: N.W. Ayer & Son, 1930).

³⁶¹ "Clark Howell's Open Letter," *Atlanta Constitution*, May 9, 1928, 7.

³⁶² "The Nation," *New York Times*, May 31, 1936, E1.

weakened,” “mediocre,” and “[dead] of public boredom.”³⁶³ But again, Clark Howell knew differently. The Klan had always existed within the shadows of the South, and it was going to take more than national embarrassment and a few financial scandals to make it go away. What Clark Howell needed most was a way to maintain the allegiance of his white supremacist readers, while still keeping up the illusion of being a voice against racial intolerance within the city. He found the solution to this need with the publication of *Gone with the Wind*.

As the Stone Mountain Confederate Memorial project had proved, Clark Howell knew that there was national demand for white heritage projects. While overtly white supremacist arguments only attracted the more extremist parts of southern racist communities, white heritage projects attracted wider support. Both approaches still encoded the racial hierarchy of white supremacist ideals, but like his paternalist vision, white heritage arguments were much more attractive to Howell’s readership. They even gave him a reason to work with many white rural Georgian politicians who saw value in the same white heritage projects. This gave his newspapers the necessary reach to allow the daily subscription model to reach out across the region in a similar fashion as his tri-weekly subscription model. In many ways, the Georgia State Capital grounds within Atlanta reflected this kind of tension, between white supremacist and “white moderate” ideologies. Before 1928, the state capital had one confederate memorial, a statue to James G. Gordon, famed Confederate general and Georgia governor, which had been built using both private and public funds, sculpted by Solon H. Borglum, Gutzon Borglum’s younger brother.³⁶⁴ In 1928, Georgians added a second statue of Confederate hero Joseph E.

³⁶³ “The Fight on Fanaticism in Indiana,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, March 23, 1930; “Declares Members of Klan Mediocre,” *Daily Boston Globe*, February 17, 1930, 6; “Editorial,” *Daily Boston Globe*, October 11, 1932, 14.

³⁶⁴ “Georgians Pay Tribute Today to John Gordon,” *Atlanta Constitution*, May 25, 1907, 1.

Brown, the state's governor during the Civil War.³⁶⁵ In 1930, the Atlanta Ladies Memorial Association planted a tree and dedicated a memorial to William Ambrose Wright, a Confederate soldier and former governor who argued vehemently for segregation.³⁶⁶ And in 1932, the capital added its most controversial statue, that of Thomas E. Watson, the infamous editor and senator who stoked racial violence as a key part of his editorial career.³⁶⁷ For Clark Howell and the Atlanta business industry, white heritage projects were a strong source of economic growth. And *Gone with the Wind*, much like Stone Mountain, was exactly the kind of white heritage project into which Southern racism could be redirected. It provided Atlanta's newspapers with a powerful tool to attract broad-based publicity for Atlanta, while avoiding the negative publicity affiliated with more overt white supremacist activities.

The Economic Divide Between Urban and Rural Communities

After the very public collapse of the Stone Mountain Confederate Memorial in 1925, many of Atlanta's urban boosters had begun to shift their attention away from tourism and toward the city's burgeoning industrial development. By 1926, the Atlanta Chamber of Commerce was reporting that "next to New Orleans and Louisville, Atlanta [was] the South's largest city." They noted that the city's economic opportunities had attracted major national corporations like Sears-Roebuck, which built a major branch for its "money order and retail business," and McKnown Bros Company, a national firm based in Chicago and New York and manufacturing wood products "used for roof supports for all buildings."³⁶⁸ By 1928, northern publications like *Forbes* and the *Cleveland Plain Dealer* were praising the fact that Atlanta had

³⁶⁵ "Statue of Joseph E. Brown, War Governor of Georgia, will be unveiled," *Atlanta Constitution*, October 16, 1928, 3.

³⁶⁶ "Atlanta Honors Heroes of Gray at Capitol today," *Atlanta Constitution*, January 20, 1930, 7.

³⁶⁷ "Tribute is Paid to Tom Watson as Bronze Statue is Unveiled," *Atlanta Constitution*, December 4, 1932, 1A.

³⁶⁸ Extension Committee of Atlanta Chamber of Commerce, "Notes from the Secretary's Desk," *City Builder Magazine*, January 1926, 27-28, Kenan Research Center, Atlanta History Center.

“tripled its buying power in the last five years.”³⁶⁹ In many ways, Atlanta was beginning to reflect the very industrial vision of Henry Grady’s New South, and the Atlanta Chamber of Commerce worked hand in hand with Atlanta’s newspapers to promote that vision. Praising that reciprocal relationship, the white Chamber of Commerce wrote that it was “deeply indebted to the *Atlanta Constitution*, *Atlanta Georgian*, *Sunday American* and *Atlanta Journal* for their very liberal space in their columns.”³⁷⁰ This was space, which was often given to the white Chamber of Commerce “without cost.”³⁷¹ In many ways, this reflects where Atlanta’s newspapers allegiances during the 1920s.

This persisted until the economy crashed in 1929, and Atlanta, like all other urban centers, saw an immense economic contraction. The Atlanta Chamber of Commerce argued that, while the city was still adding new industries, like a Clark Thread Co. plant, the effects of the Great Depression were extensive.³⁷² Atlanta’s business elites struggled to maintain the positive image of Atlanta’s economic growth, while the facts showed decline. In response, Atlanta’s urban boosters shifted tactics and began promoting the region’s recovery. Rather than promote how much the city had grown, Atlanta’s urban boosters praised Georgia’s farmers for raising a total of seven million dollars in crops, and paying “off all their old loans” making themselves “wholly free of debt.”³⁷³ By 1931, they were praising Atlanta for leading the region in “total

³⁶⁹ Extension Committee of Atlanta Chamber of Commerce, “Commentary Expressions from Forbes and Cleveland Plain Dealer,” *City Builder Magazine*, June 1928, 25, Kenan Research Center, Atlanta History Center.

³⁷⁰ Extension Committee of Atlanta Chamber of Commerce, “Atlanta Chamber’s Greatest Year of Service,” *City Builder Magazine*, February 1927, 40, Kenan Research Center, Atlanta History Center.

³⁷¹ Extension Committee of Atlanta Chamber of Commerce, “Chamber of Commerce Campaign Gratifying Success,” *City Builder Magazine*, October 1928, 19, 40, Kenan Research Center, Atlanta History Center.

³⁷² Extension Committee of Atlanta Chamber of Commerce, “Clark Company to Build Plant,” *City Builder Magazine*, January 1931, 8, Kenan Research Center, Atlanta History Center.

³⁷³ Extension Committee of Atlanta Chamber of Commerce, “Georgia Farms,” *City Builder Magazine*, March 1931, 16, 35, Kenan Research Center, Atlanta History Center.

retail sales” even though New Orleans had twice the number of stores operating.³⁷⁴ Atlanta was being pitched as a “Southern Convention City.”³⁷⁵ The white Atlanta Chamber of Commerce’s Industrial Bureau goals in presenting these figures was to document just how far Atlanta had come in driving the region’s economic interest.

This vision of Atlanta as an industrial center jarred with Georgia’s rural centers, particularly as the region struggled with the ravages of the Great Depression. Many of Georgia’s farmers saw Atlanta’s push for industrial development as pulling support from its agricultural centers and thus weakening the agricultural market. They argued that industrial overproduction within the city had flooded the market and in turn weakened the economy. As John T. Kneebone argues, the debate about region’s economic changes arose with John Crowe Ransom’s publishing of a “manifesto” entitled *I’ll Take My Stand: The South and the Agrarian Tradition*. Kneebone argues that many “liberal journalists accepted the Agrarians’ challenge and responded with essays and reviews objecting to nearly every count in the book’s indictment of modern society.”³⁷⁶ Ransom then began traveling around the South debating the merits of his viewpoints, and that debate landed at Emory University with Ralph McGill reporting for the *Atlanta Constitution*. Ransom argued that “industrialism has but one genius... production,” and “it makes no provision for any emergencies.” Ransom argued that the reason the crash had occurred was that the nations’ industrial centers “hopelessly over-produced” goods. Representing urban interests were members of the industrial community, like William D. Anderson, president of the Bibb Manufacturing Company of Macon. Anderson argued that market volatility was a normal

³⁷⁴ Extension Committee of Atlanta Chamber of Commerce, “Notes from the Industrial Bureau,” *City Builder Magazine*, August 1931, 10, Kenan Research Center, Atlanta History Center.

³⁷⁵ Lincoln McConnell, “Atlanta Becomes Very Popular as a Southern Convention City,” *City Builder Magazine*, August 1931, 12, Kenan Research Center, Atlanta History Center.

³⁷⁶ John T. Kneebone, *Southern Liberal Journalists and the Issue of Race, 1920-1944* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2011), 56.

thing, and the real reason southern farmers were so angry was because their communities had been drained of wealth due to declining commodity value. The drop in “farm wages [to] only 47 per cent” of what wage levels were in Georgia’s urban centers was responsible for this, according to Anderson. This decline, he argued, was due to the adherence of southern rural communities to an agricultural economy. With this decrease in wealth, workers in support industries like “teachers, ministers and professors of all kinds,” could not survive the economic downturn.³⁷⁷ Regardless the cause of the downturn, rural and urban communities saw one another as the cause of the problem, and as such each community proposed opposing solutions.

This Emory University debate was not an isolated phenomenon, as Ralph McGill began exploring the economic discussions as he traveled within Georgia’s rural communities in 1932. During McGill’s trip, he began debating tariff policy with his readers. While he argued that tariffs harmed the economy by attracting similar harmful tariffs globally, his readers questioned McGill’s expertise on the topic. They argued that tariffs were appealing because they would make their own crops more attractive within the domestic market. During these discussions, Ralph McGill believed that passing any tariffs would ultimately harm Georgia’s farmers because it would compel similar tariffs to be passed in other nations. When McGill offered his opinions to the readers in person, they consistently questioned his authority on the topic. One audience member responded that while he “enjoyed [his] story on the game last Saturday” they asked him “what in the hell do you think you know about tariffs on cotton?”³⁷⁸ Another told McGill, “Ralph, I read you every morning, but what in the hell do you think you know about the Smoot-Hawley Tariff?”³⁷⁹ Georgia’s rural residents were resistant to McGill’s opinions, not only

³⁷⁷ Ralph McGill, “Agrarianism vs. Industrialism Question Skillfully Debated by Anderson and Dr. Ransom,” *Atlanta Constitution*, February 12, 1931, 1.

³⁷⁸ Ralph McGill, and Eugene Patterson, *The South and the Southerner* (Athens: Brown Thrasher Books, 1992).

³⁷⁹ Harold H Martin, *Ralph McGill, Reporter* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1973), 40.

became of his lack of economic experience, but also because they reflected urban industrial interests.

This interpretation of Atlanta's newspapers was not far off either. Much of the praise Atlanta's newspapers received came from its coverage of urban interests. In 1931, the *Atlanta Constitution* had been reporting on urban political corruption.³⁸⁰ The year before, Alderman Ben T. Huiet had openly announced that there was deep-seated corruption within City Hall and demanded an investigation. The *Constitution* reported Huiet's claim that "\$3,500 [would] be spent" in order to approve the new wiring in City Hall, amplifying Huiet's calls for an investigation.³⁸¹ On January 6, 1930, the Solicitor General released a devastating Grand Jury report announcing that the "scope of the system of graft being practiced in connection with the city's affairs [was] so vast" that they had not yet been able to find its roots. When the Atlanta City Council tried to limit the effects of the newspaper's reporting, Clark Howell argued that it was "too late—too late" for them to try and stop the investigation.³⁸² The story was important for Clark Howell, because it aligned the paper with urban interests. Week after week, Clark Howell used his editorial page to compel the city's attorney to investigate fraud, arguing that corrupt practices hindered the growth of Atlanta's economy. By June 24, 1930, six cases were brought to trial against various Atlanta city clerks.³⁸³ On April 10, 1931, the *Atlanta Constitution* was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for its reporting on the subject, and Atlanta's urban boosters praised the award.

The response to Clark Howell's award reflected the growing divide between urban and rural economic values. Atlanta's urban boosters saw the award as immensely positive to the city.

³⁸⁰ "Couch to Demand Probe by Council," *Atlanta Constitution*, March 14, 1928, 8.

³⁸¹ "Council Stirred By Wiring Battle," *Atlanta Constitution*, November 19, 1929, 1.

³⁸² "Too Late--Too Late!" *Atlanta Constitution*, March 5, 1930, 6.

³⁸³ "Jury to Resume Graft Quiz Today," *Atlanta Constitution*, June 24, 1930, 1.

The white Atlanta Chamber of Commerce had just, two years prior, promoted the Pulitzer as an immense distinction for any newspaper, having invited former winners Robert Lathan and Julian Harris to speak.³⁸⁴ Once Howell's newspaper won the award, the white Chamber declared that Howell had "performed the most distinguished and meritorious public service" in combatting municipal graft.³⁸⁵ However, though, the Pulitzer Prize reinforced nationally socially acceptable values. Before 1930, it appeared that the most assured way for a southerner to get a Pulitzer Prize was to critique the nature of southern life. This was because the only southerners who had earned the prize, did so by openly criticizing the south. The *Memphis Commercial Appeal* had won for its "courageous attitude" in challenging the "operations of the Ku Klux Klan." The *Charleston South Carolina News and Courier* won their award for the editorial "Plight of the South." And Julian Harris and the Columbus, Georgia *Enquirer Sun* won for their "brave and energetic fight against the Ku Klux Klan," for denouncing "the enactment of a law barring the teaching of evolution," for fighting "dishonest and incompetent public officials," and for standing up for Columbus, Georgia's black community and "against lynching."³⁸⁶ The award was clearly a representation of northern values.

This growing divide between urban and rural Georgians economic interests generated significant discord within Georgia's state politics as well. In 1932, Georgia elected Governor Eugene Talmadge, a politician whom northern newspapers argued represented both racial "demagoguery" and the southern "backwoods."³⁸⁷ Talmadge understood the urban rural economic divide much better than most politicians, as it was this divide that gave him the

³⁸⁴ Extension Committee of Atlanta Chamber of Commerce, "Southern Citizenship Conference at Emory This Month," *City Builder Magazine*, February 1928, 31, Kenan Research Center, Atlanta History Center.

³⁸⁵ Extension Committee of Atlanta Chamber of Commerce, "Atlanta Constitution Wins Pulitzer Prize for Service," *City Builder Magazine*, May 1931, 31, Kenan Research Center, Atlanta History Center.

³⁸⁶ Pulitzer Prize Board, *The Pulitzer Prizes: Winners, 1917 to the Present: Including Nominated Finalists, 1980 to the Present*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2019).

³⁸⁷ "Both Ends and the Middle," *Boston Globe*, May 11, 1935, 14.

political advantage that had allowed his landslide victory. Talmadge had made critiquing Atlanta's media outlets an integral part of his campaign strategy. He argued that it was the newspaper industry that censored his voice to the farmers as the Commissioner of Agriculture, claiming that the *Farmer's Bulletin* denied his publications. When he ran for governor, Talmadge claimed that the "daily press" failed to cover his campaign rallies while they devoted free space to his competitors. During his campaign, he argued that newspapers ignored his speech to a packed crowd in Griffin, Georgia, all the while publishing lengthy articles and headlines about his competitor's speech on the same day to only forty or fifty people in Hancock. The truth of the matter is though, Atlanta's newspapers covered his speech as well.³⁸⁸ While this was just one key part of his larger campaign platform, it spoke to his base of farmers who were growing more antagonistic to Atlanta's urban economy.

In response to Talmadge's growing popularity leading up to the election, northern publications began arguing that Georgia was slipping into the old habits of populist rage. The *Washington Post* called Talmadge "one of the South's best-established rabble-rousers." They argued that Talmadge represented "the revolt of the landowner against the increasing power of the industrialist, and especially against the anonymous power and privileges of absentee corporate ownership."³⁸⁹ He was a "Hitlerite democrat" who was mobilizing the "Klan spirit" to gain political power within the South.³⁹⁰ But Talmadge was ultimately elected governor. Almost immediately after his election, Talmadge made the news for pardoning Philip E. Fox, a Ku Klux Klan publicity agent who was in jail for murder. After being paroled, Fox immediately returned to the Klan's fold, where Hiram W. Evans, still the organization's presiding national leader,

³⁸⁸ "Talmadge Speaks to Hancock Crowd," *Atlanta Constitution*, July 22, 1932, 11.

³⁸⁹ "American Messiahs," *Washington Post*, June 7, 1935, 9.

³⁹⁰ "Hitlerite Democrats," *Washington Post*, January 31, 1936, 8.

“promised to give him employment at a salary not less than seventy-five dollars a month.”³⁹¹ For northern newspapers, this was simply indicative of Georgia yet again returning to its old habits of white supremacy and supporting the Ku Klux Klan.

It was in this cultural climate that Margaret Mitchell’s novel, *Gone with the Wind*, was published. As Atlanta’s newspapers struggled to balance the values of the city’s rural communities and the values of a growing urban business elite, they found themselves frontline defenders in a cultural war over *Gone with the Wind*’s racial and historical authenticity. While not as controversial as the Stone Mountain Confederate Memorial, national criticism of the novel pushed the *Atlanta Constitution*, to downplay and undermine white supremacist interpretations of the novel as well as the historical authenticity of Margaret Mitchell’s work. Complicating this process, was Clark Howell’s passing, which left the *Atlanta Constitution* rudderless in the middle of a storm. As Atlanta’s business interests gained more and more control coverage of the novel within the paper, the question of whose interests the paper served became difficult to answer. This question became even more complicated when Atlanta’s business interests began promoting construction of historical markers advertising the Atlanta framed within the novel. Even these simple decisions reflected the underlying racial biases of Atlanta’s white media industry. The novel’s racism and inaccuracy became a national focus of discussion once acclaimed filmmaker David Selznick, known for translating novels like *David Copperfield*, *Anna Karenina*, and *A Tale of Two Cities* into film, purchased the film rights to the novel. As Atlanta’s newspapers promised great national prestige from the film, newly elected mayor William B. Hartsfield began promising that the city would host the film’s premier. Mitchell’s success was so intoxicating to Atlanta’s business interests, that even the *Atlanta Daily World*, the city’s only daily black

³⁹¹ “Fox, Slayer of Captain Coburn, Freed after Serving 9 Years,” *Atlanta Constitution*, May 4, 1933, 1.

newspaper, began promoting the upcoming film as integral to the city's economic interests. The result of this struggle brought together both white and black newspapers in the promotion of the new film, with Atlanta's business elites recognizing that "white moderate" racial politics could help reshape the city's national reputation.

"White Moderate" Media Promotion of *Gone with the Wind*

By February of 1936, the Atlanta media industry's promotion of the novel began. This was possible because of the connections Margaret Mitchell made while serving as a journalist for the *Atlanta Journal*. Yolande Gwin, the journalist for the *Atlanta Constitution* who wrote society articles under the pseudonym Sally Forth, was looking for a story when she remembered that Mitchell was working on a novel set in Atlanta during the Civil War. Gwin contacted Mitchell for information about it, and Gwin published the first real promotional piece for the novel in the *Constitution*, calling it an "interesting and charmingly prepared piece of work... tempered with historical facts and characters."³⁹² The thing Gwin ignored most about Mitchell's writing was how Mitchell pushed the development of women's liberation in new ways. As a journalist, Mitchell had cultivated a reputation for "defaming Georgian womanhood." Mitchell devoted significant space in her articles during the 1920s to discussing the nature of the flapper and delved deeply into the culture of road shows and the women who make such shows function. Mitchell wrote about what went on backstage, even telling the story of one girl who went on stage while sick because she was sending money home so her sister could go through school. Mitchell also questioned how much control women had over their bodies, by reporting on the growth of teenage make-up use, and the "anti-lipstick" movement that Atlanta's high schools

³⁹² Sally Forth, "Margaret Mitchell's Novel Depicts Three Major Periods," *Atlanta Constitution*, February 9, 1936, M4.

mobilized to stop the practice.³⁹³ Just as Scarlett O'Hara offered a more modern vision of Georgia's historical women, Mitchell had sought to use the newspaper's society section to call into question basic assumptions about femininity.

This pattern also existed in the articles Mitchell wrote about the Stone Mountain Confederate Memorial. As previously mentioned in chapter one, Mitchell promoted the development of the Memorial in 1923, by strapping herself into Gutzon Borglum's harness, six stories above Atlanta's streets. That article gushed about thrill of the action, while also confirming that she would never do it again.³⁹⁴ Once Borglum and the Association separated, Margaret Mitchell wrote a four-article series promoting the Confederate Generals whom the Association had chosen as subjects for the new carving under the new sculptor, Augustus Lukeman.³⁹⁵ While these articles made it clear that Margaret Mitchell held conservative political views with regard to the South, Mitchell also wrote an article profiling four Georgian women that challenged assumptions about the role of women in society. The articles made it clear that Mitchell believed that women could function well within politics, business, or war. She told the story of Rebecca Latimer Felton, the first woman to serve as a United States Senator, even if it was only for a day. She wrote about Nancy Hart, who Mitchell argued captured six British soldiers during the Revolutionary War after they tried to eat her pumpkin pie. She praised Lucy Mathilde Kenney, who served as a Confederate Soldier during the Civil War. And she told the story of Mary Musgrove, who acted both as a diplomat and a businesswoman, rising to the rank of "empress of the Creek Tribe." While her articles promoting the Stone Mountain Confederate

³⁹³ Margaret Mitchell, "Who Owns the Schoolgirl's Nose," *Atlanta Journal*, April 29, 1923.

³⁹⁴ Margaret Mitchell, "Hanging over Atlanta in Borglum's Swing," *Atlanta Journal*, May 23, 1923.

³⁹⁵ "General John Brown Gordon," *Atlanta Journal*, November 29, 1925; "When General Cobb Wrote the Georgia Code," *Atlanta Journal*, December 6, 1925, "General Benning, Hero of Burnside's Bridge," *Atlanta Journal*, December 2, 1925; "General Wright, Georgia's Hero at Gettysburg," *Atlanta Journal*, December 13, 1925.

Memorial received praise, her articles promoting Georgian women met significant resistance from readers. The lesson she learned most from this resistance was how to shape Georgian femininity for her conservative audience.

In this way, *Gone with the Wind* explored three different ideals: Atlanta's relationship to race, a modern interpretation of femininity, and the Lost Cause. It retold the story of the Lost Cause from the white feminine perspective, and it did so in a way that was palatable to many different Americans by capitalizing on the modern notions of womanhood. While southern critics argued that the novel was written well enough, they claimed it was the novel's historical accuracy that made the book cultivate such large audiences, although the novel is in fact quite historically inaccurate. Nevertheless, Atlanta's media industry became dedicated to the book, and by May, the McMillan Company, after seeing its immense popularity, postponed its release for two months so it could become the July Book-of-the-Month Club selection.³⁹⁶ During those two months, McMillan worked with Atlanta newspapers, buying advertising space and arranging for free publicity from journalists who wrote about the novel and its author. During this period, Yolande Gwin wrote a much more lengthy article detailing Mitchell's experiences writing the book, explaining why it was delayed, and highlighting the themes of the story.³⁹⁷ In the same newspaper, *Gone with the Wind* had a full page advertisement quoting a *Los Angeles Times*' review that called the novel "the most satisfactory, the most convincing, the most powerful presentation of that tragic era ever," with Davison-Paxon Co. Department store advertising a

³⁹⁶ Ellen F. Brown, John Wiley Jr, *Margaret Mitchell's Gone with the Wind: A Bestseller's Odyssey from Atlanta to Hollywood* (Lanham, Taylor Trade Publishing: 2011), 61.

³⁹⁷ Yolande Gwin, "Atlanta Author's First Novel is Story of War Between States," *Atlanta Constitution*, June 28, 1936, 3K.

“special price.”³⁹⁸ For a book not yet available, *Gone with the Wind* was commanding significant space within the newspaper.³⁹⁹

Gone with the Wind quickly became a public sensation. Margaret Mitchell appeared on WSB radio for interviews, newspapers covered every aspect of the novel’s popularity, and the book itself was called “one of the most original novels in American literature.”⁴⁰⁰ As Mitchell’s celebrity grew, the *Atlanta Constitution* kept publishing articles covering that transition. They argued that Mitchell was just trying to “keep house” and that she claimed fame had changed the telephone into an “instrument of torture.”⁴⁰¹ Contributing to that torture was Lamar Q. Ball, who wrote four different articles in four days about Margaret Mitchell’s novel. Ball was a World War I veteran who had begun writing articles for the *Atlanta Constitution*’s city section in 1935. Each of his articles delved into key aspects of the novel’s success, including several profiles of Margaret Mitchell and accounts of how she was handling her fame.⁴⁰² But the *Atlanta Constitution*’s primary focus was on the book’s popularity, and many of its articles during this period were simply repeating key publishing records that the novel was “smashing.”⁴⁰³ In August, when First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt wrote an article endorsing the book as “not a book you can put down easily,” the *Atlanta Constitution* published the article twice.⁴⁰⁴ The glowing

³⁹⁸ “Display Ad,” *Atlanta Constitution*, June 28, 1936, 11A.

³⁹⁹ “State Editors Re-elect Officers, As Convention Ends at Savannah,” *Atlanta Constitution*, June 14, 1936, 1A.

⁴⁰⁰ “Atlantan’s Novel is Placed on Sale,” *Atlanta Constitution*, July 1, 1936, 2.

⁴⁰¹ “Telephone Instrument of Torture To Atlanta’s New Literary ‘Find,’” *Atlanta Constitution*, July 9, 1936, 7;

“Atlanta Novelist Prefers to Keep House,” *Atlanta Constitution*, July 9, 1936, 7.

⁴⁰² Lamar Q. Ball, “Writing of ‘Gone with the Wind’ Beset by Difficulties,” *Atlanta Constitution*, November 9, 1936, 1.

⁴⁰³ “All Modern Publishing Records smashed by ‘Gone with the Wind,’” *Atlanta Constitution*, November 13, 1936, 1; “Presses Grind Out 250,000th Copy of ‘Gone With Wind’ Far Too Slowly,” *Atlanta Constitution*, August 9, 1936, 3A.

⁴⁰⁴ Eleanor Roosevelt, “My Day,” *Atlanta Constitution*, August 24, 1936: 10; Sally Forth, “‘Gone with the Wind’ Keeps Mrs. Roosevelt Up Late at Night,” *Atlanta Constitution*, August 26, 1936, 14.

nature of these early articles started to break down the line between paid genuine news coverage and advertising.

During the peak of the fervor over *Gone with the Wind*'s novel in November 1936, Clark Howell passed away at seventy-three years old. His passing left the *Atlanta Constitution* with little guidance over the next year and a half. In many ways, by this point Clark Howell was the *Atlanta Constitution*. His decisions had helped shape the paper's editorial policy following Henry Grady's death back in 1889, reinventing New South editorial policy with his "white moderate" approach. Clark Howell's death drew responses from all across the nation, illustrating just how influential he and his newspaper had become within national politics. Even Franklin D. Roosevelt called the newspaper to pay tribute to Howell's legacy. Clark Howell Sr., born and raised in Atlanta, had served the South in numerous positions. He had been elected to the Senate in 1900 and twice worked with Presidents on special commissions to solve a coal dispute and transportation problems. Howell's national political popularity was so extensive that Roosevelt offered him several times to become a US diplomat, but Howell declined, arguing that his work on the *Atlanta Constitution* was more important. Howell had also served the Georgia Democratic Party throughout the years and had personally served several different civic institutions as well. Howell had built the *Atlanta Constitution* into the Pulitzer Prize winning newspaper that dominated Atlanta's media market. He was even still writing articles, as in November and December of 1935, when Clark Howell travelled to the Philippines Inauguration and began reporting the events in four lengthy articles. Clark Howell had always been integral to the newspaper, but during the months leading up to his death his attention had been waning. In his

absence, many of his subordinates began serving various advertising interests. When Howell passed away, Clark Howell Jr., his son, took over the reins of the newspaper.⁴⁰⁵

Unlike his father, Clark Howell Jr. was not invested in the journalistic side of the profession. Clark Howell Jr. was the paper's business manager, and he saw the newspaper's predominant responsibility to the city's business elites rather than his readers. He was, however, dedicated to the newspaper industry, and that dedication led to his position as the head of the Southern Newspaper Publishers Association. Following his father's death, Clark Howell Jr. pushed his newspaper to promote *Gone with the Wind* even more. While many of the paper's earliest articles praising the novel's popularity appeared within the news and society sections of the newspaper, by November the line separating what was genuine news and what was advertising became blurry. Clark Howell Jr. told the Atlanta Chamber of Commerce that newspaper advertising as like "a baby's rubber panty—localized, flexible, indispensable." He argued that a publicist was only good at telling the audience about the product. Howell argued that if you want to "make 'em want" the product, then "that's advertising."⁴⁰⁶ Clark Howell Jr. adopted this approach when advertising *Gone with the Wind* for the Davison-Paxon company. In order to drum up sales of the book for the upcoming holidays, Howell Jr. created an entirely separate subsection of the paper entitled the "Christmas Gift Book Section." The entire subsection was a mixture of promotional articles detailing how great Davison-Paxon's company was, and how important it was for the *Constitution's* readers to own the book. It argued that the Davison-Paxon Company "takes pride in presenting" its "parade of Christmas Books" in a

⁴⁰⁵ "Clark Howell's Career Marked by Keen Love for State," *Atlanta Constitution*, November 15, 1936, 1.

⁴⁰⁶ Clark Howell, Jr., "Newspaper Advertising," *City Builder Magazine*, November 1935, 3, Kenan Research Center, Atlanta History Center.

massive display worthy of visiting.⁴⁰⁷ The entire article was written by Raymond A. Kline, vice president and general manager of the Davison-Paxon company. Right next to the article, in same the font and size, was an article by journalist Norman S. Berg about the “The Real Story of ‘*Gone with the Wind*’” which reproduced Mitchell’s account of the events on which she claimed to have based the book.⁴⁰⁸ Much like Clark Howell’s publishing of Simmons’ vision of the Ku Klux Klan back in 1918, the *Atlanta Constitution*’s publishing of Raymond Kline advertising copy as an article fundamentally reinforced just how much control Atlanta’s business interests had on the newspaper’s coverage.

As the *Atlanta Constitution*’s coverage of *Gone with the Wind* began reflecting more advertising the reader interest, the novel itself was starting to foster significant criticism nationally. As Malcolm Crowley argued in his review in *The New Republic*, the book was “an encyclopedia of the plantation legend.” He argued that the novel described a “big white-columned house sleeping under its trees among the cotton fields; the band of faithful retainers, including two that quaintly resemble Aunt Jemima and Old Black Joe; the white haired massa bathing in mint juleps; the heroine with her seventeen-inch waist and high spirited twins who come courting her in the magnolia colored moonlight, with the darkies singing under the hill.” Crowley noted that “the legend [was] false in part and silly in part and vicious” in that it misrepresented the history of the era. He argued that the vision of northerners “looting the mansion” and threatening to rape “its high-bred mistress” evoked the very same racist images as the “knightliness of the Ku Klux Klansmen, who frighten[ed] Negroes away from the polls.”⁴⁰⁹

⁴⁰⁷ Raymond A. Kline, “Davison Takes Pride in Presenting This Book Section,” *Atlanta Constitution*, November 29, 1936, 1.

⁴⁰⁸ Norman S. Berg, “The Real Story of ‘Gone with the Wind,’” *Atlanta Constitution*, November 29, 1936, 1.

⁴⁰⁹ Malcolm Cowley, “Going With the Wind,” *New Republic* (September 16, 1936), 161-162, as found online: <https://newrepublic.com/article/133244/going-wind> (Accessed 9/14/2016).

Crowley's concern was not in whether Mitchell's novel was pleasing to read, but rather that its representation of relations between the North and South could conjure up old wounds of sectional hate. Similarly, the *Chicago Daily News* argued that "too many people forget that this book is a novel, that it does not pretend to be history." It noted that Mitchell's portrayal of Sherman's march on Atlanta exhibited the very same southern bias that had long existed within the Ku Klux Klan. The *News* argued that "the record shows" that southerners retreated from Atlanta and were not forced out.⁴¹⁰ In many ways, both northern and southern white critics struggled to shape the interpretation of the Civil War when writing about the book, and in the process shape the Civil War's meaning.

The novel's divisiveness was also discussed by northern readers. In *The Washington Post's* letters to the editor section, readers questioned not only the nature of Grant's actions in the battle of Atlanta, but also Mitchell's portrayal of southern femininity. Reader Mary Logan Tucker admitted that she was "not only indignant but disappointed to find Margaret Mitchell had joined the group of southern women writers who cannot resist trying to defame the reputation of General Grant."⁴¹¹ Cecile Willink argued that Mitchell's characterization of Grant was accurate, given that Grant's "bloody campaign of the Wilderness" cost him "18,000 men" compared to General Lee who lost only "11,500" soldiers.⁴¹² Eustace S. Glascock joined in arguing that Mitchell was fairly neutral on Grant, and that Grant had only history to blame for that reputation.⁴¹³ One reader argued that "this book reeks with hatred, rancor, sectional strife, vulgarity, sensuality, contradiction, and malice."⁴¹⁴ Gordon L. Groover, a self-described

⁴¹⁰ *Chicago Daily News* article by way of Lamar Q. Ball, "'Gone with the Wind' Interest Arouses Chicago's Guardians of Public Opinion to Protest," *Atlanta Constitution*, December 27, 1936, A15.

⁴¹¹ Mary Logan Tucker, "Margaret Mitchell's Picture of Grant," *Washington Post*, September 1, 1936, X8.

⁴¹² Harold Lloyd, "Sherman Was Right about War," *Washington Post*, September 24, 1936, X8.

⁴¹³ Eustace S. Glascock, "Letter to the Editor," *Washington Post*, September 21, 1936, X8.

⁴¹⁴ "Gone with the Wind," *Washington Post*, October 26, 1936, X6.

Georgian, responded that “the war was over” and that novels were intended to discuss these kinds of subjects.⁴¹⁵ By November, the readers were debating whether the book offered a “vulgar and coarse portrayal of women.” One reader argued that the novel’s “defamation of southern womanhood” was “worse than the depredations of the Yankees.”⁴¹⁶ Another responded that such beliefs were “untenable by one who has read the book entirely and fairly.” They argued that some southern women in the novel come off as “outstanding women characters... exquisitely portrayed... as fine characters and noble women of the old south, or any civilization.”⁴¹⁷ As readers debated this topic, these newspapers acted as a platform for trying to come to terms with what southern identity meant in the modern world.

For Atlanta’s newspapers, however, this debate was concerning. While *Washington Post* readers were wrestling with their own understandings of the novel, Atlanta’s newspapers injected the work with immense sectional meaning. As Lamar Q. Ball argued, Margaret Mitchell’s work was a testament to the historical nature of Atlanta’s growth. Pointing out Frank Knox’s *Chicago Daily News* editorial, Ball argued that the newspaper’s failure to grasp the history of the era expressed more about the newspaper’s bias than anything about the novel. Ball argued that Knox described Sherman’s march on Atlanta as akin to a group “playful bunch of boys.” Ball argued that Sherman’s assault on Atlanta was not playful, but vicious. Ball referenced Wallace Reed’s *History of Atlanta* and Lucian Lamar Knight’s *History of Fulton County* which described the assault as a brutal attack that devastated the city. Ball argued that Mitchell’s conception was accurate, having “checked and rechecked every fact” in the library, and if the *Chicago Daily News* kept portraying the novel like the “propagandists of the north, such as Harriet Beecher

⁴¹⁵ Gordon L. Grover, “The War Is Over,” *Washington Post*, October 29, 1936, X8.

⁴¹⁶ “Sothern Women Defamed,” *Washington Post*, November 24, 1936, X10.

⁴¹⁷ Arthur M. Shephard, “Women of the South,” *Washington Post*, November 27, 1936, X6.

Stowe, who were encouraged for years in the development of northern opinion against the South,” then they would never truly understand southern history. Ball argued that Mitchell’s work was “based on history” and not intended to “inflame the public, as did the author of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*.”⁴¹⁸ Ball’s audience was of course southern, so this attempt to compare Margaret Mitchell’s book favorably to the abolitionist text, which southern readers may have looked at as “inflaming the public” to raise money for abolition, was pandering to his audience, and it worked.

By January in the *Atlanta Constitution*, Lamar Q. Ball’s vigorous defense of Mitchell’s novel had marshaled significant support from local readers, many of whom not only praised Ball for giving the *Chicago Daily News* its “comeuppance” with a “devastating rejoinder.”⁴¹⁹ Ball’s defense of the novel became a series of articles, wherein Ball republished his reader’s arguments in support of the novel. One of Ball’s readers argued that Mitchell’s accounting of the war matched her own memories of the event. She argued that “even though only a small child,” she remembered that the soldiers stole her family’s only mule that was used “to plow the patches of corn and make a living.” She argued that Sherman’s soldiers “ripped up pillows and bolsters” and even “ripped open” trunks and “carried away” livestock. Some of the newspaper’s other readers were so avid in defending the book that they demanded the novel be “compulsory reading in every high school history class in the United States of America.”⁴²⁰ For many of the *Atlanta Constitution*’s readers, attacks against *Gone with the Wind* were threats to their historical identity. Lost Cause ideology had become so embedded into southern identity that it was natural

⁴¹⁸ Lamar Q. Ball, “‘Gone with the Wind’ Interest Arouses Chicago’s Guardians of Public Opinion to Protest,” *Atlanta Constitution*, December 27, 1936, 15A.

⁴¹⁹ “Too Late,” *Atlanta Constitution*, January 3, 1937, 4C.

⁴²⁰ Lamar Q. Ball, ‘Gone with the Wind’ Readers Are Quick to Answer Criticism by Chicago Editorial Writer,” *Atlanta Constitution*, January 3, 1937, 5C.

for proponents to villainize northern soldiers and northern opinion. These articles defending white southern heritage fell right in line with the *Atlanta Constitution's* “white moderate” editorial policy.

Reshaping Atlanta's Public Spaces to Meet Tourist Expectations

On December 4, 1936, several key white Atlantans came together to conceptualize a way to promote the connection between *Gone with the Wind* and Atlanta. The meeting took place under the auspices of Atlanta's white Chamber of Commerce, but in attendance were not only the regular Chamber members, but also A.L. Belle Isle, the president of the Atlanta Convention & Tourist Bureau, J.F. DeJarnette, the president of the Atlanta Hotel Men's Association, five members of Atlanta's Historical Society, and six representatives from Atlanta's white newspaper industry. Representing the *Atlanta Constitution* were executive editor Francis W. Clarke and reporters Lamar Q. Ball and Harold Martin. Representing the Associated Press was Georgia state editor Harold Tyler, and representing the *Atlanta Georgian-American* was Joe Harris, assistant publisher.⁴²¹

At the beginning of this meeting, Chamber president W.E. Harrington laid out the problem: tourists were “frustrated” with Atlanta's lack of signage indicating key sights from the novel.⁴²² The meeting participants then began considering ways of reshaping Atlanta's public spaces to fit the expectations of visiting tourists who Lamar Q. Ball claimed would be an “enormous flow of tourist traffic through and to other cities in Georgia and neighboring states.” Ball argued that Atlanta's members needed to find a way to “attract thousands of them to Atlanta and [make] it interesting for them to spend at least several days” in the city. Harrington's

⁴²¹ Atlanta Chamber of Commerce Minutes, December 4, 1936, Box 3, Folder 6, Metro Atlanta Chamber of Commerce Records, Kenan Research Center.

⁴²² Atlanta Chamber of Commerce Minutes, December 4, 1936, Box 3, Folder 6, Metro Atlanta Chamber of Commerce Records, Kenan Research Center.

proposal was to construct “historical markers, monuments and guideposts to points of historic interest.” He argued that Margaret Mitchell wrote a letter to him personally complaining about how “since July” she had received “hundreds” of letters, phone calls, and physical visitations from tourists asking “how they could locate” the historical sites in Atlanta that are referenced in the novel. Those sites included “the battlefield of Peachtree creek and other battles fought around Atlanta, where the old Union station was, whether any of the old breastworks are still in existence and how to find them.” Mitchell wrote that it was “practically impossible” for her to direct these visitors, given that there were “so few markers in the whole city” and almost “no direction signs to help strangers.” Harrington’s solution was the creation of new physical spaces and monuments that would help the city better reflect the imagined vision of Atlanta found within the novel, a vision that focused on white plantations and Civil War battlefields. The goal of this solution was, of course, the “enormous revenue” that Atlanta stood to make from this new influx of white heritage tourism.⁴²³

Walter McElreath, past president of the Atlanta Historical Society, and Eugene Mitchell, the novelist’s father and another former president of the Atlanta Historical Society, argued that there were at least 170 points of historical interest within Atlanta that could be marked. The Atlanta Historical Society had been loosely organized to preserve “information on the history of the Gate City” in 1869.⁴²⁴ For the last ten years, the Historical Society had pushed Atlanta’s white urban elites to adopt historical markers. The original idea before the publication of Mitchell’s book was that “the entire South [was] full of history” and that Atlanta’s heritage had

⁴²³ Margaret Mitchell’s letter to Harrington on December 3, 1936, addended to Atlanta Chamber of Commerce Minutes, December 4, 1936, Box 3, Folder 6, Metro Atlanta Chamber of Commerce Records, Kenan Research Center.

⁴²⁴ “Atlanta Historical and Statistical Society,” *Atlanta Constitution*, September 29, 1869, 1.

not been “utilized like other sections use[d] their history.”⁴²⁵ The marker idea had originally failed, but ten years later, Harrington’s suggestion garnered substantive popularity.⁴²⁶ The final part of the proposal came from J. DeJarnette, president of the Atlanta Hotel Men’s Association, who laid out how financially profitable the project would be to the city as a whole. He argued that these markers would help citizens want to remain within the city, which would keep their money within the city and thus “help the State of Georgia more than any one other thing that might be done.” DeJarnette argued that advertising was integral to maintaining tourism, and local hotels were already placing billboards at diversion points to bring more of these passing tourists into the city.

After the Chamber of Commerce approved the project, they put Wilbur G. Kurtz in charge. The Chamber’s faith in Wilbur G. Kurtz was based on Kurtz’s reputation as a visual artist for Atlanta’s newspaper industry.⁴²⁷ Born and educated in the north, Wilbur George Kurtz moved to Atlanta in 1903. After studying art at the Art Institute of Chicago, Kurtz began writing for various newspapers, who found him useful as he often projected a southern voice and included large illustrations detailing key white heritage projects. Over time, his historical paintings became more popular than his writing. The imagery often used innovative techniques to draw the reader’s attention, like a three-dimensional reproduction of a train breaking out of the newspaper’s pages.⁴²⁸ Kurtz’s envisioning of Atlanta during the Civil War played an integral role in how the newspapers portrayed it to their audiences. When in 1935, Kurtz argued that before

⁴²⁵ “Atlanta Historical Society, To Preserve History of City, Formed at Meeting Tuesday: New Organization Plans to Mark Local Historic Spots and Gather Atlanta’s Life Story,” *Atlanta Constitution*, October 27, 1926, 6.

⁴²⁶ Atlanta Chamber of Commerce Meeting Minutes for December 4, 1936, Box 3, Folder 6, Metro Atlanta Chamber of Commerce Records, Kenan Research Center.

⁴²⁷ Atlanta Chamber of Commerce Meeting Minutes for December 4, 1936, Box 3, Folder 6, Metro Atlanta Chamber of Commerce Records, Kenan Research Center.

⁴²⁸ Wilbur G. Kurtz, “True Account on Andrews’ Raid and Part Played by “Texas,” *Atlanta Constitution* April 14, 1912, B6.

and after the war, much of Atlanta's road names were changed fundamentally, he was already pushing for Atlanta's business industry to begin marking historical locations within the city.⁴²⁹ In preparing her novel, Margaret Mitchell even consulted Wilbur Kurtz for images, which in turn helped her describe the various battles fought within Atlanta.⁴³⁰ His artistic depictions of the Civil War were in such high demand after the publication of the novel that the United Daughters of the Confederacy issued him an award.⁴³¹ Kurtz's role was also not limited to work related to the novel, David Selznick would also hire him to consult for the film.⁴³² He was also a consultant for two Disney films: *Song of the South* in 1946, and the *Great Locomotive Chase* in 1956. Kurtz's vision of southern white heritage not only laid the framework for *Gone with the Wind*, but became how the entire nation imagined the Civil War for three decades.

The markers very clearly illustrate Wilbur Kurtz's vision of Atlanta's Civil War legacy. Preeminent to his vision were the battles themselves, which also highlighted key business districts within Atlanta. Central to his marker program, were three military monuments near Peachtree Street, each of which accentuated several of the battles that featured within the novel. Peachtree Street had the Lowes Grande Theater and an exclusive white Peachtree Golf Club, which must have been appealing as a focus for tourist attention. These planned large-scale monuments were abnormal overall, as the goal of the marker program was to create temporary wooden markers that would be placed at 170 different points of interest. Over time, the Chamber

⁴²⁹ Wilbur G. Kurtz, "Name of Mt. Perrian Road Is 'Mt. Paran' And That of Nancy's Creek Is 'Nance's', Study of War Time Records Reveals," *Atlanta Constitution*, July 14, 1935, A13.

⁴³⁰ Mitchell (Marsh), Margaret, 1935 -1949, Folder 14, box 26, Wilbur G. Kurtz, Sr. Papers, MSS 130, Kenan Research Center, Atlanta History Center.

⁴³¹ Dennis Belmont, "Wilbur Kurtz Jr., Of Atlanta, Wins State U. D. C. Prize," *Atlanta Constitution*, December 13, 1936, A12.

⁴³² His regular publication period begins in May of 1930 and ends in June of 1932 with the "Romantic History of W&A."; Atlanta and Old South Paintings, along with a number of different manuscripts covering a number of articles published both in the Atlanta Journal and the Atlanta Constitution, boxes 46-49, Wilbur G. Kurtz, Sr. Papers, MSS 130, Kenan Research Center, Atlanta History Center.

of Commerce planned to replace those markers with more permanent bronze or steel plaques.⁴³³ But the story Kurtz's markers tell is one of Sherman's vigorously contested march south, where southerners fought back at every step of the way. As a contested vision of the war, Kurtz's reliance on southern interpretations of the war went to the heart of the very debates that played out in the Lamar Bell's articles. Beyond the Peachtree battles, Kurtz also placed markers in a way that afforded tourists the ability to imagine Sherman's march south. He marked locations where Confederate soldiers resisted the march and highlighted the difficulty Atlantans faced by the overwhelming aggression of northern soldiers. The vision Kurtz projected for the South during this period was one that enshrined the Lost Cause myth. It praised southerners for fighting for every step, and it avoided controversial discussions about slavery or even black culture. It also avoided overt promotion of Ku Klux Klan ideals. Over the next three years, the historical marker project experienced significant delays, but Kurtz finished the descriptions for over a hundred and seventeen different markers to be distributed throughout Atlanta and the surrounding region. He even created maps of Atlanta's metropolitan region locating key parts of Civil War battles, though the actual markers were cast in iron rather than bronze at the request of the National Park Service. The Chamber of Commerce and the Atlanta Hotel Men's Association paid for the construction materials, while the city of Atlanta agreed to the placement and upkeep of the markers. The project was completed in fall of 1939.⁴³⁴

In this way, Atlanta's physical spaces started to reflect the way Atlanta's white community imagined the Civil War. *Gone with the Wind*, as a white cultural product, helped cultivate a white vision of and for Atlanta. The memorial marker campaign confirmed that vision

⁴³³ Atlanta Chamber of Commerce Meeting Minutes for December 4, 1936, Box 3, Folder 6, Metro Atlanta Chamber of Commerce Records, Kenan Research Center, Atlanta History Center.

⁴³⁴ Correspondence from the Atlanta Chamber of Commerce to Wilbur G. Kurtz, August 25, 1939, Wilbur G. Kurtz, Sr. Papers, MSS 130, Kenan Research Center, Atlanta History Center.

by valuing white heritage neighborhoods over black. In the late 1930s, the majority of white Atlantans lived in the northern Peachtree district of Atlanta, and many of the markers were constructed in that area. Even when the markers strayed to other parts of the city, they were almost exclusively placed within the white islands found surrounded by black neighborhoods. This bias meant that tourists more often visited white business establishments rather than black businesses. Piedmont Park, which was not desegregated until 1963, stands out as a good example of this white island. The Fulton County Jail got a marker as the site of an old Confederate pistol factory. The Henry Grady Hotel got a marker for being the site of the home of John H. James, notable for being the mayor right after the Civil War. And of course the Davison-Paxon store got a marker for being the Austin Leydon house, which was constructed in 1858.⁴³⁵ Mozley Park stands out as another really good example of this pattern of marking white islands in black neighborhoods important, because its struggles to become integrated highlight just how complicated the marker campaign was. At the time, the Mozley Park neighborhood, just west of central Atlanta, was the location, according to Kurtz, that General C. R. Wood's "third attempt to stop Sherman's drive upon Atlanta."⁴³⁶ Kurtz marked a number of locations in the area, but did not stray from the white neighborhood section.⁴³⁷ While Mozley Park hosts several different markers, the nearby black neighborhood hosts very few, illustrating Kurtz's conception of historical Atlanta, which imagined contemporary white locations as inherently more important. These markers rebranded white-owned urban spaces as historically meaningful, which inherently

⁴³⁵ Notebook 13, Folder 2 Box 37, Wilbur G. Kurtz, Sr. Papers, MSS 130, Kenan Research Center, Atlanta History Center.

⁴³⁶ Marker Summary Report, Folder 1 Box 29, Wilbur G. Kurtz, Sr. Papers, MSS 130, Kenan Research Center, Atlanta History Center.

⁴³⁷ Kevin Kruse, *White Flight: Atlanta and the Making of Modern Conservatism* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2005), 58.

told a white story about Atlanta's engagement in the Civil War, depicting heroic white soldiers fighting a losing battle against northern aggression.

The Struggle to Represent Atlanta

The push that white Atlantans made in 1936 to make Atlanta's streets reflect the white heritage imaginary presented by *Gone with the Wind* happened largely within Atlanta's white media industry. With the novel receiving the Pulitzer Prize in 1937, Atlanta's newspapers began to argue the novel was reflective of national viewpoints.⁴³⁸ By the end of 1937, the novel started generating international news as the United States' refusal to agree to international copyright laws afforded Dutch publishers the ability to translate and publish the book without giving royalties to Margaret Mitchell.⁴³⁹ But all of this attention simply reflected white concerns about the novel. The fact is that the early discussion of *Gone with the Wind* was dominated by white media interests. They wanted to know whether or not the novel accurately represented white northern soldiers during the war or white southern femininity at home. They wanted to know how best to shape Atlanta's physical streets to reflect the novel's imagined white heritage conception of the city.

In all of this coverage, Atlanta's newspapers were actively failing to consider the novel's impression of black southern history. Although representation of the black community had incrementally improved in Atlanta's newspapers, they regularly failed to uphold black interpretations when they came in conflict with white. And yet, while other parts of the South were losing black population due to the Great Migration, the growth of Atlanta's black population was outpacing the growth of its white population. In 1920, black residents made up

⁴³⁸ "Gone with the Wind' awarded Pulitzer Prize," *Atlanta Constitution*, May 3, 1937, 1.

⁴³⁹ Gladstone Williams, "'Gone with the Wind' Author protests Dutch Publication," *Atlanta Constitution*, December 9, 1937, 12.

only thirty-one percent of the city's population, but by 1940 they represented thirty-five percent. For the black community, the fervor surrounding *Gone with the Wind* served as a reminder that the city's infrastructure was built upon white supremacy: the city was home to the new Ku Klux Klan, and the novel portrayed the Klan in a positive light. It was a major struggle for Atlanta's black journalists to deal with the novel's popularity. By this point, African American readers were turning to a new newspaper, the *Atlanta Daily World*, which replaced the previously mentioned *Atlanta Independent* in 1933. According to historian Thomas Aiello, the *Atlanta Daily World*'s popularity accounted for the paper's use of on-the-ground salesmen who went into local black neighborhoods to grow subscriptions. Scott was not just focused on developing his paper, as he began to expand beyond Atlanta, creating the black press Southern Newspaper Syndicate. As Aiello notes, the Southern Newspaper Syndicate became the black South's "systematic production of news in the region."⁴⁴⁰ By the mid-1930s, the syndicate had begun to expand beyond the South as well.

For over a year, the *Atlanta Daily World* simply ignored the novel's popularity. To black readers, there was little distinction between the New South and the Old. White Atlanta's attempt to obscure modern day white supremacy under the guise of the New South relied heavily on the ideals of the Lost Cause as a galvanizing force for white southerners. For Scott, the Lost Cause was the true problem with the novel, because it shaped slavery into a positive interaction. The *Atlanta Daily World* did not address the novel the year it was published, they did publish an article stating that the entire "story of the Negro race in America" was one of the "African slave trade and the old marts where mothers were torn from their babies like animals" to be used in "cotton fields, human prostitution and the grinding of human bones and blood into liquid

⁴⁴⁰ Thomas Aiello, *The Grapevine of the Black South* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2018), 23.

currency.”⁴⁴¹ Southern white heritage arguments fundamentally erased the horrors of slavery from Civil War discourse to attempt to recast them in a socially acceptable light.⁴⁴² In an editorial, the *Atlanta Daily World* noted that the very same libraries that bought *Gone with the Wind* were “harvesting ‘Black April,’ ‘Nigger Heaven,’ ‘Scarlett Sister Mary’ and numbers of such novels” that portrayed the black community as products of “slavery, economic starvation and wanton illiteracy.” It argued that *Gone with the Wind* was just one more a new voice that promoted racist impressions of the black community. They argued that unless black citizens stood up against this fundamentally flawed vision of “slavery, the old and new South” would maintain persuasive power.⁴⁴³ A third article in the *Atlanta Daily World* argued that African American slavery should not be a source of shame, as it was a condition shared by many different cultures and races. In this way, the *Atlanta Daily World* began to uphold what William A. Scott’s brother Aurelius Scott argued was the “black man’s burden.” He noted that “much ha[d] been written about the ‘White Man’s Burden,’” but little had been written on the nature of slavery and economic restrictions that caused the black community’s lack of advancement.⁴⁴⁴

When Selznick International Pictures bought the film rights to *Gone with the Wind* in July of 1936, the sale received prominent coverage within the white press. As previously mentioned, David Selznick, the film’s producer, had a reputation for turning popular book properties into film, as he reputation he had earned with adaptations of *David Copperfield* and *A Tale of Two Cities*. The *Atlanta Constitution* touted the sale of the novel’s movie rights as the highest ever paid for a first novel and reported the sale as \$54,000 along with royalties and a

⁴⁴¹ “Let Somebody Come Clean,” *Atlanta Daily World*, May 17, 1936, 4.

⁴⁴² The novel was not the first to do this. Some of the earliest examples of Lost Cause narratives in fiction include *Marse Chan: a Tale of Old Virginia* by Thomas Nelson Page from 1895 and *The Reign of Law* from 1900 by James Lane Allen. And of course, *Gone with the Wind* was not the last novel to do so, having been followed by Frank Yerby’s *The Vixens* in 1947.

⁴⁴³ “When ‘Art’ Runs Riot,” *Atlanta Daily World*, October 22, 1937, 6

⁴⁴⁴ Aurelius Scott, “The Black Man’s Burden,” *Atlanta Daily World*, Oct 18, 1938, 6.

cash payment of \$100,000. The *Constitution* paid a correspondent to go to Hollywood and regularly channel news back to Atlanta. Yet news of the sale went unmentioned in the *Atlanta Daily World* until late 1937.

Black journalists must have worried, at first, that the film would follow the same pattern as the book. National black publications argued that the book portrayed southern slaves as “dog-like” servants who acted as “door-mats,” and the good slave as one who “scorned freedom.”⁴⁴⁵ The *Chicago Defender* argued that the “American reading public must be easily fooled to mistake this book for an authentic story of the South.”⁴⁴⁶ The real fear, as one reviewer argued, was that this notion of the Lost Cause was Margaret Mitchells “attempt to justify a new form of slavery.”⁴⁴⁷ This form of slavery was one that depicted “not one example of the mistreatment of sales” and “not one example of a slave, proud and wise, who wanted to be free.”⁴⁴⁸ These types of concerns were much more muted, however, within the *Atlanta Daily World*’s editions.

Instead, the *Atlanta Daily World* reported that the film was an economic opportunity for black actors in Hollywood. Republishing an article pulled from the Southern News Syndicate, the *Atlanta Daily World* argued that the film should embrace black actors to play the roles of black characters. The fear this brought about was white reprisal in the southern states. Nat D. Williams reported that white southern theater owners in Arkansas, Mississippi, and Tennessee were threatening to ban any films that used black actors in a scene “with white actors.” Williams joked in his article that “Hollywood miscalculated” in assuming that the Civil War was finished, because these theater owners in the “tri-states” area were “clinging” to the past like “old moss-

⁴⁴⁵ J. A. Rogers, “J.A. Rogers Rips ‘Veil of Hypocrisy’ from ‘Best-Seller,’” *Pittsburgh Courier*, February 27, 1937, 15.

⁴⁴⁶ Dewey R. Jones, “Pointed Paragraphs,” *Chicago Defender*, March 6, 1937, 17.

⁴⁴⁷ “Reviewer Points Out Motive behind ‘Gone with the Wind,’” *Chicago Defender*, March 13, 1937, 19.

⁴⁴⁸ “Reviewer Points Out Motive behind ‘Gone with the Wind,’” 19.

back worm-eaten ideas, attitude and practices.” Williams argued that the newly expanding market for black actors in Hollywood was a great thing, because it provided a corrective to the long history that Hollywood had of projecting black southerners as “clowns... singing and dancing jigs” as though their life did not play “important and dignified parts.”⁴⁴⁹ By January 1938, Nat Williams read the novel and wrote that the book sought “to lend glamour and excuses to a really sordid past—Slavery, the Civil War, and Reconstruction.” Williams noted that these were the kinds of arguments that made the South a laughingstock to the broader nation. Holding beliefs that distorted well-recognized facts was the exact perspective that made “even southerners [laugh] at our anti-evolution laws,” and even oppose “child marriages.”⁴⁵⁰ *Gone with the Wind* appealed to white southern readers because it reinforced their inaccurate beliefs about white heritage and the Lost Cause, beliefs which were more controversial to northerners. Those kinds of narratives may have some support in the north.

David Selznick knew of this controversy and thus worked hard to sculpt the film to appeal to a national rather than exclusively southern audience. A key part of his changes in adapting the novel involved significant time debating what Selznick called “the negro problem.” Selznick wanted the movie to attract both white and black audiences, but he knew in order to do that he had to represent the black community as “decidedly on the right side of the ledger.” The problem that he faced was that the source material did not give him much room to do this, so Selznick was forced to make changes. Selznick removed any mention of the Ku Klux Klan from the film, showing his own racist assumptions by arguing that “it would be difficult, if not impossible, to clarify for audiences the difference between the old Klan and the Klan of our

⁴⁴⁹ Williams, Nat D, “Down On Beale: How Could You, Could You, Could You,” *Atlanta Daily World*, October 18 1937, 3

⁴⁵⁰ Williams, Nat D, “Down On Beale: The Wind Comes Back!!!” *Atlanta Daily World*, January 11, 1938, 6.

times.”⁴⁵¹ But, Selznick was at the same time exceedingly resistant to removing the historically racist language that pervaded the novel. Outside of Hollywood, the NAACP and various black newspapers like the *Chicago Defender* made it clear that they would boycott the film if Selznick did not correct this language. On February 11, 1939, the *Chicago Defender* argued that many of the black actors working in Hollywood were consistently surrounded by white actors reading the script and repeating the phrases. They argued that “all their years of racial pride were being wafted away on the wings of a gust of ‘Wind.’” The language was an insult to the black community, the Defender argued, and Hollywood had failed their obligation to represent all Americans.⁴⁵² The pressure being generated by these critics compelled Joseph Breen, the American film censor who worked with the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America, to fight Selznick on the topic. In the end, Selznick caved to the pressure, and some scholars like Thomas Doherty argued that Selznick’s true purpose in resisting Breen’s changes was to use it “as a bargaining chip for the expletive he really wanted to keep in the film.”⁴⁵³ For Selznick, the movie was not a political statement. He tried to make the film as uncontroversial as possible, which is why he frontloaded the film with a statement ensuring its audiences that it was not historically accurate. The statement reads that the “land of Cavaliers and Cotton Fields called the Old South” where “Gallantry took its last bow” exists “only in books.” The statement incensed Margaret Mitchell, who argued that her work accurately portrayed “North Georgia as it

⁴⁵¹ David Selznick, “Memo to Mr. Sydney Howard dated January 6, 1937,” *Memo from David O. Selznick: the Creation of Gone with the Wind and Other Motion Picture Classics, as Revealed in the Producer's Private Letters, Telegrams, Memorandums, and Autobiographical Remarks* (London: McMillan, 1973), 147.

⁴⁵² Earl J. Morris, “Race Actors Flayed for ‘Gone with the Wind,’” *Chicago Defender*, February 11, 1939, 19.

⁴⁵³ Thomas Patrick Doherty, *Hollywood's Censor: Joseph L Breen and the Production Code* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 236.

was.”⁴⁵⁴ Nevertheless, the film and its white heritage ideals were presented as a relic of an imagined past.

Local Fervor Over *Gone with the Wind*

While Atlanta’s white and black newspaper outlets produced racially biased interpretations of the novel, the economic opportunities offered by the upcoming film were covered within all newspapers. Although Francis W. Clarke passed away in early 1938, the *Constitution*’s new executive editor, Ralph McGill, did not alter the newspaper’s policy on *Gone with the Wind*.⁴⁵⁵ Both white and black media outlets unified behind covering the growing spectacle of the upcoming film. White newspapers generated a number of articles documenting the casting process for the film, with articles like “Atlanta Talent will get chance in ‘Gone with the Wind’ filming,” “Film Scout Spots 3 Atlanta Co-eds At Georgia University as Potential Stars,” and “Atlanta Girls Seeking Film Fame Initiated Into Art of Publicity.”⁴⁵⁶ Within the black press, the economic opportunities open for African Americans actors was a popular subject. The *Atlanta Daily World* wrote that “no one positively signed among the colored actors” drumming up the hopes of its own readers.⁴⁵⁷ If a role was filled, both white and black journalists announced the casting in multiple articles, often giving a biography of the actor. The only difference between white and black coverage of the casting period is that white newspapers focused almost exclusively on white casting news, and black newspapers focused exclusively on the casting of African American roles.

⁴⁵⁴ Mitchell, Margaret, “Letter from Margaret Mitchell to Virginius Dabney,” July 23, 1942, in *Margaret Mitchell's Gone with the Wind Letters 1936-1949*, ed. Richard Harwell (New York, NY: Macmillan & Co., 1976), 441.

⁴⁵⁵ “Francis W. Clarke, Executive Editor of Constitution, Dies of Bronchial Pneumonia at Piedmont Hospital,” *Atlanta Constitution*, February 21, 1938, 1.

⁴⁵⁶ “Atlanta Talent Will Get Chance in ‘Gone with the Wind’ Filming,” *Atlanta Constitution*, November 25, 1936, 2; “Atlanta Girls Seeking Film Fame Initiated into Art of Publicity,” *Atlanta Constitution*, March 15, 1937, 1.

⁴⁵⁷ “Gossip Of The Movie,” *Atlanta Daily World*, October 4, 1937.

As Atlanta's readers became more and more interested in the culture of Hollywood through the development of the movie, the demand to hear Hollywood gossip grew. This fostered within Atlanta's readers a larger sense of Atlanta's importance in the film industry. Atlanta's journalists became immersed in how Hollywood would represent Atlanta through its casting, arguing that it was important for actual southerners to be cast in the roles. On May 31, 1938, one article argued that Scarlett O'Hara would be played by a southerner, even though later the role was given to British stage actress Vivien Leigh.⁴⁵⁸ The *Atlanta Daily World* made it clear that they wanted black actors to be cast for black parts, and when that happened they often called for readers to audition.⁴⁵⁹ Selznick argued that he was being inundated with "letters and messages" asking that the main characters be "southerner[s]," and the *Atlanta Constitution* ran the story on its front page.⁴⁶⁰ The *Atlanta Daily World* put out a call to its readers that they needed to send letters into the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors Association arguing that "Chas butler be re-instated" as the "casting director for colored talent" because the newspaper was concerned that black actors were "in danger of being supplanted by other races made up to represent Negroes."⁴⁶¹ Once news broke that southerners would not hold the main parts, like when rumors spread that "Clark Gable held certain to play role of Rhett" and "Paulette Goddard Still in Running For Part of Scarlett," Atlanta's journalists began questioning just how southern the film would truly be in the end.⁴⁶² Even the *Atlanta Daily World* wanted black southerners to have the opportunity to play key parts in the film, and when Oscar Polk, noted African American Broadway actor of the time, was awarded the role of Rhett Butler's servant, his Marianna,

⁴⁵⁸ "Current Nomination for O'Hara Role is a Southerner," *Atlanta Constitution*, May 21, 1938, 1.

⁴⁵⁹ "Gossip on the Movie Lots," *Atlanta Constitution*, February 2, 1937, 2.

⁴⁶⁰ Keavy Hubbard, "Southern Screen Stars sought for roles in 'Gone with the Wind,'" *Atlanta Constitution*, October 9, 1936, 1.

⁴⁶¹ Harry Levette, "Gossip of the Movie Lots," *Atlanta Daily World*, July 20, 1938, 2.

⁴⁶² Heffernan, Harold "Clark Gable Held Certain to Play Role of Rhett in 'Gone with the Wind,'" *Atlanta Constitution*, December 29, 1936, 3.

Arkansas origins became a key point of note for the newspaper.⁴⁶³ But in the end, the real representation issue behind Scarlet O'Hara's casting generated a significant amount of southern anger aimed at Selznick in the white newspapers.⁴⁶⁴ One story that appeared in both white and black press was the rumor that President Roosevelt's maid Lizzie McDuffie would be cast in the film.⁴⁶⁵

Atlanta's white urban elites did everything they could to try and maintain control of the city's image within the film. One of the key strategies was to promote local Atlanta figures to David Selznick as notable representatives of the south. Margaret Mitchell refused to be part of the filming venture, but she named Susan Myrick, a well-known journalist from the *Macon Telegraph*, as her replacement. Myrick and Mitchell met in 1928 through the Georgia Press Institute. Susan Myrick travelled to Hollywood and began helping them with a number of things, including teaching the actors how to speak with a southern accent. In fact, Myrick was also the key figure who was responsible for teaching black actors the black southern dialect as well. In addition to Myrick, Wilbur G. Kurtz was also named as a technical expert on the project. His work on the film often dovetailed with his previously mentioned work on the historical markers.⁴⁶⁶

Southern anxiety about the film's representation of both white and black southerners played a key role during this period. Ralph McGill wrote in February of 1939 that one reader's cook was very worried that the filmmakers would "botch the negro accent."⁴⁶⁷ McGill wrote that

⁴⁶³ "Polk Gets 'Gone With Wind' Role," *Atlanta Daily World*, January 11, 1939, 2.; "Polk Lands Big Film Contract," *Atlanta Daily World*, December 31, 1938, 4.

⁴⁶⁴ "These Sensitive Southerners," *Atlanta Constitution*, January 28, 1939, 4.

⁴⁶⁵ "President Roosevelt's Aide, Mrs. Lizzie McDuffie, To Speak in Closing Of School," *Atlanta Daily World*, July 28, 1937, 1; "Report Untrue," *Atlanta Daily World*, January 29, 1938, 1.

⁴⁶⁶ To get more information about the filming of *Gone with the Wind*, there are several books like: Herb Bridges, *The Filming of Gone with the Wind* (Macon, Ga: Mercer U.P., 1998); Margaret Mitchell, and John Wiley. *The Scarlett Letters: The Making of the Film Gone with the Wind* (Guilford: Lyons Press 2018).

⁴⁶⁷ Ralph McGill, "One Word More," *Atlanta Constitution*, February 11, 1939, 4.

“Susan Myrick, of the *Macon Telegraph* was on the scene, zealously guarding each slurred ‘R’ and each and every drawl.” In addition, McGill argued that “Miss Mitchell’s book did the job well” in representing southern accents enough to give them a strong guideline.⁴⁶⁸ While whites were focused on dialect, *The Daily World* was more concerned with the novel’s use of objectionable language. As Ruby Berkley Goodwin writes, “negroes who have waded doggedly through the 1200-pages... have wondered just what Hollywood would do about many objectional terms which Miss Mitchell used.” The article proudly noted that racially inflammatory language had been “cut entirely” from the film.⁴⁶⁹ While the article itself did not delve into how that decision to cut the language was made, other sources indicated that Selznick was compelled by pressure from the NAACP and various northern black newspapers.⁴⁷⁰

For Atlanta’s urban elites, the major benefit to all of this media publicity was that the city could host *Gone with the Wind*’s world premiere.⁴⁷¹ These urban elites who wanted Atlanta to become a national economic competitor, like William Hartsfield, the Atlanta mayor elected in 1937, believed that the *Gone with the Wind* film would transform the city’s image globally. Because of this, Hartsfield immediately began pushing Selznick to use Atlanta for its global film premier. Hartsfield wanted actors to walk through the streets, undermining northern assumptions of southern cultural backwardness.⁴⁷² The actual premier date kept shifting, major representatives from MGM refusing to commit to even hosting Atlanta as the location for the

⁴⁶⁸ “Southern Accent In New York,” *Atlanta Constitution*, August 22, 1939, 2.

⁴⁶⁹ Ruby Berkley Goodwin, “Cut Objectionable Words From ‘Gone With Wind,’” *Atlanta Daily World*, February 12, 1939, 1.

⁴⁷⁰ James F. Tracy, “Revisiting a Polysemic Text: The African American Press’ Reception of *Gone with the Wind*,” *Mass Communication and Society* 4, no. 4 (2001).

⁴⁷¹ “Atlanta Wins Fight to Show Scarlett First,” *Atlanta Constitution*, July 18, 1939, 1.

⁴⁷² “Hartsfield Seeks World Premier of *Gone with the Wind* in Atlanta,” *Atlanta Constitution*, March 20, 1937, 1.

film premier.⁴⁷³ It was only cemented in November of 1939, and Hartsfield was pushing.⁴⁷⁴ The news hit the city's media industry with much acclaim.

In preparation for the premiere festivities, the Atlanta Convention and Visitors' Bureau began holding lectures for anyone "who [had] contact with tourists" to help guide these new visitors to the recently reimagined historic sites.⁴⁷⁵ A full three days were devoted to the film's premiere, but the events themselves were segregated, such as the celebratory balls, wherein each community gathered to celebrate the release of the film.⁴⁷⁶ Atlanta's white press, including the *Atlanta Constitution*, advertised and covered the white ball, while the black ball received its coverage from the *Atlanta Daily World*. The white and black press covered different sides of the festivities as well, with *The Daily World* highlighting the black community's contributions to the festival. While the *Constitution* focused on the actors and their actions during the festival, the *Daily World* called attention to the various African American staff who were visiting the city as part of the film's retinue. In the end, the studio failed to bring any of the black actors who had performed in the movie, which was a big disappointment to the *Atlanta Daily World*.⁴⁷⁷ However, the celebration did offer unique moments for integration, one of which was when the Ebenezer Choir, led by Pastor Martin Luther King Jr., was asked to perform in the Gala before the film itself.⁴⁷⁸ That performance spread out across the airwaves through the city's radio station, WSB.⁴⁷⁹ When the festival was finally held, it overtook Atlanta's downtown district. Many people adopted era-appropriate garb, and there were even horse carriages on the streets

⁴⁷³ "Gone With Wind' Premier Date Still Unsettled, says film courier," *Atlanta Constitution*, October 22, 1939, 4A.

⁴⁷⁴ "Gone with Wind' to Open Here December 15," *Atlanta Constitution*, November 5, 1939, 1A.

⁴⁷⁵ "Atlantans To Be 'Taught' by Tourism to Help Visitors See Historic Sites," *Atlanta Constitution*, November 13, 1938, 7A.

⁴⁷⁶ "Gone With Wind' To Open Here December 15," *Atlanta Constitution*, November 5, 1939, 1A.

⁴⁷⁷ William Fowlkes, "Atlanta Excited as GWTW Festival Begins," *Atlanta Daily World*, December 14, 1939, 1.

⁴⁷⁸ "Ebenezer Choir Scores At Gala 'GWTW' Ball," *Atlanta Daily World*, December 15 1939, 1.

⁴⁷⁹ "Big Bethel Choir Thrills Thousands," *Atlanta Daily World*, December 13, 1939, 1.

outside the Loew's Grand Theater where the film premiered.⁴⁸⁰ The streets bore posters and huge promotional images of Vivian Leigh and Clark Gable hanging off of buildings. For three days, Atlanta celebrated the fictional white supremacist vision of Tara.

Conclusion

In the end, Atlanta's premiere of *Gone with the Wind* proved a number of things to Atlanta's urban elites. While the premiere was widely discussed within national media outlets, it did not generate as much positive publicity as urban elites believed. The Associated Press article that was quoted and cited by many different northern publications called the event "gaudy" and "anti-climactic."⁴⁸¹ Much like the novel, the reviews were mixed. Almost all reviewers acknowledged the film's technical achievement, but the film's treatment of history. Like the novel, was criticized. Regardless of Selznick's intentions, the film attracted significant controversy. The Catholic Legion argued the film was "objectionable" for its "low moral character, principles and behavior of the main figures."⁴⁸² And when news broke out in January that the premiere only allowed white Atlantans to view the film, many national publications attacked the city's decision as regressive.⁴⁸³ The Harlem NAACP argued that the film was the "second Birth of a Nation" and boycotted its showings.⁴⁸⁴ But this controversy over the film attracted news coverage. When Howard Rushmore, the race issues editor for the *Communist Daily Worker*, wrote that the movie was great, the newspaper's editorial board fired him. The

⁴⁸⁰ "Yankees Coming' Echoes Anguish Of 1864 Atlanta," *Atlanta Constitution*, December 14, 1939, K3.

⁴⁸¹ "Gaudy Premiere in Atlanta given 'Gone with the Wind,'" *Globe and Mail*, December 16, 1939, 11; "'Gone with the Wind' Opens before Applauding Atlantans," *Sun*, December 16, 1939, 1.

⁴⁸² "Catholic Legion Objects To 'Gone with the Wind,'" *New York Times*, January 2, 1940, L21.

⁴⁸³ "'Gone with the Wind,' Seen Only by Whites," *Pittsburgh Courier*, December 23, 1939, 12.

⁴⁸⁴ "Harlem to Protest Film 'Gone with the Wind,'" *Chicago Defender*, January 6, 1940, 2.

news of his firing spread rapidly across the nation's publications.⁴⁸⁵ Atlanta's urban elites were again left with a mixed response to the city's racial image.

Over the next few years, Atlanta's urban elites would become aware that the negative publicity circulating through the black press could manifest in local violence. With Nazi racism spreading through Europe, Atlanta's newspapers began rethinking how they covered Atlanta's black community. Ralph McGill, who had spent time in Europe watching Nazi censorship and oppression firsthand, wrote an early review of the film praising it with the caveat that the historical South it portrayed was a "myth." He argued in the editorial that southern life had never been like it was presented in the film, although the film was a good story. McGill closed his editorial by imploring his readers to remember that the South was not about "'Tobacco Roads' or convict camps or the K. K. K. It [was] something else—something vital. It [was] strength."⁴⁸⁶ In the end, Atlanta's urban elites' attempt to embrace white supremacy in the guise of white heritage largely succeeded, demonstrating that white heritage projects were at least to some degree nationally acceptable.

⁴⁸⁵ "Race Editor Figures in GWTW Tiff," *Atlanta Daily World*, December 26, 1939, 1; "Red Magazine Film Critic Sneers at 'Gone with the Wind,'" *Atlanta Constitution*, December 28, 1939, 9.

⁴⁸⁶ Ralph McGill, "One More Word," *Atlanta Constitution*, December 17, 1939, B10.

CHAPTER 4—ANTI-KLAN CITY: BORROWING THE RHETORIC OF WORLD WAR II

Gone with the Wind's national success proved to Atlanta's newspapers that southern racism could be attractive to broader audiences if it was couched within a white heritage frame. Not only did the novel break sales records, but it won the Pulitzer Prize, all while openly promoting southern white heritage. Even the film was on the fast track to become the highest grossing movie of all time. It appeared at least economically that where the Stone Mountain Confederate Memorial had failed, *Gone with the Wind* had largely succeeded with white Americans. For the city's national racial image however, the novel's growing popularity still inspired the festering of the city's white supremacist roots. On October 13, 1939, Ralph T. Jones wrote that two "hooded morons" from the Ku Klux Klan were giving the city "some very undesirable advertising" by wearing Ku Klux Klan robes openly in support of the film.⁴⁸⁷ Jones was frustrated by this these individual's failure to embrace the new language of "white moderate" racism. In 1939, Atlanta's media industry came face to face with the realities that the illusion they had been steadily manufacturing was failing to take root within the city, as Atlanta still remained home to major white supremacist organizations like the Ku Klux Klan.

As Europe struggled with the rise of fascism, the city of Atlanta struggled with a resurgence of its own homegrown racism in the form of the Ku Klux Klan. As mentioned in previous chapters, Atlanta's white newspapers attempted to frame Atlanta as a "moderate" city with positive race relations in the face of major white heritage projects like Stone Mountain Confederate Memorial and *Gone with the Wind*. While the Stone Mountain Confederate

⁴⁸⁷ Ralph T. Jones, "Silhouettes," *Atlanta Constitution*, October 13, 1939, 6.

Memorial failed in becoming a reality during this period, *Gone with the Wind* was a massive success in growing the city's national reputation.

The origin of the new Klan resurgence can be found deep within Eugene Talmadge's 1932 gubernatorial campaign and win. When Talmadge began promoting Klan-based politics as Georgia state politics, Atlanta's newspapers became leading voices of criticism. By 1934, Atlanta's white and black newspapers began actively attacking the growth of the Klan, and in so doing found themselves targets of attack by white supremacists. In many ways, this was a vicious cycle, with Atlanta's newspapers attacking Talmadge and Talmadge then gaining popularity by attacking the growing economic power that Atlanta's white elites wielded throughout the state.⁴⁸⁸ In this way, Atlanta's white and black newspapers began to serve as the voices for what political scientist Robert Mickey described as the "many moderate and progressive civic groups" that were the "center of the anti-Talmadge forces."⁴⁸⁹ This chapter tells the story of how Atlanta's white newspapers, which promoted different perspectives of race during the 1930s, became much more unified on racial issues during this period and even approached the more incrementalist arguments for change propagated by some black newspapers before America joined World War II.

Understanding this shift first requires an understanding of how Atlanta's white newspapers differed before this on coverage of racial issues. Before the 1930s, while the *Atlanta Journal* and *Constitution* were unified in boosting Atlanta's urban image, they disagreed on how Atlanta should do this, promoted different politicians for office and took different approaches to criticizing white supremacy. As shown in previous chapters, the *Constitution* took a "White

⁴⁸⁸ Ben Meyer, "Charges of Demagoguery Welcomed by Talmadge," *Atlanta Constitution*, January 20, 1934, 1.

⁴⁸⁹ Robert Mickey, *Paths out of Dixie: The Democratization of Authoritarian Enclaves in America's Deep South, 1944-1972* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015), 84.

moderate” approach to appealing to white supremacist readers by promoting white heritage projects, an approach that had inspired Julian Harris to call the paper the “Atlanta Morning Molly-Coddle.”⁴⁹⁰ In contrast, the *Journal* tended to more openly trumpet white supremacist ideals, promoting what it believed was the positive influence of the Ku Klux Klan. For instance, in 1921, the *Journal* ran an extensive biography of William J. Simmons, the original founder of the modern Ku Klux Klan, which included a lengthy explanation of why the modern Klan was revived and presenting a laudatory view of how the Klan had since served the South.⁴⁹¹ This article was printed alongside large photographs documenting the celebration of the Klan’s resurrection six years earlier with burning crosses and robes and hoods. And the *Journal*’s white supremacist bias was also reflected in the news coverage policies of the *Journal* and its affiliate radio station, WSB. When Walter Paschall, a journalist for the *Journal* who would later move to WSB, called in to the station to report a triple murder and let them know he was covering it, the desk editor asked him where the murders had taken place. Once the editor learned that the murder came from a black neighborhood, he told Paschall “anytime there’s this address or this section of town, just don’t bother us. That’s not news.”⁴⁹²

By 1940, the division between the *Journal* and the *Constitution* focused more on how to stop the growth of white supremacy within the state. In this way, Atlanta’s white newspapers became the loudest supporters for what Robert Mickey calls the “southern transition period” toward “urban progressivism.”⁴⁹³ In Georgia, this trend would begin in the years leading up to World War II with the backlash to conservative white supremacist Eugene Talmadge’s U.S.

⁴⁹⁰ William F. Mugleston, “Julian Harris, the Georgia Press, and the Ku Klux Klan,” *Georgia Historical Quarterly* 59, no. 3 (1975): 290.

⁴⁹¹ Angus Perkinson, “Why the Ku Klux Klan Has Been Revived,” *Atlanta Journal*, January 6, 1921, 1.

⁴⁹² Cliff Kuhn, Harlon Joye, and Bernard West, *Living Atlanta: An Oral History of the City, 1914-1948* (Atlanta: Atlanta Historical Society, 1990), 12.

⁴⁹³ Robert Mickey, *Paths out of Dixie: The Democratization of Authoritarian Enclaves in America’s Deep South, 1944-1972* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), 33.

Senate campaign, and it would end during the war with the election of Ellis Arnall, Georgia's most progressive governor up to that point. In navigating this transition, Atlanta's white and black newspapers would begin to use the vocabulary of anti-Nazi rhetoric to challenge white supremacist ideals and the Ku Klux Klan's role in politics. Operating as a unified political force, Atlanta white newspapers joined with newspaper editors across the state, including the local black press, to push Georgia in a more progressive direction.

Atlanta Newspapers' Struggle to Frame the City's Place in National Politics

During the mid- to late 1930s, national politics played an integral role in defining Atlanta's struggle against white supremacy. Atlanta's white newspapers frequently found themselves dedicating editorial space defending the South's social and economic contributions against critiques from northern editors, all the while denouncing white supremacy to their readers. This debate began with the 1936 Senate campaign between Eugene Talmadge, the locally famous white supremacist governor of Georgia, and incumbent Richard Russell Jr. Over the course of this campaign, Atlanta's white newspapers would be faced with growing white supremacist politics as Talmadge used race baiting to generate populist support.

In doing this, Talmadge was playing the same role that Huey P. Long and Charles E. Coughlin played in building political support by harnessing rural populist rhetoric. For Talmadge, the New Deal represented the federal government's tendency to overreach and challenge the autonomy of the south. As historian Alan Brinkley argues, this tapped into "one of the most powerful impulses of the Great Depression... the urge to defend the autonomy of the individual and the independence of the community against encroachments from the modern industrial state."⁴⁹⁴ Talmadge argued that for far too long Georgia's senators had allowed the

⁴⁹⁴ Alan Brinkley, *Voices of Protest: Huey P. Long, Father Coughlin, and the Great Depression* (New York: Vintage Books, 1982), xi.

Roosevelt administration to dismantle the U.S. Constitution and bankrupt the state. Talmadge argued had Roosevelt had already forced Georgians to build expensive highway systems that Talmadge believed were not necessary for the state's growth. Talmadge argued that if allowed, Roosevelt's rapidly growing federal government would take so much power that it would erase Georgia's state identity. In addition to criticizing New Deal economic policies in Georgia, Talmadge argued that the Democratic National Convention's platform emphasized "social equality and political equality" for blacks and whites, which he argued would ultimately result in expanding black southern political rights and lead to an upswelling of black power within the state. This was the rhetoric that Atlanta's newspapers were left trying to dispute, which invited Talmadge to slam them as the "New Deal papers of Georgia and the South," that he argued were failing to tell their readers about the national Democratic party's plan for "Negro domination."⁴⁹⁵ At the heart of Talmadge's critique was the fear he stoked within his audiences that their white supremacist ideals would be undermined by federal legislation. He blamed New Deal policies for painting an image of the white southerner as a purveyor "of atrocities upon Negro men and women."⁴⁹⁶ By making white southerners the victims of northern overreach, Talmadge was able to shape his campaign speeches around race and white supremacy without evoking the Klan directly.

Talmadge's arguments were appealing to rural many Georgians as well as a smaller proportion of urban supporters, but his opponents believed that the economic successes of New Deal policies would ultimately prevail. Richard Russell created a coalition of down-ticket opposition candidates, which brought together pro-New Deal politicians like Eurith D. Rivers, candidate for governor, and Columbus Roberts, candidate for Georgia's Commissioner of

⁴⁹⁵ "Talmadge Deplores Recognition Given Race," *Atlanta Daily World*, July 1, 1936, 1.

⁴⁹⁶ "Talmadge Uses Race Issue in Speech," *Atlanta Daily World*, August 8, 1936, 1.

Agriculture. Russell's gambit was that through unifying New Deal supporters, the election would become a referendum on the New Deal, and they believed that with newspaper support, the broader public would grow to understand just how integral New Deal support was for the state.⁴⁹⁷

In response, both the *Atlanta Constitution* and the *Atlanta Journal* found themselves unified in their support of Russell and resistance to Talmadge, although their tactics for defeating Talmadge differed drastically. The *Constitution* relied heavily on questioning Talmadge's electability by targeting the local Democratic political machine. After visiting several key democratic delegates, the *Constitution* began running articles openly arguing that Talmadge couldn't win because so much of the Democratic party's establishment found his arguments untenable. The paper published "unsigned" poll numbers discrediting support for Talmadge by Democratic party's delegates within Georgia and arguing that Talmadge's plan to "array the state against the president" had "ended in a complete fiasco" with many delegates shifting not only to oppose his election, but also to oppose all of his down-ticket allies who were adopting anti-New Deal rhetoric.⁴⁹⁸ The *Atlanta Journal* disagreed with the *Constitution* that unsigned poll numbers were meaningful and instead focused its efforts on discrediting Talmadge's anti-New Deal arguments.⁴⁹⁹ To this end, the *Journal* released a series of illustrative articles documenting exactly how and where New Deal policies had improved Georgia, even going so far as to admit the growth of the federal debt, arguing that Roosevelt believed in investing that money in the American worker and farmer.⁵⁰⁰

⁴⁹⁷ "Senator Russell, Rivers, Roberts Forge to Front," *Atlanta Constitution*, August 16, 1936, A13.

⁴⁹⁸ "Rivers Overwhelmingly Selected as Strongest by Delegates, Electors to Defeat Talmadgeite," *Atlanta Constitution*, August 15, 1936, 1.

⁴⁹⁹ "So What?" *Atlanta Journal*, August 16, 1936, 1.

⁵⁰⁰ "Cotton Industry testifies to New Deal Recovery," *Atlanta Journal*, August 28, 1936, 8; "Loyal to Roosevelt," *Atlanta Journal*, August 30, 1936, 8; "Roosevelt and Washington," *Atlanta Journal*, September 2, 1936, 8; "He Borrowed to Save America," *Atlanta Journal*, September 4, 1936, 14, and more.

Atlanta's black community had no real friend in either Russell or Talmadge, but Eugene Talmadge was clearly an enemy. The *Atlanta Daily World* reported on Russell's statement at the Democratic National Convention that he regretted Talmadge was making the election a referendum on race, because the idea that the election could bring about social and political equality for blacks and whites was "absolutely false," the South was "white man's country," and he was "going to keep it that way."⁵⁰¹ The efforts of the *Daily World* to undermine Talmadge focused on illustrating just how far the governor had gone to promote racial divisions. By the end of July, the *Daily World* worried that Talmadge's stumping on race might incite "mob violence." Throughout all of his speeches, the *Daily World* reported, Talmadge used "jokes and illustrations" that were "fraught throughout with terms long ago realized as unsuited and uncouth to fall from the lips of any official of any state, north or south." The *World* reported that Talmadge used his speeches to "foster and incite racial prejudice" and that his election would lead to an increase in "illiteracy, homicide, lynchings, and all other expressions usable to designate backwardness in a state."⁵⁰² Russell's gambit worked, as he along with his loose organization of pro-New Deal politicians won their respective races. While Atlanta's white press argued that the loss showed that Georgia supported the New Deal, the *Atlanta Daily World* argued that the loss had more to do with Talmadge's actions as governor for the last four years. However, in exploring the cause of the loss, both papers ignored the fact that Talmadge did secure 34.5% of the popular vote.⁵⁰³

New Deal politics cropped again in the 1938 senatorial election, but this time Atlanta's newspapers faced a much more complicated choice than before. Back in 1937, Senator Hugo

⁵⁰¹ "Russell Smoked out on Race Issues," *Atlanta Daily World*, July 26, 1936, 1.

⁵⁰² "The Governor Incites Racial Prejudice," *Atlanta Daily World*, July 7, 1936, 6.

⁵⁰³ Joseph L. Bernd, "A Study of the Elections in Georgia" (PhD diss., Duke University, 1957), 25.

Black and William Connery proposed the so-called Black-Connery bill, which was aimed at establishing a national forty cent minimum wage, a forty-hour maximum workweek, and a minimum working age of sixteen. Georgia senator Walter F. George, who had served in the U.S. Senate for sixteen years, opposed the bill on the grounds that it would only be “an artificial stimulus” that ultimately “abolishes all vestige of state’s rights and state lines.”⁵⁰⁴ George’s arguments here echoed Talmadge’s same criticisms of New Deal policies, but this time Atlanta’s newspapers supported George’s independence on this topic. Roosevelt found George’s refusal to support his New Deal policies problematic, even though the Black-Connery Bill was one of the rare moments when George refused to support the president. The *New York Times* argued that George was actually a supporter of the New Deal, having supported more of Roosevelt’s policies than he opposed.⁵⁰⁵ For Roosevelt, Walter F. George represented more than just his single voting policy. He was part of a major wing of southern senators that controlled much of the legislative policies within Congress. When George refused to endorse a policy, that policy often did not pass. Roosevelt argued that George was a political barricade to his legislative policies, and immediately sought to replace him with a Georgia Senator more amenable to his policies.

This made the 1938 senatorial election more than simply a referendum on Georgia’s politics, but in many ways a measurement of Georgia’s refusal to accept presidential interference within their senatorial elections. On March 23, 1938 Roosevelt announced in Gainesville, Georgia with Senator Walter F. George standing behind him that the South needed new federal representation within Congress. He argued that the “purchasing power of millions” of southerners was “far too low” for their own good, and their senators and representatives had

⁵⁰⁴ “Labor Would be the Chief Victim,” *Atlanta Constitution*, December 16, 1937, 8.

⁵⁰⁵ “Yes-Men Wanted,” *New York Times*, August 12, 1938, 16.

“failed utterly” to fix that problem.⁵⁰⁶ It was a devastating challenge for George, as the voting public became torn between their loyalty to Roosevelt and their support for Walter F. George. After the speech, Roosevelt met with Clark Howell Foreman, the grandson of the *Atlanta Constitution*’s founder, to get advice on how to get Georgians to replace Walter F. George. More racially progressive than his grandfather, Foreman was dedicated to challenging white supremacy in the South, having witnessed a lynching during his second year at the University of Georgia and later having gained experience working for the Interracial Commission. During this discussion, Foreman proposed to Roosevelt that he draft a report outlining what the New Deal would do for the South. Roosevelt agreed, and Foreman began working with the National Emergency Council to write the report.⁵⁰⁷ By June 22, the President had formally requested it, and within two weeks the report was released.⁵⁰⁸

It was within this larger context that the *Report on Economic Conditions of the South* was written, which makes it an exceedingly biased framing of information. In the end though, the conclusions offered a devastating summary of the region, labeling it the “Nation’s No. 1 economic problem,” while only alluding to the complicated racial hierarchy of the region. When discussing the welfare of the black southern community, the report used that discussion only to demonstrate just how poorly white southerners were doing, or to explain why black southerners were migrating north. The report argued that a key part of the South’s failure was due to its social infrastructure, which had never recovered from the Civil War. The South’s population, while growing “more rapidly... than that of any other region” had remained largely rural as

⁵⁰⁶ L. A. Farrell, “Roosevelt Revives Fight for Increased Wages in Dedication of Gainesville’s New Square,” *Atlanta Constitution*, March 24, 1938, 1.

⁵⁰⁷ Clark Howell Foreman Oral History, reel #4007, November 16, 1974, Oral Histories of the American South, University of North Carolina.

⁵⁰⁸ Steve Davis, “The South as ‘the Nation’s No. 1 Economic Problem:’ the NEC Report of 1938,” *Georgia Historical Quarterly* 82, no.2 (1978): 121.

migration to urban areas had been “slowing down” significantly in the last ten years. The report concluded that 1.75 million southerners “stay[ed] in the farm home as casual laborers or as unemployed,” and the growth of “unemployment among white people ha[d] caused them to seek jobs which were traditionally filled only by Negroes.” This in effect meant that the job opportunities for the black community had also been “further constricted, causing greater migration.” This poverty had ultimately led to a failed southern education system, which showed “a marked disparity between the number of children [needing to be] educated and the means for educating them” and a flawed healthcare system, which indicated that the “belt of the South [was] a belt of sickness, misery, and unnecessary death.” When examining the agricultural system in the South, the report argued that while the soil was fertile at one time, it had been “sadly exploited.” Income for farmers had also been destroyed due to sharecropping, which forced white tenants to live “under economic conditions almost identical with those of Negro sharecroppers.” The only silver lining within the report was its statement that there had “long been a strong ‘New South’ movement striving to achieve for the South the wealth that [was] supposed to come from industry.” The region was “the Nation’s greatest untapped market” for corporate expansion. The problem was that “absentee ownership and the high cost of credit” had stripped a significant amount of wealth from the region, reducing its ability to keep up with the growth of consumer goods production.⁵⁰⁹

The report itself showed just how underdeveloped the South’s economy was. After the report’s release, Roosevelt began actively campaigning for Lawrence Camp, the U.S. district attorney who served the Northern District of Georgia, who was opposing George in the Georgian U.S. Senate race. Roosevelt’s involvement in the Georgia election for senator gave George a

⁵⁰⁹ National Emergency Council, *Report on Economic Conditions of the South* (Washington D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1938), 9, 46

strong platform in which to campaign. George argued that Georgia “need[ed a] senator who [could] say, ‘No’” to Roosevelt when anti-southern legislation [found] its way into congress.⁵¹⁰ To complicate this election further, Eugene Talmadge entered the race, hoping that George and Camp would split the majority vote. In many ways, both Camp and George were stronger New Deal supporters than Talmadge. National outlets began reporting that the Georgian race was bitterly divided, which the *Atlanta Constitution* dismissed.⁵¹¹ By the end of the election, northern publications were right. While Talmadge was able to secure 34.5% of the vote in 1936 against just one candidate, he was still able to secure 32.1% against two candidates.⁵¹² Georgia’s voters were split, and the reason was race. Roosevelt’s policies, while generally popular in Georgia when aimed at helping farmers recover, also threatened the South’s vision of state’s rights, which for rural voters meant anti-lynching legislation.

John T. Kneebone argues that while “southern patriots and anti-New Dealers predictably objected to the report, the journalists generally gave it a hearty endorsement.”⁵¹³ The *Atlanta Constitution* does not fit this description. The challenges posed to Atlanta by the *Report on Economic Conditions of the South* was complicated for the newspaper, because it undermined the paper’s vision of Atlanta as the icon of the New South. In that fashion, the *Constitution’s* unsigned editorials openly challenged the authenticity of the report’s data, arguing that out of the “twenty-three southern governors and senators” only eleven endorsed its findings as accurate. The *Constitution* also challenged the objectivity of the study’s conclusions. But the paper conceded that even if the report’s data was accurate, “it [was] unfair to condemn this area for

⁵¹⁰ “State Needs Senator Who Can Say ‘No,’ George Asserts,” *Atlanta Constitution*, August 16, 1938, 6.

⁵¹¹ “No Rift in the South,” *Atlanta Constitution*, April 12, 1938, 6.

⁵¹² Joseph L. Bernd, “A Study of the Elections in Georgia” (PhD diss., Duke University, 1957), 25.

⁵¹³ John T. Kneebone, *Southern Liberal Journalists and the Issue of Race, 1920-1944* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2011), 165.

evils that [were] common to every state.” They argued that the “short-sighted interests” of the other state legislatures have bled the southeastern region dry economically for short-term profits. The *Constitution* contended that the South had little control over economic affairs, because so much of the South’s economy relied on both national and international market forces. The paper noted that if railroad companies decided to charge “inequitable freight rates” for southern states, the there was little southern senators could do to fix that problem. Similarly, the “high tariffs” passed by foreign governments, and special domestic taxes aimed at southern products like “oleomargarine, made largely from cottonseed oil” made it impossible for southern farmers to thrive. The article concluded that in fact it was Roosevelt who was responsible for the decline of southern growth, because it was many of his New Deal policies that shifted power away from the South..⁵¹⁴ The *Constitution*’s response to the report was much more measured than that of others. W. D. Anderson, president of Bibb Manufacturing in Macon, Georgia, argued that a major problem with the study was that it ignored the demographic realities of the region. He made the racist argument that because the South was “handicapped” with a “large Negro population” their growth rates were inherently going to be far lower than other regions.⁵¹⁵ Ultimately, the President’s report backfired, because it generated so much negative publicity about the region that his Secretary of Agriculture, Harry L. Brown, had to apologized, saying that the president “meant no slight on South.”⁵¹⁶

The damage, however, was done, and Atlanta’s business industry knew that they had to revisit their stance on race to prevent such an argument threatening economic stability of the region. Being singled out by the President as the primary economic problem of the nation had a

⁵¹⁴ “Where Lies the Blame?,” *Atlanta Constitution*, July 27, 1938, 4.

⁵¹⁵ “Negro South’s Handicap Says Macon Industrialist,” *Atlanta Daily World*, July 9, 1939, 4.

⁵¹⁶ “F. D. R. Meant No Slight on South in Calling It No.1 Problem-Brown,” *Atlanta Constitution*, October 5, 1938, 6.

lasting effect on the South's national reputation. Northern newspapers continually tried to explain why the South was suffering so badly economically. In November 1939, the *New York Times* argued that the South's economic problems to the region's social views. The paper argued that the South's wage disparity, education and public health problems were all due to the wealth gap between white and black southerners. The *Times* argued that "Murders in Atlanta, Dallas or Memphis [were] from five to ten times as frequent as New York or Chicago in proportion to the population," which stemmed from the "difference in outlook" that the South held.⁵¹⁷ The negative publicity became so bad that even some northern newspapers came to South's defense. In 1940, *The New York Post* wrote comedically that "Southerners are people. Imagine that! Not animals, but people... To those who have studied the attitude of the North toward the peoples of the South, this [would not be] generally known."⁵¹⁸ Such situations were of course rare, but it demonstrated how extensive the negative publicity was. The *Report on Economic Conditions in the South* showed white Atlanta newspaper editors that New South ideology and a "white moderate" editorial policy were not strong enough weapons to fight against the northern perception of southern economic and social backwardness.

⁵¹⁷ "Topics of the Time," *New York Times*, October 24, 1939, Editorial Binder for 1939, in the Southern Newspaper Publishers Association Records #4600, Southern Historical Collection, The Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

⁵¹⁸ "Southerners Are People," *Dothan Eagle*, April 17, 1940, Editorial Binder for 1940, in the Southern Newspaper Publishers Association Records #4600, Southern Historical Collection, The Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

Atlanta Newspapers' Initial Attacks on the Klan

There was little that Atlanta's newspapers could do to substantively challenge the conclusions reached by the *Report*. Atlanta's newspapers were stuck distinctly in the middle of two strong competing interests, with Atlanta's economic elites seeing value in the report's promotion of the "'New South' movement" and its push to "achieve for the South the wealth that [was] supposed to come from industry." On the other hand, however, Eugene Talmadge argued that the report was another attempt by Roosevelt to undermine the South's regional identity. But what Atlanta's newspapers could do, is challenge Talmadge's fundamental assumption that the Ku Klux Klan was integral to southern identity. As with the Stone Mountain Confederate Memorial project and *Gone with the Wind*, Atlanta's newspapers were most comfortable when channeling white supremacist ideals into white heritage projects, and Eugene Talmadge's argument forced Atlanta's newspapers to face southern racism more directly. When Ralph McGill argued in 1938 that "democracies move slowly" and that Americans remained largely "in the middle of the road" on political issues, he was reinforcing Clark Howell's "white moderate" vision for Atlanta.⁵¹⁹ Starting in 1938, Ralph McGill became one of the loudest voices of dissent against the growing popularity of the Ku Klux Klan within Atlanta, and in the process he would keep using anti-Nazi rhetoric to chart a course for challenging white supremacy.

As has been illustrated previously, Clark Howell's approach to the Ku Klux Klan was always constructed with the idea of not damaging his relationship to his readers. This often meant that Howell would openly criticize Klan operations within other states, but rarely aim that criticism at local chapters. When the *New York World* published its 1921 exposé on the revived Klan, Clark Howell even refused to republish the articles, and his criticisms of racial intolerance

⁵¹⁹ Ralph McGill, "One Word More," *Atlanta Constitution*, August 5, 1938, 6.

was far too abstract and disconnected from Atlanta's public to truly challenge the organization. After 1925, Howell became more confident in his abilities to criticize local acts of hate and became an avid critic of lynching. Still, his arguments always seemed to lack any real substance, because he was too concerned with Atlanta's image to acknowledge the realities of southern racism. Howell's passing in 1936 left the *Constitution* in an ambiguous space. The paper was often a reflection of his own desires, as he was a powerful figure within the city's political and economic circles. When Roosevelt appointed Senator Hugo L. Black to the United States Supreme Court as a reward after Black supported his more controversial New Deal legislative policies, rumors began to resurface of Black's former Klan affiliation. Having risen to the Senate from Alabama, Black was always dodging these kinds of accusations. In 1930, Carlisle Barger of the *Washington Post* had argued that even though there was evidence Black may have been supported by the Klan during the election, he had "never been a kluxer at heart."⁵²⁰ Black's confirmation to the Supreme Court promised to be a major issue for many civil rights organizations like the NAACP, and after complaints were lodged, Black became one of the first appointments to not receive "immediate confirmation" since 1853.⁵²¹ As debate broke out on the Senate floor regarding Hugo Black's "eligibility" for the court, *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* reporter Ray Sprigle began investigating Black's relationship with the Alabama Klan. His investigation took too long, however, because by August 14 the Senate Judicial Sub-Committee approved Black's nomination with a six to one vote. The debate was heated and many national newspapers covered it, but Black was ultimately confirmed on August 18, only six days after his nomination.

For Atlanta's newspapers, Black's nomination did not raise much controversy on their editorial pages. Atlanta's white newspapers argued that nothing within the public record

⁵²⁰ Carlisle Barger, "The Listening Post," *Washington Post*, March 30, 1930, M3.

⁵²¹ "Black of Alabama To Get Court Seat," *Austin Statesman*, August 12, 1937, 1.

undermined Black's ability to serve on the court. The *Constitution* argued that Black would have a "patriotic sense of duty and pride" within the position and use "his best intelligence and his best judgment" to make the decisions placed before him.⁵²² Even the *Atlanta Daily World* argued during these early days that Black was a stereotypical white southern senator, and should not be judged by any other metric. The World argued that his refusal to support the anti-lynching bill said more about the fact that he was Alabama's representative than anything else. They argued that the kind of "liberalism of Mr. Black [was] not to be despised in this age," because there was too little of it.⁵²³ They noted that Black's support of Roosevelt's policies, including the wage-hour program which would help boost black wages in urban areas, stood as a major benefit to the community.⁵²⁴

At the end of September, Ray Sprigle's article was published, and it changed the tenor of discussion about Black's selection as a Supreme Court Justice forever. This time the *Atlanta Constitution* paid for the rights to republish Sprigle's articles, which concluded that Black had maintained "his membership in the masked and oath bound legion... for life." According to Sprigle, Black had originally resigned his position within the Klan to run "unimpeded" by negative publicity for the U.S. Senate. After Black won his position within the Senate, Sprigle argued that Hiram Wesley Evans, leader of the Klan, "welcomed [him] back" with a lifetime membership. It was a devastating report, and Black felt pressure to resign his position. Sprigle concluded that Black had won his senatorial election because of Klan support, and his speech during that ceremony revealed him "express[ing] his gratitude" to them for remaining loyal. In a follow-up article, Sprigle published minutes from a Klan meeting documenting Hugo Black's

⁵²² "The New Associate Justice," *Atlanta Constitution*, August 19, 1937, 6.

⁵²³ "Justice Black's Confirmation," *Atlanta Daily World*, August 30, 1937, 6.

⁵²⁴ "The Black and Klan Furore," *Atlanta Daily World*, September 19, 1937, 4.

gold plaques commemorating his lifetime KKK membership, and the standing ovation Black received.⁵²⁵ After Sprigle's six articles, Hugo Black spoke to the nation explaining where he stood on his role within the Supreme Court. He admitted to having been a Klan member, but argued that he held no positive sentiments for the organization today. The *Atlanta Constitution* accepted his statement readily and argued that he was reformed. They noted that justices cannot escape the influences that surround them once they become "one of the black robed justices of the nation's highest tribunal."⁵²⁶ They argued that his statements far outweighed any allegiances he may have held before. The *Atlanta Daily World* was less supportive. The paper had previously noted that before anyone should cast judgement on Black, they should hear what he has to say, and when he gave his statement, the *Daily World* argued that "a new day [had] dawned on America for the forgotten groups." They argued that "tolerance" was winning within the Supreme Court, and that those whose views are "un-American" would find themselves without support.⁵²⁷

On the issue of Justice Black's nomination, Atlanta's white and black newspapers found themselves supporting similar positions. For the *Atlanta Constitution*, its show of support for Ray Sprigle's articles demonstrated just how much the newspaper's editorial policy had changed since 1921. And this was just the beginning. Because after Clark Howell Jr. promoted Ralph McGill to the executive editor of the *Atlanta Constitution*, McGill began pushing the newspaper to challenge the Klan's relationship with more local figures, like Eugene Talmadge. McGill had long held negative opinions of the Klan, but his position as sports editor often placed him in the awkward position of having to avoid political issues. When Clark Howell Jr. offered him the

⁵²⁵ Ray Sprigle, "Klan Gives Black, Graves Ovation after Nominations," *Atlanta Constitution*, September 13, 1937, 1.

⁵²⁶ "Justice Black's Statement," *Atlanta Constitution*, October 3, 1937, 6.

⁵²⁷ "Justice Black's Valedictory," *Atlanta Daily World*, October 4, 1937, 6.

executive editor position with a signed daily editorial series entitled “One Word More,” the *Constitution*’s “business office” forced McGill to sign all editorials he wrote because they knew they would be controversial, and they wanted a firewall between him and the business in case he brought any negative publicity.⁵²⁸

By this point, Ralph McGill had garnered a reputation at the *Atlanta Constitution* as a more progressive editor, and the *Constitution*’s management was worried that McGill’s arguments might offend their more conservative readers. But McGill had also garnered quite a lot of national popularity by 1938. In 1932, McGill had juggled writing sports editorials and also providing a first-hand account of the Cuban Revolution. And in 1937, McGill used the funds awarded him by the Julius Rosenwald Fellowship to travel Europe and report on a number of economic and political topics. McGill left the United States for Europe at the end of November in 1937, but still maintained his regular sports column.⁵²⁹ He wrote about Denmark’s economic reforms, educational policies, and even their unique farming technology.⁵³⁰ One particular practice he highlighted was the Danish approach to “all-around farming.”⁵³¹ Not all of his articles were positive, however. When McGill compared Norway’s political system to the American system, he argued that they worked too closely with Russia for his interests.

The most important part of these articles came when McGill began covering the rise of the German Nazi Party. Ralph McGill was able to watch Adolf Hitler’s speech to the Reichstag on February 20, 1938 firsthand. McGill talked about the crowded streets, the “S S Troops,” the massive number of police officers, and the Nazi flags all over the buildings. For McGill, Hitler

⁵²⁸ Bill Shipp interview by Clifford Kuhn, 22 April 1987, P1987-05, Series D. Politics and the Media, Georgia Government Documentation Project, Special Collections and Archives, Georgia State University Library, Atlanta.

⁵²⁹ Ralph McGill, “Ralph McGill, Wife Embark for Scandinavia,” *Atlanta Constitution*, November 30, 1937, 3

⁵³⁰ Ralph McGill, “Impressions of Denmark,” *Atlanta Constitution*, January 26, 1938, 1

⁵³¹ “The Danes Feed Themselves,” *Atlanta Constitution*, February 3, 1938, 6

represented the same kind of hate-filled voice he was used to hearing in southern politicians like Eugene Talmadge. McGill noted that Hitler had “done much for Germany” to take the country out of financial ruin after World War I but that he had misused that popularity to push the people into “ruthless killing, brutality and a complete disregard for the civilized qualities of mankind.” Hitler brought to McGill all the memories of the Klan that he saw in Georgia, and it forced him to view white supremacist thought in a new light.⁵³² After receiving the letter from Clark Howell offering him a promotion, McGill traveled to Vienna to watch the country’s reception of the Nazi war machine. He argued that German propaganda was aimed at showing the world that the “people of Austria were unanimously in support of the coup which had wiped out the Austrian republic and opened the way for the German dictator to move on toward Baghdad.” He noted that there was a lot of adulation for Hitler’s ride in, but when McGill took out his camera to take pictures, he was stopped by soldiers. He was told it was forbidden to photograph the events, and the guards were quite forceful. McGill talked about the sense of oppression as the mass crowds screamed their praise to Hitler, and how he felt like an outsider.⁵³³ McGill’s most pressing concerns with Hitler’s push into Vienna was how quickly the people accepted censorship and loss of personal freedoms. He noted that so many of the individuals he spoke to referenced the growing economy, but he could only remember his suitcases getting upended in hotel rooms and the near violence he felt when police demanded that he not photograph anything.

Once back in the United States, Ralph McGill leveraged what he had seen in Europe to tackle the Ku Klux Klan. He wrote that the first thing a dictator must do was “supply his subjects with morale and food.” After doing that, the dictator could be secure in his knowledge that his people would believe whatever he wants them to believe. McGill noted that Americans should

⁵³² Ralph McGill, “How Fuehrer Sets Stage for Talk Told By McGill,” *Atlanta Constitution*, March 9, 1938, 1

⁵³³ Ralph McGill, “McGill in Vienna,” *Atlanta Constitution*, April 28, 1938, 9

not “do too much pointing of the accusing finger” at people who believed in “daffy things.” McGill noted that in the United States, “the Ku Klux Klan” required people to believe that paying them “\$10 for a sheet and a hood” gave them the right to “go around speaking solemnly of ‘Brother Kilgrap’ and ‘Brother Dragon’ and ‘Brother Keagle.’” McGill argued that the offerings from the Klan were even “more ridiculous than the stuff which Adolf and Ill Doo-chay [gave] their people.” He noted that “we went for it to the number of several millions of people. It bred crime and intolerance and bigotry and never a single good thing.”⁵³⁴ Throughout McGill’s articles, he consistently linked the Ku Klux Klan to fascism, arguing that what made the fascism in the U.S. so likely was that Americans only recently “accepted the Ku Klux Klan, and which in its past history ha[d] seen thrive similar organizations of Fascist tendencies.”⁵³⁵

As the *Atlanta Constitution*’s business office predicted, McGill’s use of the Nazi party as an analogy for critiquing the Klan generated significant opposition from readers. In December he started receiving calls attacking him for his views. These “anonymous callers” argued that Germany was on the right track, and that America could learn a lot from the country. Realizing his approach wasn’t working, McGill pivoted away from critiquing Germany to utilizing the same rhetoric to denounce the Ku Klux Klan for its “racial hatred, religious intolerance and associated hatreds.” He argued that the Klan was “not new,” but instead a legacy of hate built upon previous organizations that used “hatred as their foundation.” He argued this hatred was a “poison” that “harden[ed] arteries,” and he noted that in the end “the hates of today will pass away.”⁵³⁶ As Germany conquered Europe, McGill told his readers that intolerance would not gain ground within the United States. He argued that as much as “intolerance [was] growing,

⁵³⁴ Ralph McGill, “One Word More,” *Atlanta Constitution*, July 30, 1938, 4.

⁵³⁵ Ralph McGill, “One Word More,” *Atlanta Constitution*, October 26, 1938, 6.

⁵³⁶ Ralph McGill, “One Word More,” *Atlanta Constitution*, December 11, 1938, A20.

there [was] growing at the same time the spirit of tolerance which [was] greater and sounder than that of the opposition.”⁵³⁷ McGill made it clear in his articles that Atlanta needed to move beyond the Klan, and change its framing to reflect more contemporary progressive ideals.

All of McGill’s pushing back on Klan ideology aligned with his larger push for Atlanta’s urban elites to scrub the sins of the Ku Klux Klan from the city’s national reputation. And in December of 1938, an opportunity arose to do just that when Catholic Bishop Gerald P. O’Hara announced the opening of the new “Co-Cathedral at Peachtree Road and Peachtree Way.” The bishop bought out the Ku Klux Klan’s former headquarters at that address and demolished the mansion. In its place, the Catholic Church had constructed the Cathedral of Christ the King. Because the cathedral was a symbol against hate, Bishop Gerald O’Hara invited Hiram Wesley Evans, still remaining Grand Dragon of the Ku Klux Klan, to the dedication ceremony. It was a very public affair, with all of Atlanta’s newspapers reporting on the momentous event. Evans announced that the leader of the historically anti-Catholic organization was “extremely happy to accept” the invitation.⁵³⁸ McGill published an editorial arguing that this more than ever was evidence that Atlanta’s Klan was forever dead, with Evans having become the “wizard of the now almost really ‘invisible empire.’” McGill argued that Evans’ acceptance of the Church’s invitation should send a message “to all thinking people in the South” that Americans were turning a corner, that hate was fading and being replaced by more modern “facets of humor and human understanding and good fellowship.” He continued that “it was not many years ago when there was bitterness and strife in the nation because of the Ku Klux Klan and its doctrine.” For McGill, Hiram Wesley Evans’ redemption story was an example of just how different the

⁵³⁷ Ralph McGill, “One Word More,” *Atlanta Constitution*, December 22, 1938, 12.

⁵³⁸ “Klan Wizard Evans Accepts Invitation to Dedication of New Catholic Cathedral,” *Atlanta Constitution*, January 17, 1939, 1.

modern South was, which he defined as a place where “intolerance [was] supposed to reign,” but that now it was “not so much as in any other section of the nation.” For McGill, Evans’ support of the Catholic Church was indicative of a new image for Atlanta, the one that Clark Howell had been setting the groundwork for since 1920. McGill argued that now “there [was] no place in Atlanta for anti-Semitism, for religious intolerance,” or any form of hate. By the end of the editorial, McGill returned to his experiences in Vienna, where he saw a church stoned by “Nazi hoodlums.” He concluded that “when Adolf Hitler [was] dust, and his name one of many in history’s pages, the church [would still] be there.”⁵³⁹ Later, Hiram W. Evans would argue that this event would be the beginning of his plan to leave the Klan. Speaking to McGill, Evans argued that “you were hard on me, but not for publication, I will tell you, I was not a fool. I wanted out.”⁵⁴⁰ However, at the time, Atlanta’s black press saw the Bishop’s invitation as evidence of how much more homogeneous white southerners were. On the day of the ceremony, *The Atlanta Daily World* republished Bishop O’Hara’s words that Evans was “very human and very much interested in religion.”⁵⁴¹ The next month, the *World* would note that the Klan was far from dead and buried.⁵⁴²

The organization was far from finished with terrorizing the city. On February 3, 1939, Imperial Wizard Hiram Wesley Evans was subpoenaed to appear before the House Committee and testify why his company had received an asphalt contract which set a price “\$180,000 above the low[est] bid.” Evans denied any knowledge of the transaction, arguing that he did not remember being awarded such a contract.⁵⁴³ On Saturday February 14, 1939, the *Atlanta Daily*

⁵³⁹ Ralph McGill, “One Word More,” *Atlanta Constitution*, December 22, 1938, 12

⁵⁴⁰ Arnold Rice, *The Ku Klux Klan In American Politics* (Washington, DC: Public Affairs Press 1962), 90; and Wyn Wade, *The Fiery Cross: The Ku Klux Klan in America* (New York: Simon and Schuster 1987), 265.

⁵⁴¹ “Imperial Wizard of KKK to Attend Church Dedication,” *Atlanta Daily World*, January 17, 1939, 1.

⁵⁴² Cliff Mackay, “The Globe Trotter: The Klan comes back,” *Atlanta Daily World*, February 5, 1939, 4.

⁵⁴³ “Klan Head Named in Highway Probe,” *Atlanta Constitution*, February 3, 1939, 11.

World announced that Evans would be questioned in the Georgian House, but then in the same article warned its readers that there was “feverish activity in Suite 756 of the Hurt Building” which he argued showed “renewed activity in the Ku Klux Klan.”⁵⁴⁴ The *World* was correct. That night, the Klan descended on Atlanta in nine or ten automobiles filled with forty or fifty “men in full KKK regalia,” kidnapping six white men for initially unknown reasons. Imperial Wizard Hiram Wesley Evans initially denied the kidnappings were the work of the Klan. The actual abductions were intense, with one white man being “hurled into the back of a car” and having his head violently gashed open after rejecting the accusations that he was holding “meetings among negroes ‘in South Atlanta.’” One patrolman who watched a man be “snatched” in front of a large chain store told the reporters that “he won’t get hurt. He’ll just get a good talking to, and maybe his wife won’t have to turn over her wages to him every week.”⁵⁴⁵

On Monday, the *Daily World* announced that the Klan was back, and that the “cordial invitation” to the Catholic church about which the “white press” published “long and detailed accounts of ‘Doc’ Evans’ presence at the ceremony” was entirely misleading. *Atlanta Daily World* reporter Cliff Mackay argued that the event had been sculpted by Evans to lure black Atlantans into believing “the Klan [was] dead... what harm [was] there in the Catholic church, which was supposed to be on your side, catering to an old man.” Mackay argued that the “vicious tentacles of the Klan octopus” reached throughout Georgia, and that now “Catholics [would] even be accepted for membership in the revamped KKK in certain sections of the country.” Mackay argued that the time for action was now, and all Georgians needed to “break

⁵⁴⁴ “Thinks Klan Will Launch Drive in May,” *Atlanta Daily World*, February 14, 1939, 1.

⁵⁴⁵ “White-Robed Raiders Abduct 6 Atlantans in Swift Forays on Streets and Homes,” *Atlanta Constitution*, February 5, 1939, A1.

the political chains formed by the white Democratic primary,” explaining that segregated voting gave the Klan too much power in the South.⁵⁴⁶

Atlanta’s white newspapers were more interested in the spectacle of the kidnapping itself, because it targeted white citizens. The *Atlanta Constitution* called for the “hooded hoodlums” to be found and tried. “Regardless of whether the mysterious ‘kidnappings’ were part of a gigantic hoax or whether they were real,” the *Constitution* argued that the abductions must be investigated and punished. They argued that the most “grave concern to the people of Atlanta” was that “the police officers adopt[ed] so apathetic an attitude” in the face of citizens being abducted in front of them.⁵⁴⁷ The *Atlanta Journal* echoed the *Constitution*’s calls for a probe to get “to the bottom and full punishment” be issued, arguing that the “most sinister angle of the whole affair [was] the seeming apathy or connivance of police officers under whose eyes some of the seizures are said to have occurred.”⁵⁴⁸

Out of all the responses from the white press, Ralph McGill’s was the most creative. McGill dedicated his entire February 6, 1939 column to a brutal parody of Ku Klux Klan mentality. In the column, McGill not only illustrated the irony of the Klan’s ideology but also essentially accused Atlanta’s police chief of being a Klansman, arguing that the chief “didn’t do any talking because he didn’t want his voice recognized.” The column painted a week in the life of a fictitious Klansman who was “whipping” an “old lady” because “she needed it” on Monday, interrogating a husband who talked “pretty” because he “mistreat[ed]” his wife on Tuesday, and cornering a man “bootlegging some liquor” until he scared them away “with a big gun” on Wednesday. As the fictitious Klansman ran away, he narrated to himself, “imagine law-abiding

⁵⁴⁶ Cliff Mackay, “The Globe Trotter: The Klan Comes Back,” *Atlanta Daily World*, February 5, 1939, 4.

⁵⁴⁷ “Hoax or Reality-An Outrage,” *Atlanta Constitution*, February 6, 1939, 1.

⁵⁴⁸ “Probe and Punish!,” *Atlanta Journal*, February 6, 1939, 4.

citizens being threatened by criminals like that, it's no wonder the police need us to help them."

On Thursday, the Klan "had an initiation" and proceeded to drop by "two women" who they "heard about who are not as good as they ought to be" and because they have "to protect the womanhood of our city" they told those women to leave. By Saturday night, the kidnapping of six men to beat and scare them into following their vision of "law and order" seems like a normal day. The most powerful part of the story, however, was when the Ku Klux Klan was portrayed as afraid of the newspapers whose "writers [said they were] cowards going around in masks and robes." The fictitious Klansman's response was that the writers did not understand how Klansmen were "sworn to defend the law and womanhood." The week ended with the group of Klansmen going out to a "country church" on Sunday and putting "a 5\$ bill on the collection plate," the money of which was taken "from the pockets of that man [they] beat." Embedded in this story is an image of the Klan as a perverted Robin Hood organization which used vigilantism as a premise to attack urban centers in favor of rural citizens. For McGill, this image was how he was able to pivot between denouncing the Klan's violence and yet still appeal to the organization's rank and file members.⁵⁴⁹

On February 8, Evans announced that the Fulton County Ku Klux Klan was in fact responsible for the kidnappings, arguing that the act was intended to be part of a "naturalization ceremony," but things got out of hand. Evans argued that the Klan had "no intention to disturb or frighten anyone," that they "regret[ed] the occurrence" and agreed that "Klan robes [would] not appear in public in Georgia again until the public appearance ha[d] been duly authorized by the proper authorities in the Klan and... officers of the law."⁵⁵⁰ By the following Monday, two days after the abductions, when Evans appeared before the state House of Representatives to defend

⁵⁴⁹ Ralph McGill, "One More Word," *Atlanta Constitution*, February 6, 1939, 4.

⁵⁵⁰ "Six Kidnappings Klan Initiation Evans Admits," *Atlanta Constitution*, February 7, 1939, 1.

his bid and contract, his story had changed to say that he believed that there was no lower contract bid than his own. The House no longer had the competitive company's bid, which had been "lost in transit." While Evans was questioned for four hours by the House, only five minutes was spent on the actual competing bids. The rest of the time was spent with Evans promoting his Southeastern Construction Company and his innovative use of asphalt. By the end of the session, Chairman Wilmer D. Lanier reported that the examination revealed only that Evans was "guilty of being smart" and that no law had been broken, though the House wondered if the system was "costing the state money."⁵⁵¹

While Atlanta's white and black newspapers all condemned the kidnappings, the *Atlanta Daily World's* coverage spoke to the larger fears reverberating around the city's black community. More than anything, the kidnappings showed that the Ku Klux Klan was still active in Atlanta, even if the city's white newspapers had long declared the organization dead and buried. The *Atlanta Daily World* saw the Klan's kidnappings in a far different light. They argued that the kidnappings looked harmless, but that was only because the Klan had targeted "white victims." The *World* argued that such kidnappings would be far more violent to the black community and warned their readers to be safe arguing that "future demonstrations" could target them with "worse results."⁵⁵² Jesse O. Thomas argued that the hatred in the streets that Atlanta's white newspapers were so keen on shutting down was distracting them from the very real new form of "fascism" that was institutionalizing racist ideals. He argued that the World's Fair in New York had promoted the fact that only one black citizen had a white-collar job "out of the 1400" and the tone of the announcement implied that was a good thing. He argued that there were states that had high percentages of black student populations, without any black teachers

⁵⁵¹ I. A. Farrell, "Evans Lectures to Probers," *Atlanta Constitution*, February 7, 1939, 1.

⁵⁵² "KKK 'Kidnappings' Arouse Leaders," *Atlanta Daily World*, February 7, 1939, 1.

working in the schools. Thomas concluded that the open fascism of the Ku Klux Klan was something that should be opposed, but that Americans should also consider confronting this new form of “economic” fascism before it destroyed the community.⁵⁵³ Thomas argued that the modern Klan had infected “at least 60 percent” of the Atlanta police force.⁵⁵⁴

At the end of the House’s investigation, Hiram Wesley Evans was acquitted, and Ralph McGill wrote to his readers that the only way to stop the Klan was to vote against the politics of racism. He argued that democracies were just a “mirror of a community,” and if his readers were offended by what they saw in that mirror then he argued that they needed to stop voting for those politicians. He argued that the Klan’s popularity was diminishing significantly, as the organization had been “been having a difficult time finding members.” He attributed that to the fact that Atlanta was a more modern city with a growing economy. McGill argued that if readers wondered “at the effrontery of the Klan and at some of the people who [were] elected to office” then they “might recall that the political setup of any city or state mirrors the political conscience and desires of that community or state.” He argued that Georgians needed to stop voting Klansmen into office if they wanted the Klan to lose political power. If the people of Atlanta did not want the Klan to be revived, then the Klan had “no chance of revival.”⁵⁵⁵

The *Atlanta Daily World* was not surprised about Evans’ acquittal, because it just reinforced their understanding of how powerful the Klan was within Georgia’s politics. What was surprising about the kidnappings was just how much publicity the scheme garnered, and at least for a little while it seemed as though Atlanta would officially pass ordinances restricting the Klan’s intimidation tactics. This kind of progress would have meant a great deal to Atlanta’s

⁵⁵³ Jesse O. Thomas, “American Brand of Fascism,” *Atlanta Daily World*, February 7, 1939, 1.

⁵⁵⁴ “Fear KKK’s Claim Police as Members,” *Atlanta Daily World*, February 8, 1939, 1.

⁵⁵⁵ Ralph McGill, “One Word More,” *Atlanta Constitution*, February 8, 1939, 6.

black community, which was still subject to a local police force inundated with Klan members. Both the Georgian House and Atlanta's City Council began debating a ban on masks. In the House, the bill would outlaw "all costumes which conceal identity," and the City Council ordinance by J. Frank Beck would ban "any persons or groups 'masked or so dressed as to conceal their identity.'"⁵⁵⁶ For the first time, Atlanta's white and black newspapers were unified in their support for anti-racist political policies. Ralph McGill argued that Georgia should join other southern states in passing a mask law.⁵⁵⁷ The *Atlanta Daily World* wanted this law passed, and they argued that the Klan's "campaign of terror and intimidation" had to come to an end. The kidnappings were not "all in fun," because those new members would now know what kind of actions they could get away with. The *Daily World* argued that "had Atlanta been as alert" as "most other metropolitan cities, North and South," they would not have been subject to "the shameful acts of Saturday night."⁵⁵⁸ After Evans' apology, there seemed to be little attention paid by police officers to the events. Chief Hornsby "'cleared' Patrolman Ray Eddleman," of any wrongdoing except "using improper language" when he told the reporters what had happened.⁵⁵⁹ By February 18, it was announced that the anti-mask bill would not work because it would "restrict children" from enjoying toys.⁵⁶⁰ While Atlanta's newspapers were successful in challenging the Klan's local popularity, it must not have been easy for the paper. In all other instances, such opposition to the Klan was met with significant public pressure and physical intimidation. As much as Atlanta's white newspapers wanted to portray the city as "moderate"

⁵⁵⁶ "Bill Would Outlaw Masks in Georgia," *Atlanta Constitution*, February 8, 1939, 12.

⁵⁵⁷ Ralph McGill, "One More Word," *Atlanta Constitution*, March 21, 1940, 6.

⁵⁵⁸ "Outlaw the Mask," *Atlanta Daily World*, February 9, 1939, 6.

⁵⁵⁹ "Bill Would Outlaw Masks in Georgia," *Atlanta Constitution*, February 8, 1939, 12.

⁵⁶⁰ "Santa Clause-Wise Councilmen Kill Anti-Mask Plan," *Atlanta Constitution*, February 18, 1939, 9.

on race, Ralph McGill often joked that there were parts of Atlanta that he would not be welcome in, which one could imagine must have been the case by 1940.

Atlanta Newspapers' Challenge to Klan Influence on State Politics

Before Clark Howell's death, the Klan's influence within Georgia had regularly challenged Howell's "white moderate" vision for Atlanta. No other Georgian politician represented this struggle more than Eugene Talmadge. At the same time as the *Atlanta Constitution's* editorials were attempting to portray the city as a staunch opponent to lynching, racial hatred, and religious intolerance, Talmadge was using the politics of race to grow his support, both in rural counties and, although at a lower percentage, even in Atlanta itself. Even though Talmadge himself avoided mention of the Klan when possible, he regularly acknowledged the Klan's views as positive to the region. While they often supported similar federal government politicians, the *Journal* and *Constitution* often held oppositional opinions on state politics, with each newspaper regularly supporting different politicians for state government. During the early 1930s, this worked well for Eugene Talmadge. In 1932, 1934, and 1940, Eugene Talmadge won the Georgia state governor's race, often with more than forty percent of the popular vote, but those wins always came as a response to a divided electorate. As political scientist Joseph A. Bernd argues, Talmadge's electoral wins relied heavily on his opposition splitting the vote, and the opposition of Atlanta's two white newspapers were indicative of this split.⁵⁶¹ This all changed in 1942, when Eugene Talmadge lost his first election for state governor. There are a number of reasons why Talmadge lost, the most dominant of which was probably his decision to dismantle the state's university system, but this moment when Atlanta's newspapers industry came together to endorse the same candidate is indicative of

⁵⁶¹ Joseph L. Bernd, *Grass Roots Politics in Georgia* (Atlanta: Emory University Research Committee, 1960), 7.

a larger shift toward a more modern Atlanta. After the Klan kidnappings, and the threat Talmadge posed to the city's fragile racial image. Atlanta's newspapers finally united to oppose Talmadge and his white supremacist politics.

The shift had begun back in 1939 when James Middleton Cox bought out the *Atlanta Journal*. Before his purchase of the *Journal*, the paper's editorial policy represented a more conservative vision for the city's racial image. After the newspaper lost its owner and chief editor James Gray, his children were not interested in taking a strong hand within the newspaper's direction. The newspaper began losing subscribers, and if it were not for the popularity of WSB, the *Atlanta Journal*'s radio station, the company would have failed. In December 1939, when Atlanta was deep within the grips of the *Gone with the Wind* film fervor, James Middleton Cox bought the *Atlanta Journal*, WSB radio, and the smaller *Atlanta Georgian*. After the purchase, he shut down the *Georgian* and reorganized the *Journal*. With Cox's actions, he reduced the number of Atlanta's major white newspapers from three to two. Cox had long wanted to buy into the Atlanta media market, arguing that the city's geography offered a unique opportunity for growth as it connected various regions of the nation together. In his biography, Cox reminisced that the purchase of the *Atlanta Journal* was "the rounding out of a dream," a dream that had begun for him before the turn of the century.⁵⁶²

Cox saw the media industry as an integral tool within politics. He had entered the newspaper industry as a reporter for the *Dayton Evening News* in Ohio, and in 1898 he had purchased that newspaper. After finally paying off the loans he had taken to purchase the *Dayton Evening News*, Cox bought the *Springfield Press-Republic* in south Ohio, which allowed him to build the "News League of Ohio" in 1905. Over the next two decades, Cox used his media roots

⁵⁶² James M. Cox, *Journey Through My Years* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1946), 387.

to gain significant ground within national politics, not only securing the Ohio governorship but even becoming the 1920 Democratic Presidential nomination in the election against Warren G. Harding. After leaving the Ohio governor's office, Cox began expanding his newspaper empire beyond Ohio by buying newspapers in Kentucky and Florida. By 1939, Cox saw Georgia as an opportunity to connect his media empire together, from the "Great Lakes on the north to the Latin America on the south."⁵⁶³ Purchasing the *Atlanta Journal* was not easy for Cox, because its heirs were not only out of communication with each other, but they were also uninterested in the newspaper's affairs and delusional about the prices such a newspaper could sell for on the open market. The family's ignorance of the newspaper made it difficult for Cox to negotiate a fair price. However, Cox was finally able to achieve his goal on December 13, 1939, just two days before the *Gone with the Wind* premiered. James Cox paid \$260,000 for the *Atlanta Georgian*, \$3.1 million for the *Atlanta Journal*, and \$1.9 million for WSB Radio.⁵⁶⁴

When Cox bought into Atlanta's media market, the business community immediately asked him to explain exactly what his purposes were with the newspaper and radio station. The Atlanta Chamber of Commerce had already developed a strong relationship with Atlanta's media industry, and they needed to know if Cox intended to change that relationship. On May 8, 1940, James Middleton Cox was called before the white Chamber of Commerce and asked about his intentions with the *Atlanta Journal*. The speech Cox gave assured members of the chamber that Cox would do what was necessary to promote the interests of the city. He argued that Atlanta had always played an integral role in the nation, connecting people "from Detroit, Chicago, Cincinnati, the northwest and St. Louis" to people in the South, and people in "New York,

⁵⁶³ James M. Cox, *Journey Through My Years* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1946), 387.

⁵⁶⁴ "Journal, WSB Sold to James M. Cox," *Atlanta Constitution*, December 13, 1939, 1; "Price Announced in Journal Sale" *Atlanta Constitution*, December 14, 1939, 1.

Philadelphia, Washington, Baltimore, and Richmond, Virginia” who wanted to go south would always travel through Atlanta as well. Cox argued that this had made Atlanta a major hub for American industry, and he added that the city had fifteen different railway lines and eight different railway systems. The city hosted the “third largest telegraph center in the world, and the largest telephone center in the south,” and the city ranked “fifth or sixth in air-mail volume” with close to “fifteen hundred manufacturing concerns.” Out of all the southern cities, Cox believed Atlanta was singularly important as a hub of travel and transportation.

After shuttering the *Atlanta Georgian*, Cox argued that the *Journal* was a strong enough to grow its subscriber count and become the city’s leading newspaper again. Cox noted that it was in his interests to keep the paper following in its long history of promoting the city’s growth. He agreed with the southern vision that “Dixie changed the whole course of the northern empire,” and disavowed the northern press’ argument that the South was holding them back. He said that Atlantans were “born and bred men of iron” and that “in the past this clash of sins and ambitions and political philosophies might have brought about differences here.” He praised the city’s “homogeneous population,” ignoring the city’s racial diversity, and praised the city’s “reading public.” Reflecting more of a “white moderate” vision for Atlanta’s image, his speech praised Margaret Mitchell’s vision of Atlanta, calling her a “simple, humble, modest, little woman” who “turned the whole affairs of a wide world upside down.” He fallaciously praised *Gone with the Wind*’s historical accuracy and argued that “our younger generation never knew from histories... the cruelties and the injustices of reconstruction.” In other words, Cox made the speech he had to make to alleviate the white Chamber’s concerns about his northern heritage. Cox knew that his newspaper would have to reflect the same concerns of Atlanta’s businesses to attract advertising, and that he had to take care not to offend readers to maintain readership

numbers. Each hero Cox praised here was integral to how Atlanta's white business elites saw their city and his speech was sculpted to allay fears of how much change his purchase of the *Journal* would bring.⁵⁶⁵

Despite his promises, James Cox did not leave the *Journal* to its own editorial devices. Again, Cox saw the media as a political tool, and he used his Atlanta newspaper to manipulate Georgia's state politics. While much of the *Journal* staff did not change when Cox bought the paper, he did install his son James M. Cox Jr. as president of the newspaper and radio station, and he promoted George C. Biggers to the position of vice president and general manager. Cox trusted his son's decisions on the newspaper and radio station but remained in constant contact about key internal employment issues, and he even traveled to Atlanta occasionally. One of those major topics of concern for the elder Cox was the nature of Eurith D. Rivers' governorship. Rivers, much like Talmadge, was deeply wedded to the Klan, and he was already facing complications for his openly positive relations with Hiram W. Evans. Rivers had known Evans a long time and even served him "as a salaried lecturer."⁵⁶⁶ Only two years after Cox purchased the paper, Rivers and the elder Cox engaged in an open discussion of these issues, with Cox arguing that Rivers was regularly misusing his political power for personal gain.

In the end though, Cox had little power in confronting what he saw as Rivers' misuse of his powers as governor. When Talmadge had run against Rivers in 1939, Atlanta's newspapers split their support for candidates, and Talmadge ultimately won the election. Both Ralph McGill and James Cox knew that when Talmadge ran for governor again in 1942, the Atlanta media industry could not be divided in their opposition. They needed again to unite behind a single

⁵⁶⁵ "Speech to Atlanta Chamber of Commerce on May 8, 1940," Box 2, Folder 43, MS-2, James M. Cox Papers, Special Collections and Archives, University Libraries, Wright State University.

⁵⁶⁶ Chester L. Quarles, *The Ku Klux Klan and Related Racist and Anti-Semitic Organizations: a History and Analysis* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., 1999), 79.

candidate whom they hoped would defeat Talmadge. This candidate was Ellis Arnall, who had served as Georgia state attorney general since 1938. While serving under Governor Rivers, Arnall had become a major intermediary within Georgia's state politics, who had been praised for his "political independence" from the governor.⁵⁶⁷ The political distance between Ellis Arnall and Klan ally Governor Rivers only grew when the state faced financial ruin for being in debt to its faculty for "several million dollars in unpaid salaries." Rivers could not pass new tax laws because the public was openly hostile to them, so he began looking for agencies with standing funds that he could use to solve the larger financial problem in education. When Rivers found the Highway Department's funds, he immediately froze them with the intention of using them to pay off the debt. The Department's chairman, M. L. Miller, argued that what Rivers was doing was illegal. He contacted Arnall for support, but Arnall saw the complication becoming way too public and decided to abstain from voicing support from Miller. In September, Rivers issued an executive order diverting close to two million dollars to the education fund. Miller openly denounced Rivers for being corrupt, and that Rivers was "in collusion" with Imperial Wizard Hiram W. Evans, who was still maintaining the "an emulsified asphalt monopoly for which he had previously been criticized."⁵⁶⁸ Miller argued that he was responsible for "slashing the maximum price to be paid for asphalt sand mix by approximately 25 per cent" and that was what generated the excess revenue.⁵⁶⁹ Miller was physically removed from his office by the state militia, and Miller's lawsuit against Rivers went all the way to the Supreme Court. The Court would eventually rule in favor of Miller, arguing that Rivers had no authority to fire him. Atlanta's white newspapers denounced Rivers' actions and hoped that he would "obey the

⁵⁶⁷ "Arnall to Dismiss Rivers' Suit Against Whitley," *Atlanta Constitution*, February 17, 1940, 1.

⁵⁶⁸ "Miller Hits Governor in Caustic Speech," *Atlanta Constitution*, March 21, 1940, 1.

⁵⁶⁹ "The Court Speaks," *Atlanta Constitution*, April 12, 1940, 12.

authority of the courts.”⁵⁷⁰ Throughout the entire debacle, the *Atlanta Constitution* attacked Rivers’ actions as embarrassing to the state. The newspaper argued that the “descent into outlawry and savagery” from the Governor had forced the “good citizens of Georgia” to “hang their heads in shame.”⁵⁷¹

The turmoil generated from Rivers and Millers’ public debate attracted national attention, and subsequently federal investigators began a thorough investigation of the Georgia Highway Department’s finances. Atlanta’s newspapers found themselves stuck in the middle. On the one hand, they wanted the Klan influence out of the state government, but on the other hand federal intervention made it look like Georgia could not handle its own affairs. By March, Attorney General Lawrence Camp of the United States District Court for North Georgia argued that the “FBI, federal inspectors and men of the internal revenue intelligence unit” would be sent to Georgia to get to the root of the financial malfeasance was going on in the Georgia state highway department. The *Atlanta Constitution* described the state as “under a cloud” with “no confidence in the handling of public affairs until the need for investigation is either backed by conclusive evidence, made fully public or dissipated entirely.”⁵⁷² By May 31, the US Government indicted John Greer, Rivers’ former state highway purchasing agent, and Hiram W. Evans, former Ku Klux Klan Imperial Wizard, for forcing the State of Georgia to pay \$456,427.42 for emulsified asphalt that lower competitive bids would have charged \$90,000 less.⁵⁷³ Evans pleaded no contest and was fined \$15,000, but Ellis Arnall took Evans to civil court and demanded that he

⁵⁷⁰ “The Court Speaks,” *Atlanta Constitution*, April 12, 1940, 12.

⁵⁷¹ “The Measure of Civilization,” *Atlanta Constitution*, March 12, 1940, 1.

⁵⁷² “What Does It Mean?” *Atlanta Constitution*, March 24, 1940, 1A.

⁵⁷³ “Hiram W. Evans, John W. Greer, Jr. Indicted in Road Probe,” *Atlanta Constitution*, May 31, 1940, 1.

pay the state \$384,081 for price-fixing the asphalt.⁵⁷⁴ In the end, the suit was dismissed by the federal district court.

By the end of the federal investigation into the Georgia Highway Department, Ellis Arnall had secured significant popularity, which allowed him to keep hold of his position as attorney general even though Eurith D. Rivers was voted out of office. In June 1941, Eugene Talmadge argued that “foreigners” in Georgia State’s university system “should be replaced by Georgia-born educators.” To achieve this, Talmadge accused Dean Walter Cocking of the University of Georgia and Dr. Marvin S. Pittman of the Georgia State Teachers College in Statesboro, along with eight other faculty members, of promoting racial integration for Georgia’s schools. The Board of Regents was unsure of how to proceed, and so they fired everyone except Cocking and Pittman. They argued that both remaining educators were integral to the system. In response, Talmadge demanded the resignation of three of the board’s members, one of which was Clark Howell Jr., owner of the *Atlanta Constitution*. By July 3, Howell Jr. resigned his position, arguing that “factional politics” had not only torn apart the Highway Department, but were also now destroying the state’s university system.⁵⁷⁵

In covering these events, the *Atlanta Constitution* kept connecting Talmadge’s policies to Hitler’s, arguing that Talmadge’s use of censorship mirrored the way Nazis relied on their newspapers to get propaganda to the public.⁵⁷⁶ The *Constitution*’s comparisons of Talmadge to Hitler was starting to disgruntle some of its readers. One such reader, Winfield P. Jones, argued that he disliked how the Atlanta newspapers treated Eugene Talmadge. Jones argued that the newspapers kept calling him “a dictator, a Hitler a veritable ‘devil incarnate,’” but Jones argued

⁵⁷⁴ “Dr. Evans Pays 15,000 Fine in Antitrust Case,” *Atlanta Constitution*, January 25, 1941, 1.

⁵⁷⁵ “Georgia Editors Say: Clark Howell Resigns,” *Atlanta Constitution*, July 3, 1941, 6.

⁵⁷⁶ “Abit Nix Likens Talmadge to Adolf Hitler,” *Atlanta Constitution*, July 31, 1940, 12.

that Talmadge's decisions were aimed at sculpting a better environment for the South. Jones argued the modernizing influences on the South from universities had a "tendency to regard with indifference the basic principles of our southern civilization." He argued that there had been "an influx into Georgia from other parts of the country of thousands who [held] different views" which had "contributed to a 'letting down' of our hereditary views."⁵⁷⁷ This backlash of white supremacist Georgians to the increasingly moderate racial politics of Atlanta's newspapers threatened the "moderate" racial image of the city as Eugene Talmadge promoted white supremacist politics.

In 1941, attorney general Ellis Arnall came out against Talmadge's purge of the higher education system. Arnall argued that Talmadge was going beyond his office's powers by removing the three Board of Regents from their positions. By June, Arnall had officially entered the gubernatorial race to oppose Eugene Talmadge, and almost immediately began seeking the support of Atlanta's media industry. Arnall argued that Georgians would not "tolerate 'imitation Hitler.'"⁵⁷⁸ He was confident that he could secure the *Atlanta Constitution's* endorsement, because Ralph McGill had already proved a major opponent to Talmadge's rule during the previous election, and Talmadge's attacks on Clark Howell Jr. Arnall wanted to secure all of the Atlanta media industry's support, however, so he began working toward obtaining the *Atlanta Journal's* endorsement, as well, though securing both endorsements "had never been done before."⁵⁷⁹

To find out how he could obtain the *Journal's* endorsement, Ellis Arnall contacted George C. Biggers, the longtime executive vice president and general manager of the

⁵⁷⁷ "Believes Governor is Right," *Atlanta Constitution*, July 26, 1941, 4.

⁵⁷⁸ "Arnall Enters Race, Flays Tyrant," *Atlanta Constitution*, June 28, 1941, 1.

⁵⁷⁹ Ellis Arnall (Georgia Governor), April 2, 1986, interview by Mel Steely and Ted Fritz-Simmons, Georgia Political Papers and Oral History Program, Annie Belle Weaver Special Collections, Irvine Sullivan Ingram Library, University of West Georgia.

newspaper.⁵⁸⁰ Biggers argued that the James M. Cox usually handled the newspaper's endorsements personally, so Arnall should "call... Cox and tell him who [he is.]" Biggers told Arnall that he should make sure to "commend [Cox] on his political record and commend him on his newspaper career." After that, Biggers noted that Arnall would have to arrange a meeting with Cox and maybe even try and travel up to "his home in Dayton, Ohio." Arnall did all of this, and after a significant amount of time being interrogated by Cox about his beliefs, Arnall secured the *Atlanta Journal's* endorsement, though Cox thought that the endorsement would almost assuredly scare the *Constitution* away from endorsing him. Arnall and Cox put a plan together to get the *Atlanta Constitution* to endorse Arnall first, and then Cox agreed that the *Journal* would follow up with its endorsement.

Almost immediately after Arnall received the endorsements, Eugene Talmadge began referring to "them lying newspapers" in his stump speeches.⁵⁸¹ In response, Atlanta's newspapers began outing Talmadge's Klan connections, arguing that Georgia had no place for white supremacist politics. McGill argued that Talmadge had "flouted truth and the testimony of people whom he [knew] to be right" and that he had "left his own kind of people and [was] listening to those whom he [knew] in his heart [were] not worthy of his trust and confidence." McGill concluded that Governor Talmadge's actions would make the state much more ignorant and the recruiters "for the Ku Klux Klan... happy." He noted that Talmadge's white supremacist politics would also endanger many black draftees in Athens who would soon be "serving their country."⁵⁸² As the Georgia governor's election approached, the protests McGill predicted began spreading. In 1942, Ellis Arnall, still serving as Georgia's attorney general, wrote that Talmadge

⁵⁸⁰ "James M. Cox Asserts *Journal* 'To Remain Free,'" *Atlanta Constitution*, December 18, 1939, C4.

⁵⁸¹ Lamar Ball, "Rival Editors Indorse Arnall Before 3,000," *Atlanta Constitution*, August 23, 1942, A1.

⁵⁸² Ralph McGill, "One Word More: Three New Regents," *Atlanta Constitution*, July 13, 1941, 8.

had made it impossible for him to both do his job as Georgia state attorney and also run against him in the governor's race. On July 28, 1942, in Statesboro, Georgia, students congregated in protest of the firing of Georgia State Teacher's College president Dr. Marvin S. Pittman. A counter-protest was organized by Talmadge's supporters and the police surrounding the two protests worried things would escalate. From within the crowd of Talmadge supporters, a tear gas cannister exploded, and the protestors started to grow chaotic. Initially, it seemed that the students were involved, but as investigators began exploring the Talmadge group, it was learned that a Talmadge supporter named Robert F. Wood had been planning the attack for a while. Wood told investigators that he "only did what [he] was paid to do."⁵⁸³ The story ran on the front page of the *Atlanta Constitution*, and the photograph of Wood being carried away by police was dramatic. Over the next few months, more and more negative press would congregate around Talmadge. Those images gained traction within the public, and on August 4, John Negas pressed charges of intimidation and violence against Wood. Negas noted that when he "refused to remove Ellis Arnall stickers from the window of [his] place of business," Negas beat him and threatened him with a gun.⁵⁸⁴

Ellis Arnall proceeded to win the 1942 gubernatorial election, a victory which Arnall believed was a result of the power of the Atlanta newspapers. As Arnall would later recount, "When I was governor, I don't think the newspapers were ever critical of a thing I did," and he even admitted that James M. Cox called him "his political godchild."⁵⁸⁵ Arnall would later argue that Atlanta's newspapers were not critical to his positions because he relied on many figures

⁵⁸³ Lamar Ball, "Talmadge Aide Indicted for Statesboro Attack," *Atlanta Constitution*, July 29, 1942, 1.

⁵⁸⁴ Lamar Ball, "Talmadge Foe, 71, Says Wood Beat Him," *Atlanta Constitution*, August 4, 1942, 1.

⁵⁸⁵ Ellis Arnall (Georgia Governor), April 2, 1986, interview by Mel Steely and Ted Fritz-Simmons, Georgia Political Papers and Oral History Program, Annie Belle Weaver Special Collections, Irvine Sullivan Ingram Library, University of West Georgia.

within the newspaper industry as a sounding board for his ideas. He noted that he “would discuss things with them that was [sic] important so that we were in accord. Sometimes they made suggestions which I accepted, and sometimes I didn’t. But after we talked it out, we were all together.”⁵⁸⁶ This was how James M. Cox Jr. had maintained some control over Georgia’s state politics. In contrast to Floyd Hunter’s view of newspapers as a tool of the business elite, in many ways Governor Ellis Arnall was a political tool of the Atlanta newspaper industry. Much like Ralph McGill, Cox understood that the South’s penchant for maintaining verbal allegiance to white supremacist ideology would hurt the region immensely in the shadow of World War II. To this end, Atlanta’s newspapers advised Arnall to change the tenor and nature of Georgia’s political discussions on race. In 1944, Ellis Arnall learned that the Supreme Court had ruled that the white primary system, which restricted black participation in the Democratic primary system, was declared unconstitutional in *Smith v. Allwright*, Ellis Arnall drove all the way to Miami to receive advice from James M. Cox.

Conclusion

As governor, Ellis Arnall oversaw a shift toward “moderate” Georgia politics. Arnall helped ratify the state’s new constitution, which extended his term as governor to four years, and he immediately began pushing for an amendment that allowed him to serve two successive terms. While he ultimately failed in securing that amendment, Arnall was able to introduce other changes within Georgia’s state politics, the most transformative of which was the abolition of the white primary. When the Supreme Court ruled in *Smith v. Allwright*, Arnall knew that if he agreed with the court and dismantled the white primary system in Georgia, that he would be

⁵⁸⁶ Ellis Arnall (Georgia Governor), April 2, 1986, interview by Mel Steely and Ted Fritz-Simmons, Georgia Political Papers and Oral History Program, Annie Belle Weaver Special Collections, Irvine Sullivan Ingram Library, University of West Georgia.

ending his political career within the South, because he would confirm what Eugene Talmadge had argued that Arnall would limit the political power of the white Georgian farmer. In his own words, Arnall thought that if he said “to hell with the Court. We are going to run things our way and we're not going to give first-class citizenship to the blacks and we're not going to let blacks vote in the white primary,” he would be governor for the rest of his life. Cox told Arnall that he should not “do that, because we have a country of law, and either we must respect the courts, or we will have anarchy.”⁵⁸⁷ However, publicly, Arnall held his opinion in silence. When asked about the white primary, he argued that the decision was “under the exclusive control and authority of the State and County Democratic Executive Committee.”⁵⁸⁸ Even when he helped repeal the poll tax, he remained quiet on the white primary system.⁵⁸⁹

The governor’s public silence about integrating the primary system was a source of significant concern for the *Atlanta Daily World*, which regularly argued that the *Smith v. Allwright* ruling should be an aid to push the “south ‘liberal.’”⁵⁹⁰ The *World*’s editorials were hopeful that Governor Arnall, whom the *World* saw as an ally “with the forces of liberalism,” would ultimately support the integration of the primary system. The paper praised him for supporting legislation that allowed teenagers to vote and praised him when his early arguments suggested that he did not mind integrating the primary system. It was not until March 1946 that Arnall announced the Georgia democratic primary would be integrated, a stance the *Atlanta Daily World* called “heartening evidence of a trend in the thinking of fair-minded white Georgians.” The *World* immediately began projecting the voting power of Georgia’s black

⁵⁸⁷ Ellis Arnall (Georgia Governor), March 25 and April 17, 1986, interview by James F. Cook, Georgia Government Document Project, Special Collections and Archives, Georgia State University Library.

⁵⁸⁸ “Governor in Reply to Vote Query,” *Atlanta Daily World*, May 17, 1944, 1.

⁵⁸⁹ Cliff MacKay, “Poll Tax Repealed by State Senate After Hot Debate,” *Atlanta Daily World*, January 25, 1945, 1.

⁵⁹⁰ “Says White Primary’s End May Make South Liberal,” *Atlanta Daily World*, July 1, 1945, 1.

community, noting that in “forty-nine counties” black citizens outnumbered white, and white Georgians began fearing a significant loss of their voting power.⁵⁹¹ Once he broke from his silence, Arnall continued to speak out against the white primary system, arguing that all attempts to keep the black Georgians from participating in the election would be stopped.⁵⁹²

By 1946, Ellis Arnall had proved that Georgia could support a liberal governor, although Arnall paid the price of his moderate stance on race: his political career within Georgia was over by the next election. Arnall would go on to serve President Truman as the director of the Office of Price Stabilization and decline a position as the U.S. Solicitor General. Throughout his life, Arnall would praise his relationship with James M. Cox and note that Cox’s endorsement went way beyond the election, and that Cox advised him on many of his decisions throughout his tenure as governor. But James Cox’s outsider celebrity status gave him tools that other newspaper figures simply could not use. Cox was exceedingly popular within the Democratic party, but it was his media empire that gave him the most power. For Atlanta’s media industry, Arnall’s term as governor demonstrated incrementalist social and political racial change for the state. It proved to James Middleton Cox that Atlanta’s white newspaper industry had some power beyond the city’s borders, and for Ralph McGill at the *Atlanta Constitution*, it proved that the city could begin to dismantle the states long tradition of white supremacist politics. And for Atlanta’s black community, Arnall’s tenure proved that racial change could be achieved in Georgia. From this point forward, Atlanta’s media industry would face an entirely new challenge. They would have to find a way to uphold the city’s newly crafted image of racial equality in the face of public demonstrations, as white and black citizens began to advocate for racial issues on Atlanta’s city streets.

⁵⁹¹ “Those Unfounded Fears,” *Atlanta Daily World*, March 17, 1946, 4.

⁵⁹² “Arnall Frowns on Maneuvers to Keep Negro from His Vote Right,” *Atlanta Daily World*, April 6, 1946, 1.

CHAPTER 5—"TOO BUSY TO HATE": DENOUNCING PUBLIC RACIAL DEMONSTRATIONS

As governor, Ellis Arnall oversaw a number of incrementalist racial policies for Georgia, and the image of Atlanta as a moderate city that its newspapers were working together to develop became an important force within the city. But this new racial image was not easily maintained, because as soon as World War II came to a close, the city began to buckle under massive population growth. After the war, as soldiers returned home, there was a resurgence of racially motivated public demonstrations in the city that prompted both white and black newspapers to take a stand against protests that threatened to undermine the city's moderate racial image. Working with a new "ruling coalition between black Atlantans and wealthy north-side whites," Atlanta's newspapers argued that public demonstrations were destructive to the city's newly established "civic image of racial peace," which the city's Mayor William B. Hartsfield would later come to describe as a city "too busy to hate."⁵⁹³ What resulted from this period was an image-conscious coalition of white and black newspaper figures who used their journalistic platforms to mitigate the more public elements of the city's racial protests. Within the *Atlanta Daily World*, this meant denouncing the march on City Hall to protest the city's lack of black police officers, and within the *Atlanta Constitution* and the *Atlanta Journal*, this meant attacking the public demonstrations arranged by the new white supremacist organization called the Columbians.

These white supremacist and vocal civil rights protests stemmed from racial tension building around the lack of housing available to returning World War II veterans. Starting in

⁵⁹³ Karen Ferguson, *Black Politics in New Deal Atlanta* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 263.

1945, the United Negro Veterans and Women's Auxiliary Group began pushing for Atlanta politicians to begin hiring black police officers to serve the city's black community. The *Atlanta Daily World* worked with the local chapter of the NAACP to limit the march's scope and reach, because they argued that a public march on City Hall would damage the racial reputation of the city. The NAACP and the *World* argued that political power could be wrested through judicious use of the ballot, since the white primary system had finally been dismantled. After Arnall's announcement of the white primary's demise, black registered voters in Atlanta jumped from 8.3% to 27.2% of Atlanta's voting public. As Ronald Bayor argues, black leaders began negotiating behind the scenes with Mayor William Hartsfield to make concessions on issues important to black political advancement in exchange for black voter support.⁵⁹⁴ Tomiko Brown-Nagin calls the approach that Atlanta black elites took to civil rights during this period "pragmatic civil rights," because the goals were to "preserve the economic self-sufficiency that black elites had achieved under Jim Crow, expand black political influence, and preserve personal autonomy" without necessarily or immediately dismantling Jim Crow.⁵⁹⁵ This pragmatic approach can be seen in the *Atlanta Daily World's* criticism of the march on City Hall, which it called "ill-advised and inopportune," as well as the newspaper's calls for activists to adopt the "practical educational plan" that the NAACP had started "several years ago."⁵⁹⁶ And yet, there was also strife developing within white neighborhoods as well.

The pressure of returning soldiers on Atlanta's real estate market gave rise to newly integrated neighborhoods. Even though the city did not officially regulate the segregation of

⁵⁹⁴ Ronald H. Bayor, *Race and the Shaping of Twentieth Century Atlanta* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 18.

⁵⁹⁵ Tomiko Brown-Nagin, *Courage to Dissent: Atlanta and the Long History of the Civil Rights Movement* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 2.

⁵⁹⁶ "United Veterans in March on City Hall," *Atlanta Daily World*, March 5, 1946, 1; "Undoing Good Work," *Atlanta Daily World*, March 3, 1946, 6.

individual neighborhoods, the city had largely developed racially segregated. As returning black soldiers began purchasing houses within largely white neighborhoods, white protestors began using public agitation and violence to reinforce their own imagined neighborhood consistency. This led to the formation of the Columbians organization in Atlanta, an ideological descendant of the Ku Klux Klan, which was incorporated by Emory Burke in 1946. The Columbians organized a series of public rallies and neighborhood marches during that year to promote the preservation of neighborhood segregation and white supremacy. Ralph McGill, editor of the *Atlanta Constitution*, mocked the leaders of the Columbians for their unsavory backgrounds, all while the *Constitution*'s unsigned editorials called the group "little punks and hoodlums" who needed the police to "raid their quarters for the explosives and guns they seem to be using."⁵⁹⁷ In response, the Columbians openly threatened the *Constitution* and the *Journal* for getting involved with "racial matters" that they felt should be left up to elected officials.⁵⁹⁸ The city's image had only just begun recovering from the massive publicity nightmare that was the Klan, and the *Constitution* made it clear that this new white supremacist organization would not succeed in hurting the city's racial image either.

The Atlanta newspaper industry worked hand in hand with what criminal justice scholar Lesly Williams Reid calls the "image-conscious... media savvy" mayor William B. Hartsfield, who made it his mission to repair the city's national public image. When Hartsfield took office in 1936, the city had just been downgraded to an "A" economic rating by Moody Investors' Services.⁵⁹⁹ Atlanta was much like many other southern cities during the war. After the report

⁵⁹⁷ Ralph McGill, "Rapists and Wife Deserters," *Atlanta Constitution*, November 10, 1946, 12B; "Let's Act Quickly and Emphatically," *Atlanta Constitution*, November 2, 1946, 2.

⁵⁹⁸ "Let's Act Quickly and Emphatically," *Atlanta Constitution*, November 2, 1946, 2.

⁵⁹⁹ Kevin Kruse, *White Flight: Atlanta and the Making of Modern Conservatism* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2005), 49.

was published arguing that the South was in need of economic development, the United States Government began issuing contracts for companies to build factories within the South. As civil rights historian Karen Ferguson argues, wartime industry was integral to both the growth of Atlanta's economy, and its resulting booming black population.⁶⁰⁰ It was only in September of 1946 that the city was able to recover its "AA" economic rating, and racial instability threatened that rating.⁶⁰¹ In comparison, Hartsfield was so concerned about Atlanta's racial image that he responded to the United Negro Veterans' threat to publicly protest the city's failure to hire black police with a counter-threat to crack down on vagrancy in "Negro sections of the city."⁶⁰² He also arranged to receive advance copies of both major white newspapers for review before they were distributed. Hartsfield used this early access to construct responses to the news stories before they hit the newsstands and to generate pressure on Atlanta's white journalists to alter news stories to cover the city and his administration in a positive light. Several times, Hartsfield demanded that the *Atlanta Constitution* edit or redact a story, and journalists were actively forced to argue against this pressure.⁶⁰³ When Hartsfield was unable to secure a retraction for an objectionable article, he could count on Ralph McGill to write an editorial that either reframed the topic in a positive light or at least limited the damage. *Atlanta Constitution* journalist Jack Nelson recalls Hartsfield physically showing up at the newspaper office, raging into the news bull pit and ranting at staff and being "very alliterative in his cursing." Nelson remembers being pressured to change a story in 1957, when he had uncovered a graft ring within the Atlanta Police Department at Howell Mill Road. Hartsfield was livid and cursing up a storm in the

⁶⁰⁰ Karen Ferguson, *Black Politics in New Deal Atlanta* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 225-226.

⁶⁰¹ "Why Not a Triple-A Rating?," *Atlanta Constitution*, September 18, 1946, 10.

⁶⁰² "Vagrants Face Work or Jail," *Atlanta Constitution*, March 1, 1946, 16.

⁶⁰³ Millard B. Grimes, *The Last Linotype, The Story of Georgia and its Newspapers Since World War II* (Macon: Mercer University Press and the Georgia Press Association, 1985), 87.

morning hours, and Ralph McGill forced Nelson to confirm that the story was accurate. When Nelson did not back down, McGill used his editorial space to write that the voting public should not lose faith in the mayor because of “a few rotten apples.”⁶⁰⁴ The *Atlanta Constitution* uniformly endorsed his candidacy every time he ran for office. In many ways, Atlanta’s newspapers were becoming the mayor’s most vocal allies.

When Atlanta faced the threat of public protests from both pragmatic civil rights organizations and white supremacist organization, Atlanta’s newspapers used their positions of power to challenge and shut the demonstrations down. Placing the city’s national racial reputation first, as they did with the Stone Mountain Confederate Memorial and *Gone with the Wind*, Atlanta’s white and black newspapers openly denounced public agitation as a viable route to secure social change. All throughout 1946, Atlanta faced significant racial discord within its city’s streets. As the United Negro Veterans organization and the Women’s Auxiliary Group marched on City Hall to demand the hiring of black police officers, and the Columbians rallies ended with neighborhood patrols in search of black citizens to abuse, Atlanta’s newspapers struggled to editorialize these events as abnormal to the city’s moderate nature. For Atlanta, 1946 stands as a pivotal moment, but it was the culmination of a long steady push by Atlanta’s business interests, which included major figures within the city’s newspaper industry, that culminated in this racially moderate image for the city.

Regional and National Pressures on Atlanta Newspapers

The interracial coalition of moderate urban elites who fought to reshape Atlanta’s racial image did so in response to post-World War II regional and national socioeconomic pressures.

⁶⁰⁴ Jack Nelson (*Atlanta Constitution* Reporter), interview by Clifford Kuhn and Paul Shields, October 30, 1993, P1993-01, Series D. *Politics and the Media*, *Georgia Government Documentation Project*, Special Collections and Archives, Georgia State University Library.

Although *Constitution* editor Ralph McGill had seen parallels between the KKK and the Nazi Party since his visit to Germany four years earlier, McGill's use of anti-Nazi rhetoric to attack Talmadge was new to Atlanta's newspapers. As the United States entered the war, Ralph McGill was still very much a southern racial moderate, as he still openly challenged the efficacy of federal anti-lynching legislation and promoted a literacy standard to replace the Poll Tax. And yet, the Atlanta newspaper's open denunciation of the Ku Klux Klan still garnered significant attention from northern publications. With that newfound attention, however, came criticism. Walter White, Executive Secretary of the NAACP and author of the "People and Places" column within the influential African American newspaper, the *Chicago Defender*, argued that Ralph McGill's denunciation of federal anti-lynching reform made him an "ex-liberal," who used to be worthy of praise. He argued that McGill had left his liberal nature so far behind, that he had taken "to the storm cellars" to hide from "demagogues."⁶⁰⁵ White's opinion aside, Ralph McGill continued to garner substantive praise nationwide, gaining a reputation as a progressive southern voice on race.

In 1943, Ralph McGill was even invited to participate in the University of Chicago's Round Table discussion on race, where McGill argued that the southern race situation was complicated, because it involved the study of a minority population, the black community, encased within another minority population, Southerners as a whole. McGill argued that the South faced a number of economic and social complications that hindered its ability to change its position on race. He argued that the South regularly had to negotiate with states that had better economic infrastructures, and more federal political support. This made coming to terms with the

⁶⁰⁵ Walter White, "People and Places," *Chicago Defender*, December 12, 1942, 15; Walter White, "People and Places," *Chicago Defender*, December 19, 1942, 15; Walter White, "People and Places," *Chicago Defender*, February 13, 1943, 15.

complications that black southerners had to face even more complicated. McGill described the radio show as “fascinating, humbling and exhausting.” He estimated that some 12,000,000 people listened to the broadcast, which was a “fast-moving, emotion-packed” discussion. Opposite him were Avery Craven and Robert Redfield, professors in history and natural sciences respectively. Reflecting on Roosevelt’s argument that the South was the nation’s number one economic problem, McGill argued that the nation’s political systems had placed the region into a “tributary section” of the nation’s economic streams. He argued that this was what made the southern black community’s position so difficult, because they had become the “minority’s minority.”⁶⁰⁶

The radio show improved Ralph McGill’s reputation within the nation as an expert on southern race relations, and he was invited to Durham, South Carolina as the presiding officer in a panel on the development of civil rights within the South.⁶⁰⁷ By June, Walter White’s opinion on McGill would flip, and White would praise McGill as a southerner who was regularly fighting against the South’s most vocal racists. White called the *Atlanta Constitution* an “intelligently run newspaper with more coverage of state, national and world news than any other paper” and a “progressive editorial policy, especially under Ralph McGill, [that] manifested more intelligence and vision than any other Georgia newspaper.” But, despite that kernel of praise, White noted that the paper could do more by using its platform to push a more progressive vision on race. In particular, White was frustrated that the *Constitution* spent so much time covering a black farmer who spent his days farming and his nights in jail, rather than covering advancements of Atlanta’s black colleges during the same timeframe.⁶⁰⁸ Despite these criticisms, newspaper coverage from

⁶⁰⁶ Ralph McGill, “One Word More,” *Atlanta Constitution*, March 30, 1942, 8.

⁶⁰⁷ “Federal Action to Curb Racism Proposed on Air,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, December 12, 1942, 15.

⁶⁰⁸ Walter White, “People and Places,” *Chicago Defender*, June 26, 1943, 15.

this period documents a shift in McGill's reputation on race. From this point forward, McGill's reputation as a racial moderate would only continue to grow. In 1944, he would be asked to serve on the committee for the Wilkie Award, an award given to the best black press article.⁶⁰⁹

At the same time as Ralph McGill and the *Atlanta Constitution* were experiencing this shift in reputation, the *Atlanta Journal* experienced pressure to reflect the state's rural and urban communities more accurately. In 1946, James M. Cox, owner of the *Journal*, received reader responses from Atlanta's rural hinterlands that helped him contextualize what role its readers wanted from the newspaper, and those responses were quite uniform. They did not mind the more centrist voices of its editors like William Bryan Wright, but what they did want was for the newspaper to stop focusing on Atlanta's own issues. They wanted the city's newspapers to embrace their role as regional and state newspapers and abandon their reflection of only Atlanta's interests. This was particularly meaningful in various areas as Atlanta's newspapers were not the only newspapers to try and adopt the regional newspaper role within these cities. In many counties, they were in direct competition with other newspapers from nearby metropolises. Time and time again from various points of the state, the *Journal's* readers demanded that the newspaper send more correspondents out to their particular county to cover issues relevant to their interests rather than only focusing on reports about urban interests.

In Dalton, Georgia, for example, a city thirty-eight miles from Chattanooga and ninety miles from Atlanta, the *Journal* and *Constitution* competed with two newspapers from Chattanooga, Tennessee: the *Chattanooga Times*, and the *Chattanooga Press*. This was in addition to their competition with the *Daily Citizen*, Dalton's local newspaper since 1847. While the readers in Dalton were only a "49-minute drive away" from Chattanooga, their "loyalty to

⁶⁰⁹ "Wilkie Awards Organized for Negro Writers," *Washington Post*, December 21, 1933, 6.

Georgia over Tennessee” pushed them to buy into Atlanta’s newspapers at a higher rate as the region’s “trading area and news source.” This loyalty gave the *Journal* a daily circulation rate of 1,328 in the city. However, that loyalty was not granted blindly, as they argued that the newspaper spent way too much time discussing urban issues rather than state and national news coverage. To be clear, they liked the newspaper’s editorial coverage, but they wanted the *Atlanta Journal* to embrace its position as a state newspaper and abandon representing just urban interests in Atlanta. Three readers argued that the newspapers offered “more Atlanta than National news” coverage and that the *Journal* provided “insufficient articles of state and national interest.” They argued that the *Atlanta Journal* was also far too focused on “sensational news” stories rather than “civic improvements, business and industrial progress.”⁶¹⁰ An integral point to illustrate, is that these readers were not criticizing the *Journal* for its coverage of racial issues.

Readers in Rome, which was similarly situated in the northeast of Georgia not far from Alabama’s border, echoed many of the same viewpoints. They argued that the *Atlanta Journal*’s “greatest service” to the region would be to “increase State news coverage, particularly on outstanding, unusual or novel achievements in agriculture, business, industry, etc.”⁶¹¹ But even if they did not do that, these readers argued that state news should “be consolidated into one or more pages as needed with a fixed location in the paper,” so that they could more easily avoid Atlanta-centric news stories. Rome readers argued that the *Journal* had an “inefficient local correspondent” which had led to a “lack of space” devoted to “N.W. Georgia generally on business and industrial progress in comparison with other cities.”⁶¹² These views were not just

⁶¹⁰ Atlanta Journal File, Box 7, Folder 39, MS-2, James M. Cox Papers, Special Collections and Archives, University Libraries, Wright State University, Dayton, Ohio.

⁶¹¹ “Rome Reader Report” and “Dalton Reader Report,” Box 7, Folder 39, MS-2, James M. Cox Papers, Special Collections and Archives, University Libraries, Wright State University, Dayton, Ohio.

⁶¹² “Rome Reader Report,” Box 7, Folder 39, MS-2, James M. Cox Papers, Special Collections and Archives, University Libraries, Wright State University, Dayton, Ohio.

reflected in the northwest, however, as readers in cities like Athens and Augusta expressed similar concerns.

Away from Georgia's state borders, Atlanta's newspapers only competed against local newspapers. In Athens, seventy miles west of Atlanta, readers reported that they were "completely sold on [the] *Journal*," bringing in 2,735 newspapers. There, the newspaper market pit the *Journal* against the *Constitution* and the *Athens Banner*. All the readers surveyed praised the *Journal* for its editorial coverage, but Abit Nix, an Athens-based lawyer and politician, argued that the *Atlanta Journal's* news coverage policy was far too one sided. Nix noted that the *Journal* should provide a "pro-con discussion of issues involved." He also noted that the Sunday Magazine should "include more coverage of State, less of Atlanta." Again, they suggested that the *Atlanta Journal* not just try and report on the region from their urban perspective, but instead send a "staff reporter and photographers to other sections" so that they could expand their coverage of the state. Athens readers echoed other regional voices recommending that the "state news should be consolidated into one section" and the financial focus should be on state perspectives rather than just Atlanta.⁶¹³

In Gainesville, just fifty miles northwest of the capital, Atlanta's lack of state coverage was again central to the reader's criticism. Mary Redwine, Gainesville's secretary of the Chamber of Commerce and a 15-year subscriber, argued that she only read the "right hand editorial page" anymore because the paper was just not as good as the *Constitution*, which had a "square and balanced makeup" and was much "more attractive" than the *Atlanta Journal's* older layout. Joisiah Crudup, another reader, had several criticisms, noting that the Atlanta edition of the paper was much more colorful than the state edition, and that the newspaper's lack of focus

⁶¹³ "Athens Reader Report," Box 7, Folder 39, MS-2, James M. Cox Papers, Special Collections and Archives, University Libraries, Wright State University, Dayton, Ohio.

on regional news was a major disappointment. Like many others, Crudup argued that the paper should hire more local journalists to “include more coverage of the state.”⁶¹⁴ All Gainesville readers argued that the newspaper should have a more dedicated reporter “covering Gainesville community,” even noting that the newspaper could do a better job at featuring the many “North Georgia tourist attractions.”⁶¹⁵

On the other side of the state in Augusta, Georgia, some 140 miles away from Atlanta, the *Journal* was also criticized about its failure to cover regional issues. As a competing urban center, Augusta had two local newspapers, the *Augusta Herald* and the *Augusta Chronicle*. As a result, the *Journal*’s subscription rate was only 700 mailed and 700 air-expressed subscriptions, with the delivery system being paid by the subscriber depending on their needs. Again, a major dislike expressed by readers in the area was that Augusta needed an “aggressive *Journal* Correspondent” to offer local news coverage that currently was simply “not comparable with the rest of the state.” They argued that “editors and editorial columnists should travel the state more to prevent their consistent writing on Atlanta, and to give readers a chance to make their acquaintance.” Augusta readers also argued that “state news should be collected on one or two pages” with “standard features... having fixed locations in paper.”⁶¹⁶ All of the readers interviewed by the *Journal* said the same thing, the paper faced a real question as to whom they should represent, rural or urban interests.

During and after World War II, the rural-urban divide did exist to some degree, but it is unclear if the struggle for representation seemed to reflect more on Atlanta’s grounding in

⁶¹⁴ “Gainesville Reader Report,” Box 7, Folder 39, MS-2, James M. Cox Papers, Special Collections and Archives, University Libraries, Wright State University, Dayton, Ohio.

⁶¹⁵ “Augusta Reader Report,” Box 7, Folder 39, MS-2, James M. Cox Papers, Special Collections and Archives, University Libraries, Wright State University, Dayton, Ohio.

⁶¹⁶ “Augusta Reader Report,” Box 7, Folder 39, MS-2, James M. Cox Papers, Special Collections and Archives, University Libraries, Wright State University, Dayton, Ohio.

economics rather than issues of race. Atlanta's newspaper industry was heavily promoting industrial expansion which was integral to the city's growth and prosperity during the larger war mobilization. The "white moderate" perspective that Atlanta's newspapers adopted was never reflected in the comments, but the newspaper's embrace of industrial economics and their lack of focus on rural issues did often frustrate them. Atlanta's economy developed at a rapid pace, placing it in direct competition with many other national cities. Ralph McGill was not just using his editorial power within the paper to shape public opinion, but he also worked within the Atlanta Chamber of Commerce to push the city's urban leaders to help shape the city's racial image to reflect the "white moderate" perspective. As other major cities like Detroit and New York City experienced race riots, Atlanta was able to escape that fate because of this unique positioning of the city's elites on race. Their escaping the racial violence of the period also became a major boon to the city's reputation, as McGill began promoting the city as progressive on race.

Denouncing Civil Rights Activism in Atlanta

By the 1940s, Atlanta's newspaper industry found itself having to navigate the complicated discussion of community policing. Policing itself had been a longstanding area of contention for the city's white urban elites, as it was often home to corruption and graft rings throughout the 1920s and 30s. In fact, Mayor William B. Hartsfield won his first mayoral election because of the popularity he harnessed in standing against police corruption under the city's previous mayor, James L. Key.⁶¹⁷ A result of the very public struggle between Atlanta's newspapers and the Ku Klux Klan regarding the 1940 kidnappings made it clear just how pervasive the Klan's influence was within the city's police department. Atlanta's black

⁶¹⁷ Harold H. Martin, *William Berry Hartsfield, Mayor of Atlanta* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1978).

community made it clear by 1940 that they did not feel safe with white officers policing their neighborhoods, and the local NAACP began working behind the scenes to try and push for the city to hire black police officers. White editors were stuck between the natural complications that had arisen from white policing, and the segregated nature of Atlanta's public spaces. Over the next few years, Ralph McGill argued for the hiring of black police officers, but his argument was always couched in coded references to white supremacist ideology. For instance, he made it clear that even if black officers were hired, they would never be given the authority to arrest white citizens. This was a complicated editorial position for Atlanta's white newspapers, but they had an unlikely ally in the *Atlanta Daily World*, with its typical moderate incrementalist stance on racial progress. When the United Negro Veterans and Women's Auxiliary Group marched on City Hall, the *Constitution* largely ignored the protest, only republishing articles by the *World* that echoed white Atlanta's own racially moderate vision on the issue. What followed was a pattern of events that led to the *World* and *Constitution* working hand in hand to undermine public protests for racial change, which ultimately allowed Atlanta's white elites to stall the hiring of black police officers for two years until 1948.

For Atlanta's black community, the city's all-white police department represented a major threat. Like federal anti-lynching legislation laws, a black policing system was an integral part of public safety for black Atlantans. The local chapter of the NAACP took the issue as their own, having advocated for the hiring of black officers in the *Atlanta Daily World's* editorial columns since 1937. This became particularly important with the recent reports of the Klan kidnappings when police simply stood and watched. It was hard to ignore the high record of police brutality aimed at black Atlantans without also correlating it with their extensive Klan sympathies. To complicated things more, comparable southern cities were already establishing

such policies. Eight years earlier, the debate over race in community policing had erupted in Dallas, although the loudest voices from the region were those opposing the issue. For C. A. Scott, chairman of the Crime Committee of the NAACP and the *Atlanta Daily World*'s general manager, the argument why Atlanta should follow suit and hire black police officers was simple. Black officers would be a "sure means of reducing crime" within the black community because black officers could better "interpret Negro problems and Negro people."⁶¹⁸ Scott's dual roles with the NAACP and the *World* afforded him the unique position to turn NAACP policy recommendations into editorial stances and thus amplify the message for incremental racial change within Atlanta.

By 1941, black police officers were being hired by a number of northern cities like New York City, Detroit, Chicago, Washington D.C., Baltimore, Tulsa, and Philadelphia, as well as some southern cities like Knoxville, Dallas, Houston, and Charlotte. For the NAACP, these cities became iconic representatives of the benefits of black community policing, with the cities often citing lower crime rates.⁶¹⁹ And yet, regardless of how hard the *Atlanta Daily World* pushed the issue, the policy change failed to gain traction with Atlanta's white urban elites, despite the fact that the Fulton County grand jury had engaged in a long argument about how to stop the large number of homicides occurring within Atlanta's black community. Atlanta's police chief, M.A. Hornsby, argued that while Atlanta's white police officers were "improving every year" in covering black communities, Hornsby argued that he could not "keep negroes from gambling and killing each other over women." Their solution was to establish "special patrols and investigators" to move through black neighborhoods and keep an eye on "vagrant

⁶¹⁸ James Foreman Jr., *Locking Up Our Own: Crime and Punishment in Black America* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux), 84.

⁶¹⁹ "Columbus and Colored Military Police," *Atlanta Daily World*, October 25, 1941, 4.

Negroes and detect subversive activities.”⁶²⁰ Unsurprisingly, the *Atlanta Daily World* opposed these actions. Writing in the *Daily World*, the Reverend J. Clarence Wright argued that adding more white police officers into the community would “not go very far in the solution.” He noted that politicians failed to understand the real cause of this criminal activity, which was urban developers who had “crowded Negroes into unsightly and unsanitary ghettos.” He argued that many individuals within the city had failed to provide “adequate educational opportunity and health facilities for ‘the largest percentage of negro population of any city in the nation.’”⁶²¹ Walter R. Chivers, a sociologist who had taught for the historically black Morehouse College since 1925, argued that “Atlanta need[ed] Negro police.” Chivers argued that the sheer number of homicides was “poor advertising” for Atlanta and Fulton County and that black “social workers work[ed] more effectively” within the black community than white social workers. Chivers noted that not only could black social workers go into areas that white social workers were usually barred from, but that they could engage in “easy conversation about their common sufferings.” He stated that the “increased use of Negro social workers by southern departments of public welfare [was] proof that the old belief prevalent among Southern white people that they [knew] Negroes [had] exploded in their faces.” In the end, Chivers argued that Atlanta needed to hire black police officers to keep the community on track, and that doing anything else would simply ignore the root of the problem.⁶²² Atlanta’s white newspapers remained silent on the issue because there was little necessity to comply at this stage. Given that black Atlantans had little political power within the city, Atlanta’s white urban elites like William B. Hartsfield could regularly ignore whatever demands they placed on the city.

⁶²⁰ “Hornsby Asks LeCraw to Act in Police Row,” *Atlanta Constitution*, August 30, 1941, 1.

⁶²¹ Wright J. Clarence, “From my Study Window,” *Atlanta Daily World*, August 31, 1941, 4.

⁶²² Walter R. Chivers, “Walter Chivers Says,” *Atlanta Daily World*, September 7, 1941, 4.

This was not solely limited to Atlanta, as many of America's urban spaces struggled with these very complications. In 1943, W.E.B. Du Bois argued that America's white press "suddenly become conscious of the Negro press," and began accusing them of "exciting the mass of Negroes to discontent and even to violence."⁶²³ Du Bois argued that white newspaper arguments were inaccurate, and that the black press had been agitating for equal rights long before 1943. Atlanta's media industry was very different though, because white and black newspapers were operating well within the knowledge of each other. Years before, Clark Howell had called the *Atlanta Independent* "one of the ablest negro papers," but the big change in the 1940s was that Atlanta's white and black newspapers began promoting similar perspectives on racial progress.⁶²⁴ There was more to this new shift in perspective within America's white press, and it had to do the growing racial volatility of America's cities. Standing in front of the Chamber of Commerce board of directors in 1943, Ralph McGill argued that there were "Radicals from other parts of the country" within Atlanta's black community who had been "for some time" pushing violence. McGill argued that the city really needed to adopt a "common sense viewpoint" and begin to "provide education and economic opportunities to the negro" or face the very real threat of violence.⁶²⁵

Forty-three days after this speech, Beaumont, Texas erupted into violence over a rumor that a white woman had been raped by a black man. Five days after that, Detroit, Michigan erupted into violence due to several related factors, including a housing shortage, employment discrimination against the black community, and a lack of minority representation in policing.⁶²⁶

⁶²³ W.E.B. Du Bois, "Race Pulse Reflected Accurately in Zooming Newspaper Circulation," *Chicago Defender*, February 20, 1943, 13.

⁶²⁴ "The Negro and Politics," *Atlanta Constitution*, July 31, 1904, A4.

⁶²⁵ Atlanta Chamber of Commerce Meeting Minutes, May 3, 1943, Kenan Research Center, Atlanta History Center, 3.

⁶²⁶ Thomas J. Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 42.

Another riot broke out in Harlem that same summer over the shooting of a black soldier by a white police officer. None of these riots were a singular anomaly, but instead part of a larger trend throughout the nation that included other cities like Los Angeles, Philadelphia, and Mobile.⁶²⁷ This wave of racial instability within some of America's most densely urbanized centers struck fear into the Atlanta's urban elites, as they conjured memories of the 1906 Race Riot that brought the city to its knees. Many were afraid that Atlanta would be next, so Atlanta's elites used the same tool it had been relying on for years: the white newspaper.⁶²⁸

Ralph McGill of the *Atlanta Constitution* became the city's major representative in the national debate on race, and his goal was to undermine the larger argument that the South was responsible for all things racially motivated. Not long after the Detroit riot, Michigan Governor Harry F. Kelly put together a committee to investigate the riot and determine its causes. The conclusions of the all-white committee—made up of an attorney general, two police commissioners, and a prosecuting attorney—were that the rioters were “hoodlums,” who were “young unattached, uprooted, and unskilled misfits.” Their argument was that these “hoodlums” had migrated to Detroit from the South in search of economic opportunity and turned to violence when they were met with rejection. These conclusions spread all throughout northern media outlets because it reinstated the South as the source of the nation's racial problems. This explanation was attractive to the radically conservative *Chicago Tribune*, which argued that the workers, who were “imported from the South,” were responsible for also importing racial “intolerance.”⁶²⁹ And it resonated with the liberal *Pittsburgh Courier* that argued that racial

⁶²⁷ “A Wave of Rioting,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, June 18, 1943, 10.

⁶²⁸ Daniel Kryder, *Divided Arsenal: Race and the American State during World War II* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Nat Brandt, *Harlem at War: The Black Experience in WWII* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1996); Thomas J. Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996).

⁶²⁹ “Southerners Race an Issue,” *New York Times*, July 1, 1943, 18.

hatred had “seep[ed] like poison into the North.”⁶³⁰ On ABC, Quincy Howe argued that the cause of the riots were “hundreds of thousands of workers, white and negro, [who had] streamed into Detroit, many of them from the South. They [brought] with them prejudices and hatreds that sometimes [led] to lynchings in small communities, but that [gave] rise to mass riots in a big industrial city.”⁶³¹ On WJZ and the Blue Network, Henry J. Taylor argued that white southerners knew “these riots were coming. Furthermore, they [knew] that this [was] only the beginning.”⁶³² These northern correspondents gave the impression that all American racism originated from the South, which became a key point of debate in Atlanta media.

The core complication with the committee’s explanations for the Detroit riot was that many of the rioters had lived within Detroit for at least five years prior, as revealed by University of Michigan sociologist C.F. Ramsay, who argued that southern migration played “almost no factor” in the resultant violence. Ramsay published these findings in newspapers across the nation, that summer, including the *Atlanta Constitution*.⁶³³ Unfortunately, his arguments did not gain traction in undermining the conclusions of the committee, and the national narrative continued to use the South as a scapegoat for racial violence. It would not be until almost fifty years later that historians Dominic J. Capeci Jr and Martha Wilkerson concretely proved that the Detroit race riot was actually the product of white attacks on black homes. Capeci and Wilkerson argue that during the first six hours police arrested twice as many white rioters as they did black, and that the black rioters that were arrested were not primarily black youth but much more often “married, in their mid-twenties, employed as laborers, and arrested for felonies in their own communities.” These black residents were longstanding citizens of /Detroit, who had homes to

⁶³⁰ J.A. Rogers, “Rogers says,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, July 3, 1943, 7.

⁶³¹ “News Commentators Decry Detroit Riots,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, July 3, 1943, 5.

⁶³² “News Commentators Decry Detroit Riots,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, July 3, 1943, 5.

⁶³³ “Detroit Riot Inquiry Discounts Migration,” *New York Times*, June 27, 1943, 13.

protect. Meanwhile, it was white rioters who were often “younger, more often single, and more likely unemployed than blacks” and who went into black neighborhoods to cause the violence.⁶³⁴

Despite this emerging national narrative, Atlanta newspapers saw the committee’s explanation for the attack as destructive to the economic and social reputation of the South, and journalists like Ralph McGill and the editorial staff of the *Atlanta Constitution* began attacking their conclusions. Ralph McGill argued that the summer’s race riots were evidence not of a specifically southern but a “national sickness” which forces them to “lose tempers or perspectives” about what is most important. For McGill, the war overseas was far more important than the housing and economic complications face in the nation’s urban centers. McGill claimed that the most disturbing part of these events was that Detroit’s had failed in recognizing its own internal problems. He noted that the Michigan governor’s decision to blame southerners for their problems with racism meant that they were ignoring their own “overcrowded cities, overcrowded working areas, overcrowded transportation lines, lack of housing, lack of recreation, etc.” Ralph McGill not only made these claims in his editorials but also sent a telegram directly to Detroit’s Mayor and Police Commissioner which was distributed through the Associated Press for national publication. In the letter, McGill argued that the committee’s blaming of the “influx of southerners” was a dangerous path, and that they needed to recognize that “the race problem [was] a national problem and not a sectional problem.”⁶³⁵ In Atlanta, rumors began to spread that the city would undergo another race riot, and the newspaper published an editorial calling those rumors “absolutely false!” They noted that these rumors were

⁶³⁴ Dominic J. Capeci Jr. and Martha Wilkerson, “The Detroit Rioters of 1943: A Reinterpretation,” *Michigan Historical Review*, 16:1 (Spring 1990): 60-70.

⁶³⁵ Ralph McGill, “One Word More,” *Atlanta Constitution*, June 22, 1943, 4.

the work of “the enemy” and that “otherwise patriotic, well-meaning persons had unthinkingly aided the enemy by spreading” them.⁶³⁶

More facets of Atlanta’s citizenry began pushing for the hiring of black officers, including a group of women from the Atlanta Council of Church Women who petitioned Atlanta’s City Council. *The Atlanta Constitution* finally covered the events, breaking its silence on the issue.⁶³⁷ This early coverage was still anemic, however, appearing only on the seventh page of the newspaper with less than seventy words devoted to the story. For the larger white community, the issue regarding black police officers seemingly came out of nowhere. The City Council tabled the measure for another day, assuming to some degree that the issue might vanish from public discourse.⁶³⁸

In 1944, the issue was resurrected as the Southern Regional Council issued its “seven main points” to helping bridge economic and educational support for black southerners. The *Atlanta Constitution* argued that the report was something that “every southerner interested in the future of the South and its bi-racial problem” should consider. They argued that the proposals were not radical in nature, but instead aimed at reinforcing the social tenets of segregation by ensuring that “Negro policemen and firemen” who would only “work only in Negro areas and patrol only Negro districts.”⁶³⁹ The *Atlanta Daily World* followed up this coverage, illustrating in much more detail just how meaningful the hiring of black police officers would be for the city. One journalist for the *Atlanta Daily World*, Spike Washington, argued that policing “blackouts” had forced black Atlantans into dangerous situations, because its black communities were “not adequately policed.” He argued that “negro policemen in these blacked out Negro districts”

⁶³⁶ “Race Riot Rumors Absolutely False!,” *Atlanta Constitution*, June 27, 1943, 1.

⁶³⁷ “Negro police, to Patrol Negro Sections, Asked,” *Atlanta Constitution*, October 22, 1943, 7.

⁶³⁸ “Hornsby Bungled Heinz Case, Butler Complains to Council,” *Atlanta Constitution*, November 2, 1943, 5.

⁶³⁹ “Regional Council Recommendations,” *Atlanta Constitution*, December 13, 1944, 10.

would ultimately “help greatly in protecting our womanhood.”⁶⁴⁰ The *Daily World* also used its front pages as a platform for amplifying the impact of hiring black officers in other cities. They interviewed a black officer from Memphis, Tennessee, discussing how much good black officers were doing for that city. They republished an article from the *Columbia Record*, a South Carolina evening newspaper, which argued for the hiring of black officers.⁶⁴¹ They even amplified key interracial civil rights organizations’ arguments like the crime analysis by the Committee on Interracial Cooperation, where the newspaper’s general manager C.A. Scott was an integral figure.⁶⁴² The *Daily World* also republished the Southern Regional Council’s resolutions which argued for the “growing practice” of employing black police and firemen in southern cities.⁶⁴³ They praised Greensboro, North Carolina for hiring black officers in March of 1945.⁶⁴⁴

As Atlanta’s white urban elites debated the issue, World War II ended, and veterans began coming home with the intention of changing Atlanta’s perspective on race. While the *Atlanta Daily World* did not actively participate in the *Pittsburgh Courier*’s “Double V” campaign for equal treatment for black veterans, because as civil rights historian Thomas Aiello notes “it was a competitor’s promotion,” Atlanta’s black community did support the spirit of the campaign.⁶⁴⁵ On December 4, 1945, the United Negro Veterans issued a call in the *Atlanta Daily World* for “all Negro veterans” to meet at the YMCA in order to discuss information regarding “upgrading in jobs” and discussing “vital post-war questions.”⁶⁴⁶ The United Negro Veterans

⁶⁴⁰ “Blackout Assault Leads to Conclusion that Negro Police Are Needed Here,” *Atlanta Daily World*, December 14, 1943, 1.

⁶⁴¹ “Carolina Paper Urges Use of Race Officers,” *Atlanta Daily World*, February 10, 1944, 1.

⁶⁴² “Interracial Group Discusses Negro Police for City,” *Atlanta Daily World*, November 3, 1943, 1.

⁶⁴³ “Council Moves to Prepare South for Nation’s Returning Soldiers,” *Atlanta Daily World*, December 8, 1944, 1.

⁶⁴⁴ “Greensboro Adds Two Negro Police,” *Atlanta Daily World*, March 10, 1945, 8.

⁶⁴⁵ Thomas Aiello, *The Grapevine of the Black South* (Athens: University of Georgia, 2018), 109.

⁶⁴⁶ “United Negro Veterans Rally and Membership Campaign,” *Atlanta Daily World*, December 5, 1945, 2.

described themselves as a “wide-awake and progressive organization” that “all problems confronting the returned veteran must be met and solved through the application of the principles of a people’s democracy.”⁶⁴⁷ The organization was integral in helping veterans reintegrate into society, helping them circumvent the growing housing shortage, as many white Atlantans protested the expansion of black neighborhoods. However, the United Negro Veterans’ campaign complicated the ongoing push for black police officers because as A.T. Walden, Atlanta’s local NAACP leader, tried converting the momentum of the newly voting black public into concessions from the mayor, the United Negro Veterans were challenging the city’s new moderate racial image by engaging in very public protests.⁶⁴⁸

At the February 18 City Council meeting, seven United Negro Veterans filed into the chamber with protest signs, demanding that Atlanta hire black police officers to serve its black neighborhoods. The United Negro Veterans had tried to push for change peacefully, submitting a formal petition to Mayor Hartsfield and demanding that the city comply, but Hartsfield had not followed through. Within that petition, they promised that their organization would be at the City Council meeting to ensure the issue was broached.⁶⁴⁹ Armed with signs promoting the hiring of black police officers, the protest was peaceful, but insistent. The veterans group argued that providing black police officers for their neighborhoods would “be a ‘happy combination of wisdom and justice.’” The white City Council members refused to make a ruling and argued that this was a police committee issue, so they forwarded the request to the chief of police who would convene by February 28.⁶⁵⁰ The group promised that if progress were not made, they would organize a protest march. Right before the meeting, the NAACP issued an announcement that the

⁶⁴⁷ “Veterans Set for Meet Tonight at 8,” *Atlanta Daily World*, December 5, 1945, 3.

⁶⁴⁸ Tomiko Brown-Nagin, *Courage to Dissent*, 38-39.

⁶⁴⁹ “Group Seeks Negroes on Police Force,” *Atlanta Constitution*, February 10, 1946, A10.

⁶⁵⁰ “Council Seeks Home Rule in Conducting City Affairs,” *Atlanta Constitution*, February 19, 1946, 6.

Atlanta branch did not support the United Negro Veterans issue, and that the Atlanta NAACP chapter found the United Negro Veterans' arguments to be destructive to the incrementalist racial change they were pushing within the city.⁶⁵¹ At the February 28 meeting, no decision was made about the hiring of black officers. Instead, Mayor Hartsfield ordered the police to crack down on "vagrants who refuse[d] to accept jobs," starting with those individuals "loitering in Negro sections of the city."⁶⁵² The goal of the mayor and other white urban elites was clear: they wanted to stall the hiring of black officers as long as possible.

The stalling tactic worked to some degree because it gave Atlanta's newspapers enough time to frame the issue for their public. As McGill would write, showing a "white moderate" stance on the issue, the hiring of black officers would not threaten segregation because black officers would "work only in Negro districts and they [would] arrest only Negro law violators."⁶⁵³ Over the next few years, Atlanta's white newspapers slowly began to support the idea of black officers serving black neighborhoods, but a public protest in the streets would deeply undermine the city's moderate racial image. It took McGill until 1947 before he agreed that the hiring of black officers was "no longer a real question about their desirability."⁶⁵⁴ When the United Negro Veterans began circulating flyers around Atlanta's black neighborhoods calling for a march on City Hall, even the *Atlanta Daily World* showed an incrementalist stance on the issue, attacking the march as "undoing good work." For Atlanta's white newspapers, this was perfect, because it meant white newspapers could criticize the march by simply republishing the *Atlanta Daily World's* critiques. C.A. Scott, who was *World's* general manager and a longtime proponent of the hiring of black officers within the NAACP, argued that his newspaper would

⁶⁵¹ "NAACP Not Behind Demonstration by Veterans' Group," *Atlanta Daily World*, February 28, 1946, 1.

⁶⁵² "Vagrants Face Work or Jail," *Atlanta Constitution*, March 1, 1946, 16.

⁶⁵³ Ralph McGill, "Cool Facts for a Hot Summer," *Atlanta Constitution*, April 9, 1946, 8.

⁶⁵⁴ Ralph McGill, "Concluding with Copenhagen," *Atlanta Constitution*, September 7, 1947, D2.

not advertise anything to do with the march.⁶⁵⁵ The local NAACP, utilizing editorial space within the *Daily World* the day before the march, argued that while they supported the veterans and their desires, they did not like the tactics being used and openly disliked the march's organizer, activist Dr. E.G. Bodie. The writer argued that this "ill-guided body" was taking actions that would ultimately harm Atlanta's black community, using the *Daily World's* editorial column to openly attack the "crack-pot plan to 'March on city hall.'" The writer argued that the local NAACP, along with "other responsible civic organizations and individuals" were working behind the scenes to produce much more pragmatic change within the city, whereas "the fly-by-night, wildcat leadership" of the United Negro Veterans was destructive to the relationships that the NAACP and the newspaper had cultivated over the years.⁶⁵⁶ Instead of advertising the march, the *Daily World* made prominent key advertisements of other veterans' agencies within the city that they supported instead. The *World* also reported that the paper was not alone in its condemnation of the march, but joined by 120 different black businesses that represented 95 different industries.⁶⁵⁷

The march itself was ultimately peaceful, beginning at the Ebenezer Baptist Church on Auburn Avenue and ending at the Atlanta City Hall. Reports vary as to how many protestors showed up to the march, with the *Atlanta Daily World* claiming the marches had less than 100 participants and the *Atlanta Constitution* claiming between 150 and 200 participants. The march included members from two organizations, the United Negro Veterans and the Woman's Auxiliary Group. The crowd assembled in front of City Hall at two o'clock under a large banner proclaiming that "105,000 Negro residents of Atlanta believe they are entitled to representation

⁶⁵⁵ "Veterans Plan Is Scheduled for Tomorrow," *Atlanta Constitution*, March 3, 1946, B6.

⁶⁵⁶ "Undoing Good Work," *Atlanta Daily World*, March 3, 1946, 6.

⁶⁵⁷ "Groups Not behind Monday 'Police March,'" *Atlanta Daily World*, March 3, 1946, 1.

on the police force.” The protestors formed a line and marched around the block, chanting. At the end of the march, its leaders gave speeches, and then the protest dispersed. There was no official action taken by the all-white City Council, because they argued the police committee had yet to respond to their request for black officers.⁶⁵⁸ The rhetorical effect of the march was to unite Atlanta’s newspapers against on-the-street protests.

The United Negro Veterans march was given no support by the city’s newspapers, and Atlanta’s black community was largely resistant to the march happening at all. Before and after, Atlanta’s white and black newspapers were openly hostile to the protest. The *Atlanta Constitution* treated the march as nothing special, granting it three small paragraphs buried at the end of the news story section, while its editors offered no response.⁶⁵⁹ The only editorial comment they referenced was the *Atlanta Daily World*’s opinions, which were devastatingly negative. The *World* called the march a “cheap publicity” stunt aimed at garnering its leaders “personal glory.” They argued that the speeches given by the march’s leaders were “incoherent” and “lacked both sound logic and forceful appeal.” The *World* summarized that the speakers did more harm than good for the hiring of black police. The *World* noted that the “handful of whites who happened to be present at the march went away unimpressed and unconvinced as to the moral righteousness inherent in such a cause.”⁶⁶⁰ The *World* also noted that many black audience members were confused by the speakers’ inability to articulate their arguments. For instance, the *World* critiqued the speakers’ failure to reference the “32 other southern cities” who had success in hiring black police officers or Atlanta’s unique judicial racial bias that had helped foster such high criminal statistics for the black community within the city. The *World* concluded that the

⁶⁵⁸ “United Veterans in March on City Hall,” *Atlanta Daily World*, March 5, 1946, 1.

⁶⁵⁹ “Negro Police Sought in City Hall March,” *Atlanta Constitution*, March 5, 1946, 5.

⁶⁶⁰ “And So They Marched,” *Atlanta Daily World*, March 8, 1946, 6.

worst thing about the march was that it was simply not persuasive, so it ultimately did more harm than good.

With the massive amount of negative publicity leading up to the march, the demonstration may have been doomed to fail regardless of how strong the speakers' arguments were. Without the support of the press, the United Negro Veterans faced diminishing support from the public and ultimately failed in their objectives. The local chapter of the NAACP was uninterested in such a challenge, because they assumed that such a path would scare away white liberals. Instead, the Atlanta NAACP used the march as a tool to negotiate with Hartsfield about the value of keeping such public protests silent. Eventually, Atlanta's white and black media began advocating for the hiring of black police officers, and in 1948, Mayor Hartsfield and police chief Herbert Jenkins swore in eight black police officers, seven of whom were veterans from World War II. These new officers operated only within the black neighborhoods, and they were unable to exercise police power over whites. They were not even provided space within Atlanta's white police department but forced instead to operate out of the basement of the Butler Street YMCA.⁶⁶¹ However, Hartsfield knew that he would need the support of black voters the following year, when the first mayoral election after Georgia abolished the white primary would be held.

While the United Negro Veterans' march did not lead directly to the hiring of black police officers, it did result in white and black newspapers unifying together to create a cohesive vision on race for the city. That cohesive vision laid a plan for incrementalist racial change within the city, but at a much slower pace than more radical black activists wanted. The white newspapers' new moderate perspective on race afforded them much more common ground with

⁶⁶¹ Tomiko Brown-Nagin, *Courage to Dissent*, 37.

the *Atlanta Daily World* than simply promoting the hiring black police officers. Now they finally found editorial space to actively push for federal intervention on lynching. On May 21, 1947, the *Atlanta Constitution* openly condemned the acquittal by a jury of twenty-eight white men charged with the lynching of African American Greenville, South Carolina resident Willie Earle. The *Constitution* joined with the *Atlanta Daily World* in calling for federal intervention in the trial, arguing that “it seems to us an awful and humiliating confession for a people of any state to make—that a federal law is needed to bring about enforcement of State laws.”⁶⁶² Similarly, they also found common ground on critiquing northern viewpoints of race. When in September of 1948 the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* reporter Ray Sprigle published a series of articles discussing the conditions of the southern black community, both the *Atlanta Constitution* and the *Atlanta Daily World* joined together in denouncing the publication as failing to truly represent southern black interests. The *Constitution* argued that “Sprigle [fell] into the habit in depending upon generalizations, half-truths, hearsay and innuendo ”that although his article series had certainly garnered him many accolades “in other sections for his ‘courage’ in disguising himself as a Negro,” it was only a “good stunt” that would solve nothing for the southern black community.⁶⁶³ The *Daily World* argued that the article series did not uncover anything that “all Americans, certainly white and colored southerners, did not already know.” What Sprigle’s article did best, the *World* argued, was give “flesh and substance to the cause of Dixiecrats... to set back the cause of mutual advancement between the races.” The *World* concluded its argument by noting that Sprigle’s article series was a waste of time, and that its findings had been spoken about by black commenters for decades.⁶⁶⁴ The result of these shifts afforded both

⁶⁶² “Toward a Federal Lynch Law,” *Atlanta Constitution*, May 23, 1947, 10.

⁶⁶³ “Mr. Sprigle’s Expose,” *Atlanta Constitution*, August 23, 1948, 8.

⁶⁶⁴ “No Help to Our Cause,” *Atlanta World*, August 31, 1948, 6.

white and black newspapers in Atlanta a more unified message on race, one that proposed incremental progress toward political and economic equality for black southerners. However, complications began to arise as the newspapers disagreed on just what social equality meant. One of those complications arose within Atlanta's housing market, which made Atlanta's newspapers an easy target for white supremacists.

Denouncing White Supremacist Demonstrations in Atlanta

Just as William Hartsfield struggled with the growth of radical politics within Atlanta's black communities, Atlanta also experienced a new kind of white supremacist organization, built on Nazi rhetoric. As veterans returned from World War II, Atlanta had difficulty balancing the demand for housing with the widespread desire among whites to maintain segregated neighborhoods. At this stage, there was no set political infrastructure for maintaining segregated neighborhoods. As Bayor argues, the city would begin to use its growing highway system to create natural segregated enclaves, but none of this was in place in 1945. Instead, Atlanta's segregated neighborhoods were largely the product of the city's real estate boards and social purchasing practices rather than legislative policies. As rumors of progressive real estate agents began spreading, Hartsfield took to the city's newspapers to make the deeply "white moderate" announcement that the "housing problem" affected "both white and Negro sections" of the city, and that his administration had "no authority under the law to enact or enforce segregation." Instead of looking to the city, Hartsfield argued that the media should publicly expose "any agents" who were "selling properties in white neighborhoods to Negroes" so that it might hurt their profitability.⁶⁶⁵ In the end, this solution was not attractive enough to white Atlantans who could not afford to move out of Atlanta's inner city. Instead, white and black neighborhoods

⁶⁶⁵ "Mayor Blames Agents for Negro Intrusion," *Atlanta Constitution*, March 31, 1946, D8.

found themselves in conflict in neighborhoods where integration was starting to happen naturally.⁶⁶⁶

As previously mentioned, on August 17, 1946, Emory Burke founded a new white supremacist organization called the Columbians by rallying together Atlanta's working-class white families who were financially unable to vacate Atlanta's inner city. Despite Hartsfield's call to publicly expose real estate agents integrating white neighborhoods, local white supremacists saw Hartsfield's inaction as a betrayal. As the Columbians were a deeply white supremacist organization with a Klan-like framework, they were a threat to Atlanta's moderate racial image, that was making national headlines at a time when Atlanta's newspapers were also struggling with the march on City Hall.⁶⁶⁷ By December, however, Atlanta's newspapers had successfully reframed the city's struggle with the Columbians into a narrative touting Atlanta's moderate identity. Mayor Hartsfield took aggressive stances against the Columbians to promote his unique relationship as a white moderate southern mayor, and the editors of the newspapers found themselves praised by northern progressive publications for their dogged crusade in shutting the organization down. Within Atlanta, however, white and black newspapers found themselves targets of violence by the Columbians as their organization began to get dismantled.

The Columbians had been operating out of warehouses throughout the city, as historian Kevin Kruse argues, playing advertisements and music to attract crowds, giving their white audiences a show that illustrated to "the white Anglo-Saxons how to take control of the Government." Inside their office, they had a "library of Nazi histories and a Confederate battle flag," which they used to promote the very same white supremacist arguments the Klan had used. However, they did not go so far as to openly embrace the Klan, because of the Klan's

⁶⁶⁶ Kevin Kruse, *White Flight*, 49.

⁶⁶⁷ "Columbians Cloud Atlanta's Skies with an Aura of Nazism," *Washington Post*, December 1, 1946, M1.

unpopularity with the city's urban elites. By founding the Columbians as an organization aimed at attaining "voting solidarity among all white citizens who were adherents of the true American spirit," Burke could argue that the Atlanta's newspapers were lying when they attributed Klan ideals to the organization's founders.⁶⁶⁸ But the Columbians relied on Klan favorability with their audiences, and they openly praised the Klan, calling them "a group with members of sterling characters and a history and tradition that is beautiful."⁶⁶⁹ The Columbians followed in the footsteps of other white supremacist organizations aimed at limiting the political power of black southern communities.⁶⁷⁰ Burke and the Columbians "repudiated" what they saw as "the un-American idea of the melting pot."⁶⁷¹ A key part of their popularity was based on their tactic of labeling specific neighborhoods as "zoned as a white community" with a lightning bolt symbol blazoned across.⁶⁷² These signs came to represent white supremacist ideals to the black community as much as Klan regalia. The Columbians not only talked favorably of the Nazi party, promoting the rebuilding of the Nazi Reich within America, but also argued that Atlanta's newspapers were the enemy of the people.

By late August, Emory Burke was gathering three hundred people to his racist speeches. And within those speeches, he was attempting to turn the public's ire toward Atlanta's newspapers. In his speeches, Burke argued that Atlanta's newspapers played a larger role in importing northern ideals into the South that threatened the ideals of southern uniformity. He argued that the Atlanta newspaper industry "was part of the opposing forces, the forces that want to ruin the South." He argued that both the *Atlanta Constitution's* editor Ralph McGill, and the

⁶⁶⁸ "Columbians Incorporate for Vote Unity," *Atlanta Constitution*, August 18, 1946, A2.

⁶⁶⁹ "Preserve 'White South,' Columbian Leader Shouts," *Atlanta Constitution*, August 27, 1946, 9.

⁶⁷⁰ Kevin Kruse, *White Flight*, 44.

⁶⁷¹ "Columbians Incorporate for Vote Unity," *Atlanta Constitution*, August 27, 1946, 9.

⁶⁷² Kevin Kruse, *White Flight*, 47.

Atlanta Journal's editor Wright Bryan were writing "on racial matters which should be left to 'the constituted authorities.'"⁶⁷³ His attacks on Atlanta newspapers challenged their impartiality. For its part, while the *Atlanta Constitution* was steadily navigating the issue of hiring black police officers, they were actively censoring Burke's more white supremacist arguments by refusing to report the violence as racially motivated.

In many ways, the *Atlanta's Constitution*'s early coverage of the Columbians was a return to old "white moderate" policies, in that they did not mention racial hate at all as a motive behind the violence. It took a letter from a reader, M.K. Echols, to bring up the issue, and his criticism was the newspapers needed to do a better job. Echols argued that he read about violent beating of a young black man in the streets, and another person whose house was "shot into," but as they "watched" the newspaper's editorials section, the *Constitution* had produced "nothing" about these stories. Echols noted that if white Atlantans did not wake up and recognize this violence and speak out against it, then this "sudden turmoil" would grow to a point that the city would regret not too "far down the road."⁶⁷⁴ By October 18, 163 unnamed residents of the Western Heights neighborhood had signed a response letter not only questioning whether Echols was a real resident of Western Heights, but also outright denying his argument that the neighborhood had any turmoil given that it was "not a potential Negro community and never [would] be for [they] intend[ed] to keep it white." They admitted to being a "thoroughly organized" neighborhood that had been mobilized to stop "the advance of the Negro into" it. By late October, however, the area's violence started to garner traditional coverage in articles within Atlanta's newspapers.

⁶⁷³ "Preserve 'White South,' Columbian Leader Shouts," *Atlanta Constitution*, August 27, 1946, 9.

⁶⁷⁴ M.K. Echols, "Outrage," *Atlanta Constitution*, October 3, 1946, 10.

On October 24, 1946, police detectives H.C. Newton and J.A. Preston attended a Columbian meeting investigating the growth in violent racial rhetoric. After the meeting, a group of Columbians began to congregate, aiming to find and attack a black man whom they argued was responsible for attacking a white woman earlier, but the two detectives were successful in shutting the group down. After the detectives investigated the case, they learned that “the woman in question was locked up on a drunk charge and no such act had been committed.” The detectives attended another Columbians meeting, wherein the group agreed to not only “zone” neighborhoods to only have whites within, but also agreed to physically remove blacks from those neighborhoods. The Columbians also openly criticized the police department and the Atlanta newspapers as representing “moneyed interests.” After the second meeting, the Columbians began marching around neighborhoods in uniform, attacking black citizens. On Monday October 28, 1946, James Ralph Childers and three other white men wearing Columbian insignia attacked African American Clifford Hines as he was walking home after visiting his mother.⁶⁷⁵ The mob stole his money, cigarettes, and radio, leaving him on the ground. In the end, the police arrested both James Ralph Childers and Clifford Hines for disorderly conduct. Both the *Constitution* and the *Daily World* called for an investigation, and Police Chief Hornsby agreed to “fix [the] ‘Columbian’ role” in the escalating violence.⁶⁷⁶ This pressure resulted in Mayor William Hartsfield ordering a probe of the organization, demanding that the Columbian organization be formally investigated.⁶⁷⁷

It was only after a bomb was detonated outside Goldsmith Sibley’s house on Ashby Street, “shaking the porch and breaking the glass” but injuring no one, that Atlanta’s newspapers

⁶⁷⁵ “Two Held by Police,” *Atlanta Constitution*, October 29, 1946, 17.

⁶⁷⁶ Keeler McCartney, “Beating Probe Ordered to Fix ‘Columbian’ Role,” *Atlanta Constitution*, October 30, 1946, 1.

⁶⁷⁷ “Mayor Orders Columbians, Probe Here,” *Atlanta Constitution*, October 31, 1946, 1.

began to seriously cover the growing violence.⁶⁷⁸ They demanded that the city police shut this organization down before they hurt someone. Many of the same incidents that the *Atlanta Daily World* had long ago linked to the Columbians, the *Atlanta Constitution* only now started linking to the organization. Both Ralph McGill and Ralph T. Jones wrote editorials in the middle of November detailing a full-scale attack on the organization and its white supremacist motives. McGill focused his editorial on the organization and its leaders, while Jones discussed the more abstract issues of hate that seemed to be resurfacing within the city. Ralph McGill's article again employed a narrative approach, where he actively detailed the sordid criminal records of the organization's leaders. He reported that Homer Loomis had been married twice and had abandoned both wives and children to move South to work with the Columbians. McGill even alluded to the sexual impropriety in Loomis' relationship, arguing that his first wife immediately requested an annulment after their first night in bed. McGill argued that James Coursey was wanted by Carroll County for "criminal assault... of a 19-year old girl." He noted that Coursey left his wife after "beating her good and soundly" around the same time as he was leading the Columbians. The heart of McGill's argument, however, was not in embarrassing Loomis and Coursey, but instead arguing that the organization was founded on the very same violent and racist foundation as the Ku Klux Klan. He argued that the organization was a scam, intended to "secure three dollars" in exchange for stoking anger.⁶⁷⁹ In response, the Columbians sent two of its members, Lanier Wall and Ralph Childers, to the newspaper's offices in order "to talk with McGill about the things he had been printing." Burke later admitted that the goal was to intimidate McGill.⁶⁸⁰ In many ways, Atlanta's newspapers had declared war on white

⁶⁷⁸ "Police Intensify Probe of Columbians," *Atlanta Daily World*, November 1, 1946, 1.

⁶⁷⁹ Ralph McGill, "Rapists and Wife deserters," *Atlanta Constitution*, November 10, 1946, B12.

⁶⁸⁰ Keeler McCartney, "Tear Gas Bomb Routs Columbians in Midst of Tirade against Editor," *Atlanta Constitution*, November 15, 1946, 1.

supremacy, yet again. Harnessing the power of the editorial column, Atlanta's newspapers began using their political clout to shut down the Columbians. and the city responded.

On November 15, Emory C. Burke's latest rally was cut short by a tear gas canister being lobbed into the warehouse from the street by unreported actors. Atlanta's newspapers snapped photographs of the Columbian membership as they streamed out of the building with tears running down their cheeks. The attack was increasingly timed, with Burke was right in the middle of an attack on Atlanta's newspaper industry, arguing that they published "pure lies" about the organization, and that Burke recently sent Wall and Childers to the *Atlanta Constitution* to threaten physical harm to a Ralph McGill who "trembled and shook."⁶⁸¹ On November 16, the leaders faced indictments for "inciting to riot," with Loomis and Burke being brought in for "racial disturbances" within the city. The organization found its reputation shifting within the public's eye, as many of its members were indicted for violence, others were physically attacked in the streets, and some were attacked in their homes. In many ways, the organization was officially dismantled on December 14, 1946, when the three Columbian leaders were indicted for orchestrating plans to bomb "the Atlanta Police station, the buildings of the *Atlanta Constitution* and the Atlanta Journal," and William Hartsfield's most recent pride and joy, the "city Auditorium."⁶⁸² Emory Burke was ultimately sentenced to three years, and Loomis was given two years on a chain gang and six months in prison.⁶⁸³

Conclusion

The struggle against the Columbians brought to light just how wrong the Atlanta newspaper industry's conclusion that white supremacist ideology was only a "rural problem" in

⁶⁸¹ Keeler McCartney, "Tear Gas Routs Columbians in midst of Tirade against Editor," *Atlanta Constitution*, November 15, 1946, 1.

⁶⁸² "Three Columbians indicted," *Atlanta Constitution*, December 14, 1946, 1.

⁶⁸³ Kevin Kruse, *White Flight*, 49.

the region. And yet, the editorial policies that Clark Howell and Ralph McGill had put into place helped protect the city's national reputation from any damage the organization could manifest. In fact, the struggle between the Atlanta's newspapers industry and the Columbians would be framed within national publications as a distinct marker of how racially moderate the city was. In late November, William B. Hartsfield argued that he "stands for equality before the law" was met with resounding praise by the *Baltimore Sun*. Hartsfield noted that his "administration [saw] no difference in lawlessness and the inflicting of physical violence upon innocent persons or the destruction of property, no matter under what banner it [was] done." The *Baltimore Sun* responded that this was a broad statement, that could be applied to a number of different cases and they hoped to see results. Hartsfield was thanked by the Attorney General of the United States for "the alacrity with which official Atlanta moved" to challenge the Columbians.⁶⁸⁴ The *Christian Science Monitor* praised Atlanta's acceptance of tolerance and praised Hartsfield for shutting down the white supremacist organization so quickly.⁶⁸⁵

Integral to this national discourse was a discussion about how important Atlanta's white newspapers were to the organization's decline. The *Washington Post* wrote in early November that the *Constitution's* coverage was so strong and fast that it afforded the "progressive forces in Atlanta" to "suppress this lawlessness" in record time.⁶⁸⁶ Edward T. Folliard argued that the period of silence, which Atlanta's newspapers called the "hush-hush policy," was integral because it refused to give "them free advertising." However, Folliard praised the papers for recognizing the threat early enough that they could call politician's attentions to the kind of destructive behavior that the organization posed the city. Now, however, they admitted that they

⁶⁸⁴ "A Georgia Mayor Who Stands for Equality before the Law," *Sun*, November 25, 1946, 12.

⁶⁸⁵ "Embattled Tolerance," *Christian Science Monitor*, November 9, 1946, 4.

⁶⁸⁶ "Acting Against Hate," *Washington Post*, November 11, 1946, 4.

were “terribly embarrassed by the Munich atmosphere brought to [Atlanta] by the Columbians.” He argued that in early November, the Atlanta newspapers changed their approach, and began “crusading against” the Columbians with the support of “virtually all civic and patriotic organizations.” Folliard noted that it was a fascinating mobilization of public support against a hate organization the demonstrated just how different Atlanta was from other southern cities.⁶⁸⁷ He also worked with Ralph McGill, whom he praised for seeing the organization as a failure of the community. McGill wrote that “their audiences are almost entirely good, plain persons of little or no education, of little working skills, in a very low-income group.”⁶⁸⁸ In all of these articles though, Atlanta came out, by the standards of that period, as a progressive icon of the South.

But this censorship that was so integral to the dismantling of the Columbians’ organization was also the same editorial policy that undermined the hiring of the black police officers within the city. Their editorial policy of ignoring the United Negro Veterans organization and their demands in the early stages meant that when they began agitating publicly, Atlanta’s white residents were ill-prepared to grapple with this new reality. It was only when white newspapers embraced the hiring of black police officers that the issue made some political progress, which was illustrative of larger shift within the city’s political infrastructure that Tomiko Brown-Nagin attributes to Walden’s behind-the-scenes push. And yet, this struggle also garnered substantive national public attention. Right after the United Negro Veterans and the Women’s Auxiliary Group marched on Atlanta’s city hall, the *Chicago Defender* published an article from the Associated Negro Press that black officers were being asked to canvass

⁶⁸⁷ “Columbians Cloud Atlanta’s Skies with an Aura of Nazism,” *Washington Post*, December 1, 1946, M1.

⁶⁸⁸ “Columbians like Hitler Play Up to ‘Little People,’” *Washington Post*, December 3, 1946, 1.

Atlanta's black districts.⁶⁸⁹ In 1947, the *Pittsburgh Courier* wrote that "the drive for negro policemen [had gained] momentum" as "negro and white leaders pushed" to "fight for the hiring of Negro police."⁶⁹⁰ 1948, the nation's black newspapers praised the city for finally making changes in the "right direction." Integral to these reports was the idea that the city stood out particularly among other Georgian cities who had still refused to hire black police officers. The *Birmingham News* praised Atlanta for finally falling "into step with 50 other southern cities in employing Negro police."⁶⁹¹ Benjamin E. Mays of the *Pittsburgh Courier* argued that while it was a only a "half loaf step... there are times when a half loaf is better than no loaf at all."⁶⁹² John Leflore at the *Chicago Defender* wrote an extensive article detailing how "anti-negro elements" tried to stop the hiring of black officers, but he praised that the city's judicial system for upholding the new policy.⁶⁹³

Both events, the hiring of black police officers and the dismantling of the Columbians ultimately became iconic examples of Atlanta's growing racially progressive image, although scholars like Tomiko Brown-Nagin would call these changes incrementalist. However, this period also stands out as the moment when the city's newspapers fully demonstrated their power to frame the city as racially moderate. This new message brought together white and black newspapers on race to support the city's larger national economic interests. Atlanta's newspaper industry in many ways became the voice of the city on race, telling its more vocally racist white citizens that their public outrages were embarrassing the city. Similarly, Atlanta's newspapers were also telling Atlanta's black citizens that the city would not reward public protests with

⁶⁸⁹ "Negro Police for Atlanta," *Chicago Defender*, March 23, 1946, 8.

⁶⁹⁰ "Handwriting on Wall Shows More Race Police in Dixie," *Pittsburgh Courier*, August 2, 1947, 12.

⁶⁹¹ "Atlanta's Negro Police," *Birmingham News*, December 26, 1947, 1.

⁶⁹² Benjamin E. Mays, "It Did Happen," *Pittsburgh Courier*, January 10, 1948, 6.

⁶⁹³ John Leflore, "Court Okays Atlanta Hiring Negro Police," *Chicago Defender*, February 7, 1948, 2.

political change. The result of this larger struggle was an editorial policy of mitigation that pushed racism into the shadows, and thus ensured a new form of institutional racism that was hidden by the city's racially moderate national reputation.

CONCLUSION—“LIGHTHOUSE OF RACIAL TOLERANCE?”

Between 1920 and 1960, Atlanta's newspapers were the primary arbiters of the city's racial image. In many ways, Atlanta's newspapers were fighting a battle for Atlanta's racial reputation, and their enemy took the form of what they saw as extremist positions on racial change. Their tools of war were their editorial columns and reporting. Using their ability to silence the news events that the editors felt were dangerous to the city's racial image, they also actively used their editorial platforms as influencers to try and compel change within their readership. And yet again, Atlanta's newspapers were constrained to not only the interests of their readers, but also the larger advertising infrastructure that operated within the city's downtown business district. As Atlanta's newspaper owners and editors navigated the social circles of the city's business elites, they became integral participants in shaping the more nationally appealing image. Over time, Atlanta's urban image reflected the changing nature of what a “white moderate” was within Atlanta's larger socioeconomic contexts. In the early 1920s, Clark Howell framed the “white moderate” around the paternalist embrace of black communities, along with the overt promotion of white heritage projects. By the 1940s, Ralph McGill nuanced the image of the “white moderate” perspective to include an overt rejection of the Ku Klux Klan, along with the open acceptance of token integration. These shifts were economic decisions made to help better their own newspaper's competitive nature within the city, and in this process the *Atlanta Constitution* helped lead the way to the rise of Atlanta's “white moderate.” These were changes grounded within the changing values of their changing readerships, which had direct effects on each newspaper's fluctuating subscription count. As Atlanta's newspapers were profit-driven enterprises which relied heavily on large readerships to

support their journalism through subscriptions and advertisements, they were consistently trying to balance urban business interests against white supremacist readership demands. The most difficult task facing Atlanta editors may actually have been trying to pinpoint which vision of race was most appealing to their audiences at each point, so that they could reflect that racial image while serving the larger public interest. Complicating this process was of course the racial bias of Atlanta's white and black newspapers, which pushed each community to seek news from their own media outlets.

Before and during the 1920s, Atlanta's white newspapers continued to report on major racial issues in a way that would appeal to white supremacist readers. White heritage projects like the Stone Mountain Confederate Memorial united Atlanta's major white newspapers editors to promote Atlanta as a symbol of the Lost Cause. In their blind fervor to support the Memorial, white newspaper editors turned a blind eye to the festering influence of the revived Ku Klux Klan on the project, making a choice to place the city's economic interests ahead of the public interest. This was not the first time this would happen, and it would not be the last. For many decades after his death, *Atlanta Constitution* editor Henry Grady's New South marketing campaign influenced white local newspaper editors to promote white heritage projects and frame the city's image in the most positive light at whatever cost. The results of their journalistic oversight would ultimately include the squandering of hundreds of thousands of dollars on the Stone Mountain Confederate Memorial Project and the national embarrassment of the city, although the propaganda surrounding the project had a long-lasting effect on southern white pride in Confederate heritage and support for the Lost Cause. Having finally been completed in the 1970s, the Stone Mountain Confederate Memorial still stands as a testament to southern

white heritage, which Jeanine Jones, the public relations manager for the Stone Mountain Park, says draws in four million visitors annually.⁶⁹⁴

At the same time as the southern white fervor and national controversy over the Stone Mountain Confederate Memorial was occurring, *Atlanta Constitution* editor Clark Howell was becoming increasingly concerned about the black community's impression that the region was an unsafe place for black southerners. With the black migration out of the South during the early 1920s, Howell began to implement a new version of Grady's New South editorial policy that recast Atlanta not as the home of white supremacy but instead as a "white moderate" city that was friendly to both black and white communities. To this end, he regularly attacked the act of lynching and allowed Atlanta's Urban League the space to publish a regular Jim Crow column promoting black accomplishments and cultural events in the back pages of his newspaper, taking the first step toward incrementalist racial change. If too many black citizens fled to northern and western states, Howell believed, Atlanta's economy would falter and then fail. And yet the *Constitution* continued to support white supremacist political policies. Howell came out staunchly against federal anti-lynching laws and devoted extensive editorial space to shutting down that legislation wherever possible. In this way, Howell was able to maintain loyalty to his white readers, all the while giving some concessions to the black community. Atlanta would be seen as a safer place and so that the *Constitution* would appeal to black readers. The fact that this column was introduced at the same time as the paper was promoting the Stone Mountain Confederate Memorial project on its front pages projected a confused vision on race for the paper during this period, reflecting the newspaper's economic need to appeal to white and black audiences with conflicting values.

⁶⁹⁴ "Stone Mountain: The Ugly Past – and Fraught Future – of the Biggest Confederate Monument," *Washington Post*, September 19, 2017.

The next time Atlanta's white newspaper editors were given the opportunity to influence the city's growing national reputation on race was the publication and notoriety of *Gone with the Wind*. Both the book and the film were financially successful despite their racism and historical inaccuracy, and yet the publicity succeeded at largely mitigating the political embarrassment that hounded many of the other white heritage projects that preceded them. For Atlanta's newspapers, the book and film provided a new opportunity to reshape the city's image around white southern heritage, which obscured city and region's white supremacy. Heralding the book's national and international appeal, Atlanta's newspapers hammered away at northern publication's criticisms that it failed to factually represent the Civil War. By 1939, Atlanta was known nationwide as the home of *Gone with the Wind*, and it proudly served as host to the film's premiere and the city also reshaped its physical spaces to reflect the imagined landscapes presented within the work of fiction. This time, the fervor surrounding the book and film made the distinction between white heritage and white supremacy clearer. When white supremacist organizations threatened to capitalize off *Gone with the Wind*'s popularity, Atlanta's newspapers refused to give them publication space for fear of spreading their propaganda. When they did cover the Klan's support of the novel, they did so with ridicule and open admissions of embarrassment. This shift from actively obscuring Klan behavior to openly ridiculing it foreshadows the shifting perspectives white southerners had on race during World War II, when white newspaper editors would weaponize the rhetoric of anti-Nazi sentiment against the Ku Klux Klan and denounce what local newspaper editors saw as extremist perspectives on racial change in both the black and white communities.

All of this evidence illustrates a longer vision of Atlanta media's struggle to cover racial issues than has been recognized previously, locating the rhetorical battleground in the print of

Atlanta's white and black newspapers, where editors and journalists worked to serve the public interest despite—and sometimes even because of—social and economic pressures. The first steps of the war occurred when Jesse O. Thomas, the field secretary of the Atlanta Urban League, proposed running a Weekly Bulletin in the *Constitution* in 1921, and Clark Howell made it a regular installation in the back pages of the newspaper, nearly forty years before the challenge to racially biased narratives on television that has been widely recognized. Its first soldiers were black leaders like Jesse O. Thomas and the unsigned editorial writers at the *Atlanta Independent* and *Atlanta Daily World*, who served the cause of black equality long before more widely recognized civil rights advocates in the media in of later years. White editors and journalists like Clark Howell and Ralph McGill fought alongside them, but more as representatives of their own “white moderate” community than as representatives of the rhetorical war for black equality. Howell and McGill's editorial policies redirected the radical fight for black equality into token integration and incrementalist change, along with shaping white supremacy ideologies into white heritage projects, which were much more attractive to white national economic interests. In fact, the greatest effect of their editorial policies was to confront the growing extremism within their own race. They had much more success in curbing the excesses of the Ku Klux Klan and the Columbians than they did in promoting black equality within Atlanta or even the region.

The Rural–Urban Construct and Media Consolidation

Despite Atlanta newspapers' attacks on the Klan during the 1940s, the dominant ideology behind race within Georgia still heavily promoted white supremacist ideologies. During the 1946 gubernatorial election, Atlanta's newspapers unified to back James V. Carmichael, who was a racial moderate and then-current governor Ellis Arnall's handpicked successor. The 1946 election was iconic because it showed just how infected Georgia's politics were with white

supremacist ideology. Opposed to Carmichael was the overt white supremacist Eugene Talmadge, running for governor yet again. Ralph McGill again tried to play the election as a struggle between modern urban progress against conservative rural regression, but voters did not find the argument persuasive.⁶⁹⁵ Instead, Talmadge's arguments about the Atlanta media industry's overreach and the Arnall's loss of white political privileges was instrumental in Talmadge's defeat of Carmichael. The loss was devastating, because it demonstrated to some degree the limitations of Atlanta's media industry's influence on the state's political arena. McGill faced significant pressure to try and reframe his opinion of Talmadge, but McGill made it clear that Talmadge did not represent Atlanta's interests. After the election, Talmadge became deathly ill with psoriasis of the liver. When death seemed imminent, McGill reframed his criticisms into praise of the governor-elect's ability to represent his constituency enough to win three gubernatorial elections.⁶⁹⁶ For McGill, it was important that any stance he made on the subject had to maintain the independent image of Atlanta's urban identity. Talmadge's death resulted in what historians call "the three governors' controversy," which stood as a political debate over who should represent the governor-elect's place within office. During the brief window between Talmadge's death and the inauguration, three parties claimed the governor title: Ellis Arnall, the previous governor; Melvin E. Thompson, the lieutenant governor-elect; and Herman Talmadge, Eugene Talmadge's son.

Atlanta's newspapers viewed the three governors' controversy as a trap, because the election seemed deeply divided. With three major political figures vying for the position of governor, Atlanta's newspapers struggled to offer an opinion as to who should fill the role. Clark

⁶⁹⁵ Ralph McGill, "A Very Poor Quality of Mud," *Atlanta Constitution*, June 22, 1946, 4.

⁶⁹⁶ Ralph McGill, "Talmadge Is Critically Ill: Turn for Worse Is Unexpected," *Atlanta Constitution*, December 20, 1946, 1.

Howell Jr. wanted the *Atlanta Constitution* to avoid the issue entirely, but Ralph McGill, still devastated by Carmichael's loss, wanted to use his platform to influence the controversy's outcome. Immediately following Talmadge's death, Ralph McGill wrote an extensive editorial cataloguing Talmadge's career, and he was much more kind than he had ever been in assessing it.⁶⁹⁷ Embedded within the analysis, however, was an appeal to stick with the laws on the books rather than backroom politics to resolve the controversy.⁶⁹⁸ Of course, this fit McGill's vision, because the laws seemed to emphasize Melvin E. Thompson or Ellis Arnall as the most likely candidates. McGill saw Talmadge's son as the worst of the three candidates, given his pledge to reinstate the white primary system. The controversy turned toxic. In signed editorials, Ralph McGill argued that the lieutenant governor should succeed Arnall, because that was his legal role, but the *Constitution's* unsigned editorials stayed out of it. McGill lamented that the controversy was dividing the state, and he warned readers that "politics [was] a struggle for power" that only laws could circumvent.⁶⁹⁹ Immediately after McGill's editorial, James Cox wrote to his son that he feared Clark Howell, Jr., the general manager and president of the *Constitution*, would fire Ralph McGill. He argued that Clark Howell Jr. was "a coward" and that he must be "scared to death of adverse reaction to the policy of his paper in recent weeks." Cox noted that Howell must be "blaming it all on McGill."⁷⁰⁰ Cox liked McGill so much, he had tried to bring him on to the *Atlanta Journal's* staff, but McGill never took his offer.

As Cox and McGill struggled to influence the outcome of the controversy, the political infighting within the state capitol reached a fevered pitch. While Atlanta's white newspapers

⁶⁹⁷ Ralph McGill, "Talmadge's Career Colorful, Stormy Crowned by Success," *Atlanta Constitution*, December 22, 1946, A1.

⁶⁹⁸ "Pulse of the Public," *Atlanta Constitution*, December 30, 1946, 6.

⁶⁹⁹ Ralph McGill, "Politics is a Struggle for Power," *Atlanta Constitution*, January 5, 1947, C14.

⁷⁰⁰ "Letter from James Cox to James M. Cox Jr," March 21, 1947, Box 32, Folder 32, MS-2, James M. Cox Papers, Special Collections and Archives, University Libraries, Wright State University.

wanted their readers to believe that Talmadge won due to his rural supporters, Herman Talmadge argued that his father's win was Georgia's universal demand to reinstate the white primary system. Talmadge argued that he most reliably represented his father's interests to those voters, and that he should be named his father's successor. Historian Charles Bullock describes Herman Talmadge's argument as the result of a series of "strange transactions involving writing-in votes and a previously unused 120-year-old portion of the state constitution," and sure enough Talmadge was confirmed by the state House as the state's governor. The controversy would ultimately go before the Supreme Court, and they ruled that Herman Talmadge could not hold the office without being elected by the state's voters, and that Georgia's state Constitution clearly "required former Gov. Ellis Arnall to serve" at least until the Lieutenant Governor Thompson could be sworn in to take on the powers as acting governor.⁷⁰¹ While this ruling solved the struggle for the governorship, it also reinforced Ralph McGill's narrative that there was a rural-based political cabal pushing to undermine the laws of the state.

This narrative was reflected by other media outlets as well. On September 29, 1948, the first southern television station, WSB-TV, made its inaugural broadcast. The station launched as part of Atlanta Newspapers, Inc., James M. Cox Jr.'s media conglomerate. This new multimedia corporation would have print, radio, and televisual news stations consistently promoting a unified message that all originated from Atlanta. As might be expected, all of Atlanta's white newspapers heavily promoted the launch of the television station, running numerous articles praising the new medium as a historic cultural phenomenon. Staring out at the new television audience for the inaugural broadcast were Governor Melvin E. Thompson, Atlanta Mayor William B. Hartsfield, James M. Cox Jr., and WSB news director J. Leonard Reinsch. As

⁷⁰¹ "We Live by Law," *Atlanta Constitution*, March 20, 1947, 1.

newspapers spread through Georgia's rural counties, so too did news of television in rural newspapers. Yet, as media historian Patrick Novotny argues, much of this initial television production did very little in changing how Georgians received their news, who largely received their information from newspapers and radio.⁷⁰² In many ways, television was not as innovative as the newspapers established, given that much of the staff for the television station came from positions within both the newspaper and radio stations already existing within Cox's media industry. Many of them served at WSB's radio station as well, and Leonard Reinsch oversaw the news operations for both radio and television, and as expected these voices promoted the urban-rural construct as well.

The urban-rural construct seemed integral to this new media landscape's discourse. Atlanta's newspapers had developed a key infrastructure built on pitting rural and urban interests against each other, and they did this with the eye toward the future, which they believed would endorse more modern impressions of race. This became even more clear during the next gubernatorial election on November 17, 1948, when Melvin E. Thompson defended his position as governor against Herman Talmadge, who embraced the same rhetoric as his father. This time, Atlanta's newspapers avoided endorsing either candidate. The economics were not viable, particularly for the *Atlanta Constitution* whose readership had begun flagging. By February 3, 1949, George C. Biggers wrote to James M. Cox with the circulation reports on the *Atlanta Journal* and the *Atlanta Constitution* side by side to help him consider just how much the *Atlanta Constitution's* rates had declined. The *Constitution's* circulation rates which were 197,850 in 1948 dropped to 186,425 by 1949. In comparison, the *Atlanta Journal's* daily circulation rates were not only higher at 253,025 in 1948, but it had only dropped to 252,556 in 1949. During the

⁷⁰² Patrick Novotny, "The Impact of Television on Georgia: 1948-1952," *Georgia Quarterly* 91, no. 3 (Fall 2007): 325.

same period, the *Journal*'s Sunday edition gained 1,261 subscribers and the *Constitution*'s Sunday Edition lost 8,350 subscribers.⁷⁰³ The *Atlanta Journal* also led the *Constitution* in amount of content produced. Biggers reported that they exceeded the *Constitution* by "5,000 inches" during the paper's 1947's retail daily, and by 1948 that lead was "17,760 inches." And in terms of general daily editions, the *Constitution* was behind by "4,400 inches" during the same year.⁷⁰⁴ Ultimately, the *Constitution*'s stability within the Atlanta newspaper industry was questionable, and James Cox was determined to buy it. Hermann Talmadge was a viably popular candidate, leading Talmadge to win the election. When justifying the Atlanta newspaper industry's lack of opposition to Talmadge, McGill argued that "the prospects for Georgia offered by the opposition to Talmadge were worse than those probable under Talmadge. Thousands of Georgians refused to vote either way." But even in refusing to oppose Talmadge, McGill, and the Atlanta newspapers industry as a whole, defined their value as independent from what they argued was the dominant voice of rural politics.

Although the *Constitution*'s subscription rates were flagging, Atlanta's white newspapers' shift to adopt the "white moderate" stance on racial issues was indicative of a larger shift across the South. In fact, several southern cities were doing better than Atlanta, by devoting an entire page to coverage of black community events. The Southern Regional Council's 1949 publication entitled *Race in the News* challenged the way southern newspapers talked about race. The council argued that "coverage of racial news by southern newspapers" had seen a "marked improvement" since the 1930s, when the report argued that "most newspapers ignored the Negro, except for his crimes." The report argued that few southern journalists conceived of race

⁷⁰³ George C. Biggers File, Box 9, Folder 23, MS-2, James M. Cox Papers, Special Collections and Archives, University Libraries, Wright State University.

⁷⁰⁴ "Telegram to Cox Sr," March 19, 1948, Box 32, Folder 32, MS-2, James M. Cox Papers, Special Collections and Archives, University Libraries, Wright State University.

in line with the new “national consciousness” that promoted more progressive black equality. The report argued that white newspapers now paid attention to “spectacular achievements of individual Negroes like Ralph Bunche and Alice Coachman,” but that “no newspaper could ignore them and still pretend to be a newspaper.” However, the report also concluded that there was still a great deal of room for improvement. They noted that now newspapers had “failed to give their readers the truth,” but “more often through omission than commission.” The report argued that, while white editors would not issue the “kind of inflammatory writing” heard from some politicians, they argued that most still “segregate the news of the two races.” Additionally, many white southern newspapers, like Atlanta’s white newspapers, had still only included the bare minimum of articles necessary in covering the black community, and the Council argued that they needed to fix that approach. The report demanded that black citizens be referred to with the customary “Mr.,’ ‘Miss,’ or ‘Mrs.” And they asked to not refer to the race of citizen in the headlines of crime stories involving black southerners.⁷⁰⁵ The pamphlet was extensive, and in many ways it validated Ralph McGill’s “white moderate” approach to covering racial issues.

In 1950, Cox purchased the *Atlanta Constitution*, adding it to his media conglomerate. For the first time, both of Atlanta’s largest white newspapers were put under the management of a single administration. Atlanta Newspapers, Inc. oversaw all business aspects of the Cox media enterprises within the city, including television and radio. Even though the newspapers remained independent, they found themselves unified in supporting anti-white supremacist narratives. Cox was content in allowing the *Constitution* and the *Journal* to keep releasing their own individual daily newspapers, with the *Constitution* releasing morning editions and the *Journal* releasing evening editions. However, Cox did merge both of newspaper’s Sunday editions, making for the

⁷⁰⁵ Southern Regional Council, Inc. *Race in the News: Usage in Southern Newspapers* (Atlanta, Southern Regional Council, Inc, 1949).

one massive Sunday edition release called the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*. This merged edition challenged readers' understandings of how the newspapers functioned, with many readers feeling that the newspapers were "all one paper," even though they had separate offices and different editions.⁷⁰⁶

One of the most important changes Cox put through in the *Atlanta Constitution* came on May 15, 1950, when Ralph McGill's editorial column was brought up to the front page. From this point forward, Ralph McGill became the voice of the *Atlanta Constitution*. This positioning of his column was held not only in the daily edition, but also the Sunday edition. In his first column, McGill praised the *Atlanta Constitution*'s protection of his "editorial freedom." He talked about how his "head has been bloody before" from writing controversial editorials, and he would use this new platform to keep fighting against "the bigotries, prejudices, and evil" of the South. By January 9, 1951, James M. Cox wrote to Ralph McGill, saying "the *Constitution* grows better... That doesn't mean that it was bad at any time, but it is a great deal more of a pleasure to read these days... you and all your boys are to be congratulated on the great improvement."⁷⁰⁷ By rebranding the *Atlanta Constitution* around Ralph McGill, northerner Cox ensured that the newspaper would embrace its new moderate perspective on race for many years to come.

The media industry's contrast of a rural-urban social divide was rooted more in their interests in portraying Atlanta as separate space from the larger racist ideologies of the South, then it was a real reflection of social progress within the city's politics. In the 1940s and 1950s, Atlanta's economic growth was significant. Its airport, which was anemic in 1940, became

⁷⁰⁶ Millard B. Grimes, *The Last Linotype: The Story of Georgia and Its Newspapers Since World War II* (Macon: Mercer University, 1985), 81.

⁷⁰⁷ Letter to Ralph McGill from James M. Cox, Jr., Box 29, Folder 24, MS-2, James M. Cox Papers, Special Collections and Archives, University Libraries, Wright State University.

swamped with passengers by the mid-1950s. *TIME Magazine* journalists called it “one of the busiest airports in the nation for domestic air traffic.” In 1955 alone, “246,709 aircraft movements” went through the airport.⁷⁰⁸ In 1958, the white Atlanta Chamber of Commerce reported that “36 new manufacturing plants” were established in the city during that 12-month period, with “83-out-of-town companies” establishing “sales or service offices, or distribution warehouses,” and “national firms” having relocated 141 different offices to the city.⁷⁰⁹ Atlanta newspapers experienced similar growth within their subscriber numbers. In 1953, they advertised “home coverage in Georgia’s 174 towns of 1000 or more population, radiating all the way to its southeastern coastlines.”⁷¹⁰ With this growth in subscriptions, Ralph McGill’s reputation also grew in the region, and by proxy Atlanta’s image as a racially moderate city, until it would become known by the end of the 1950s as Hartsfield’s “lighthouse of racial and religious tolerance in the [S]outh.” The idea of Atlanta as a modern economic metropolis became an integral part of the city media’s publicity campaign, and a racially moderate image was an integral part of that message.

Condemning the Klan and Racial Intolerance in the 1950s

In 1950, Ralph McGill declared that “the South today has a feeling it is out of the woods... its infections, like the Ku Klux Klan, and the demagoguery of some of its politicians [remain], but even these plagues are not as virulent as they used to be.” He argued that “the talk today is not so much of the two lynchings last year, but of the more than 20 that were prevented by forthright action of local law-enforcement officers.” He wrote that “as for the Klan, it is an

⁷⁰⁸ Robert W. Kelly, “Ticket Counters at Atlanta Airport,” *The LIFE Picture Collection*, Getty Images, Available online: <https://www.gettyimages.com/detail/news-photo/elevated-view-of-airline-pasengers-waiting-around-the-news-photo/532491293>.

⁷⁰⁹ Extension Committee of Atlanta Chamber of Commerce, “Industrial Bureau Reports 1,707 New Jobs with \$6,835,000 New Payroll for 1958 Here,” *City Builder Magazine*, December 1958, 2, Kenan Research Center, Atlanta History Center.

⁷¹⁰ “Advertisement,” *Editor & Publisher* 86, no. 11 (1953): 47.

almost impotent organization, unfeared save in the few remote rural regions where population is sparse and frustration and poverty worse. Even in such areas, the Klan is growing less resolute.”⁷¹¹ With this and other editorials, Ralph McGill became a bridge between Atlanta’s white and black communities. The *Atlanta Daily World* called Ralph McGill “our well known and oft quoted editor,” even if he never wrote a word in their publication.⁷¹²

McGill’s image of editorial freedom came at a cost, however, and he knew it. Atlanta Newspapers, Inc. was unified, with its president George C. Biggers hired by James Cox to preside over all the corporation’s media outlets. This meant that Biggers oversaw many of the media corporation’s racially moderate editors, including Ralph McGill of the *Atlanta Constitution*, William Jennings Bryan at the *Atlanta Journal*, Elmo Ellis at WSB-Radio, and Ray Moore at WSB-TV. In many ways, Biggers played an integral role in shaping editorial decisions. In the early 1950s, Ralph McGill confided in Jack Tarver, the general manager of both newspapers, that Biggers wanted him to curb his editorials. Biggers argued that McGill “was too liberal, and it was bad for the paper’s image in the community.” Tarver argued that McGill and Biggers “never understood each other” which inherently forced Tarver to operate as a “kind of an intermediary.” Tarver noted that McGill once wrote a two-page memo planning out a trip and asked for Biggers’ opinion on it, and when he got the memo back with “Whatever you wish, GCB” scrawled on the bottom, McGill turned to Tarver asking what it meant. McGill even threatened to support Dwight D. Eisenhower in the 1952 presidential election, which forced both Cox and Biggers to contact Tarver over the subject. Tarver argues that it almost pushed McGill to quit the paper.⁷¹³

⁷¹¹ Ralph McGill, “Reconstruction Has Just Begun,” *Atlanta Constitution*, March 21, 1950, 10.

⁷¹² “It Has Come to This,” *Atlanta Daily World*, August 13, 1952, 6.

⁷¹³ Millard B. Grimes, *The Last Linotype: The Story of Georgia and Its Newspapers Since World War II* (Macon: Mercer University, 1985), 82, 86.

Ralph McGill's political stances came to represent the larger corporate image of Cox's multimedia industry. McGill stopped referring to the Klan as an ever-present threat, but instead referred to the South's former struggle with the Klan's influence in the city. This shift helped create the illusion that Klan influence was gone. By 1956, the Klan was used to illustrate the struggles Atlanta had with white supremacy in the past, and the fact that this struggle was over an iconic part of the city's moderate racial image. When Senator John F. Kennedy first made headlines at the 1956 Democratic Convention, Ralph McGill noted that he wouldn't be the first Catholic to achieve the presidential ticket, given that Al Smith was nominated in 1928, and faced the "iniquitous Ku Klux Klan" who had been "viciously anti-Catholic and exercised considerable political influence through fear and intimidation."⁷¹⁴ He wrote that the major critics of the FBI included "communists [and] Fascists (the Ku Klux Klan is among the organizations which have fought and sought to discredit the FBI)."⁷¹⁵ McGill, like Howell before him, underestimated the pervasive influence of white supremacy within the South.

Like many southerners, Ralph McGill was shocked by displays of anger and hate during the massive resistance campaigns across the nation in September of 1957. In both Little Rock, Arkansas and Nashville, Tennessee, white protests broke out in opposition to planned integration of white school districts. McGill wrote that this new form of mob violence should not become "the face of the South," but noted that the images of the "demonstrators" evoked "pity and compassion" as they were just "pawns of agitators and ignorance."⁷¹⁶ He argued that few southerners outside of Atlanta were really coming to grips with the costs of these kinds of demonstrations. He argued that the South had "raised a total of more than \$37,000,000" to attract

⁷¹⁴ Ralph McGill, "Kennedy for Vice President," *Atlanta Constitution*, August 1956, 1.

⁷¹⁵ Ralph McGill, "J. Edgar Hoover: The 'FBI Story'" *Atlanta Constitution*, December 15, 1956, 1.

⁷¹⁶ Ralph McGill, "The Face of the South," *Atlanta Constitution*, September 12, 1957, 1.

investment, and these kinds of outbursts would force corporations to ask if they should “invest in a new plant” in a state where “acute racial tensions and the possibility of violence” were a possibility. He noted that these “citizens councils or Klans” were just new problems that stymied the region’s growth. They presented the South as a “chaotic picture” where investment was questionable.⁷¹⁷

After Ralph McGill’s editorials on Little Rock, his national popularity skyrocketed. CBS asked him to give comments on the topic, and McGill’s editorials sparked visceral responses from his readers, with many critical of his stances. An anonymous reader from Birmingham wrote him a three-page typed letter arguing that the federal courts had undermined the safety of the region, laced with threats of violence spliced with biblical quotes.⁷¹⁸ An Atlanta reader wrote to the paper, “Why is it that you have a syndicated writer who is biased and prejudiced against the South?”⁷¹⁹ Elizabeth Truehard from Los Angeles, California wrote to him that his assumption about the “indisposableness of public schools” was questionable, noting that the public could dismiss the idea of public schools in the South and still retain the notion of educating our children.⁷²⁰ Mrs. D. Moore of Atlanta argued that she believed the South was “gradually leading up to a racial war.” She noted that her family and friends thought integration was being “stirred up” by “people coming in Georgia and other southern states from northern states.”⁷²¹ The letters were extensive, and many of them reminded McGill that if he did not like living in the South, he was welcome to leave it. It was within this context that Ralph McGill finally understood just how

⁷¹⁷ Ralph McGill, “The Cost of Little Rock,” *Atlanta Constitution*, September 29, 1957, 1.

⁷¹⁸ “Race Rows Blamed on Minorities,” September 1957, Folder 1, Box 24, Ralph McGill Papers, Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University.

⁷¹⁹ “Atlanta Letter,” September 1957, Folder 1, Box 24, Ralph McGill Papers, Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University.

⁷²⁰ “A Third Facet of the School Problem,” September 1957, Folder 1, Box 24, Ralph McGill Papers, Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University.

⁷²¹ “Segregation,” September 27, 1957, Folder 1, Box 24, Ralph McGill Papers, Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University.

extensive the influence of the Klan was within his city. Any illusions he may have had about the Klan being a rural phenomenon must have been dismissed after he received all of this feedback.

In December 1957, George C. Biggers, who had consistently pushed back on Ralph McGill's more liberal stances, announced his retirement. In his place, Jack Tarver, who had always been more appreciative of McGill's stances, became president of the paper. Now McGill had a supportive newspaper president and national acclaim to bolster his platform. When violence erupted against the Hebrew Benevolent Congregation temple on Peach Street on October 12, 1958 and fifty sticks of dynamite exploded the building's front edifice, McGill finally had the ability and authority to critique the events. After the bombing, Ralph McGill wrote his Pulitzer Prize winning editorial called "A Church., A School..." wherein he contradicted the mayor's statement that Atlanta was a "lighthouse of racial tolerance," asking his readers the sobering question of what kind of society attacked such innocent places. He argued that the attack was "a harvest... a crop of things sown." He noted that demagoguery in southern politics was the cause of this kind of violence. He noted that for "too many years now we have seen the Confederate flag and the emotions of the great war become the property of men not fit to tie the shoes of those who fought for it." He argued that out of all the things that the South had become a symbol of, now it was a "symbol of the hate and bombings."⁷²²

Early Atlanta Television Coverage

Nevertheless, by the 1950s, Atlanta's racially moderate image was so widely known that it was garnering recognition for the city and its media outlets. In 1951, WSB radio and WSB television won a joint Peabody award for their ability to "complement each other in the public interest."⁷²³ By that time, due to the consolidation of the city's media outlets, Atlanta had a

⁷²² Ralph McGill, "A Church, A School," *Atlanta Constitution*, October 13, 1958, 1.

⁷²³ "WSB Radio, TV Given Top Award" *Atlanta Constitution*, May 2, 1952, 28.

widespread pattern of cross-media collaboration, with each media outlet building off of the content produced by others. In 1953, WSB-TV and Radio again won a joint Peabody award for aiming programming at exploring issues in education, religion and government. In each of these instances, the Atlanta Newspapers corporation became a producer of award-winning content, which spread across its varied media outlets. But as part of that information-sharing process, the corporation found itself reinforcing more moderate perspectives on racial issues, which appealed to the corporation's broader audiences across all these media platforms. This meant that Atlanta's media outlets reflected, by and large, a "white moderate" racial image for the city in a merged narrative that embraced white southern heritage but condemned the notion of loud and aggressive racial violence from both the white and black community.

This moderate image was reinforced by the fact that Atlanta's early television stations produced relatively limited local content, so what little local content there was aired between nationally syndicated content from the National Broadcasting Company (NBC). By 1955, television signed on at seven a.m. and went until midnight. Local content began between 8:26 and 8:30 in the morning, when WSB would issue a four-minute news update from their live studio. For approximately an hour after that, WSB would air "Today in Georgia," which delved into a number of key local issues. After that, all content would be generated from NBC, until 6:00 in the evening when local entertainment content like Woody Willow and the Statemen Quartette would air. At 6:50, Ray Moore would air ten more minutes of news, followed by more local and national entertainment programming until 11:03 Newsroom came on airing thirty minutes of full uninterrupted local news.⁷²⁴ Every step of the way, local television production was always squeezed into the broadcast between nationally syndicated content. This meant that

⁷²⁴ "Monday December 12, 1955 Program Log," Folder WSB-TV, Box 473, Radio Division, FCC Records, National Archives in Washington D.C.

local producers had to be cognizant of the national arguments that would air before and after their content, so it would not come off as discordant with those messages.⁷²⁵

Roy Moore described the period when he joined WSB-TV as news director as very rudimentary. This early WSB-TV newsroom program did not regularly subdivide its news into regular segments, but spent in general ten minutes on a local newscast, approximately five minutes on local weather, and about fifteen minutes devoted to national news. Even then, Moore lamented that commercials often ate up about two and a half minutes of the time spent on local newscasts. He argued that this content was very sparse and quickly produced. In many ways, he argued that local television producers relied on materials produced by local newspapers for the stories they covered. They would get “a service from the newspapers” and then often read it on air. If there were “glossy still pictures from Associated Press wire photo,” then they would “paste them up in a cardboard frame.” If the reporter was reading a story of Eisenhower, the viewer would see a picture of him. If they got pictures of something too late, then they would often run an additional news story showing the imagery later. Ray Moore recounted that once he gave a report about a Connecticut building that had collapsed with no imagery, and then when they received the imagery the next day he did a report saying “this is what it looked like yesterday,” followed by a story about how they were still searching the rubble.⁷²⁶

During this early period, Ray Moore lamented that the station broadcast “hardly any local news at all.”⁷²⁷ WSB-TV had one cameraman. Even though WSB was advertising itself as responsible for not just covering all of Atlanta but all of Georgia, staff members were spread thin

⁷²⁵ Ray Moore, interviewed by Clifford Kuhn, May 8, 1987 and June 18, 1987, Politics and the Media, Georgia government Documentation Project, Special Collections and Archives, Georgia State University Library, 16.

⁷²⁶ Ray Moore, interviewed by Clifford Kuhn, May 8, 1987 and June 18, 1987, Politics and the Media, Georgia government Documentation Project, Special Collections and Archives, Georgia State University Library, 14.

⁷²⁷ Ray Moore, interviewed by Clifford Kuhn, May 8, 1987 and June 18, 1987, Politics and the Media, Georgia government Documentation Project, Special Collections and Archives, Georgia State University Library, 16.

just reporting on the city. The major hurdle to growth was economics. Unlike newspapers, which had varied subscriber support, early television broadcasts were free to consumers with only rudimentary measurements of advertising efficacy, although, local television stations relied very heavily on advertiser funding. Most of that funding came from national sources through their syndication with NBC. Once Moore joined WSB-TV, he remembered arguing with his hiring supervisor, Mark Bartlett, about the need to hire another camera operator. Bartlett responded that WSB already had “an audience that’s bigger than the other two stations combined.” The more viewers they had, the higher the value of the advertisements that they could sell. However, if there was no more market to expand into, Bartlett saw little value in spending money on improving WSB’s service. It was already selling all of its commercial space at a high price, so he argued that even if he could sell more commercial airtime, he “wouldn’t have any place to put [it].” Bartlett threw the question back to Moore: “[U]nless you can show me some way we can gain more revenue for this or increase our audience, I just can’t go for it right now.”⁷²⁸ Moore argues that it took the expansion in audience numbers of WAGA television, the second oldest television station in Atlanta that launched six months after WSB, to push WSB to innovate. With WSB failing to cover local stories, WAGA began reporting on local news aggressively, covering local news stories and producing significant editorial content with Dale Clark and Paul Shields. At that point, Moore was able to go back to Bartlett and argue successfully that they needed to do more.

In response, Bartlett hired Joe Fain as a second camera operator, who was now able to go outside the studio and begin covering Atlanta news. This coverage was very similar to the previous in that when Moore looked at an issue, he did so from the perspective of a white

⁷²⁸ Ray Moore, interviewed by Clifford Kuhn, May 8, 1987 and June 18, 1987, Politics and the Media, Georgia government Documentation Project, Special Collections and Archives, Georgia State University Library, 19.

Atlantan who was interested in protecting Atlanta's moderate image. WSB adopted moderate perspectives on many controversial topics, trying to provide a unified message to their viewers that painted Atlanta in the most positive light possible, and this policy extended to issues of race. Much like the *Atlanta Constitution* and the *Atlanta Journal*, WSB-TV privileged white voices in presenting racial issues.

Preparing Atlanta to Accept Token Integration

Much like Clark Howell and Ralph McGill, WSB-TV became a leading voice on promoting token integration to the white moderate southerner. They did this in the same way that Atlanta's newspapers did, by framing coverage around a racially moderate image of the city, and utilizing economic arguments to create a binary system where token integration was the only rational decision for the city. In 1956, Governor Marvin Griffin broadcast across the state that "the Supreme Court had no authority to declare segregated public schools unconstitutional." He claimed that he would force Georgia's public schools to stay open and segregated, and the camera showed a captive white legislative audience focusing on every word.⁷²⁹ But in the following press conference, Griffin was forced to justify his position as part of the experience of other cities during this period.⁷³⁰ Given Griffin's importance to the issue, he became WSB's iconic representative of segregationist ideology for their viewers.⁷³¹ Griffin represented rural interests for WSB, and the station mirrored the narratives of Atlanta's newspapers that his

⁷²⁹ WSB-TV newsfilm clip of governor Marvin Griffin addressing the General Assembly on segregation and keeping public schools open, Atlanta, Georgia, 1956, WSB-TV newsfilm collection, reel 0920, 3:49/05:49, Walter J. Brown Media Archives and Peabody Awards Collection, The University of Georgia Libraries, Athens.

⁷³⁰ Governor Marvin Griffin Holds Press Conference (1956), wsbn42213, WSB Newsfilm collection, reel WSBN0920, Walter J. Brown Media Archives and Peabody Awards Collection, The University of Georgia Libraries.

⁷³¹ WSB-TV newsfilm clip of interview with Georgia Governor Marvin Griffin regarding segregation in Georgia public schools, 1955 June 1, wsbn38910, WSB Newsfilm collection, reel WSBN0154, Walter J. Brown Media Archives and Peabody Awards Collection, The University of Georgia Libraries.

decisions were indicative of rural white supremacist minorities. Ralph McGill, Roy Moore and other white media figures still maintained strong stances promoting token integration.

WSB-TV coverage became harder to categorize when Moore and others reported on segregation issues outside the state, where their concern about Atlanta's racial image was no longer relevant. During the 1957 Montgomery bus boycott, WSB television recorded protests outside of a bus station where white police seemed to be moving through a black crowd, and there are close up images of police batons as white officers gathered around crowds of black southerners.⁷³² Similarly, WSB's 1958 footage of police standing inside a diner in what appeared to be Oklahoma City showed a peaceful black sit-in, with the camera catching the smiling face of a young black child sitting atop one of the stools.⁷³³ This practice of turning viewers' attention toward public disturbances within other cities, while ignoring the growing unrest in their own followed the same patterns as the revised New South editorial policy found decades earlier within white Atlanta newspapers. Rather than interview local Atlanta citizens about their thoughts on their own city's segregation process, WSB instead aired a 1958 interview of a young black woman who proudly announced that she helped break down segregation in her own hometown and was now on her way to Little Rock to help break it down there. When the journalist asked her if she saw herself as bringing "trouble" to the region, she responded that she did not know anything about that, smiling at the camera.⁷³⁴

When Ray Moore traveled to New Orleans to cover the Ruby Bridges protests for WSB-TV in 1959, he did so not only to document the racial drama unfolding in that city but also to

⁷³² Untitled, wsbn35039, WSB Newsfilm collection, reel WSBN0776, Walter J. Brown Media Archives and Peabody Awards Collection, The University of Georgia Libraries, Athens, Ga.

⁷³³ WSB-TV newsfilm clip of African Americans protesting segregation by conducting a lunch counter sit-in, possibly in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, 1958, wsbn34026, WSB Newsfilm collection, reel WSBN0758, Walter J. Brown Media Archives and Peabody Awards Collection, The University of Georgia Libraries.

⁷³⁴ Black Girl on her Fight to Enroll in White School, WSB Newsfilm collection, reel WSBN36687, Walter J. Brown Media Archives and Peabody Awards Collection, The University of Georgia Libraries.

shape the issue of school segregation for Atlanta audiences. After Little Rock, all southern cities faced decisions about how to integrate their school systems in order to comply with the 1954 *Brown v. Topeka Kansas Board of Education* decision declaring school segregation unconstitutional. Atlanta was already engaged in a several-year process to see how it might adopt integration with as little public disturbance as possible. In response to school integration, many white southern legislators argued that they would shut down the local public school systems. Their argument was that they could control the public school system through funding, and so they felt that they should be able to control who attended those schools. Moore designed his documentary called “The Last School Bell” to dismantle this argument. The documentary aired on June 7, 1959, and it offered the very first WSB televised editorial, which concluded that “we (WSB management) are compelled to disagree with those who believe the private school system can work... in most instances, students will not get a better education in private schools.”⁷³⁵ When Moore went into New Orleans to cover its approach to integrating schools, he was operating as the eyes and ears of Atlanta. He wanted to show his viewers how not to approach integration.

Moore received immense praise for his documentary, with the *Atlanta Journal* reporting five out of six respondents approved of the television station’s editorial stances.⁷³⁶ Moore decided to return to New Orleans a year later, to record another documentary called “The School Dilemma,” which he aimed at breaking down the entire chaos of the protests that were ongoing in the Crescent City. His goal here was to force Georgia’s legislature to think about the consequences of their actions before they debated the integration process in their own session

⁷³⁵ Joan Zitzelman, “Programming in the Public Interest: a Perspective of WSB-Television, 1948-1963” (master’s thesis, University of Georgia, 1961), 67.

⁷³⁶ *Atlanta Journal*, June 8, 1959, 17, as referenced in Joan Zitzelman, “Programming in the Public Interest: a Perspective of WSB-Television, 1948-1963” (master’s thesis, University of Georgia, 1961), 67.

beginning on January of 1961. This second documentary was extensive, utilizing key coverage techniques that portrayed the chaos of the New Orleans' streets very well to their audiences. Moore edited that footage to illustrate just how destructive the protests were. He showed visceral, shouting matches of white mothers screaming at the camera with children crying in their arms. He carefully asked white protestors questions about their positions, letting them speak openly and frankly, so that the camera recorded their horrendous hate-filled rhetoric. He used long shots of city streets, which showed white mobs streaming between buildings. The footage showed white police struggling not to hurt the white protestors, gently showering them with unfocused water as the white protestors screamed angrily at police. The camera even showed the mobs bring down a business government door, as the protestors broke into City Hall with a force that can only be explained through the sheer volume of protestors. Police officers rode four wheelers and horses around the crowds, as angry white southerners waived confederate flags at the cameras and stood around burning crosses and effigies of hanging black dolls. The footage was chaotic and hate-filled, and for Atlanta it would have been a businessman's nightmare.⁷³⁷

In the end, Moore's televised editorial and the violent footage made for an exceedingly persuasive argument toward peaceful token integration of Atlanta's schools. He concluded in his report that white New Orleans had a "hatred, rich and undiluted" that could be seen in all the faces of the protestors. He argued that one mother's "mouth twisted as she saw a little six-year old negro child, a white bow in her hair, walk into William Franz School." He noted that another "sneered, "They'll hold back our kids, but they won't hold back those black apes." For Moore, the visceral image of hate was an important lesson for his audience, because it told the story of

⁷³⁷ All of this footage is broken down at length within my article: David Stephen Bennett, "The Televised Revolution: 'Progressive' Television Coverage of the 1960 New Orleans School Desegregation Crisis," *Louisiana History: The Journal of the Louisiana Historical Association* 58, no. 3 (2017): 339 – 365.

what Atlanta could face if viewers did not heed his warning. He argued that he knew Georgia's senators would not be walked on by the federal government, and that they would give as good a show as all of the other states in resistance to integration. However, he hoped they would see reason because he argued that integration will happen regardless of their protests. Moore argued that the protests, screaming and anger, was not reflected of the majority opinion. He argued that in all of that chaos, he watched as "two well-dressed negro women drove by and smiled at those who were booing," and the gesture was immediately met by "two of the white women [who] laughed and waved back." Moore concluded his documentary by arguing that it was "a crazy wonderful world." While the imagery and sounds of the screaming mobs may have been more visceral, the editorial opinions followed the very same "white moderate" message that stretched back to 1921 when Clark Howell choose to include Jesse O. Thomas' incrementalist arguments within his paper. Like Howell, Moore was framing the issue of integration on terms that white moderate audiences want, all the while censoring the activist messages that were argued by black civil rights leaders.⁷³⁸

"Too Busy to Hate"

For forty years, Atlanta's white media industry had been debating the nature of race, but always central to this discussion was a "white moderate" voice obstructing more progressive attempts at promoting racial change. The debate culminated in Ralph McGill's editorials in the *Atlanta Constitution* and Ray Moore's documentaries on WSB-TV which openly embraced a "white moderate" message for pushing token integration and other incrementalist change toward black equality. It was not that Atlanta was "too busy to hate," but that the city's media industry was too focused on promoting the city's economic interests to acknowledge the closeted and

⁷³⁸ Bennett, "The Televised Revolution: 'Progressive' Television Coverage of the 1960 New Orleans School Desegregation Crisis," 339 – 365.

institutional racist nature that their messages fostered. When the city finally integrated its schools on August 30, 1961, William Hartsfield had prepared information packets for incoming journalists to help them set up for covering the events. Those events were largely boring affairs, where little or no protests existed, which almost immediately had national newspapers praising Atlanta as the standard for common sense within the south.⁷³⁹ For McGill and Moore, this must have been a relief, because so much of their journalistic reputation had been built on promoting the city as a moderate place. They had seen how destructive the negative publicity could be for a city's economy, so they issued compelling arguments to their readership against following those paths, and their reward was the silent acceptance of the Atlanta white community of token integration, for the most part, without controversy.

This is not to say that Atlanta did not experience racial protests during the 1960s. In fact, on October 19, 1960, Martin Luther King Jr. would be arrested for participating in a sit-in at Rich's department store in Atlanta. While this was early in his popularity, WSB-TV could not ignore his participation and so gave him the spotlight to frame the protest. Speaking to WSB's television audience, King argued that the sit-in movement was trying to "change the attitude" of the people within Atlanta's community "so that the situation [could] be changed."⁷⁴⁰ By the end of the interview, King claimed that the "reasonable" nature of Atlanta's community should mean a peaceful transition toward integration. Considering the fact that he was arrested for a peaceful protest, King's statements made it clear that Atlanta's image of racial tolerance hid a much more complicated form of racial oppression, which was the beginning of institutional racism.

⁷³⁹ "'No Nonsense' Police Attitude Key to Atlanta's Peaceful Integration," *Chicago Defender*, September 6, 1961. 19; "Atlanta Integration Is Peaceful; Louisiana School Law Is Upset," *New York Times*, August 31, 1961, 1; "Integration in Atlanta Hailed," *New York Amsterdam News*, September 9, 1961, 1, etc.

⁷⁴⁰ WSB-TV newfilm clip of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. speaking about the civil rights movement after being arrested during a sit-in at Rich's Department Store, Atlanta, Georgia, October 19, 1960, WSBN37496, WSB-TV newfilm collection, reel 0826, 50:16/51:19, Walter J. Brown Media Archives and Peabody Awards Collection, The University of Georgia Libraries, Athens, Georgia.

Hartsfield demanded time to offer a rebuttal, and on October 24, 1960, William Hartsfield would defend the arrest of King, arguing “that the national... or... international impact” of these protests was to damage the city’s reputation, stating that this was especially true when “most of us would like to preserve the status quo.”⁷⁴¹ For Hartsfield, King’s protests threatened to dismantle the image of the city as racially moderate, and that was costly.

King’s imprisonment for a peaceful protest foreshadowed the city’s reaction to the protests of the 1960s, like the 1962 white roadblocks on Peyton and Harlan Roads that attempted to stop neighborhood integration, and the 1963 Toddle House sit-in protest aimed at integrating the restaurant, which would again document a local white media industry concerned about framing the protests to fit within their vision of a racially moderate Atlanta. The Toddle House protests in particular would show how much the white media’s portrayal of Atlanta clashed with the experience of Atlanta’s black community, and these protests would lead into what Tomiko Brown-Nagin describes as the “apex and nadir of the radical phase” in Atlanta’s civil rights movement.⁷⁴² During the 1960s, there were many moments during the civil rights movement when Atlanta’s moderate leadership could have lost control of the city’s racial image, but what stopped that from happening was how much power Atlanta’s white media industry had in framing coverage. By the 1960s, Atlanta’s two major white daily newspapers, dominant white radio station, and dominant white television station belonged to the Atlanta Newspapers corporation. And all of these media outlets were owned by James Middletown Cox Jr. and shared a legacy with Ralph McGill, the most popular white southern editor promoting Atlanta’s “white

⁷⁴¹ Series of WSB-TV newfilm clips of mayor William B. Hartsfield speaking to reporters about recent civil rights demonstrations and the arrest of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. in Atlanta, Georgia, October 24, 1960, wsbn43085, WSB-TV newfilm collection, reel 0962, 45:39/53:08, Walter J. Brown Media Archives and Peabody Awards Collection, The University of Georgia Libraries, Athens, Georgia.

⁷⁴² Tomiko Brown-Nagin, *Courage to Dissent: Atlanta and the Long History of the Civil Rights Movement* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press 2012), 231.

moderate” image. Beyond that, there was only one major black newspaper, the *Atlanta Daily World*, which echoed in many ways the arguments of Atlanta’s white media industry regarding local race issues, because it faced the same economic realities faced by the other media outlets. The *Daily World* needed white advertising support to supplement its subscription numbers, so it had to promote Atlanta’s business interests as much as possible. In other words, it was ultimately economics that made all of these media outlets dedicated to promoting Atlanta’s image as a racially moderate city. To do otherwise was far too financially destructive.

To this end, Atlanta’s media institutions would portray the later protests of the 1960s as highly ineffectual and also dangerous. In print, the stories of the protests were buried in the backs of their respective editions. The Sunday, December 22, 1963 edition of the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* positioned the article on the Toddle House protest at the end of the news articles, next to the funeral notices. The second article that ran on the protests came out on the Monday following the Sunday protest, appearing again at the end of the news section, right before the paper’s editorial page. Beyond the placement of articles, white newspapers sculpted coverage to highlight the controversial nature of the protests, focusing on the crimes of which the protestors were accused. Atlanta’s white newspapers also used the statements of local white political figures to give context to the protests, but they never gave voice to those who were arrested. Each of the articles held prominent quotations about the event from either the police sergeant who organized the arrests, or the State Senator hosting delegates from Kenya, who were using press coverage of their visit to criticize the South’s handling of racial issues.⁷⁴³ When more protestors were arrested, the *Atlanta Constitution* reported that all twenty-one of the protesters faced fines for breaking Georgia’s anti-trespass law without giving voice to the protestors.⁷⁴⁴

⁷⁴³ “17 SNCC Aides Arrested Here On Sit-In Count,” *Atlanta Journal and Constitution*, December 22, 1963, B12.

⁷⁴⁴ “4 More Seized in Sit-ins At Peachtree Restaurant,” *Atlanta Constitution*, December 23, 1963, 3.

Footage taken of the protest by WSB-TV was also framed with similar arguments, although the imagery showed students peacefully sitting at the lunch counter waiting to be served, and someone who looks like the manager speaking to each of the students in turn. Both inside the restaurant behind the students and milling about outside the restaurant were police officers who seemed to be waiting for the television reporters to stop filming.⁷⁴⁵ Once we understand just how much liberty Atlanta's media industry took in shaping coverage of local racial protests, it is not surprising to see that *Jet Magazine's* account of the events differed greatly from the accounts put out by Atlanta Newspaper Inc. A *Jet Magazine* article tells the story of a chaotic fight between the protestors and police that ended with police officers physically dragging the students out into the streets and loading them into the paddy wagon. To quote Richard Claxton Gregory, famous comedian and civil rights activist, "hypocritical Atlanta" was "worse than Birmingham or Mississippi" because at least in Alabama or Mississippi, members of the black community knew where they stood.⁷⁴⁶

⁷⁴⁵ "WSB-TV newsfilm clip of civil rights workers protesting segregation during a sit-in at two Toddle House restaurants in Atlanta, Georgia," December 1963, WSB-TV newsfilm collection, reel 1128, 15:46/19:59, Walter J. Brown Media Archives and Peabody Awards Collection, University of Georgia Libraries.

⁷⁴⁶ "Angry Gregory Lashes Hypocrisy of Atlanta," *Jet Magazine*, January 9, 1964, 8.

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