

## DIRECT-ACTION PROTESTS IN THE UPPER SOUTH: KENTUCKY CHAPTERS OF THE CONGRESS OF RACIAL EQUALITY

*By Gerald L. Smith*

In January 2001, Don Edwards, a white columnist for the *Lexington Herald-Leader*, wrote an article in remembrance of Martin Luther King Jr.'s birthday. Edwards recalled a demonstration he witnessed on Main Street in Richmond, Kentucky, during the early 1960s:

Half a dozen people were carrying signs that protested no counter service for blacks. The chief of police and another officer walked by and looked. The noon whistle blew. The chief said to some white college men who were watching: "We're going down the street and have lunch. If you boys want to break this up, that's fine with us." Then the police left. One of the students climbed to the top of the hotel building and rained bricks down on the marchers. No one was killed. The marchers dodged the bricks and kept on with what they were doing.

Then they left. "We were there out of curiosity," continued Edwards. "We had never seen a civil rights demonstration. It was something we thought happened only in the Deep South or in large cities."<sup>1</sup>

Edwards's memory of the civil rights years of Kentucky provides ample reason for a deeper look into the protests against racial inequal-

GERALD L. SMITH is an associate professor of history at the University of Kentucky. He is the author, editor, or coeditor of three books. He is currently writing a new general history of African Americans in Kentucky and serving as a general coeditor of the forthcoming *Kentucky African American Encyclopedia*.

<sup>1</sup> *Lexington Herald-Leader*, January 16, 2001.

ity in the Bluegrass State during the 1950s and 1960s. His memory of the incident that took shape that day provides an opportunity for a closer examination of the events which took place in Richmond and other Kentucky cities as result of direct-action protests against segregation in public accommodations.

To be sure, demonstrations in Kentucky were not as eventful as those in the Deep South. There were no bus boycotts, racial lynchings, or mass protests which captured national attention. Unlike governors in Arkansas, Mississippi, and Alabama, the leading statesmen of Kentucky did not challenge the federal government in opposition to integration. Governor A. B. Chandler ordered the Kentucky National Guard to restore order in Sturgis, Kentucky, during a school desegregation crisis in 1956; Bert Combs wrote letters to seven thousand Kentucky business managers appealing to them to integrate their establishments in the early 1960s, and Edward T. Breathitt signed a state civil rights bill in 1966, making Kentucky the first state south of the Ohio River to pass this kind of legislation.<sup>2</sup>

Local officials in some communities took precautions to minimize violent racial conflicts. F. E. Whitney recalled that the mayor of Hopkinsville “made a declaration that he wasn’t going to let any riots happen.” He insisted that store managers cooperate with abolishing segregation in the community. Audrey Grevious, president of the Lexington chapter of the NAACP, remembered being in a “fortunate” situation:

Chief [E. C.] Hale was the police chief at the time. We met with him and talked to him about what were going to do, and that we were going to try to remain as peaceful as possible. That we were not going to try to start any riots or anything, and that we wanted to see how we could work together. After we had talked for a long, long time . . . he agreed with us that they would not arrest anyone unless the owner of the

<sup>2</sup> *Kentucky's Black Heritage* (Frankfort, 1971), 106; *Louisville Courier-Journal*, January 19, 28, 1966 (hereafter *Courier-Journal*); Kentucky: 100 Years After The Emancipation Proclamation, reel 21, part 24, series B, frame 00590, Papers of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, microfilm, special collections, University of Kentucky Libraries, Lexington, Kentucky (hereafter NAACP Papers).

building took out a warrant for our arrest.

George Esters of Bowling Green recalled: “The reason why Bowling Green changed was the city fathers heard that Freedom Riders were coming to Bowling Green to sit-in. That’s when restaurants began to open up and when things began to change a little bit.”<sup>3</sup>

On the surface, it seemed that civil rights demonstrations had bypassed Kentucky. Minimal press coverage, the small size of the African American population, and the distance white Kentuckians were alleged to maintain from the Deep South states regarding racial issues, gave those persons living in Kentucky a distorted impression of what was actually taking place in the Bluegrass State. With the exception of the *Louisville Defender*, a weekly African American newspaper, Kentucky newspapers extended limited coverage to local civil rights activities. Although the *Louisville Courier-Journal* offered good coverage on school desegregation, it was selective with the news it reported on racial conditions.<sup>4</sup> In Lexington, Ralph Derrickson, a white reporter for the *Lexington Herald* during the 1960s, recalled that his publisher, Fred Wachs, believed that printing stories on demonstrations served only to “inspire” more demonstrations. In 2004, the *Lexington Herald-Leader* issued a statement that it “neglected” to cover the civil rights movement. “The people in charge of recording the first draft of history, as journalism is sometimes called, ignored sit-ins and marches or relegated them to small notices in the back pages,” according to reporters Linda B. Blackford and Linda Minch.<sup>5</sup>

Although widespread violence and levels of organized white resistance were not as pervasive in Kentucky as was the case farther south, breaking down racial barriers entailed much struggle and sacrifice. There were sit-ins, stand-ins, and starve-ins. There were picket lines, mass meetings, and economic boycotts. Outside of Louisville, civil rights demonstrations in Kentucky involved small groups of protesters willing to risk the consequences of challenging the status quo. A

<sup>3</sup> Catherine Fosl and Tracy E. K’Meyer, *Freedom on The Border: An Oral History of the Civil Rights Movement in Kentucky* (Lexington, 2009), (quote)98, (quote)107-8; *Lexington Herald*, April 4, 1972.

<sup>4</sup> Reverend W. J. Hodge interview by Charles Staiger, Louisville, Ky., December 14, 1977, university archives, University of Louisville, Louisville, Kentucky.

<sup>5</sup> *Lexington Herald-Leader*, July 4, 2004.

principal instigator for organizing these small groups of activists was the Congress of Racial Equality, better known as CORE. Founded in Chicago in 1942, CORE began as an intellectual and interracial civil rights organization. It sought to abolish segregation through nonviolent direct action. It was an outgrowth of Christian student pacifists affiliated with the Fellowship of Reconciliation (FOR).<sup>6</sup> The year CORE was founded, Bayard Rustin, a pacifist leader affiliated with FOR, boarded a bus in Louisville for Nashville to confront segregation on interstate travel. He sat in the front of the bus and refused to move when the bus driver ordered him to move to the back. When Rustin asked why he should move, the driver replied: "Because that's the law, Niggers ride in the back." Along the way to Nashville, the driver insisted Rustin move to the back at each stop. Rustin was finally arrested less than twenty miles outside Nashville.<sup>7</sup>

On August 9, 1947, CORE launched the Journey of Reconciliation in response to a recent Supreme Court decision *Morgan v. Virginia* (1946), outlawing segregated seating in interstate travel. Sixteen men, eight black and eight white, rode buses through the Upper South to ascertain which states complied with the law. The integrated group left Washington, D.C., and traveled through North Carolina, Tennessee, Kentucky, Virginia, and back to Washington, D.C.<sup>8</sup> Twelve years later, CORE established a chapter in Lexington, Kentucky, which would serve as the strongest and longest-surviving branch in the state. Other branches were established in Louisville, Frankfort, Richmond, and Covington.<sup>9</sup>

The presence and leadership of CORE in nonviolent direct action is well documented in the Deep South. August Meier and Elliott

<sup>6</sup> Aldon Morris argues that a "well-developed indigenous base" contributed to the success of the civil rights movement. Aldon D. Morris, *The Origins of the Civil Rights Movement: Black Communities Organizing for Change* (New York, 1984), xiii, 128-29, 157-58; August Meier and Elliot Rudwick, *CORE: A Study in the Civil Rights Movement, 1942-1968* (Urbana, 1975), 4, 73.

<sup>7</sup> Derek Catsam, *Freedom's Main Line: The Journey of Reconciliation and the Freedom Rides* (Lexington, 2009), 13, 24.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>9</sup> The Lexington chapter was formed February 5, 1959; see reel 20, series 5, frame 00070, Papers of the Congress of Racial Equality, microfilm, special collections, University of Kentucky Libraries, Lexington, Kentucky (hereafter CORE Papers).



Rudwick's massive volume, *CORE: A Study in the Civil Rights Movement, 1942–1968* (1973) offers an overview of the rise and decline of this important civil rights organization. On several occasions, members of the NAACP and CORE in Kentucky joined forces to confront Jim Crow practices. Yet a deeper examination of direct-action protests organized by CORE in the Upper South is still needed. This study of Kentucky CORE chapters seeks to help fill this gap in history. It explores the origin of the chapters, the role of local leaders, the protest movements they organized, and the various experiences chapters confronted while paving the road for integration. CORE chapters in small communities in Kentucky found allies in nearby college faculty and students. While racial violence and other forms of white resistance were not as common in Kentucky as that which occurred in other states, CORE had a major impact on the desegregation of public accommodations and successfully challenged employment discrimination in the state during the modern civil rights movement.

In the early 1960s, CORE, the NAACP, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) were influential civil rights forces throughout the Deep South. These states experienced voter-registration drives and violent confrontations between white resisters and activists. But Kentucky was an Upper South state. Here African Americans could vote and their population was smaller. The African American population in Louisville was able to draw upon contacts with national civil rights organizations, manufacturing plants, civic leaders, and unions to “shape the climate for the civil rights movement,”<sup>10</sup> Louisville was also fortunate to have a link to SCLC, headed by Martin Luther King Jr. thereby giving it an even greater connection with the larger struggle for civil rights.<sup>11</sup>

Since the 1960s, much has been written about the struggle for

<sup>10</sup> Tracy E. K'Meyer, *Civil Rights in the Gateway to the South: Louisville, Kentucky, 1945-1980* (Lexington, 2009), 7; George C. Wright, *The Pursuit of Equality, 1890-1980*, vol. 2 of *A History of Blacks in Kentucky*, 2 vols. (Frankfort, 1992), 90.

<sup>11</sup> According to Tracy E. K'Meyer, SCLC organizers visited Louisville. Martin Luther King Jr.'s brother, A. D. King, became pastor of Zion Baptist Church in 1965. He led the Kentucky Christian Leadership Conference; see K'Meyer, *Gateway to the South*, 117, 290.

black equality. In more recent years, scholars have published local and state studies. These works have rightly emphasized the significance of grassroots activism, religion, labor, and kinship networks. They have informed our understanding of ideological, generational, and geographical influences and differences which have shaped the African American freedom struggle. There has appeared a growing emphasis on the women who inspired and shaped the movement.<sup>12</sup> Their story is still evolving, but the leadership, courage, and sacrifices they embodied are now, as they should be, central to the civil rights narrative.

Civil rights studies have raised new questions on the origins of the movement, recognized unsung personalities, and shed light on coalitions. There has been a growing interest in the movement in Kentucky. Three important works on Louisville provide an excellent understanding of the civil rights struggle in a border city.<sup>13</sup> The

<sup>12</sup> William Chafe's 1980 landmark study of the movement in Greensboro, North Carolina, was at the forefront of community studies of the civil rights movement. Over the next twenty-five years, an increasing number of works have examined local and state histories of the black struggle. Selected works include: Chafe, *Civilities and Civil Rights: Greensboro, North Carolina, and the Black Struggle for Freedom* (Oxford, 1980); Adam Fairclough, *Race and Democracy: The Civil Rights Struggle in Louisiana, 1915-1972* (Athens, 1995); Stephen G. N. Tuck, *Beyond Atlanta: The Struggle for Racial Equality in Georgia, 1940-1980* (Athens, 2001); Charles M. Payne, *I've Got the Light of Freedom: The Organizing Tradition and the Mississippi Freedom Struggle* (Berkeley, 1995); Vicki L. Crawford, Jacqueline Anne Rouse, and Barbara Woods, *Women in the Civil Rights Movement: Trailblazers & Torchers, 1941-1965* (Bloomington, 1993); Peter J. Ling and Sharon Monteith, eds., *Gender and the Civil Rights Movement* (New Brunswick, N.J., 2004); John Dittmer, *The Struggle for Civil Rights in Mississippi* (Urbana, 1994); Tracy E. K'Meyer, *Civil Rights in the Gateway to the South: Louisville, Kentucky* (Lexington, 2009); Quintard Taylor, *The Forging of a Black Community: Seattle's Central District from 1870 through the Civil Rights Era* (Seattle, 1994); Johnny E. Williams, *African American Religion and the Civil Rights Movement in Arkansas* (Jackson, Miss., 2003)

<sup>13</sup> According to Tracy E. K'Meyer, "In the Louisville struggle, people and organizations committed to the pursuit of racial equality repeatedly and habitually forged collaborative relationships and partnerships across racial and ideological lines." See K'Meyer, *Gateway to the South*, 289. Luther Adams writes of the migrants who came to Louisville to advance the cause of racial equality. He posits that "many African Americans arrived in Louisville highly politicized and, like blacks throughout the region, brought with them a tradition of fighting for equality within the South. . . . Through a variety of strategies, civil rights activists, often led by migrants, struggled to desegregate public accommodations and secure equal access to employment." See Luther Adams, *Way Up North in Louisville: African American Migration in the Urban South, 1930-1970* (Chapel Hill, 2010), 12.

“Civil Rights Movement in Kentucky Oral History Project” of the Kentucky Historical Society, the documentary “Living The Story: The Civil Rights Movement in Kentucky,” and Catherine Fosl and Tracy E. K’Meyer’s *Freedom on The Border: An Oral History of the Civil Rights Movement in Kentucky* offer comprehensive insights into the struggle from the perspective of African American activists in small and larger communities.

For too long, the memory of the movement was shaped by white Kentuckians who proclaimed that an amiable relationship existed between the races. A 1950 article published in *The Survey* magazine reported: “As a border state, Kentucky’s allegiance to segregation was not as firmly rooted as in the Deep South. Moreover, it has a larger number of northern-born citizens. And the newspapers of the state, particularly the liberal-minded *Courier-Journal* and *Louisville Times*, have supported the Negroes’ fight for economic and education rights.”<sup>14</sup> Ten years later, the *Courier-Journal* assessed the progress of the state toward school integration and noted that Kentucky “does not have a history of racial conflict and tension to be compared with that of the states of the old Confederacy. All of this tended to ease the way for compliance in Kentucky.”<sup>15</sup> Thinking back on the civil rights movement, Andrew Eckdahl, a managing editor with the *Lexington Herald*, was unable to “recall any arrest as a result of demonstrations in Lexington.” Mark Ethridge of the *Louisville Courier-Journal* and *Louisville Times* wrote that “the Negro gets a better break in Louisville than in any southern city.”<sup>16</sup>

To be sure, Kentucky has celebrated its southern identity. It has upheld images of southern mansions, wealthy landowners, and loyal black workers. Yet, as Anne E. Marshall has written, “By the mid-twentieth century . . . Confederate identity surfaced within Kentucky only intermittently.” Following the completion of Civil War

<sup>14</sup> O. C. Dawkins, “Kentucky Outgrows Segregation,” *The Survey*, July 1950, 358-59.

<sup>15</sup> *Courier-Journal*, October 31, 1960, reel 20, series 5, frame 00313, CORE Papers.

<sup>16</sup> K’Meyer, *Gateway to the South*, 1; Andrew Eckdahl interview by Marguerite Ruttle, Lexington, Kentucky, July 6, 1978, Louie B. Nunn Center for Oral History, University of Kentucky Libraries.

monuments, and the death of soldiers, “the Lost Cause movement lost much of its potency.”<sup>17</sup> This was quite evident during the civil rights years as white Kentuckians chose to distance themselves from the South, preferring to promote their state as being more racially progressive than those in the Deep South. But in no way was the fight for integration easier and simpler in the Upper-South state of Kentucky. It was challenging, difficult, frustrating, and long, yet not as violent as Mississippi and Alabama.

Soon after the Civil War, white Southerners complained about the existence of “New Negroes” who were considered “barbaric” and not loyal like their forbearers during slavery. As a consequence, whites sought to keep blacks in “their place,” which was subservient to that of whites. According to historian Leon Litwack, “To listen to white Southerners in the late nineteenth century the New Negro, born in freedom and undisciplined by slavery was devoid of the habits of diligence, order, faithfulness, and morality that had been taught their elders; young blacks possessed neither the temperament, demeanor, nor humility of the former slaves, and they were said to be more restless, less deferential, and still worse, less fearful of whites.”<sup>18</sup> Between 1865 and 1880, Kentucky witnessed an unprecedented amount of racial violence. Historian George Wright found numerous examples of lynchings, mob rule, and legal lynchings in the early-twentieth century. In his work on Louisville, he introduced the concept of “polite racism,” which he described as “a form of oppression that extended a few concessions to Afro-Americans as long as they accepted their ‘place’ and remained at the bottom of society.”<sup>19</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Anne E. Marshall says that Kentucky was a southern state “before, during, and after the Civil War”; see Marshall, *Creating A Confederate Kentucky: The Lost Cause and Civil War Memory in a Border State* (Chapel Hill, 2010), (quotes)183. Mary Jean Wall argues that “Bluegrass horsemen joined with outsiders in assigning a Southern identity to their region early in the twentieth century, when doing so suited the nostalgic needs of white Americans generally and the economic needs of Bluegrass horsemen specifically”; see Wall, *How Kentucky Became Southern: A Tale of Outlaws, Horse Thieves, Gamblers, and Breeders* (Lexington, 2010), 5-6.

<sup>18</sup> Leon F. Litwack, *Trouble in Mind: Black Southerners in the Age of Jim Crow* (New York, 1998), 198.

<sup>19</sup> George C. Wright, *Life Behind a Veil: Blacks in Louisville, Kentucky, 1865-1930* (Baton Rouge, 1985), (quote)4, and *Racial Violence in Kentucky, 1865-1940: Lynchings, Mob Rule and*

In spite of segregation and racial violence, African Americans established their own businesses, schools, churches, newspapers, fraternal lodges, and community organizations throughout the state. The Colored Agricultural and Mechanical Association began sponsoring a fair in Lexington in 1869; the Baptist Normal and Theological Institute opened in 1880; the State Normal School (Kentucky State University) welcomed students in 1887; forty-eight lodges of the black Masons had been founded by the early 1900s; the Kentucky Association of Colored Women's Clubs was organized in 1903; and African American physicians founded the Red Cross Hospital in Louisville to treat African Americans in 1919. The establishment of African American institutions and the leaders they produced was impressive considering the harassment, limited opportunities, and legal restrictions they encountered throughout the state. And as the twentieth century progressed, so did the forms of racism and discrimination in Kentucky.<sup>20</sup>

In 1904, State Representative Carl Day of Breathitt County led the legislature to pass a law segregating private and public educational institutions. Individuals and institutions in violation of the Day Law were fined. Similar to the experiences of African Americans elsewhere, black Kentuckians were also confronted with many other challenges in everyday life. Employment opportunities remained limited to low-paying, unskilled jobs that typically required excessive physical labor. Housing was substandard and located in the worst areas of a community. Louisville passed a residential segregation ordinance on May 11, 1914.<sup>21</sup> In the coal-mining communities of eastern Kentucky, it was not uncommon for blacks to be separated into "Colored Towns."<sup>22</sup> Nancy Johnson of Baxter remembered that,

"*Legal Lynchings*" (Baton Rouge, 1980), 1, 8, 10.

<sup>20</sup> Wright, *In Pursuit of Equality*, 33, 54-55; Marion B. Lucas, *From Slavery to Segregation, 1760-1890*, vol. 1 of *A History of Blacks in Kentucky*, 2 vols. (Frankfort, 1992), 214; Gerald L. Smith, "Afro-American Culture," in *The Kentucky Encyclopedia*, ed. John E. Kleber (Lexington, 1992), 3.

<sup>21</sup> "Segregation," in *The Encyclopedia of Louisville*, ed. John E. Kleber (Lexington, 2001), 799.

<sup>22</sup> Wright, *Racial Violence in Kentucky*, 144; see also Ronald D Eller, *Miners, Millhands, and Mountaineers: Industrialization of the Appalachian South, 1880-1930* (Knoxville, 1982), 170-71. For

“In Harlan, they would have nice water fountains for the whites, and then they’d have little fountains some place else for blacks.” Mary Northington recalled that blacks in Covington had to walk across the bridge to Cincinnati to the movies. She also noted how black students interested in taking typing and shorthand had to attend night school in Cincinnati: “Holmes High School had a business program. We had domestic arts and domestic science. In our building was a furnished apartment where girls were supposed to learn how to keep house, how to be maids.”<sup>23</sup> In London, Kentucky, the London Lions Club sponsored an annual minstrel show in the 1950s. The shows served as fund-raisers and featured local white men and women and members of the London Lions Club in black face with white make-up around their eyes and mouths.<sup>24</sup>

Kentucky African Americans did not easily accept these distorted images and the place whites had reserved for them. They had a long history of challenging racial discrimination dating back to the late-nineteenth century. They fought to overcome racial inequality. In 1870, African Americans in Louisville protested segregation on streetcars. In the early 1890s, black middle-class leaders challenged state legislation authorizing separate rail cars for blacks and whites. They organized public meetings, a test case, and fund-raising efforts to combat the law. However, the U.S Supreme Court validation of separate-but-equal facilities in *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896) defeated their cause.<sup>25</sup>

By the second decade of the twentieth century, the NAACP was evolving into a leading civil rights organization with a comprehensive agenda. According to Patricia Sullivan, “The NAACP promised a militant campaign on behalf of human rights and for enforcement of the constitution whereby all men are equal before the law and at the ballot box irrespective of their condition or their color.” The work of the organization revolved around “investigation, publicity, legal aid,

the Day Law, see *Kentucky Acts* (1904), vol. 20, chap. 85, 181.

<sup>23</sup> Fosl and K’Meyer, *Freedom on the Border*, 21-22.

<sup>24</sup> Carl Keith Greene, *Images of America: Laurel County* (Charleston, 1997), 6, 46-47.

<sup>25</sup> Anne E. Marshall, “Kentucky’s Separate Coach Law and African American Response, 1892-1900,” *Register of the Kentucky Historical Society* 98 (2000): 254-57 (hereafter *Register*); Lucas, *From Slavery to Segregation*, 296-98.

and public meetings.”<sup>26</sup> Its first major civil rights victory was won in Kentucky. On November 5, 1917, in the case of *Buchanan v. Warley*, the U.S. Supreme Court declared that Louisville’s residential segregation ordinance was unconstitutional.<sup>27</sup> Morefield Story, an attorney on the case and president of the NAACP described the ruling as “the most important decision that has been made since the Dred Scott case, and happily this time it is the right way.” He believed that the victory alone “justified the existence of the NAACP, and all the effort and money that have been put into it.” A subsequent membership drive led to more than a thousand new members in Louisville. The Washington, D.C., branch was the only one to exceed Louisville in new memberships.<sup>28</sup> The large-scale membership drive encouraged the formation of branches in cities throughout Kentucky. By the 1940s, the Regional NAACP of Eastern Kentucky had been formed which included Barbourville, Benham, Lynch, Harlan, and Middlesboro.<sup>29</sup>

Nationally, the NAACP lobbied for antilynching legislation, challenged teacher-salary discrimination, and worked to abolish all-white juries. The organization also chipped away at segregation in education. In 1949, the organization won Lyman T. Johnson’s lawsuit to gain admission to the University of Kentucky graduate school. The national NAACP legal defense team successfully argued the historic 1954 case of *Brown v. Board of Education* in which the U.S. Supreme Court declared that segregation in education was unconstitutional. The following year, the court decreed that federal district courts would guide the process of school desegregation. Local school boards were not given specific timetables. Throughout the South, NAACP leaders encouraged local branches to file petitions with school boards to implement the process of school desegregation.<sup>30</sup> The NAACP filed lawsuits against school districts in Clay and Sturgis, Kentucky, as well as Fulton, Hopkins, and Scott Counties. By 1960, integration

<sup>26</sup> Patricia Sullivan, *Lift Every Voice: The NAACP and the Making of the Civil Rights Movement* (New York, 2009), 16.

<sup>27</sup> Wright, *Life Behind a Veil*, 233-35.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 231-38.

<sup>29</sup> Wright, *In Pursuit of Equality*, 152-56, 186.

<sup>30</sup> Sullivan, *Lift Every Voice*, 422-23.



had occurred in 106 of the state's 212 school districts.<sup>31</sup>

For most of the twentieth century, the NAACP was the most viable and visible civil rights organization in Kentucky and the nation. But, writes Aldon D. Morris, "the white power structure of the South" began a campaign to minimize the influence of the organization following the Brown decisions. Beginning in 1956, southern state governments accused the NAACP of being communist and required it to reveal its membership lists. With access to the names and addresses of members, white officials could institute violent and economic repression on those members involved in lawsuits against school districts. Laws and injunctions were filed against the organization to disrupt it from functioning. The NAACP became embroiled in lawsuits in Virginia, Arkansas, Tennessee, Georgia, South Carolina, and Florida as of 1957. It was outlawed in Alabama.<sup>32</sup> While the state government in Kentucky did not seek to abolish local NAACP chapters, members did experience cases of white resistance. In a September 11, 1956, letter from state NAACP president James Crumlin to NAACP executive secretary Roy Wilkins, Crumlin indicated that a suit had been filed against the Hopkins County Board of Education to integrate the schools with deliberate speed. He also noted that "crosses had been burned, individuals fired and other threats of intimidation have been received by the plaintiffs and members of the NAACP."<sup>33</sup> In August 1957, the branch in Princeton, Kentucky, was "defunct" because of threats placed on officers and members. That same month, James A. Crumlin also reported that during his meeting with the Madisonville branch they were intimidated three times. The police inquired "what we were doing," reported Crumlin, "and why so many Negroes were gathered in one place." In spite of this episode, Crumlin observed, "there seemed to be new courage

<sup>31</sup> James Crumlin to Roy Wilkins, November 30, 1956, reel 7 series A, part 27, frame 00345-00346, NAACP Papers; Commission on Human Rights, Kentucky: 100 Years after the Emancipation Proclamation, December 31, 1963, reel 21, part 24, series B, frame 00590, *ibid.*; see also *Courier-Journal*, October 31, 1960.

<sup>32</sup> Morris, *Origins of the Civil Rights Movement*, 30-31.

<sup>33</sup> James A. Crumlin to Roy Wilkins, September 11, 1956, reel 7, part 27, series A, frames 00324-25, NAACP Papers.

and new hope in this branch.”<sup>34</sup>

Before the arrival of CORE in Kentucky, the NAACP had employed direct-action protests in Louisville. For example, the NAACP Youth Council led a struggle to integrate some lunch counters in the 1950s. When the Brown Theater denied African Americans admission to the film *Porgy and Bess*, the council picketed the establishment.<sup>35</sup> Branch chapters of the NAACP and CORE would work together to erase the sting of segregation in Kentucky communities. CORE served as an avenue for whites to further their support and interest in civil rights. It also gave local African American leaders a platform and philosophy for stimulating change.

### Lexington

As of 1957, there were less than ten CORE affiliates nationwide. Few African Americans had heard of CORE before 1960. It was a northern-based organization with a predominately white membership. However, southern white opposition to the NAACP created opportunities for CORE to organize in the South. The first CORE chapter in Kentucky was organized in Lexington in 1959. Unlike the groups in Charleston, West Virginia, and East St. Louis, Illinois, which were all-black, the Lexington chapter was “an interracial, university-based affiliate, composed largely of teachers and clergymen.”<sup>36</sup> According to National Field Secretary Gordon Carey, Kentucky was “the kind of place where nonviolent direct action can be used very effectively in the solution of racial problems and conflicts. Our experience in the so-called border states has shown this to be true.”<sup>37</sup> At the time, city buses, the police and fire departments, YWCA, bus stations, and airport cafeterias were integrated. Yet, no black bus drivers had been hired.<sup>38</sup> Several restaurants, the four five-and-dime stores

<sup>34</sup> James A. Crumlin to Gloster B. Current, August 28, 1957, part 27, series A, frame 00451, *ibid*.

<sup>35</sup> Ann Braden, *The Wall Between* (Knoxville, 1999), 192.

<sup>36</sup> Meier and Rudwick, *CORE*, 92; Morris, *Origins of the Civil Rights Movement*, 132.

<sup>37</sup> Gordon Carey to William Reichert, February 10, 1959, reel 20, series 5, frame 00058, NAACP Papers.

<sup>38</sup> The Lexington Transit Company hired twenty-eight-year-old Frank Johnson in August 1961; see the *Louisville Defender*, August 31, 1961.



Sit-in Demonstration at a Downtown Lexington Lunch Counter, 1960. *Courtesy of Calvert McCann.*

downtown, and restaurants near the University of Kentucky campus were segregated. William O. Reichert, a white assistant professor in the department of political science at the University of Kentucky, and Rabbi Joseph Rosenbloom of Temple Adath Israel were instrumental in inviting CORE leaders to Lexington. Within the first year, Reichert and the Reverend Charles Smith, an African American assistant minister at Shiloh Baptist Church, had both served as chair. The Reverend W. A. Jones, pastor of the Pleasant Green Baptist Church, was a member of the steering committee that had tested the dining policies of McCrory's and H. L. Green's five-and-dime stores for black and white customers. Both stores had refused to serve black customers.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>39</sup> Joseph R. Rosenbloom to Gentlemen, November 5, 1958, reel 20, series A, frame 00050; William O. Reichert to R. C. Kirkwood, March 26, 1959, reel 20, series 5, frame 00067; Bill R. [Reichert] to Jim [Robinson], July 3, 1959, reel 20, series 5, frames 00092-93; James R. Robinson to William O. Reichert, November 3, 1959, reel 20, series 5, frame 000101; report of James T. McCain, February 2 through February 14, 1959, reel 20, series 5, frames 00057-58, CORE Papers

On Sunday, February 8, 1959, Pleasant Green Church hosted a presentation on CORE from field secretary James McCain. The following week, the committee sent a smaller delegation of representatives to Woolworth's and Kresge's, but the management of these establishments likewise refused to serve the group. The presence of the biracial steering committee in these stores began to raise the concern of white managers. A committee would discuss the racial policy of the establishment with the manager, while others occupied seats in the store. Reichert later referred to these kinds of tactics as "mild sit-ins."<sup>40</sup> About thirty persons were the backbone of the organization, but more than one hundred names appeared on the membership list as of March 21, 1959. Early members included people affiliated with the University of Kentucky, the local NAACP, and students and faculty from the College of the Bible in Lexington. Support also came from the social-action committee of the Unitarian Student Fellowship. In late 1959, the group conducted a poll and found that 82 percent of those interviewed would not "avoid eating at any restaurant surrounding the campus which served Negro students without discrimination."<sup>41</sup>

The Lexington chapter was not able to convince local store managers to change their policies through negotiation. Reichert wrote letters to the presidents of all four national variety stores. He informed each of them of the "considerable progress in the area of race relations." This also did not convince the presidents of these

<sup>40</sup> James R. Robinson to Joseph R. Rosenbloom, November 10, 1958, reel 20, series, frame 00050, *ibid.*; "Application For Affiliation," reel 20, series, 00070; William O. Reichert to R. C. Kirkwood, March 26, 1959, reel 20, series 5, frame 00067; *Lexington Herald*, June 10, 1959; Reichert to Robinson; "Report of James T. McCain, February 2 through February 14, 1959," reel 20, series 5, frames, 00050, 00057-58, 00067-68, 00070-74, 00083-85; 00113-15, all in *ibid.*; "Mild sit-in" quote is from Bill R. [Reichert] to Jim [Robinson], June 2, 1959, reel 20, series 5, frames 00083-85, CORE Papers.

<sup>41</sup> Bill [Reichert] to Jim [Robinson], May 10, 1959, reel 20, series 5, frame 00078; "Membership List of CORE, Lexington, Kentucky," March 21, 1959, reel 20, series 5, frames 00063-64; report of James T. McCain, February 2 through February 14, 1959, reel 20, series 5, frames 00057-58; Bill [Reichert] to Jim [Robinson], n.d., reel 20, series 5, frame 000102; open letter from Reverend Donald N. Anderson, January 26, 1959, reel 20, series 5, frame 00114; "Poll Taken," reel 20, series 5, frame 00106, all in CORE Papers.

stores to change their policies.<sup>42</sup> Meanwhile, on July 11, 1959, the Lexington Committee on Racial Equality (CORE) held its first sit-in at Varsity Village Restaurant near the University of Kentucky campus:

Ten [CORE] members (5 [Negroe] [*sic*] and 5 White) entered the restaurant at 11:00 a.m. above the verbal protest of the manager and sat quietly at the counter for two hours—meanwhile the group numbers swelled to 18 persons, all of whom upon leaving left a 25 [cent] tip for the waitresses. The manager said he was going to close the store which he did. Another sit-in was held there the following week. And, once again, a twenty-five cent tip was left.<sup>43</sup>

By the end of 1959, only a few restaurants in the community had cooperated with the request of the Lexington CORE to desegregate.<sup>44</sup> On February 27, 1960, a group of blacks and whites numbering between twenty-five and thirty staged a sit-in at H. L. Green's lunch counter. After two hours, the participants affiliated with CORE disbanded. According to the store manager, there was no trouble. Although police cruisers arrived at the scene expecting to break up a fight, they had responded to a misleading call. The counter was closed the next week "due to mechanical failure." When demonstrators arrived again to protest, they found chains had been placed at the front of the entrance to the lunch counters and "selected 'customers' were allowed to sit at the counter. CORE members were not selected." When CORE members crossed the chains to sit at the counter, they had "cokes spilled on them." Audrey Grevious, president of the local NAACP remembered the manager sitting on a stool swinging the chain. "The chain kept hitting me right across the leg . . . I would move a little bit and he would scoot up and move some more." The situation became tense as the men in the line became angry with the manager's behavior but Grevious advised them to step off the picket

<sup>42</sup> For an example of the letters sent, see William O. Reichert to R. C. Kirkwood, executive vice president, F. W. Woolworth Company, March 26, 1959, reel 20, series 5, frame 00067, *ibid.*

<sup>43</sup> Joy M. Query to J. Peck, July 22, 1959, reel 20, frames 00094-95, *ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> "News from Lexington, Ky. October 1959," reel 20, series 5, frames 00098-99, *ibid.*; "Report of James T. McCain February 2 through February 14, 1959," reel 20, frames 00057-58, 00098-99, *ibid.*

line. Meanwhile, the manager kept swinging the chain. “I stood there and I’m looking him right on the eyeball and he’s looking me right on the eyeball. And he’s still swinging, its still hitting—and I started singing ‘Yield Not to Temptation.’ Now how all the words to that song came, I will never know. I think I sang all of them right, and then I started making up my own for that time.”<sup>45</sup>

Training sessions were organized to prepare demonstrators for verbal and physical abuse. Additionally, the group made a concerted effort to emphasize the commitment of the national office to nonviolence. Members were even searched before participating in a demonstration in order to make sure they did not have anything in their possession that might be labeled as a weapon. In a letter to national executive secretary James Robinson, Reichert indicated that the group was experiencing “internal differences between ‘moderate and gentle people’ and ‘a more radically active faction.’” Yet Reichert remained optimistic. “The essential thing is to let the public know that injustice exists in the community. If the public then wants to correct the injustice, we will have succeeded in our task.”<sup>46</sup>

The Lexington CORE held demonstrations at McCrory’s, Kresge’s, and Woolworth’s. Occasionally, blacks and whites would sit next to each other and demonstrate using the “integrated sandwich plan” which involved a white member ordering a sandwich and sharing it with an African American. This practice “caused quite a bit of confusion.” On May 29, 1960, local black ministers “voted 100% participation in demonstrations.” Less than a month later, ten ministers participated in sit-ins at different variety stores and the number would increase significantly.<sup>47</sup> In August, Julia Lewis informed Marvin Rich, national community-relations director, that the “great move here

<sup>45</sup> *Lexington Herald*, February 28, 1960(quote); Gerald L. Smith, “Blacks in Lexington, Kentucky: The Struggle for Civil Rights, 1945-1980” (MA thesis, University of Kentucky, 1983), 41-42; Fosl and K’Meyer, *Freedom on the Border*, 99-100.

<sup>46</sup> Smith, “Blacks in Lexington, Kentucky,” 43; Bill Reichert to James Robinson, May 4, 1960, reel 20 series 5, frame 00152, CORE Papers.

<sup>47</sup> “LEXINGTON CORE TURNS FROM NEGOTIATING TO BECOME AN ACTION GROUP, 1959-60” in “Report from Lexington CORE,” reel 20, series 5, frame 00167, *ibid.*; Meier and Rudwick, *CORE*, 79.

was in winning the faith of the ministers” and that the Council of Christians and Jews had “joined up.” She added that “it’s real great to see the negro community awake from their deep sleep.”<sup>48</sup> By the summer of 1960, most downtown lunch counters had integrated. But segregated eating establishments continued to exist in the city. The following year, the effort to integrate the “locally owned Wallace’s Restaurant” was “met with some violence as the manager “attempted to remove one CORE member by dragging her from her seat. There was also “organized resistance from other restaurant owners, who appear[ed] to have banded together.”<sup>49</sup>

In 1960-61, CORE demonstrations were held to integrate the seating at Lexington movie theaters. The first took place at the Kentucky Theater and involved seven demonstrators. The number increased to thirty-two with the recruitment of high school students. Other “stand-ins” were held at theaters but did not draw as many protestors. The Strand Theatre was one of a chain of Schine Theatres in New York. Faculty and students at Buffalo University in New York held a sympathy protest to pressure Schine to change its policies. The national CORE helped coordinate similar demonstrations in Rochester and Syracuse. Picketers held signs which read: “Help End Segregation in Lexington Theatres.”<sup>50</sup> On April 3, 1961, twenty-two Lexington CORE members were arrested at the Kentucky Theater for breach of peace. Later that month, more than two hundred African Americans and their white supporters marched in a “Freedom Parade” on Main Street. Less than a week later, CORE had made progress toward a plan for the integration of theaters. The Lexington Human Rights Committee served as a mediator between the theaters and CORE. By the summer, the Kentucky, Strand, and Ben Ali had all integrated.<sup>51</sup>

<sup>48</sup> Julia Lewis to Marvin Rich, August 12, 1960, reel 20, series 5, frame 00174, CORE Papers; Meier and Rudwick, *CORE*, 81.

<sup>49</sup> Smith, “Blacks in Lexington, Kentucky,” 45; James R. O’Rourke Jr. to Marvin Rich, May 17, 1961, reel 20, series 5, frame 00241, CORE Papers.

<sup>50</sup> Students Picket Schine Theatres In Support of Lexington, Kentucky Stand-Ins [1961], reel 20, series 5, frame 00235, *ibid.*

<sup>51</sup> Jane B. Stone to Marvin Rich, April 3, 1961, reel 20, series 5, frame 00221, *ibid.*; Gerald



In the fall of 1961, the Phoenix Hotel in downtown Lexington came under fire after several African American members of the Boston Celtics basketball team, in town to play an exhibition game, were not pleased with the way they were treated in the coffee shop. In October, five team members, including future Hall of Famer Bill Russell, refused to play in the game and returned to Boston. CORE activists held a protest at the hotel because it stipulated that African Americans who were served had to be “participating in a convention at the hotel.” Two months later, musician Louis Armstrong was in Lexington to perform at the Phoenix. Not understanding the hotel policy, he decided not to cross the picket line. To prevent Armstrong from breaking his contract, demonstrators cut short the protest that evening in order for him to perform. The Phoenix eventually changed its policy. Gerald Cunningham, a seminary student and member of CORE, recalled participating in Saturday sit-ins at the hotel coffee shop until they finally received menus in 1963. “We never thought we would get served, so none of us brought any money for coffee.”<sup>52</sup> In August of that year, the Lexington CORE sponsored a “selective buying campaign” urging African Americans to shop at stores with black employees. Nine blacks were arrested for lying in the aisles of Sears Roebuck department store. Direct-action protests continued through the month, and a mass march was held downtown. These campaigns led twenty stores to offer white-collar jobs to African Americans.<sup>53</sup>

To be sure, Lexington and other Kentucky communities took advantage of the height of civil rights protest throughout the South in 1963. As the nation witnessed the violent response of Birmingham, Alabama police commissioner Eugene “Bull” Conner toward civil protesters, Lexington activists created a placard affixed around the neck of dog which read: “Birmingham Now, Lexington Next?”

L. Smith, *Lexington, Kentucky*, Black American Series (Charleston, 2002), 120; Smith, “Blacks in Lexington,” 45-47; Joseph P. Perkins Jr, “Field Report Lexington, Kentucky,” June 24, 1961, reel 20 series 5, frame 00238, CORE Papers.

<sup>52</sup> Smith, *Lexington, Kentucky*, 112, 118-19; *Lexington Herald-Leader*, August 17, 2004(quote).

<sup>53</sup> Smith, “Blacks in Lexington,” 51-53; Meier and Rudwick, *CORE*, 233-34.



In May 1963, police dogs represented the violent resistance encountered in Birmingham, Alabama. This photo captures the atmosphere in Lexington, Kentucky, at this time: will Lexington be next? *Courtesy of Calvert McCann.*

Clearly, local demonstrators recognized that whites did not want this contentious scene in their state.<sup>54</sup> They drew upon whites' desires to maintain an image which portrayed a friendly and racially progressive community. However, this general myth about Kentucky became more difficult to maintain as other CORE chapters in the state would also employ direct-action protest to bring an end to segregation.

### Louisville

The city of Louisville had a historical and inspiring reputation for political and civil rights activism. Luther Adams, in an important study of the city during the modern civil rights years, writes that, "Blacks in Louisville continued a tradition of activism that linked the struggle for equality in the River City to the black southern political mandate that African Americans *must* stay and fight for freedom in the South."<sup>55</sup> This mentality had been present for several years and

<sup>54</sup> Smith, *Lexington, Kentucky*, 122; K'Meyer makes a similar observation regarding Birmingham in *Gateway to the South*, 104-5.

<sup>55</sup> Adams, *Way Up North in Louisville*, 80-99, (quote)124.

especially so by the mid-twentieth century. During the late 1950s, the Louisville NAACP Youth Council was engaged in direct-action protests to desegregate public facilities. Young Africans conducted sit-ins against lunch counters at five-and-dime stores and picketed clothing stores and theaters on Fourth Street between the years 1956 and 1961.<sup>56</sup>

In December 1959, students picketed the Brown Theater after being denied admission to the film *Porgy and Bess*. According to Adams, “The protest and picketing surrounding *Porgy and Bess* represented a departure in terms of pace, scale, and strategy from prior forms of black activism in the city.” Direct-action campaigns were consistently mounted against segregation in public accommodations and discrimination in employment and housing. Still, efforts to pass a local public-accommodations ordinance by the board of alderman would be a difficult process.<sup>57</sup>

In the midst of this environment, local activists invited the national field secretary of CORE, Len Holt, to the city to conduct workshops on nonviolence. In 1960, an interracial Louisville chapter of CORE was formed. It was a “small chapter” comprising adult African Americans, liberal whites, and students. Bishop C. Ewbank Tucker of the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church; George Kimbrough, a white doctor affiliated with the Unitarian Church; white students Lynn Pfhul and Brigid McHugh; and African American students Beverly Neal and David West were among the twenty-five members of the organization. Seven students participated in the first protest at the Char-Mont Room in the Kaufman-Straus department store. The enthusiasm of the group attracted support from the Louisville Links, the Independent Improvement Association, and the local chapter of Alpha Phi Alpha. All three African American civic organizations canceled their accounts with the store. The store executive vice president eventually closed the lunch counter with plans to remove the counters. But CORE continued to protests at other

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 127-29; K'Meyer, *Gateway to the South*, 81-82.

<sup>57</sup> Adams, *Way Up North in Louisville*, 130-32 (quote)130.

stores. Toward the end of 1960, the Louisville CORE was challenging segregation at Stewart's Dry Goods Company. Pfuhl described it as "the bulwark of segregation here." "We believe," said Pfuhl, "that if we can achieve integration here, we shall eventually be able to integrate all of Louisville." But the demonstrations did not last long. Tracy E. K'Meyer observes: "The Louisville CORE affiliate was always relatively weak and unstable, in part because of the city's NAACP Youth Council, which had already engaged in protests at drugstore lunch counters and theaters, had attracted many activist-minded black youth."<sup>58</sup>

Still, CORE remained an active organization in the city. Members held demonstrations at Taylor's drugstores and a sit-in at Ben Snyder's department store during the summer of 1960. Bishop Tucker, along with other local NAACP activists Lyman Johnson, the Reverend W. J. Hodge, and student activist Frank Stanley Jr., formed the Integration Steering Committee. This group brought together the resources of the NAACP, the nonviolent practices of CORE, and the connections of the Interdenominational Ministers Council which consisted of African American clergy. In a letter to the national office in January 1961, CORE member Birdie McHugh was optimistic about the relationship of the organization with the NAACP, stating that, "They are cooperating immensely and may let us have a representative on their weekly radio program." McHugh also noted that they were trying to establish relationships with labor unions and social and service clubs.<sup>59</sup>

Yet in reality, CORE and NAACP leaders had a strained relationship for several reasons. First, they were not united on the best tactics for accomplishing desegregation. Tucker, a CORE leader, was committed to nonviolent direct action, while the NAACP encouraged meetings with members of the white business community. Hodge, pastor of the Fifth Street Baptist Church was president of the NAACP and was not convinced sit-ins were the answer to ending seg-

<sup>58</sup> K'Meyer, *Gateway to the South*, 84-88 (quote)86-87; Adams, *Way Up North in Louisville*, 133.

<sup>59</sup> Adams, *Way Up North in Louisville*, 133-36; Birdie McHugh to Dear Sirs, January 19, 1961, reel 20, series 5, frame 00352, CORE Papers.

regation. "We felt at the time that in most cities where they had been effective, there was a black college. . . . Well, at that time Louisville had not a black college, and we were fearful that because of the lacking of this . . . we couldn't get the kind of support" to be successful.<sup>60</sup> Second, CORE was looked at suspiciously by NAACP members as a group of well-to-do blacks and a "band of white radicals." Lastly, Tucker and members of the NAACP lacked respect for one another. The NAACP considered Tucker an "opportunist." Tucker had a flyer printed headlined: NEGROES OF LOUISVILLE—WAKE UP—AND GET WISE TO THESE ORGANIZATIONS WHO LOOK DOWN WITH DERISION UPON THE MASSES OF THE PEOPLE. The flyer described members of Alpha Phi Alpha fraternity as "Tea sippers and pseudo aristocrats." He added that "C. Ewbank Tucker is never embarrassed when he fights for the Civil Rights of his people, and when he smokes out organizations like the Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity which never made any contributions to the integration fight in Louisville." "It was no coincidence," writes Luther Adams, "that Lyman Johnson and Maurice Rabb were prominent members of both Alpha Phi Alpha and the NAACP."<sup>61</sup>

While CORE and the NAACP were having their differences and seeking to determine which direction to pursue, Louisville black youth took charge of the direct-action protest movement in January 1961. The next month, demonstrations were held at Stewart's department store and Kaufman-Straus. Other demonstrations took place at Blue Boar Cafeteria as well as movie theaters. The demonstrations also led to the arrest of over one hundred CORE and NAACP Youth Council members during the month of February. The demonstrators encountered violent resistance from whites. A cross was burned in the yard of CORE member Lynn Pfuhl. Employees of the stores "knocked down and pushed around" those picketing stores. "They had a paddy wagon at Fourth and Walnut," remembered Gerald

<sup>60</sup> Adams, *Way Up North in Louisville*, 135; Hodge is quoted in K'Meyer, *Gateway to the South*, 87.

<sup>61</sup> See flyer, reel 40, series 5, frame 00964, CORE Papers. For more on the tension between CORE and the NAACP, see Adams, *Way Up North in Louisville*, 135-36.

White, "They would drag you, head bumping, to Fourth Street, in the street, by two legs to the paddy wagon."<sup>62</sup>

These protests, a "Nothing New for Easter" campaign, and meetings with Governor Bert Combs led Mayor Bruce Hoblitzell to form an emergency committee to address segregation in public accommodations. But this interracial committee did not move soon enough, so arrests continued. Martin Luther King Jr. came to the city on April 19, 1961, and spoke at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and Quinn Chapel AME Church. Clearly, King's presence enhanced the national identification of Louisville with the movement. As the Kentucky Derby approached, Mayor Hoblitzell and the emergency committee pressed local businesses to desegregate. Some opened their doors to blacks, while others resisted. Nevertheless, black leaders decided to call off the demonstrations and the "Nothing New for Easter" campaign. The Integration Steering Committee found that more than one hundred businesses in downtown Louisville were serving blacks by June 1961. But most hotels, restaurants, and theaters continued to discriminate. The struggle continued with CORE and the NAACP leading independent protests. That summer CORE members were arrested as they confronted segregation at Fontaine Ferry Amusement Park. Meanwhile, the friction between Tucker and the local NAACP continued.<sup>63</sup> By October 1961, the Louisville CORE was struggling terribly to survive. Lynn Pfuhl was disappointed with the lack of interest in staging a sit-in at the Brown Hotel coffee shop. In a letter to Fredricka Teer, assistant to the field director, Pfuhl wrote: "I'm afraid that Louisville CORE has 'had it.' . . . if we could only manage to stage even one sit-in, then perhaps interest would revive. But as things stand at present, the future seems hopeless."<sup>64</sup>

Despite its challenges, the Louisville CORE reported the follow-

<sup>62</sup> Adams, *Way Up North in Louisville*, 137-38; White is quoted in K'Meyer, *Civil Rights in the Gateway to the South*, 90; The reference to the cross in Lynn Pfuhl's front yard comes from Beverly Neal to Gordon R. Carey, February 17, 1961, reel 20, series 5, frame 00357, CORE Papers. Neal mentions newspaper clippings from the *Louisville Defender*.

<sup>63</sup> Adams, *Way Up North in Louisville*, 137-42.

<sup>64</sup> Lynn Pfuhl to Fredricka Teer, October 14, 1961, reel 20, series 5, frame 00382, CORE Papers.

ing year that it had staged pickets at the Bell Telephone Company in pursuit of employment opportunities. The organization negotiated with Sears and Roebuck for two weeks and the store “upgraded” three African Americans salespersons. It encouraged a boycott of Coca-Cola to pressure the company to hire African American clerical workers. However, the reputation of the organization did not improve. Tucker had “made many enemies within the community among traditional black leaders” and the organization needed more young adults. He was viewed as “an authoritarian chairman who does not allow for democratic function of the group.” The “chaotic condition” of the Louisville CORE surely led to the decision of three youths in CORE to leave and form the Student Nonviolent Action Committee that briefly existed as an affiliate of SNCC.<sup>65</sup>

The Non-Partisan Registration Committee (NPRC) was also claiming the interest of African American activists. Organized in 1960, the committee campaigned on the claim that “Fifty-one thousand Registered Voters Can Totally Desegregate Louisville.” The NPRC registered close to twenty thousand African American voters by the time of the 1961 mayoral election. With African American support, Republican William O. Cowger won the race. Cowger favored establishing a Human Relations Commission (HRC) but did not support passing a local ordinance. Once elected, he established an HRC but pressure for a public-accommodations ordinance continued to mount in the black community. CORE pressed the mayor to support an ordinance or face a demonstration at City Hall. With the HRC, CORE, NAACP, and the *Louisville Defender* supporting the passage of an ordinance, the board of alderman finally passed it on May 14, 1963. It prohibited discrimination on the basis of race, color, or religion in public establishments that offered food, shelter, and

<sup>65</sup> Louisville CORE, Report Form, February 19, 1962, reel 40, series 5, frame 00971; quotes are from “Joint Report on Louisville to James McCain, April 19, 1962,” reel 40, series 5, frame 00990; Henry Thomas to Jim McCain, April 22, 1962, reel 40, series 5, 01002-3; Henry Thomas to James McCain, May 17, 1962, reel 40, series 5, frame 01006; Report from Mary Hamilton to James McCain, June 22, 1962, reel 40, series 5, frame 01014, all in CORE Papers; K'Meyer, *Gateway to the South*, 102.



amusement. At the time, no city had passed this kind of ordinance.<sup>66</sup> This was an important piece of legislation for those who had been on the front lines. But the presence of CORE in the community continued to dissolve. In January 1964, James T. McCain, director of organization, inquired whether the chapter was still “active and functioning.”<sup>67</sup>

### Frankfort

On February 1, 1960, four students sat at the segregated lunch counter of the local Woolworth's store in Greensboro, North Carolina. Although they were denied service, they remained in their seats. Their actions sparked a wave of sit-ins organized and led by college students throughout the South. African American college presidents of historically black public institutions faced a serious dilemma: support their students and risk losing financial support or accept segregation and lose creditability in their community. Rufus Atwood, president of Kentucky State College in Frankfort, confronted this issue in the spring of 1960. On March 18, Arthur Norman, an assistant professor in the department of education and psychology,

<sup>66</sup> George C. Wright, “Desegregation of Public Accommodations in Louisville” in *Southern Businessmen and Desegregation*, ed. Elizabeth Jacoway and David R. Colburn (Baton Rouge, 1982), 209; Adams, *Way Up North in Louisville*, 143-45.

<sup>67</sup> Reverend C. Ewbank Tucker controlled the direction of the Louisville chapter of CORE and had on occasion denounced traditional black leadership in Louisville. Carl and Anne Braden were two longtime white supporters of the movement. The Bradens were active with the Southern Conference Educational Fund. In 1954, they were accused of being communists. They had purchased a home for a black electrician named Andrew Wade in an all-white suburb of Louisville. When whites learned that a black family would occupy the house, the Bradens were questioned for having supported the transaction. On June 27, the house was bombed and the Bradens were accused of promoting violence. Carl Braden was arrested and spent almost two years in prison for violation of Kentucky's sedition law. The papers of CORE include important discussions regarding whether the Bradens should participate in the Louisville chapter. In 1960, the Louisville CORE voted to deny the Bradens the opportunity to demonstrate with the group. See Joseph Perkins to Anne Braden, November 26, 1960, reel 20, series 5, frame 00334, CORE Papers; Henry Thomas to Jim [Robinson], March 12, 1962, reel 40, series 5, frame 00983, *ibid.*; Mary Hamilton to James McCain, December 1962, reel 40, series 5, frame 01021, *ibid.* See also K'Meyer, *Gateway to the South*, 86-87; James McCain to Bishop Ewbank Tucker, January 11, 1964, reel 18, series 5, frame 0257(quote), CORE Papers.

and Lester Trip, a student, contacted CORE about forming a chapter in Frankfort. The letter included other signatures and purported to represent a group of persons in Frankfort interested improving racial conditions in the city. The Students for Civil Rights was formed within two weeks as the Frankfort CORE affiliate.<sup>68</sup>

On April 2, fifty students, organized in groups of three, visited twenty eating establishments in Frankfort to ascertain the policy for serving black customers. The students were also filmed during a workshop for the Chet Huntley program scheduled to air April 10 or 17. Ann Hunter, the Kentucky State College dean of students, had allegedly expressed support for CORE and indicated that the students would not be penalized for their efforts. The group sent a letter to Mayor Paul Judd appealing to him for support in “removing the evils of racial discrimination.” Specifically, they wanted him to “use the influence” of his position by sending letters to white business owners encouraging them to desegregate. They also urged him to present an ordinance requiring individuals to serve everyone.<sup>69</sup> The effect of segregation on the community was eloquently expressed by Owen Carter, the president of the Kentucky State College Student Council and a member of the newsletter staff of the affiliate. His editorial, “Stop Buying at Segregated Places,” reflected on the experiences of those who watched movies at the Grand movie theater. “Oh how nauseated we feel when we go there to creep up a long dismal staircase into a decrepid [*sic*] grandstand crowded with so many other contented black sheep.”<sup>70</sup>

As the students busily engaged in preparations for direct action, President Atwood’s attitude toward CORE was not clear at first. He favored creating a Council on Human Relations. The Frankfort

<sup>68</sup> Gerald L. Smith, *A Black Educator in the Segregated South* (Lexington, 1994), 149, 152-53.

<sup>69</sup> Newsletter, Frankfort CORE Affiliate, April [n.d.], reel 40, series 5, frame 00913, CORE Papers; Students For Civil Rights to Mayor of Frankfort, April 6, 1960, *ibid.*; Owen Carter, “Stop Buying At Segregated Places” (an editorial) [n.d.], reel 40, series 5, 00915, *ibid.* Chet Huntley was a television news anchor for NBC’s nightly news program; see Lyle Johnston, *“Good Night, Chet”: A Biography of Chet Huntley* (Jefferson, N.C., 2003).

<sup>70</sup> Owen Carter, “Stop Buying At Segregated Places” (an editorial), [n.d.], reel 40, series 5, frame 00915, CORE Papers.

CORE newsletter claimed that his administration had warned students engaging in demonstrations that they could be expelled or have their scholarships revoked. But in early April, Atwood had submitted a statement to CORE emphasizing his support for it. There was even a discussion between CORE and the college administration about a joint effort to improve racial conditions in the city. Then on April 6, CORE allies were informed of Atwood's support during a mass meeting on the campus. The meeting attracted media attention. Word spread that the students were planning sit-in demonstrations. But Mayor Judd met with leaders in the community and the sit-ins were delayed for a few weeks.

The situation on campus grew tense as students submitted a list of demands to the executive council of the university which expressed a desire for more rights and better services. When they received no response, the students boycotted the college cafeteria. They also held a demonstration during a board of regents meeting on campus. These actions infuriated President Atwood who blamed CORE for the campus protest. Leaders were warned that they faced expulsion if they met on the campus "to arouse unrest among the students."<sup>71</sup>

Students planned to march from the campus to the capitol, but the executive council of the college fired the two faculty members associated with CORE and expelled twelve students just before the march, most of whom were members of CORE. Then on May 2, there was a fire at the college gymnasium, resulting in over one hundred dollars in damages. President Atwood relaxed some of the campus rules, but the dismissed CORE members believed that he was being pressured by local white leaders to remove CORE from Frankfort. This controversy quickly weakened the Frankfort CORE chapter. However, Atwood publicly supported faculty and staff demonstrations against local segregation in the early 1960s. When the Frankfort chapter of the NAACP boycotted the local cab company during a Christmas break, Atwood allowed the college director of maintenance to pick up student luggage from the bus and train sta-

<sup>71</sup> Smith, *A Black Educator in the Segregated South*, 153-56 (quote)156.

tions in order to strengthen the boycott.<sup>72</sup>

Following the demise of CORE in Frankfort, Helen Holmes led a steering committee that worked to desegregate restaurants and lunch counters. Holmes was a Kentucky State College English professor and president of the local NAACP. She recruited students and faculty to participate in local demonstrations. Negotiations were successful with five businesses but failed with five others. The steering committee voted to engage in sit-ins. Although there was not “a whole lot” of students, Gertrude Ridgel, who also taught at the college, remembered participating in sit-ins at downtown restaurants.<sup>73</sup>

In February 1962, Genevieve Hughes, a white field secretary with the national office, visited Frankfort at the request of Clayton Jones, who was working with the Kentucky Human Rights Commission and had been affiliated with the Lexington CORE. In a field report, she describes Frankfort as having “a small Negro community which except for the college people is not very aggressive.” Hughes noted that a steering committee, which consisted of a group of local leaders, had been organized and was being led by Holmes. Hughes learned that this committee had successfully negotiated the desegregation of five establishments but was experiencing difficulties with others. Moreover, she found that members of the steering committee were not interested in “forming a CORE chapter” like the one organized on the Kentucky State College campus. The Lexington and Louisville chapters had given CORE a bad name in the opinion of local African American leaders. Perhaps Frankfort leaders were familiar with some of the early tension over organization and leadership the Lexington chapter had experienced during its first year in existence, as well as the “chaos” the Louisville chapter had faced. Nevertheless, Hughes was still encouraged by her visit to Frankfort. She “found the attitude of the mayor refreshing.” “He regretted,” wrote Hughes, “but even admitted the necessity of the sit-ins. The police were instructed

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 157-58 and Smith, “Student Demonstrations and the Dilemma of the Black College President in 1960: Rufus Atwood and Kentucky State College,” *Register* 88 (1990): 329-33.

<sup>73</sup> Field Report from Genevieve Hughes, Frankfort, Kentucky, February 5-8, 1962, reel 40, series 5, frame 00932(quote), CORE Papers; Fosl and K'Meyer, *Freedom on the Border*, 104-5.

to protect not arrest the sit-inners.” While in Frankfort, Hughes claimed that she trained nearly one hundred students in sit-ins and held a session on nonviolence with ten of them. She was impressed with Holmes and wrote beside her name at the bottom of the report that Holmes was “forceful,” “capable,” and “very NAACP.” Even though CORE did not function for very long as an organization in Frankfort, direct-action protest still served as a means for breaking down racial barriers.<sup>74</sup>

### Northern Kentucky

In July 1960, the local NAACP chapter in Covington, Kentucky, met to express disapproval with a “whites only” sign hanging over the ladies restroom in Coppin’s department store. Because the NAACP was not prepared to organize a direct-action protest, CORE was asked to offer assistance. In November, the organization held an “open meeting” at the L. B. Fouse Civic Center in Covington to discuss the admission of African Americans to the YMCA and Madison and Liberty Theaters. CORE also began to sponsor workshops on non-violent direct action with the last one held on December 9. Twenty-five blacks and seven whites attended the final workshop. Lucille Barrett, an African American, was named chair and a white woman, Janet Gries, became vice chair. Regional field secretary, Joseph Perkins, a native of Owensboro, Kentucky, who would participate in the CORE 1961 Freedom Rides, facilitated the organization of the Covington chapter.<sup>75</sup>

<sup>74</sup> National Field Secretary Ulysses Prince III filed a critical report on his encounter with chairman Julia Lewis of the Lexington chapter in April 1960. Prince criticized the group for “poor judgment and poor organization” in a meeting which took place at Pleasant Green Baptist Church on April 24, 1960. See “Field Report,” reel 20, series 5, frames 00148-49, 00167, CORE Papers. Gertrude Ridgel depicts Holmes as a hard worker determined to integrate public facilities. See “Field Report from Genevieve Hughes, Frankfort, Kentucky, February 5-February 8, 1962,” reel 40, series 5, frame 00932, *ibid.* Fosl and K’Meyer, *Freedom on the Border*, 105; Catsam, *Freedom’s Main Line*, 68.

<sup>75</sup> Jim Embry, “Congress of Racial Equality, Northern Kentucky Chapter,” in *The Encyclopedia of Northern Kentucky*, eds. Paul A. Tenkotte and James C. Claypool (Lexington, 2009), 220-21, 825; Theodore H. H. Harris, “Alice Thornton Shimmfessel,” *ibid.*, 825; Press Release, Covington, Kentucky, November 28, 1960, reel 20, series 5, frame 00483, CORE

On December 3, 1960, the group began picketing and passing out leaflets at downtown stores in Covington. John Bornhorn, the Covington chief of police, initially permitted six to eight demonstrators to walk the picket line but reduced this number to two and forbade passing out leaflets because of a potential litter problem. Yet the Covington CORE managed to list several accomplishments between November 29 and December 10. The chapter noted that the Woolworth's and Kresge's five-and-dime stores and Mergard's Bowling Lanes were serving African Americans, and the group had "taken direct action against the Madison and Liberty Theatres." The YMCA accepted black membership in the athletic program but did not allow blacks to live in the building.

As of December 7, the "Covington CORE Master List" recorded forty-two names which included four whites. The organization had the cooperation of the local NAACP, as well as the support of six members of the Young Christian Workers.<sup>76</sup>

The Covington affiliate expanded and was recognized as the Northern Kentucky chapter of CORE by January 1961. It represented Campbell, Kenton, and Boone Counties. The chapter was given official recognition in February 1961.<sup>77</sup> The chapter met at the Fouse Center on Bush Street. Besides demonstrating against segregation in businesses, the chapter raised money for the Freedom Rides, which were led by national CORE in May 1961. And it even picketed the Greyhound Bus Terminal in Covington in support of the Freedom Riders.

In late August 1961, the chapter reported that the YMCA had integrated in Covington and that two drive-ins, Dixie Gardens and

Papers; Joseph P. Perkins Jr. to Gordon Carey, December 12, 1960, reel 20, series 5, frame 00498, *ibid.* "Application For Affiliation" [n.d.], reel 20, series 5, frame 00504, *ibid.*; Merline Davis, "Students can relive history in Freedom Rides," *Lexington Herald-Leader*, January 13, 2011.

<sup>76</sup> "Covington CORE Accomplishments," November 29–December 10, 1960, reel 20, series 5, frame, 00488, CORE Papers; "Confidential Covington CORE Master List, December 7, 1960, reel 20, series 5, frame 00496, *ibid.*; Embry, "Congress of Racial Equality, Northern Kentucky Chapter," *Encyclopedia of Northern Kentucky*, 220–21.

<sup>77</sup> Gordon Carey to J. P. Greis, January 31, 1961, reel 20, series 5, frame 00502, CORE Papers; "Application for Affiliation, reel 20, series 5, frame 00504, *ibid.*

Florence, Kentucky Drive-in, would soon be “completely integrated.” The following year, the chapter continued to engage direct-action protest against public facilities. Motels and restaurants were integrated as well as Pasquale’s and Newport Bowling Lanes. The chapter negotiated employment opportunities for African Americans at Sears and Roebuck, A & P, and Kroger grocery stores and joined with the Cincinnati NAACP in boycotting the Coca-Cola Company. According to Jim Embry, “The Northern Kentucky CORE was a small group of dedicated civil rights activists who received little support from the local black community, black ministers, and black business owners.”<sup>78</sup>

### Richmond

In November 1960, three African Americans and three white faculty from Eastern Kentucky State College (present-day Eastern Kentucky University) formed a committee with an interest in raising funds for the indigent in the city and publishing information on local discrimination. The presence of the Madison County Committee of Racial Equality raised concerns in the white community. James Robert Flynn, a white assistant professor of history at Eastern State College, led a meeting with members of the local community and city officials to dispel rumors that demonstrations against lunch counters were planned. Flynn also attempted to correct rumors that they were affiliated with CORE. About sixty-five persons attended the meeting which was held at the Early Church of God on Broadway. In attendance was CORE field secretary Joseph Perkins, who had recently visited several of the stores downtown and was served at one, Begley’s drugstore. He discussed the role of sit-ins in other cities. Once word had circulated that he was in town, however, he was not served even at Begley’s. Perkins found that the president-elect of Eastern Kentucky State College, Robert R. Martin, opposed CORE activities. Martin had heard about the recent events in Frankfort and

<sup>78</sup> Embry, “Congress of Racial Equality, Northern Kentucky Chapter,” *Encyclopedia of Northern Kentucky*, 220–21, (quote)221, 825; Barbara R. Cantrill to Dear Sirs [National office], August 26, 1961, reel 20, series 5, frames 00515, 00518, CORE Papers; Barbara Cantrill, to Mr [James] Farmer, May 6, 1961, reel 20, series 5, frame 00516, *ibid*.



the fire at the gymnasium on the Kentucky State campus. According to the “Field Report” Perkins later filed with the national office, Martin “threatened out-of-town students with expulsion if they took part in public demonstrations, demanded an exact accounting of my activities while on campus, and severely reprimanded Dr. Flynn in my presence for what he considered a breach of faith in inviting me to Richmond.” Among those in attendance at the meeting with the committee were Mayor Ed Wayman and Police Chief Carl T. Newland. Both had been invited to the meeting and addressed the gathering following Perkins’s presentation. Newland openly intimidated those blacks at the meeting when he said: “I know every one of you.” Perkins reported that “Wayman asserted that Richmond did not need outsiders [me] to help solve its problems.”<sup>79</sup>

Local drugstore owners in Richmond made it clear that they would close their establishments if they were forced to serve blacks. Even though no demonstrations were planned, Flynn in a November 4 letter to CORE field director Gordon Carey wrote:

As for reprisals, the police and mayor have systematically tried to get all who are in our group fired. All the local high school teachers, about half the Eastern faculty members, and many negroes have thus been frightened out (the mayor & police chief called on some negroes personally) . . . Rotten eggs have been thrown on some homes, I am being tailed in hopes of catching me in some minor law violation, etc. . . . Mr. Perkins probably would have been run out of town if he had stayed and the reaction to CORE is so bad I am glad that one can be affiliated [and] keep some other name.<sup>80</sup>

On March 20, 1961, in a letter to the editor of the *Richmond Register*, Flynn noted that the Madison League for Racial Equality urged people to stop going downtown because “certain” drugstore owners

<sup>79</sup> Joseph P. Perkins Jr., “Field Report,” December 20, 1960, reel 20, series 5, frames 00430-31(quote), CORE Papers; *Richmond Register*, October 27, 1960; Gordon R. Carey to James R. Flynn, November 1, 1960; reel 20, frames 00420 and 00430-31, CORE Papers.

<sup>80</sup> James R. Flynn to [Gordon] Carey, November 4, 1960, reel 20, frames 00427-28, *ibid.*

refused to meet with “responsible citizens” to address the integration of lunch counters. He noted that this appeal would be canceled once owners agreed to a plan for integration.<sup>81</sup> Mayor Waymon was not pleased and expressed his ire in a responding letter. He informed Flynn that the letter “did nothing to aid your program for better race relations between our citizens and that rumors had circulated that “outsiders are to be brought in for sit-in demonstrations.” Waymon continued, “If this is true you better banish the idea immediately. If they come I intend to lock everyone of them in jail until they agree to leave Richmond. Believe me, I have that power.”<sup>82</sup>

Despite the mayor’s threats, the Madison League for Racial Equality announced a planned boycott in Richmond for March 21. “The town became quite hysterical on the day that the boycott was to begin but Flynn was not downtown. The group did hold demonstrations on May 16 from 5:30 to 6:30 p.m. and May 21 from 11:30 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. in front of Burd’s Drugstore on Main Street. At the first demonstration an “angry crowd of 60 or more had collected and begun shouting obscenities and threats.” The police chief informed the demonstrators they would be arrested if they “blocked the sidewalk for one second.” He walked away and according to Flynn “a reliable student could quote him saying: ‘Boys, I’ll be gone for 15 minutes. If you want to break this up, that’s, up to you.’” The crowd threw ice and coke cups until Flynn ended the demonstration. He later learned that there were some high school students on the roof preparing to throw stones at the protestors.<sup>83</sup> The scene is reminiscent of the one described by Don Edwards, except that the CORE Papers provide the names, dates, and context of a demonstration and struggle beyond what the public observed.<sup>84</sup>

During the spring of 1961, the league submitted an application to

<sup>81</sup> James Flynn to the editor of the *Richmond Register*, March 20, 1961, reel 20, series 5, frame 00436, *ibid*.

<sup>82</sup> Ed Waymon to James Flynn, March 22, 1961, reel 20, series 5, frame 00436, *ibid*.

<sup>83</sup> James R. Flynn to Edgar A. Zingman, May 24, 1961, reel 20, series 5, frames, 00442-43, *ibid*.

<sup>84</sup> *Richmond Register*, March 20, 1961; reel 20, series, 5, frame 00436, *ibid*.

become an affiliate of CORE. Originally, James R. Flynn and Charles Hansel, who was also employed at Eastern Kentucky State College, served as cochaIRS. The application listed twenty active members. Oliver and Lela Cunningham remembered the CORE group as “just a handful of citizens with white professors.” The group, listed as the Madison County Committee of Racial Equality, reported it had cooperated with the local NAACP to gain information on school integration and the Richmond committee to negotiate with drugstore owners about their racial policies. The application also revealed that because of the efforts of the Lexington CORE and the national office, the M & M Drugstore and Newberry’s were serving African Americans; the Madison Theater planned to integrate in the summer; sit-ins had led to the opening of the local park, and Burd’s and Begley’s drugstores were being pressured to desegregate. However, CORE members would learn that the theater would not integrate so soon. There remained some confusion in the Schine management as to whether to the negotiations with Lexington theaters applied to Richmond. This issue was still lingering at the end of the year.<sup>85</sup>

The Madison CORE faced incredible challenges during its existence. Flynn believed President Martin “hurt” their “CORE group a great deal.” Faculty interested in the organization were discouraged from participating because the president disapproved. Only those students whose parents were residents of Madison County were allowed to join the Madison County CORE, and even those students were discouraged by the president from doing so. Department chairs described CORE as “subversive and clandestine.” Believing his contract would not be renewed, Flynn resigned from his position on the faculty. He did convince the mayor to create a Richmond committee, but few white members of the community responded. Flynn wanted the Governor’s Commission on Human Rights to visit the city and

<sup>85</sup> Application for Affiliation, [n.d.], reel 20, series 5, frame 00455, CORE Papers; Oliver and Lela Cunningham and Margaret Spears interview by author August 28, 1996; Beatrice Huguely to My dear friend [National Office], December 26, 1961, reel 20, series 5, frame 00465, CORE Papers.

strengthen the committee.<sup>86</sup>

On May 25, 1961, Flynn wrote Vice President Lyndon Johnson, who was scheduled to deliver the commencement address at the college. In his letter, Flynn wrote about the “plight” of African Americans in Richmond. “They suffer from crippling discrimination in the areas of employment, hospitalization, education, and public accommodations. Many of those who will greet you have tried to prevent our members from exercising their Constitutional rights of free speech and freedom of assembly.” Flynn noted that Johnson “could do immense good” while in the city and requested a “brief interview” with him.<sup>87</sup>

The departure of Flynn and Hansel was a blow to the local chapter. Esther Walker and Beatrice Huguely complained to James Cary that “It seems we here in Richmond are at a stand still . . . We need some one [*sic*] to revive the people since our white friends are gone. Most of the people seem bewildered.”<sup>88</sup> In June 1961, Viva O. Sloan had “reluctantly agreed” to serve as chair of the Madison County CORE. A retired white teacher in Berea, Kentucky, Sloan requested that she receive her correspondence in “plain envelopes or wrappers; not that I mind who knows, but for safety precautions.” She mentioned that in her apartment house there were “two occupants against racial equality.” Field Director Gordon R. Carey replied, “your chapter will certainly have many challenges and struggles ahead since you are apparently in one of the least progressive areas of Kentucky.”<sup>89</sup> Carey was right. The next month the Richmond CORE tried to have a picnic at the Irvine-McDowell Park that was owned by the city. The mayor had said it was fine. African Americans had attended the park on other occasions. But when Esther Walker, chair of the action committee, arrived with her six children, a policeman asked her to leave.

<sup>86</sup> Flynn to Zingman, May 24, 1961, reel 20, series 5, frame 00442-00443, *ibid*.

<sup>87</sup> James R. Flynn to Lyndon Johnson, May 25, 1961, reel 20, series 5, frame 00443, *ibid*.

<sup>88</sup> Esther Walker and Beatrice Huguely to James Carey, June 15, 1961, reel 20 series 5, frame 00449, *ibid*.

<sup>89</sup> Viva O. Sloan to Gordon R. Carey, June 17, 1961, reel 20, series 5, frame 00447, *ibid*.; Cary to Sloan, June 26, 1961, reel 20, series 5, frame 00447, *ibid*.

When she refused to do so, she was arrested. Because the property had been given to the city to be used as a hospital on the condition that no African Americans or “foreigners” could be admitted, the city expressed concern over the possibility of losing the grounds if blacks were allowed to attend the park. The Madison CORE filed a lawsuit and the matter was also forwarded to the general council of the national office.<sup>90</sup>

On June 22, 1961, Beatrice Huguely was elected chair of CORE with Sloan serving as cochair.<sup>91</sup> The next month, the branch, along with members of Lexington CORE, picketed drugstores on Main Street. Short lines consisting of three persons each picketed Collins, Stockton’s, and Burd’s drugstores. The police chief determined the area in which the groups could demonstrate. Persons distributing leaflets had to stand so “close to the curb as to be nearly in the street.” The police also allowed crowds to gather at the sites. According to Beatrice Huguely, “The police stood by without intervening when Gerald Cunningham was beaten to the ground and Ronald Berry (age seventeen) was struck. They neither arrested, reprimanded, or sent away the attackers. One policeman told two white men, pointing to Julia Lewis, ‘get her, beat her up.’” Chief Newland told Lewis she had five minutes to get out of town. Police also watched as Huguely’s sign was taken from her and destroyed. When police broke up the picket line and demonstrators dispersed, two members of the group, who did not protest but served as drivers, were arrested for reckless driving. A crowd soon gathered at the police station. “The behavior of the crowd was so threatening that persons who were in the cars whose drivers were arrested had to ask both the chief and the mayor for police protection on their way home,” which the police did provide.<sup>92</sup> The Madison CORE continued to face harassment. While

<sup>90</sup> Miss Sammie Huguely, Esther Walker, and Mrs. Elmer Huguely to Congress of Racial Equality, July 18, 1961, reel 20, series 5, frame 00451, *ibid.*; Gordon R. Carey to Mrs. Elmer Huguely and Mrs. Esther Walker, July 26, 1961, reel 20, series 5, frame 00451, *ibid.*; Beatrice Huguely to My dear friend [National office] December 26, 1961, reel 20, series 5, frame 00465, *ibid.*

<sup>91</sup> To CORE office, July 3, 1961, reel 20, series 5, frame 00550, *ibid.*

<sup>92</sup> Beatrice Huguely, “Richmond Police: Intimidation, Failure to give protection and illegal

picketing local drugstores, teenagers and children threw firecrackers and shot BB guns at them forcing them to stop their protests. "This is a tough town," observed Huguely, "because we have so many stiff segregationists and so many scared or nonchalant Negroes."<sup>93</sup>

### Civil Rights Legislation

The desegregation of public accommodations did not come easily in Kentucky. But Kentucky CORE chapters served as the agitator which ultimately moved some cities to change their racial policies on segregation in public accommodations. In December 1962, the second annual report of the Commission on Human Rights revealed that four hundred motels, hotels, lunch counters, drugstores, and other public accommodations were providing equal service to both races. Recreational facilities were integrated in fifty-five cities. Yet the majority of indoor theaters excluded blacks. And as the report revealed, "Despite experience which shows that desegregation in places of public accommodation hasn't hurt such businesses in Kentucky, segregation is the rule and fair treatment the exception."<sup>94</sup>

Gradually, racial barriers in public accommodations began to fall throughout the state. On March 5, 1964, over ten thousand persons participated in a march on Frankfort to petition the state legislature to pass a state civil rights bill. Martin Luther King Jr. and Jackie Robinson were among the speakers at the capitol. The gathering had a limited effect, though. Senate Majority Leader Casper Gardner of Owensboro observed: "I think it's a very poor idea to try to use pressure of this nature. The demonstrations wouldn't impress me if they had 100,000 people out there." Governor Edward T. Breathitt Jr. was criticized for not supporting a strong bill and waiting until the last fifteen days of the ses-

arrest," [n.d.], reel 20, series 5, frame 00461, *ibid.*

<sup>93</sup> CORE "Report Form," June 26, 1962, reel 20, series 5, frame 000469-70, *ibid.*

<sup>94</sup> Cases of police brutality were still evident in Richmond in 1967. See *Louisville Defender*, July 20, 1967; Commission on Human Rights, *Kentucky: 100 Years After The Emancipation Proclamation*, reel 21, part 24, series B, frame 00590, NAACP Papers.

sion to push for the legislation. “No man was more publicly committed or privately opposed to civil rights than Governor Edward T. Breathitt,” said Frank Stanley Jr., chair of the Allied Organizations for Civil Rights in Kentucky. “Negroes all over the state feel that he backtracked.” More than thirty supporters of the bill participated in a five-day hunger strike in the gallery of the House of Representatives. Stanley issued a statement which read:

We are seated in the gallery of the State House of Representatives, demonstrating nonviolently through our refusal to receive food and our refusal to leave, in order to impress upon this Legislature, our Governor, and the people of Kentucky the urgency of passing public accommodations legislation now—not two years hence, but now.<sup>95</sup>

Even though the 1964 state civil rights bill was defeated, Breathitt attempted to call a special session of the legislature to pass a bill. After this failed, he worked to get a bill passed. Having a state law would provide wider coverage and greater enforcement. In 1966, the General Assembly passed a state civil rights bill enabling Kentucky to become the first state south of the Ohio to have its own civil rights legislation.<sup>96</sup> However, Kentucky was still behind the other border states, Delaware, Maryland, and Missouri and several northern states which had already established laws to prohibit discrimination in employment and public accommodations.<sup>97</sup>

## Conclusion

<sup>95</sup> *Courier-Journal*, March 6, (quote)17, 1964; Anne Braden, “Civil Rights,” *Louisville Encyclopedia*, 191; Anthony Newberry, “Civil Rights Act of 1966,” *Kentucky Encyclopedia*, 191-92; *Louisville Defender*, March 26, 1964.

<sup>96</sup> *Courier-Journal*, March 13, 1964, January 2, 1964; Newberry, “Civil Rights Act of 1966,” *Kentucky Encyclopedia*, 192.

<sup>97</sup> A Human Rights Commission report noted that a state law is broader. “Under federal coverage, a barbershop in a hotel is covered while one down the block is not. Restaurants are covered. Bar-and-grills are not. A bowling alley with a restaurant is covered. A bowling alley is not.” Regarding employment discrimination, the federal law would be limited to companies with twenty-five employees. See *Courier-Journal*, January 28, 1966; Newberry, “Civil Rights Act of 1966,” *Kentucky Encyclopedia*, 192.



After the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and passage of a state civil rights act, white resistance to racial equality remained ever-present in the Bluegrass State. The city of Richmond continued to make only slow progress. There was one African American working downtown as of July 3, 1968. Under the leadership of the Reverend H. L. Parks, pastor of St. Paul Church and president of the Richmond Christian Leadership Council, a boycott was launched against local merchants. The successful demonstrations led to the hiring of blacks on the police and fire departments as well as in other businesses in the city.<sup>98</sup> But this development could not overcome what was to occur next. The following month a “racial gunfight” between blacks and white took place less than fifteen miles from Richmond, near the small college town of Berea.<sup>99</sup>

On September 1, 1968, the National State’s Rights Party held a rally on Route 25 about a half-mile from Berea. Persons gathered to support Alabama governor George Wallace for president. Potential for a disturbance was likely, given that hate literature was passed out and whiskey and beer were circulating among the crowd. Derogatory references were made to “nigger-lovers,” Jews, and Catholics. Founded in 1958, the party constitution espoused “the task of saving America and the white race.” According to a news report, around four o’clock in the afternoon, three carloads of armed African Americans appeared at the rally. What happened next was not clear, but shots were fired, about forty in total, leaving one white and one African American dead. Six blacks and eight whites were arrested. A committee in Madison County raised money for the six black defendants. The story made national news. The following March, a trial was held in the Richmond Madison County Courthouse for those arrested. When it was over, the African Americans admitted to the crime of unlawful assembly and were sentenced to probation. The whites were fined five hundred dollars and found guilty of disorderly conduct; three served thirty days in jail. No one was charged with murder.<sup>100</sup>

<sup>98</sup> *Louisville Defender*, February 13, 1969.

<sup>99</sup> *Berea Citizen*, September 12, 1968.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, September 5, 12, 1968; Clive Webb, *Rabble Rousers: The American Far Right in the*

Years earlier, these black men would have probably been lynched or “legally” lynched. But as the 1960s came to a close and a new decade began, it was apparent that Kentucky was struggling to change. Segregation was no longer legal, but race remained a controversial issue in the state.

How the integration of public accommodations occurred in Kentucky is worth remembering and understanding. An editorial in the *Lexington Herald-Leader* explains in part what took place in Kentucky. According to the *Herald-Leader*, “Boycotts, water-hosed marchers, church bombings and murders were certainly the movement’s most compelling images. Yet, there also were efforts of quiet persistence and consistent witnessing that often changed minds and softened hearts.”<sup>101</sup> While this is true, the role of CORE and the people committed to nonviolent direct-action protest has been overlooked. They protested and they were persistent.

Central to this struggle were African American women in the state. In November 1960, Helen Phelps, president of both the NAACP in Richmond and the City Federation of Colored Women’s Clubs, prepared a campaign to build an integrated community center in Richmond.<sup>102</sup> The following month, national CORE Field Secretary Joseph Perkins, a native of Owensboro, credited Julia Lewis of Lexington with “a large amount of the chapter’s success. She has a forceful personality and has relentlessly planned strategy keeping the group’s energy focused on the problem.”<sup>103</sup> The African American women who led Kentucky CORE and NAACP chapters left a legacy of courage and commitment. Audrey Grevious of Lexington,

*Civil Rights Era* (Athens, 2010), 159, 179; *Louisville Defender*, March 20, 1969.

<sup>101</sup> *Lexington Herald-Leader*, August 17, 2004.

<sup>102</sup> “*Richmond Daily Register*, November 5, 1960; “City Federation of Colored Women’s Clubs, Richmond, Kentucky, Sponsoring A Buy-A-Rick Sale,” Mrs. Helen Laine Phelps, president, Mrs. Esther D. Walker, secretary, Mrs. Mary E. Spillman, treasurer, part 27, reel 7, series A, frames 00254-55, NAACP Papers; Helen L. Phelps to Gloster B. Current, August 15, 1961, part 27, reel 7, series A, frames 00257-60, *ibid.*; see also Fosl and K’Meyer, *Freedom on the Border*, 89-90, 96, 116-24.

<sup>103</sup> “Field Report,” Joseph P. Perkins Jr., December 20, 1960, reel 20, Series 5, frame 00195, CORE Papers.

Beatrice Huguely of Richmond, Lucille Barnett of Covington, and Helen Holmes of Frankfort assumed the reins of leadership during a difficult time, and CORE embraced their efforts.

This was important because in each community where a CORE chapter was organized, it faced a different environment. In Lexington and Covington, there was cooperation with the NAACP but only a small group of active participants. In Louisville, the organization found itself competing with the more established local NAACP. In Frankfort, the chapter was formed in the midst of a student controversy on the Kentucky State campus. In Richmond, white resistance was firm from the very beginning. Yet, despite all of these circumstances, CORE held firm to its commitment of direct-action protest.

As the 1960s progressed, the national CORE office would face financial, ideological, and organizational challenges.<sup>104</sup> The Lexington CORE was the only remaining active chapter in the state by the end of the decade.<sup>105</sup> And it too had experienced ideological differences with some of its white members. Yet, CORE had proved to be a viable civil rights organization in Kentucky because of its direct-action tactics, interracial component, ties to college faculty, and the committed leadership of local African American women. The experience of CORE in Kentucky serves as another important piece of civil rights history. Clearly, historian Robert J. Norrell recognized the importance of these stories when he wrote in the foreword of his book, *Reaping the Whirlwind: The Civil Rights Movement in Tuskegee*: “Each community now has a story to tell about the movement, and only when many of those stories are told will the great social upheaval of the South

<sup>104</sup> By the mid-1960s, the national CORE had members who questioned the usefulness of nonviolence. There were issues regarding the relationship between the national office and local chapters. In addition to a strained budget, black nationalism led to increased tensions between black and white members. See Meier and Rudwick, *CORE*, 282-88.

<sup>105</sup> In April 1968, the Lexington CORE presented a list of grievances to the mayor which included issues surrounding education, employment, and the creation of biracial public committees. The Lexington CORE continued to function into the early 1980s, when it became embroiled in a controversy with the national office; see *Lexington Herald*, April 16, 1964 and January 20, 1981.

be well understood.”<sup>106</sup> The stories which shaped the movement in Kentucky towns are critical to the overall civil rights story in America. While the Bluegrass State did not acquire national attention as did other states, the journey toward equality was just as hard-fought and meaningful. The legacy of CORE serves a clear reminder that direct-action also took place in the Upper South.

<sup>106</sup> Robert J. Norrell, *Reaping the Whirlwind: The Civil Rights Movement in Tuskegee* (New York, 1985), ix.