

Article

“Remember Little Rock”: Racial (In)Justice and the Shaping of Contemporary White Evangelicalism

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Abstract: In 1957, Little Rock became a flash point for conflict over the U.S. Supreme Court’s *Brown* decision. This article examines Little Rock as a religious symbol for white southerners—especially white southern evangelicals—as they sought to exercise their self-appointed roles as cultural guardians to devise competing, but ultimately complementary, strategies to manage social change to limit desegregation and other civil rights expansions for African Americans. This history reveals how support for segregation helped to convert white southern evangelicals to conservative political activism in this period.

Keywords: white southern evangelicalism; white supremacy; civil rights; *Brown* decision; Little Rock crisis; conservative political activism



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1. Introduction

In 1954, the U.S. Supreme Court shocked many white southerners by ruling racial segregation in public education unconstitutional. This decision—known as *Brown v. Board of Education (Topeka)*—finally acknowledged “separate educational facilities are inherently unequal”. It also partially overruled the key legal justification for segregation established in the Court’s 1896 *Plessy v. Ferguson* decision.¹ In the modern south, however, the recent origins of racial segregation had been transformed through myth and memory into a long-standing tradition and even a divinely ordained way of life. The editor of *The Cavalier Daily*, a student newspaper at the University of Virginia that announced its allegiance to a romantic vision of the Old South in its name, reflected and participated in this process when writing that the *Brown* decision “is contrary to a way of life and violates the way they have thought since 1619”.² The date specified here was not accidental. The editor understood the arrival of the first enslaved Africans in Virginia as a pivotal event in southern (and perhaps American) history. This genteel critique of the *Brown* decision put white supremacy—expressed through both slavery and segregation—at the center of the southern way of life.

Little Rock became a flash point for conflict after the *Brown* decision and what it would mean for the “southern way of life”. In some respects, the Arkansas city seemed an unlikely place for a major battle to preserve segregation. Civic leaders had cultivated a “moderate” reputation on race relations for some time. The Little Rock school board even approved a plan for limited and gradual integration in 1955 with little initial controversy. Organized resistance from newly formed white citizens’ councils to desegregation in Hoxie, Arkansas, in 1955, however, contributed to the Little Rock crisis. The Hoxie school board voted unanimously in favor of integration and refused to change course once strong segregationist opposition emerged. Significantly, Hoxie officials explicitly stated their belief that racial integration “was right in the sight of God”—a direct challenge to claims that maintaining segregation was a religious duty. The Hoxie school board sought an injunction against segregationists and eventually secured the nullification of Arkansas’s segregation laws. To placate angry segregationists and protect his immediate political future during and after the Hoxie controversy, Gov. Orval Faubus abandoned his “moderate” stance on

race relations in favor of strident support for segregation. This early and little-known battle over segregation in Hoxie set the stage for a still greater conflict to emerge in Little Rock.³

Tensions in Little Rock began to rise as soon as it became clear that the school district's plan for limited integration would be implemented and nine African American students would attend Central High School in the autumn of 1957. Throughout the spring and summer of 1957 especially, Little Rock also attracted sometimes intense outside attention as staunch segregationists across the south wondered if the city and the state could be trusted to hold the color line.⁴ A vicious public battle to maintain segregation erupted when the Little Rock Nine sought entry to Central High in September 1957. Gov. Orval Faubus refused to allow the students to enter the school, deploying the Arkansas National Guard to block their way. In response to Faubus's action, President Dwight D. Eisenhower ordered federal troops to the scene to guarantee entry to Central High for the African American students. The president later federalized the Arkansas National Guard to protect the Nine from segregationists who abused them outside the school and their children who bullied them within it.⁵

This study focuses on Little Rock as a religious symbol for white southerners—and particularly white southern evangelicals—who sought to preserve white supremacy after the *Brown* decision by maintaining segregation or managing desegregation to limit its effects.⁶ As such, the history of racial integration at Little Rock Central High provides the context for an examination of racial (in)justice in the shaping of white southern evangelicalism in this period. Even before the Central High crisis, apprehensions about what might happen in Little Rock after the *Brown* decision made the city a symbol on which to pin hopes as well as fears for the future of the south and the nation. The Central High crisis itself captured national attention, bringing images of violent efforts to stop desegregation directly into people's homes through the relatively new medium of television. The call to "Remember Little Rock"—even after the Central High crisis had passed—served an important role in energizing "massive resistance" campaigns across the south.⁷ It also motivated quieter, but no less significant, responses from "moderates" who proved willing to compromise on segregated schools without renouncing white supremacy. The injunction to "Remember Little Rock"—both a rallying cry and a warning, depending on the particular context—lingered in the minds of white southern evangelicals as they contemplated the future and how best to shape it in their own image.

Recently, historians of American religion have begun to examine the history of white supremacy as central to the rise of a highly politicized conservative Protestant evangelicalism in the twentieth century.⁸ Some denominational works, in particular, have sought to draw sharp distinctions between "progressive", "moderate", and "conservative" evangelicals. Their differences are important; however, the same is true of their similarities. By examining Little Rock as a multivalent religious symbol, this study emphasizes the connections among competing expressions of white southern evangelicalism. Most importantly, white evangelicals embraced a vision of themselves as cultural guardians responsible for determining the nature and scope of social change.⁹ This shared vision animated efforts to preserve white supremacy—either by maintaining segregation or by managing desegregation to minimize its impact. The difference between "moderates" (or even most "progressives") and "conservatives", therefore, was a matter of degree rather than kind. Understanding both the commitment to exercise authority as cultural guardians and, in so doing, to maintain racial hierarchies helps to explain some aspects of white evangelical political realignment during this period. Through their embrace of a host of conservative political causes, white evangelicals repeatedly rejected racial justice in favor of social control.

2. "Remember Little Rock": Witness, Ritual and Myth

Little Rock became a powerful religious symbol for many Americans through a potent combination of witness, ritual, and myth. On 4 September 1957, African American students and their escorts attempted to enter Central High, but they were turned away by Arkansas

National Guard troops under the governor's orders. Elizabeth Eckford—one of the Little Rock Nine—arrived at campus alone. Like the other members of the Nine, Eckford found her way barred by guardsmen. She walked through the mob to a nearby bus stop as segregationists screamed racist insults and spat on her. Some even threatened to “lynch her” for daring to step outside her place and attempt to enter a “white” school. Unable even to cross the school's threshold, the Nine remained at home for more than two weeks, waiting for the federal government to act. A federal judge ordered the governor to comply with the court's order to allow desegregation at Central High. Faubus told the Arkansas National Guard troops to stand down, and the Nine entered Central for the first time on September 23. The mob turned violent—not only menacing the black students, but also beating black journalists on the street. Fearful of further violence, the Little Rock police removed the Nine from school. Although reluctant to intervene to end segregation, President Eisenhower ordered the U.S. Army's 101st Airborne Division to Little Rock and placed the Arkansas National Guard under federal control to restore order. Federal troops escorted the Nine back to Central for their first full day of classes on September 25.¹⁰

Across the nation, Americans were riveted by these events. Television—still a relatively new medium in 1957—captured the drama and urgency of the Little Rock crisis. This technology allowed Americans who had never set foot in Little Rock to witness frenzied protests against integration within the intimate spaces of their own homes. Realities of racial oppression and racial violence were brought home to them—quite literally—as never before. National newspapers and magazines also documented these events, printing shocking photos of federal troops protecting African American teens from angry white mobs intent on terrorizing them on their way to school. Some of these images remain fixed even now in public memory. This is perhaps especially true of the photographs depicting white women and girls—their faces contorted with anger and hatred—threatening black children. Because these white women transgressed cultural ideals of ladylike decorum and maternal kindness in their protests against racial integration, these photographs proved particularly jarring to middle-class sensibilities both inside and outside the south. Witnessing such racial hatred and social disorder inspired sympathy for civil rights expansions in the south among some white Americans.

After the tumultuous events of the initial crisis, Little Rock became a symbol of racial progress in America. The Nine figured prominently in triumphal accounts of African American dignity and persistence that overcame racial injustice. “Remember[ing] Little Rock”, in this case, meant memorializing racism that had been defeated rather than rooting out racism that still endured within the nation's social structures. This moral vision contributed to the emergence of the supposedly “color-blind” politics of the late twentieth century that celebrated the ideal of racial equality in name only.¹¹

The Little Rock crisis, however, appeared quite different to many white southerners. The lawlessness of white protestors shocked many “moderates” and “progressives”. Segregation had been established after the Reconstruction Era and expanded during the Progressive Era to exert social control over African Americans as part of a modern economic development strategy. Many white southerners believed that this new system of strict racial separation would promote the racial harmony necessary to attract business to the region. They had not wavered in this belief before the *Brown* decision, maintaining Jim Crow laws throughout a long succession of legal challenges against them.¹²

Events in Little Rock, however, began to unsettle this white southern dogma—at least, among the religious and political “moderates” who made up a large percentage of the region's middle class. By the 1950s, many white southerners had come to the unsettling realization that Jim Crow segregation was a source of racial tension and social protest rather than a remedy for social disorder. They came to see that their social values and institutional arrangements could not be sustained without some change. It was simply no longer possible for them to maintain the same commitments to law and order, economic development, public education, and legal segregation in the new political context created

by the *Brown* decision. Increasingly, they expressed willingness to alter racial arrangements to preserve their other interests.¹³

“Moderates” also found the ugliness of the segregationist demonstrations in Little Rock offensive. They valued respectability and sought to distance themselves from the unseemly, emotional outbursts of the segregationists’ protests. Although they shared the same assumptions of white racial superiority, “moderates” disdained the working-class whites who sent their children to Central High and protested racial integration in the streets.¹⁴ They deplored “mob rule” and endeavored to carve out a position for themselves between the “extremes” of integration and segregation. Their differences with hard-line segregationists were never about rejecting white supremacy, but rather how to preserve it in a changing political context.¹⁵

“Moderate” religion played an important role in authorizing “moderate” politics. After the Civil War, white southerners embraced evangelical religion with great enthusiasm. Their commitments to evangelicalism remained strong throughout the twentieth century. Southern Baptists (whose numbers dwarfed other white evangelical denominations throughout much of the region) exercised significant cultural authority—so much so that the Southern Baptist Convention often operated as the *de facto* established religion.¹⁶ For moderates within white southern evangelicalism, “Remember Little Rock” was a warning. They could not afford to cede control of their churches or their communities to “extreme” elements. Emphasizing the reasonableness of their religion and their politics, moderates offered a moral vision that emphasized Christian love expressed through Christian authority. Theirs was a vision of a well-ordered society that rested on hierarchy (racial and otherwise), not equality. Understanding themselves as the proper arbiters of morality, moderates sought to maintain control of the political, economic, and social levers of power throughout the Central High crisis despite conservative opposition to maintain segregation at almost any cost.¹⁷

“Conservatives” also took their roles as cultural guardians seriously. Conflict between “moderates” and “conservatives” often revolved around competition for the high moral ground that would determine the appropriate response to the challenge racial integration posed to white supremacy. Numerous pamphlets and periodicals from this period depicted segregationists in Little Rock as courageous defenders of white southern female purity against the purported violence of federal troops. One widely distributed political cartoon combined an injunction to “Remember Little Rock” with an image of a soldier pointing his bayonet at the backs of two teen-age white girls to drive home the perceived danger of federal authority.¹⁸ Other messages focused on white girls as victims of a supposedly uncontrolled black male sexuality, insisting that racial integration in public schools would lead to the degradation of white womanhood through interracial marriage. These warnings put a new spin on the old falsehoods about black men raping white women often used to justify lynchings, expressing fears of a white female sexual agency insufficiently restrained by white patriarchy.¹⁹ Students shared racist poems and chanted racist songs around the schoolyard. The injunction to “Remember Little Rock” appeared almost everywhere, emblazoned on segregation cards, stickers, and buttons. These items circulated almost like prayer cards, encouraging white southerners to keep the faith by holding the color line.²⁰

The public spectacle of segregationists protesting racial integration at Central High created a highly ritualized context. Public protests drew specific content from a broad repertoire of white evangelical religion—especially long-standing traditions of biblical racism and veneration of the Lost Cause.²¹ Segregationists also increasingly identified white supremacy with a strident Americanism that vilified both communism and racial integration by conflating them. Carrying signs that asserted “Race Mixing is Communism” alongside both American and Confederate flags, segregationists created a pageantry of hate that both attracted and repelled other white southerners. In these events, “Remember Little Rock” always functioned as more than a segregationist rallying cry. It was an invitation to participate in the rituals and myths of southern exceptionalism. White southern evangelicals overwhelmingly accepted that invitation, drawing on different elements of

this shared tradition to authorize competing expressions of white supremacy to preserve what they believed most important to the “southern way of life”.

3. First the Schools, Then the Churches?

Racial integration in schools was not the only issue at stake for many white southerners. Fears that their churches might become the next sites for racial integration simmered near the surface of discussions about public education and civil rights in this period. Just three months before the Little Rock Nine entered Central High School for the first time and during a period when tensions had reached near fever-pitch over whether segregation would fall in Little Rock public schools, U.S. Representative and Southern Baptist Convention President Brooks Hays received a letter from an indignant constituent in Louann, Arkansas—a small, rural community south of Little Rock.²² Almost certainly aware of the congressman’s deep commitment to a moderate, modern, and ecumenical expression of Southern Baptist faith, the writer scorned religious modernists and their support for racial equality—especially within churches. He demanded to know why “some of our ‘modernized’ white and ‘negro’ preachers” engaged in “antagonizing acts [against] segregation, from riding in the front seats of buses to leading negro children into segregated schools”.

“[It] cannot be that they learned that from the teachings of the bible or from bible reading”, he asserted, insisting that his own Bible study yielded nothing that would challenge segregation. The writer’s greatest outrage, however, was reserved for the idea that blacks might be better Christians than whites because they embraced racial equality as a Christian ideal. “I would not be surprised in the least that some of our modernized white and negro preachers . . . don’t begin to preach that if any of we white folks get to heaven we will have to hitch hike a ride on some negro’s ‘coattails,’” he fumed, “. . . I don’t now and never will be made to believe that any of our ‘forbears’ went to hell! for the reason that they did not worship with negroes”.²³

Hays offered a measured and conciliatory response in return. Taking a firm states’ rights position, the congressman stressed his long-standing opposition to the federal government “projecting its authority” into southern communities to expand civil rights for African Americans against white objections. Hays identified as a “moderate” in both religion and politics, and he sought to find a middle position between those who supported integration and those who insisted upon maintaining segregation. Both these positions were often cast as “extremes” during the period—with the greatest criticism generally reserved for civil rights activists whose support for racial integration was cast as “anarchy” or “communism” because it threatened “law and order” by challenging segregation.

In reality, no such middle ground existed. As a moderate, Hays consistently emphasized white preferences over black rights—a stance that supported continued segregation by leaving social change that would secure any measure of racial equality entirely to white discretion. His signing of the Southern Manifesto in 1956 was not inconsistent with such “moderation” on civil rights in either politics or religion.²⁴

Hays ended the letter to his fellow Arkansan by appealing to Christian values he hoped would move more white southerners to accept and then to direct desegregation in public schools and other civil rights expansions for African Americans. It also hinted at the danger faced by civil rights activists in Little Rock then organizing to desegregate Central High and throughout the south by denouncing violence to preserve white supremacy. “Above all”, he wrote, “I deplore the use of violence and ask only that we strive for peaceful solutions to our problems, based on justice and brotherhood. We must not deny the evidence of good will on every side, and should use this good will as the foundation for a new period of peace and tranquility”.²⁵

Hays described himself as a “Rauschenbusch Baptist”, an identification that signaled his allegiance to a Social Gospel in which Christians lived out their faith through their embrace of a shared responsibility to care for society.²⁶ Walter Rauschenbusch was a leader of the Social Gospel movement within American Protestantism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. As a Baptist pastor and theologian, he encouraged Christians

to view their religion as a revolutionary movement capable of transforming society. His work therefore focused on improving social conditions through the application of Christian ethics to social problems rather than simply converting individuals to Christianity. Rauschenbusch, for example, supported the formation of labor unions and economic collectives. The Social Gospel movement, however, was not monolithic. Although generally regarded as a progressive movement, it also contained significant conservative elements focused, in particular, on alcohol, prostitution, and gambling as social ills to be eradicated. Hays situated himself within the Social Gospel movement through his identification with Rauschenbusch, and he embodied a Social Gospel Baptist faith that combined both progressive and conservative elements.

Hays' focus on "justice" and "brotherhood" in debates over civil rights for African Americans derived from this tradition and expressed values he believed central to Christian life. For Hays, justice could not be separated from love. He believed Christians who had been commanded to love their neighbors could not then deny justice to some of those neighbors because of the color of their skin. The commandment to love the neighbor demanded an understanding of brotherhood grounded on justice for all people.²⁷

This ethic of love and justice, however, also included a white paternalism that effectively subverted the racial equality it seemed to mandate. Like other white southern moderates, Hays relied on white preferences to set the pace and extent of social change to secure justice for blacks. His insistence on white voluntarism as a necessary condition for civil rights expansions—frequently expressed as opposition to "forced" integration by Hays and other white southern moderates during this period—revealed a strong conservative bent to apparently moderate or even progressive religious commitments and denominational structures. Through his public roles as a U.S. congressman and Southern Baptist denominational leader, Hays repeatedly stressed the necessity for Christian leadership in American society—especially with respect to improving race relations. He even saved calls for moral leadership from the SBC in his papers—sometimes marking passages that resonated with his own goals for the denomination.²⁸

Hays attempted to put these values into practice by actively inserting himself into the Central High crisis, attempting to broker a compromise between Faubus and Eisenhower he hoped would result in a peaceful resolution. The effort failed, but it demonstrated Hays's commitment to moderate principles and moral leadership. The line blurred between his religious and political duties—if a such a line existed at all—in this attempt to prevent a violent conflict over black students entering a public school in Little Rock.

Regardless of Hays's personal sentiments regarding desegregation of public schools in Little Rock or elsewhere, a reliance on individual conversion for social reform and a vision of white evangelicals as cultural guardians responsible for controlling social change linked so-called "moderate" evangelicalism to the conservative forms that whole-heartedly endorsed segregation. Additionally, the lingering appeal of Lost Cause religion continued to exert a powerful influence within white southern evangelicalism. Created by white southerners in the aftermath of the Civil War, Lost Cause mythology encouraged the veneration of the Confederacy and its rebellion against the Union by emphasizing the purportedly aristocratic virtues of the antebellum south. It sought to distance white southerners from their support of slavery, providing alternate and misleading interpretations for the civil war as a defense of the south against northern greed and aggression. In particular, Lost Cause religion cast secession as necessary for the protection of "states' rights"—a defense that obliquely recalled the centrality of slavery to the property rights white southerners expected their states to defend by preserving slavery even as this conceit distanced them from open acknowledgment of the racialized brutality of the southern slave system after the war. In its celebration of southern exceptionalism, Lost Cause religion gave rise to a "southern historical experience . . . [that] provided the model for segregation that southern churches accepted". (Wilson 2009)²⁹ Indeed, twentieth-century appeals to states' rights in opposition to desegregation and other civil rights advances resonated so strongly with white southerners precisely because they recalled these historical connections.

During protests against desegregation in Little Rock during the Central High crisis, for example, segregationists explicitly drew on Confederate symbols. Their use of the Confederate battle flag is worth examination here. Flags are always multivalent symbols, capable of conveying multiple meanings simultaneously. Use of the Confederate flag in this context recalled not only the existence of the Confederacy and its violent rebellion against federal authority to preserve slavery, but also the white terrorism enacted during Reconstruction to make freedom as much like slavery for African Americans as possible. By connecting the Confederate flag to protests against civil rights for African Americans in the 1950s and beyond, this symbol acquired additional meanings as well.

Lost Cause themes also found expression in the example Hays used to conclude *A Southern Moderate Speaks*, a book he published the year after he lost re-election to an arch-segregationist for his attempts to end the Little Rock crisis peacefully. The story—borrowed from the celebrated Southern Baptist evangelist Billy Graham—guided Hays’s own approach to race relations and offered a model he believed could be used to convince other white southerners to accept desegregation. The memoir itself represented a powerful example of the moral leadership Hays sought to embody. “Shortly after the close of the Civil War, a Negro entered a fashionable church in Richmond, Virginia, one Sunday morning while communion was being served. He walked down the aisle and knelt at the altar. A rustle of shock and anger swept through the congregation. Sensing the situation, a distinguished layman immediately stood up, stepped forward to the altar and knelt beside his colored brother”, Hays wrote. “. . . The layman who set the example was Robert E. Lee”. (Hays 1959)³⁰.

That Hays would hold up Robert E. Lee—the most revered martyr of Lost Cause religion for his military service to the Confederacy in order to preserve slavery—as a model of Christian love and racial reconciliation—demonstrates the depth of white supremacy within white evangelicalism. This story does not merely romanticize the old south. It pulls that problematic history into the present as *the* proper model on which to base a new configuration of race relations in the south. Lee’s leadership in a rebellion against the United States and his enslavement of African Americans enhance rather than diminish his character in this telling. Ultimately, it is a story about social change that does not fundamentally alter social structures—a fitting model for desegregation that generally failed to result in integration.

In keeping with Hays’s religious and political ideals, this story revolves around white preferences rather than black rights. He emphasizes white Christian responsibility to direct social change for the good of others and white generosity as the mechanism for (limited) black acceptance. The story suggests that white evangelicals—especially elite white evangelical men—deserve the authority they have over others. It suggests that propriety of white southern patriarchy by naturalizing the racial and gender hierarchies maintained under this system. Although Hays’s contemporaries might have been unaware that their ancestors had appealed to female subordination in marriage as the ideal model for chattel slavery, they shared similar assumptions that white men ought to shoulder public responsibilities for policing boundaries of race and gender in their society. As struggles over segregation intensified and desegregation proved unavoidable, these white southern evangelicals would insist with great vehemence that gender roles that prescribed female submission to male authority were divinely ordained and impervious to change.³¹

Hays framed his understanding of evangelical cultural guardianship in starker terms during an acceptance speech for his role as chairman of the SBC’s Christian Life Commission, a position he held immediately before becoming the denomination’s president. “The Negro’s situation may be likened to his being in a cave”, he said. “While he might not be able to emerge immediately, no blocks must be thrown in his way. He must be able to see the light ahead, and it must be our job to assist him in putting away the stones that lie in his path and block the light”. (Hays 1959)³² This orientation nurtured practices of white paternalism as expressions of Christian duty and Christian love, encouraging Southern

Baptists to accept expansions in civil rights for African Americans without challenging their assumptions of white supremacy.

Perhaps building on this foundation, other white evangelicals would come to view measured support for desegregation as the context for white spiritual development. In a sermon delivered in the immediate aftermath of the bombing of the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama, in 1963, one Southern Baptist pastor addressed the issue of race directly from the pulpit for the first time in his career. He assured the congregation that he would make no “attempt to call upon legal rights rather than see that the problem is basically one of attitude and one of the heart”. However, he felt compelled to urge his congregation to consider a change of heart and even the possibility of opening the church to blacks. “. . . I am saying that today the white Christian needs the Negro Christian in order to become the persons we must, in Christ, become”, the pastor explained.³³ The explicit focus on racial tolerance—not racial equality—as the context for white evangelical spiritual growth is striking in this sermon because it assumes not only that whites are and should be in charge, but also that they matter in a way others simply do not.

4. On the Edge or at the Center?

Others found any openness to racial justice—no matter how conditional or halting—unacceptable. In June 1957, the Rev. Carey Daniel, pastor of First Baptist Church of West Dallas, Texas, and executive vice-president of the Dallas chapter of Citizens’ Council of America for Segregation, mailed a copy of his pamphlet titled “God The Original Segregationist” to Brooks Hays. As a representative of “the Daddy of the Texas Citizens’ Councils”, Daniel wanted to “register the strongest possible protest against the race-mixing and mongrelizing activities of the ‘Christian Life Commission’ and against the Southern Baptist Convention’s continued endorsement of the U.S. Supreme Court’s unscriptural and unconstitutional amalgamation laws”.³⁴ In addition to his duties in the U.S. House of Representatives, Hays also served as the chairman of the Southern Baptist Conventions’s Christian Life Commission from 1955 to 1957.³⁵ This agency—dedicated to addressing social concerns like poverty, alcohol use, and, most controversially, race relations through the application of Christian ethics—was widely regarded as the most “liberal” or “progressive” organization in the SBC at the time.³⁶ Daniel contacted Hays not only because he felt threatened by the CLC’s activities, but also because Hays exercised considerable influence within the SBC as the chairman of the CLC and president-elect of the denomination. Indeed, Hays reached the peak of his power within the SBC during the time he was involved in the Little Rock crisis.³⁷

Daniel warned that his church would suspend contributions to the CLC “until there is a radical change in that policy”. He also claimed that his white citizens’ council “numbered thousands in Dallas and about three million in the South”, stressing that this organization “has more Baptist preachers . . . than ministers of all the other denominations put together”. Daniel sharply criticized Hays for attempting “to give the impression that the great majority of Southern Baptists favor race-mixing”. He insisted that the facts on the ground proved the opposite. “Baptists were the largest church group that voted in the recent referendum in which Texans voted over four to one for interposition and continued segregation”, he insisted. Daniel also warned of schism should the SBC deny the will of segregationists within the denomination. “If you keep this up”, he wrote, “you will soon split the SBC wide open and it SHOULD be split before it agrees to making America a mulatto nation”. He concluded the letter by pleading with Hays to read his pamphlet and to condemn the “Supreme Court’s mongrelization laws” at the next SBC meeting.

It is worth noting that Daniel contacted Hays as tensions over the imminent desegregation of Little Rock’s Central High were approaching their peak. Segregationists assessed news from Little Rock closely during this period, looking for reasons to hope that desegregation would be thwarted and finding reasons to fear it might succeed. Georgia Gov. Marvin Griffin even visited Little Rock in the summer of 1957 to attack the *Brown* decision and urge Arkansans to fight to defend states’ rights by resisting desegregation. Daniel’s

post-script hints at his awareness of the broader political context—which would include plans for desegregation in Little Rock—and Hays’s “moderate” position on desegregation as part of the Arkansas congressional delegation. This post-script obliquely attacked Hays’s political work and hinted at Daniel’s own powerful political connections: “Thank God for a new Texas Governor like Price Daniel (my first cousin), an active Baptist who is such an outspoken segregationist”!³⁸ The implication that Hays and his state lacked the same religious and political commitments to preserve segregation would not have been difficult for the congressman to discern. The inclusion of Daniel’s infamous pamphlet denouncing the *Brown* decision to end segregation in public schools also strongly suggests his concern about the situation in Little Rock without the necessity of speaking directly to it.

Indeed, Hays read Daniel’s pamphlet with possibly equal concern about its message and influence. He underscored a few points and then sent it to A.C. Miller, who served as executive secretary of the CLC. The pamphlet was “as bad as anything I have seen”, Hays confided to Miller, and, perhaps more troubling for both men, it “circulated among Members of Congress”.³⁹

The CLC monitored right-wing extremism during this period. The agency’s collection of pamphlets and other materials suggests an awareness that hard-right conservative politics would appeal to Southern Baptists committed to maintaining segregation.⁴⁰ Significantly, these CLC files included materials from the National Education Program—an organization founded by George Benson at Harding University in Searcy, Arkansas. With its extensive Church of Christ connections, NEP created a highly effective communications network to encourage white evangelicals—especially those living in the south or who had migrated to the west—to embrace both conservative politics and corporate business alongside—and indeed as integral parts of—their Christian faith. Its far-right activism contributed to the ascendancy of the Republican Party in the late twentieth century. Benson was an ardent segregationist, and his religious justifications for segregation bore a striking resemblance to the views expressed in Daniel’s pamphlet—especially in terms of the so-called “Curse of Ham” mythology and anti-communist sentiment.⁴¹ His support for segregation should not be divorced from his anti-communism and anti-union activism.

Appeals to purported biblical literalism and anti-communism in defense of segregation helped lay the groundwork for the NEP and other right-wing activists in their efforts to convert aggrieved whites to their cause after the *Brown* decision. Daniel, for example, combined a heavy reliance on “Curse of Ham” mythology with unfounded assertions that civil rights activists were really Communists intent on destroying America in “God The Original Segregationist”. As segregationists increasingly accepted the assertion that civil rights for blacks equaled communism, this formulation sometimes shifted to allow anti-communist rhetoric to come to the fore and even to stand as a seemingly “color-blind” proxy for opposition to civil rights.

American evangelicals have long appealed to the “Curse of Ham” and the related “Curse of Cain” to justify racial inequality. Employing supposedly literal readings of the Bible, they creatively interpreted accounts recorded in Genesis to presume that God created dark skin coloration as a “curse”. These myths explained the existence of racial difference and justified slavery and, later, segregation as consequences of the divine “curse”. In the mid-twentieth century, Daniel and other segregationists employed the Hamitic mythology to support popular conceptions of black sexuality as a threat to the white patriarchy. Insisting that racial integration in schools would lead to the “mongrelization” of American society through interracial marriage, Daniel warned that the nation would face the same fate as the biblical cities of Sodom and Gomorrah.⁴²

Daniel also explicitly linked “race mixing” to communism: “There Is Absolutely Nothing The Communists Would Love More Than A Mongrelized America That They Could Easily Enslave”.⁴³ This overwrought rhetoric called attention to the urgency of several combined threats. It again reminded readers of the dangers of interracial marriage and the *legitimate* mixed-race children such unions would produce. It framed illicit sex and loss of racial purity within the context of communism, and it further claimed that black

or mixed-race people (and whites who tolerated them) would allow democracy to fall and become slaves under an authoritarian regime. The fixation on slavery is particularly noteworthy given Daniel's tendency to ignore the history of slavery in the United States, falsely claim that "the land of Dixie has always been a veritable paradise for the Negro", or blame white northerners for the slave trade ("remember there were no Southern slave ships").⁴⁴ Daniel's true concern in all of this hysteria was protecting white patriarchy within a broader context of white supremacy. For him, "mongrelization" was not just "race mixing", but also the toleration of "race mixing".⁴⁵

In writing and disseminating such messages, Daniel claimed the mantle of cultural guardianship and sought to exert a restraining influence over dangers he perceived within American culture. He repeatedly asserted his vision of a well-ordered society for the south as a region and the United States as a nation. Daniel suggested, for example, that he and other segregationists were the "true" friends of black men and women. "Negroes are quite happy and satisfied with their segregated condition", he insisted. "Whenever you find a Southern colored man who is a strong integrationist you may be sure the white folks have 'done been talking' to him." The moderates who were willing to tolerate some measure of desegregation in schools and other public accommodations were "the real enemies of the Negro". Their actions would "destroy both the white race and the black race", he charged, "and substitute a weakened and degenerated tribe of half-breeds" in their place. The racism in his words is apparent; however, the classism may be somewhat less obvious. Daniel's use of dialect is both racialized in its mocking tone toward African Americans, but also elitist in the difference it suggests between educated, middle-class whites (who presumably know the rules of grammar well enough to violate them for effect) and their working-class neighbors. Although the tone and content are considerably different from anything Hays wrote, Daniel's pamphlet served as a similarly important vehicle for an elite white southern evangelical man to present himself—and, by extension, other elite white southern evangelical men—as the proper arbiter of race and gender boundaries in society.

In what passes for an attempt at humor, Daniel also claimed that sensible blacks shared his views and operated their own black citizens' councils. "The one here in Dallas", he joked, "I understand, meets and operates almost within the shadow of the headquarters of the National Association for the Agitation of the Colored People!"⁴⁶ His jest worked to underscore his charge that racial integration represented a communist plot to subvert American democracy by attacking white American families.

At other times, however, Daniel expressed an awareness that African Americans did not, in fact, share his belief in racial segregation as an unalloyed social good. "Does anyone really doubt that intermarriage and mongrelization are inevitable if [racial integration] happens? Does anyone actually think it possible to mix children in the close and constant associations of the classroom, the playground and the dining hall without having to invite both together to all the parties, swims, dances and other social activities?" Daniel asked. "The Negroes would scream 'discrimination' to the skies if they were left out. And can any sensible person imagine such a situation as that without the interracial dating, courtship and marriage (not to mention worse evils) that would naturally follow?"⁴⁷

Daniel furnished additional pamphlets during the Little Rock crisis and even published a hardbound collection of his sermons around this time for those who lacked the imagination to answer such questions for themselves. For example, Little Rock figured prominently in "God Laughs at the Race-Mixers". Daniel urged his readers to "Remember Little Rock", printing two graphic images that depicted federal troops threatening or abusing white children to enforce desegregation orders. These images—"Remember Little Rock" and "Brotherhood by Bayonet"—are not unique to Daniel's work. They circulated in various forms quite extensively during and after the Little Rock crisis. In "Remember Little Rock", a soldier points his bayonet at the backs of two white teen-age girls. "Brotherhood by Bayonet" features a bayonet-wielding soldier pressing his foot against a white girl's neck to force her to stand next to a black girl on their way into a school. Perhaps intentionally,

the school house bears a striking resemblance to a typical Protestant church and therefore may communicate the perceived danger of racial integration in that space as well.⁴⁸

From this distance, it is difficult to see the humor in “God Laughs at Race-Mixers”. Daniel, however, introduced the pamphlet as a collection of jokes. His attempts to mock both blacks and whites who supported integration are actually serious efforts to incorporate new, strongly anti-government sentiments into their existing support for segregation.⁴⁹ Daniel accused the U.S. government of violating the U.S. Constitution by enforcing desegregation orders, interpreting the protection of black rights as the infringement of white rights. Additionally, he conflated divine and national authority in his rendering of the Constitution’s origins—a choice that emphasized white evangelicals’ authority as cultural guardians to determine both the meaning and the application of U.S. law. Interpreting the Tenth Amendment, Daniel insisted, “OUR SACRED, BIBLE-BASED U.S. CONSTITUTION, declaring itself “THE SUPREME LAW OF THE LAND”, still says, “The powers not delegated to the United States by the Constitution, nor prohibited by it to the States” (including bus and school administration) “are reserved to the States respectively, or to the people”. In the concluding section on “THE TEN COMMANDMENTS FOR THE RACE-MIXERS”, Daniel doubled-down on claims that constitutional rights belonged to whites only: “THOU SHALT NOT STEAL the Constitutional rights, States rights or God-given rights of White Southerners”.⁵⁰

Daniel also took aim at the United Nations, referring to the organization as the “Jew-nited Nations” and insisting that it operated as a communist front.⁵¹ Such explicit appeals to antisemitism were common among segregationists. Indeed, significant parallels existed between antisemitism and anti-black racism. Daniel’s attacks on the United Nations amplified his other anti-government messages, emphasizing the multiple and related threats he perceived to white supremacy. He suggested repeatedly that respectable politicians and preachers did not have their people’s best interests at heart, insisting that their willingness to brook any compromise on segregation disqualified them from office.

Brooks Hays certainly fit the bill as a dangerous politician and preacher as far as Daniel was concerned. Indeed, as noted earlier, Daniel strongly disapproved of Hays and told him so in no uncertain terms. He was not alone in condemning Hays for his religious and political work to improve race relations. Hays received numerous letters and telegrams during the controversy over desegregation in Little Rock that expressed fears of “miscegenation” and vented grievances (real and imagined) against blacks and “outsiders” pressing for social change. Some writers even attacked Hays for meeting with African Americans after a photograph of Hays with two black Baptist denominational leaders appeared in the press.⁵²

“I felt physically ill when I saw your picture in the [local newspaper] Saturday”, one woman wrote, noting that she had recently severed ties with her local Baptist church over integration. (It is not clear from the letter if blacks actually attended services with whites in this church. More likely, the congregation expressed some measure of support for integration in the future in its worship services or in other public spaces. Integrated church services were exceedingly rare during this period, and they remain uncommon today.) “Each day I view with alarm what is happening to the white race—especially the women. It is not color which concerns me so much, but the contempt which the Negro holds for us, and I never step outside alone for the marketing that I am not rudely treated or hear vile language. It is my conviction that the Negro does not want to stop at being ‘equal,’ but they intend to rule and are using every implement to do so. Even the Bible”.⁵³

For this writer and other white evangelicals, social control of African American mattered far more than racial justice. She expressed fear at the loss of social status and cultural authority. Her insistence that African Americans would not “stop at being ‘equal,’ but . . . intend to rule” is particularly telling. This claim speaks to the profound attachment white evangelicals held (and continue to hold) for their self-appointed roles as cultural guardians as well as a visceral fear of displacement.

Opposition to civil rights has played a crucial role in the shaping of contemporary evangelicalism. By focusing on Little Rock as a religious symbol particularly for white southern evangelicals who sought to preserve white supremacy by maintaining segregation or managing desegregation to limit its effects, this study traces a portion of that history. It also contributes to a growing scholarly discourse on precisely how seemingly “color-blind” policies arose in direct response to civil rights and how they have served to maintain white supremacy in American institutions by focusing on a period during which “color-blind” rhetoric had not yet replaced overtly racist rhetoric. The blending of highly sexualized fears of miscegenation alongside anti-communist slogans, for example, demonstrate a relationship between these concepts that is no longer readily apparent to white southern evangelicals or, indeed, many other Americans. Little Rock lingered in the minds of white southern evangelicals as they contemplated the future and how best to shape it in their own image and colored their responses to other civil rights initiatives. This example (and many others) helps to demonstrate that the history of white supremacy has been central to the rise of a highly politicized conservative Protestant evangelicalism in the twentieth century. It also emphasizes the connections among competing expressions of white evangelicalism—especially their shared vision of themselves as cultural guardians responsible for determining the nature and scope of social change. The reasons behind white evangelical political realignment in the twentieth century become much clearer by examining both the commitment to exercise authority as cultural guardians and, in so doing, to maintain racial inequality.

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Notes

- ¹ See *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*, 347 U.S. 483 (1954). See also *Plessy*, for more detail on the codification of racial segregation in U.S. law through “separate but equal”. See *Plessy v. Ferguson*, 163, U.S. 537 (1896).
- ² *The Cavalier Daily*, University of Virginia, 18 May 1954 quoted in (Cobb 2005, p. 29).
- ³ Hoxie was not the first Arkansas school district to enact racial integration. Fayetteville and Charleston peacefully integrated their public schools in 1954. However, Hoxie was the first Arkansas community to face significant resistance to desegregation of its public schools. After *LIFE* magazine featured Hoxie as a model for desegregation, ardent segregationists from across the region descended on the town and enacted a campaign of intimidation and harassment to stop integration. Before Hoxie, Orval Faubus had spent much of his political career avoiding discussion of race and taking moderate stands when race could not be avoided. Faubus’s efforts to prove his conversion to the segregationist cause was real directly contributed to the furor that erupted in Little Rock in 1957. For more information, see (Williams 2014, pp. 33–53). The direct quotation of the Hoxie official appears on page 33.
- ⁴ Despite its current reputation as a reliably conservative state, Arkansas has a strong tradition of political liberalism. It was by no means certain where Arkansas would stand on racial justice during this period. Segregationists had ample reason to worry that the state would accommodate demands for limited or gradual desegregation rather than fight to preserve strict racial separation. Questions over maintaining segregation or allowing desegregation roiled Arkansas politics—particularly in Little Rock—in the years immediately after the *Brown* decision. In 1954, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People petitioned the Little Rock School Board for immediate integration after the *Brown* decision. Little Rock officials adopted a phased plan for limited integration (generally known as the Blossom Plan) the next year. Several African American students attempted to enroll in Little Rock schools in 1956. The school board denied these requests for enrollment in order to maintain segregation in local schools. A group of African American parents filed a federal suit seeking immediate desegregation of Little Rock schools that same year. This case—known as *Aaron v. Cooper*—would eventually extend racial integration in Little Rock throughout the south. In 1957, Gov. Orval Faubus signed a number of bills approved by Arkansas voters in the general election meant to maintain segregation or, failing that, limit desegregation. These measures included the creation of a state sovereignty commission, authorization for school districts to retain legal counsel, and elimination of requirements for school attendance for students in racially mixed public schools. In April 1957, the federal district court decided to uphold Little Rock’s plan for gradual and limited desegregation and to retain jurisdiction over the case. That jurisdictional decision made the Blossom Plan a court mandate. Over the spring and summer of 1957, segregationists—including members of the Capital Citizens’ Council and Mothers’ League of Little Rock Central High School—attempted to prevent implementation of the Blossom Plan through

local protests and legal challenges. These issues were not simply local matters. They frequently attracted intense regional and national attention.

- 5 The Little Rock Nine included Melba Pattillo Beals, Minnijean Brown, Elizabeth Eckford, Ernest Green, Gloria Ray Karlmark, Carlotta Walls LaNier, Thelma Mothershed, Terrence Roberts, and Jefferson Thomas. In September 1957, Gov. Orval Faubus called the Arkansas National Guard to Little Rock's Central High School to "preserve the peace". President Dwight Eisenhower intervened, ordering the 101st Airborne Division of the U.S. Army to Little Rock to perform domestic law enforcement under the Insurrection Act and then federalizing the Arkansas National Guard. After Faubus lost control of the Arkansas National Guard, those troops protected the African American students at Central. For more information on the Little Rock Nine and the fight to integrate Central High School, see, for example, (Anderson 2010). Erin Krutko Devlin explores the contemporary limits of the civil rights-era achievements in her work on Little Rock. See (Devlin 2017).
- 6 Opposition to civil rights for African Americans was not limited to the south. White supremacy has always been a national rather than a regional problem in the United States.
- 7 Massive resistance refers to a political strategy that called for intense opposition to racial integration at all levels of white southern society. A number of fine histories examine massive resistance as a key element of white southern resistance to racial integration in public education as well as other advances in African American civil rights. In many cases, however, historians of massive resistance neglect religion—especially white southern evangelicalism—either by treating religion superficially or ignoring it almost entirely. Even in recent works like Elizabeth Gillespie McRae's *Mothers of Massive Resistance* in which the author attempts to expand the historiography of massive resistance significantly by closely interrogating white women's roles in maintaining segregation and preventing desegregation through their authority as wives and mothers the white southern evangelical religion that authorized them to exercise maternal authority in public, political spaces receives little attention. See, for example, (McRae 2018; Lewis 2006; Day 2014).
- 8 Perhaps the most influential recent work on white supremacy in white evangelicalism is Anthea Butler's *White Evangelical Racism*. Butler's work represents a move to forthright analysis of racism and the denial of racism in American evangelicalism to explain the persistence of white supremacy in the structures of American society. These issues are of paramount concern for historians of white southern evangelicalism as well. Scholars like J. Russell Hawkins have sought to address the issue of white supremacy in white southern evangelicalism by investigating the influence of segregationist theology in Southern Baptist and Methodist churches in South Carolina to reveal both the structural power of the laity committed to preserving segregation during the Civil Rights era and the ease with which segregationist theology could be channeled into seemingly "color-blind" policies and programs later. Hawkins's work represents an important intervention in the historiography of white southern evangelicalism and its opposition to civil rights. Other scholars—including Darren Dochuk and Joseph Crespino—have contributed greatly to current understandings of white southern evangelicalism and the ascendance of modern conservatism in American politics. Although Dochuk downplays race and gender in his analysis of conservative political activism among white southern evangelicals and white southern evangelical migrants to the west, his work emphasizes the centrality of their religion to the Republican Party's political success in the late twentieth century. Crespino provides a more nuanced examination of the differences among white southern evangelicals and how they accommodated to the demands of desegregation without whole-heartedly embracing racial equality. Importantly, he also offers a powerful challenge to New Right claims to ownership of a "color-blind" triumph of civil rights. All of these studies have much to recommend them; however, most of them focus on the differences among white southern evangelicals rather than their similarities. The similarities matter just as much and can help to explain the persistence of racial inequality through the transition to the "color-blind" conservative politics of the late twentieth century. By examining continuities between moderate (often divided into "moderate" and "progressive" streams in other histories, depending on their commitments to tolerate desegregation or to offer mild encouragement for it) and conservative forms of white southern evangelicalism, it becomes easier to understand how seemingly progressive changes like desegregation can serve to preserve the very social inequalities they appear to challenge. The real issue is not so much the "progressiveness" of any particular individual or group, but the nature and scope of social change especially within the social structures that white southern evangelicals helped to form and sustain. See (Butler 2021; Hawkins 2021; Dochuk 2011; Crespino 2007).
- 9 My thanks to Alyson Dickson for many years of conversation about the relationship between denominational structures and social change. Her research into the Southern Baptist Convention—especially with respect to women's organizing in the early twentieth century and their commitments to cultural guardianship—has influenced my own thinking to a considerable degree.
- 10 For more detail, see (Anderson 2010, pp. 57–89).
- 11 For an eloquent account of Little Rock in public memory and its use in justifying tokenism, desegregation without integration, and voter suppression, see (Devlin 2017, pp. 111–48).
- 12 See, for example, (Cobb 2005, p. 5).
- 13 See, for example, (Chappell 1994, pp. 97–121); Joseph Crespino, *In Search of Another Country*, 18–48; and (Newman 2001, pp. 20–22). Significantly, Newman describes a three-stage process of Southern Baptist adjustment to desegregation. In the first stage, Newman explains, many Southern Baptists supported segregation in the years immediately prior to the *Brown* decision but increasingly allowed that African Americans should be afforded equal economic and educational opportunities within segregated spaces. After *Brown*, Newman argues that Southern Baptists entered a second stage in which they moved "however reluctantly and incrementally" toward acceptance of desegregation because they valued law and order as well as public

education. After passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Newman identifies a third stage in which Southern Baptists rejected segregation and racism as “unchristian”. Newman stresses that, although Southern Baptists did not want racial integration, most “rejected overt discrimination” after entering the third stage of accommodation to desegregation.

- 14 To be clear, support for segregation was in no way limited to the working-class white southerners. Nearly all white southerners supported segregation before the Brown decision. However, class differences mattered a great deal in the conflicts that emerged among white southerners about how to respond to the court’s order to end racial segregation in public schools.
- 15 Scholars like J. Russell Hawkins and Joseph Crespino make similar arguments in their histories of white southern evangelicalism in South Carolina and Mississippi, respectively. Both studies demonstrate the centrality of white evangelical Protestantism to segregation and explain how commitments to segregationist religion led to the embrace of seemingly “colorblind” conservative political activism in the late twentieth century. See (Hawkins 2021, pp. 7–17) for concise overviews of their arguments.
- 16 Numerous histories have focused on the “moderate” or even “progressive” nature of Southern Baptist leaders and the Southern Baptist Convention’s social programs. Although these studies have much to recommend them, they tend to minimize the denomination’s role in supporting and sustaining racial inequality through their focus on the influence and activism of “progressive” Baptists. The central issue here is not the “progressiveness” of particular individuals or groups, but the structural developments that have enacted racial inequality within the denomination and the broader society. Even in carefully balanced studies like Mark Newman’s highly influential *Getting Right With God*, emphasis on “progressive” influence sometimes works to overstate the progressive nature of social change within denominational structures. At times, Newman seems to celebrate the “progressive” minority within the SBC who encouraged other Baptists to accept desegregation by challenging biblical defenses of segregation. Although he acknowledges that these “progressive” Baptists generally did not participate in the civil rights movement or advocate for racial justice, Newman argues that they played an important role in undermining support for “overt discrimination and segregation” within the denomination. Indeed, he stresses that these “progressives” proved successful in challenging “the mystic, sacred and seemingly immutable character of segregation” and thereby helped other Baptists “to adjust to the desegregation demands of the civil rights movement and to the civil rights acts of the 1960s”. Such Baptist leaders certainly exercised significant influence within the SBC; however, the persistence of racial inequality and the enthusiastic embrace of “colorblind” conservatism among Southern Baptists suggests the persistence of white supremacy within institutional structures rather than their transformation to enact racial equality. See (Newman 2001, pp. 65–66).
- 17 Historians of white southern evangelicalism often employ a separate category for “progressives”. I do not separate “moderates” from “progressives” in this study because their positions on desegregation are quite similar in practice. Very few white southern evangelicals advocated in favor of racial integration in this period or for other expansions of civil rights for African Americans. If they held these convictions, they often remained silent or articulated more “moderate” positions encouraging acceptance of desegregation without appearing to welcome it. The decision to remain silent is not without consequences. In this case, silence on racial integration equalled support for continued segregation and therefore white supremacy as well. I would not dispute the existence of progressive white southern evangelicals. (I do challenge claims about their influence elsewhere in the article.) To date, I have found little evidence of “progressive” white evangelical activism in support of racial integration in Little Rock public schools during this period.
- 18 See, for example, Carey Daniel, “God Laughs at the Race-Mixers”, Brooks Hays Papers, AR 97, Christian Life Commission, Race Relations, Box 3, Folder 1, Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.
- 19 Karen Anderson makes a similar point about changing sexual mores and fears of female sexual agency in her history of Little Rock. Her discussion of Sammie Dean Parker, in particular, examines these issues. Parker’s sometimes sexually provocative behavior challenged ideals about white southern female purity that she drew upon to shield her from punishment for her bullying of the Little Rock Nine at Central High. See (Anderson 2010, pp. 110–14). See also (Dailey 2004) for a careful analysis of sexualized segregationist theology.
- 20 See, for example, John M. Fox Collection of Little Rock Central High School Segregationist Cards, University of Arkansas-Little Rock, Center for Arkansas History and Culture, Little Rock, Arkansas. This collection includes seven wallet-sized segregation cards distributed at or near Little Rock Central High School from 1957 to 1958. Fox did not create the cards.
- 21 These traditions are examined in more detail later in the article.
- 22 Hays served in the U.S. House of Representatives from 1943 to 1959. He lost his seat as a result of the Little Rock segregation controversy. Hays was elected president of the Southern Baptist Convention in 1957. He served as president of the denomination until 1959. It is rare for a layman like Hays to hold this position in the SBC.
- 23 Letter from R.L. Maxwell to Brooks Hays, dated 24 June 1957. Quotation marks and exclamation point in original. Brooks Hays Papers, Collection AR 97, Christian Life Commission Correspondence, Box 2 File 6, Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.
- 24 The Declaration of Constitutional Principles (more commonly known as the Southern Manifesto) protested the U.S. Supreme Court’s *Brown* decision. It was signed by 19 U.S. Senators and 82 Representatives from the South. The manifesto embraced a constitutional argument that the Supreme Court had exceeded its authority in ordering an end to segregation in schools and helped to initiate widespread “massive resistance” to integration in public schools. The blending of “conservative” and “segregationist” politics became increasingly common in this period. See Southern Declaration of Constitutional Principles,

Congressional Record, 84th Congress Second Session, Vol. 102, part 4 (12 March 1956) (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1956), pp. 4459–60. Hays later said that he signed the Southern Manifesto under intense pressure. Arkansas Gov. Orval Faubus intensified this pressure by persuading James W. Trimble—the only other hold-out among the Arkansas delegation—to sign the document. Hays expressed regret for his participation in this protest almost immediately. However, there is no question that Hays benefitted politically by signing the Southern Manifesto. This action quelled segregationist opposition in his district and allowed him to win re-election easily. See (Williams 2006, p. 93).

25 Letter from Brooks Hays to R.L. Maxwell, dated 8 July 1957. Brooks Hays Papers, Collection AR 97, Christian Life Commission Correspondence, Box 2 File 6, Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.

26 For this quotation, see Brooks Hays, Interview by Ronald Tonks, August 1977 (Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tenn.) quoted in (Stookey 2020), p. 20. I also wish to express my gratitude for the insights Ronald Tonks shared with me about his meetings with Hays during my research at the SBHLA. The interpretations of Hays' motivations and actions that appear in this article are my own. For a detailed discussion of social gospel theology and reactions against it within white southern evangelicalism, see (Quiros 2018, pp. 20–40).

27 Hays's writings—both public and private—contain copious examples of his understanding and practice of the Social Gospel and his views on love and justice in Christian life. See, for example, (Hays 1959, pp. 195–215); Brooks Hays Papers, especially correspondence and other materials related to the Christian Life Commission, Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee; and even poems like “A Hymn of Brotherhood” (typed with revisions 12 December 1978, originally written in 1958), Brooks Hays Supplementary Papers MS H334s, Series 7, Subseries 3, Box 6, Folder 6, University of Arkansas Libraries, Fayetteville, Arkansas. Stephen M. Stookey offers a similar interpretation in “Brooks Hays: Civil Politician in an Uncivil Parish”. In discussing Hays's sermons as “prophetic calls to Christian social responsibility rather than the traditional fare of evangelistic appeals”, Stookey states that Hays “equated social justice with love”—especially Christian love for their neighbors. See (Stookey 2020, p. 25).

28 See, for example, “Baptists Spurn Hate Approach”, an editorial that appears to have been reprinted from the *Charlotte Observer* and clipped from a newspaper published in Thomasville, N.C., in the late 1950s. A red pencil mark sets off the final lines: “In these times, the South needs guidance in race relations. Our people look naturally to their religious leaders. We can be thankful that these leaders refuse to be stampeded by apostles of hate”. Brooks Hays Papers, Collection AR 97, Christian Life Commission, Race Relations, Correspondence, Box 2 File 7, Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.

29 Charles Reagan Wilson, *Baptized in the Blood: The Religion of the Lost Cause, 1865–1920* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2009), 14. For more information on Lost Cause religion, see also (Cox 2003); (Foster 1988); (Gallagher and Nolan 2000).

30 Hays, *A Southern Moderate Speaks*, pp. 214–15.

31 Recent work by Kristin Kobes Du Mez underscores the centrality of male authority and female submission to contemporary expressions of American evangelicalism. In *Jesus and John Wayne*, Du Mez pays careful attention to the relationship between the white evangelical center and its margins with respect to the gender complementarianism that defines its patriarchal social structures—a relationship that this article examines, too, but with greater attention to race than gender. It is important to note again that issues of gender and race are intimately connected in the history of American evangelicalism and in the history of America more broadly. Indeed, Du Mez examines a resurgent biblical defense of slavery in the rise of New Calvinism that is particularly pertinent to the consideration of white evangelicalism and Lost Cause religion here. Since the 1990s, she notes, Doug Wilson has defended slavery as biblical and benevolent, accused nineteenth-century abolitionists of “zealous hatred of the Word of God” for their efforts to emancipate slaves, and lauded Robert E. Lee as “a gracious Christian gentleman, a brother in Christ”. Although such views are extreme within contemporary evangelicalism, their existence and dissemination are not insignificant or entirely marginal. John Piper's patronage has assured Wilson's entry into more respectable evangelical circles. The closeness between figures like Wilson and Piper, as Du Mez ably demonstrates, points to a powerful linkage between gender and race in constructions of “biblical patriarchy” that many white evangelicals seek to embody today. If anything, the celebration of Lee among certain twentieth and twenty-first century white evangelicals suggests an enduring allegiance to ideals of a militant masculinity expressed through mastery over others (especially racial others given the related rhetoric about slavery) and even rebellion against a government that might seek to protect their rights against the interests of elite white evangelical men as essential Christian virtues that has slipped its southern origins. See (Du Mez 2020, pp. 201–4). In contrast, scholars like Barry Hankins have argued that Southern Baptists have embraced values of racial equality but find it difficult—if not impossible—to take “progressive” stands for racial justice because they are too invested in conservative politics more generally. He attributes their embrace of a “culture-war” model of activism to the denomination's limited efforts at racial reconciliation in the late twentieth century. If this aspect of evangelical identity is interpreted as a commitment to cultural guardianship, it may help to explain the strength and persistence of commitments to conservative politics among American evangelicals in the late twentieth century and beyond. Conservative political activism on “culture-war” issues then can be understood as a sign of religious identity and an expression of religious piety because it is intended to guard American culture against danger or decline. See (Hankins 2002, pp. 270–71).

32 Hays, *A Southern Moderate Speaks*, p. 205.

33 See “The Imperative of Race Relations”, sermon delivered at Vienna Baptist Church, 22 September 1963, Christian Life Commission, Race: Sermons 1973, Box 21, Folder 31, Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.

- 34 Letter from Carey Daniel to Brooks Hays, dated 3 June 1957. Brooks Hays Papers, Collection AR 97, Christian Life Commission Correspondence, Box 2 File 6, Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.
- 35 The Christian Life Commission originated as the Social Services Commission in 1913. It was renamed as the Christian Life Commission in 1947 and, again, as the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission in 1997.
- 36 For a similar interpretation of the Southern Baptist Convention's Christian Life Commission, see (Stookey 2020, p. 29).
- 37 The same point is made in (Williams 2006, p. 95).
- 38 Letter from Carey Daniel to Brooks Hays, dated 3 June 1957. Brooks Hays Papers, Collection AR 97, Christian Life Commission Correspondence, Box 2 File 6, Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee. Emphasis in original. Daniel also claimed that his pamphlet had sold "nearly 20,000 copies" and was in its fourteenth edition in a list of his publications he enclosed with this letter to Hays. Daniel's letter underscores the very real power held by the laity in white southern evangelical denominations. Southern Baptists, for example, exercise congregational polity, meaning that local churches are independent entities that may associate with other churches but are not governed by denominational hierarchies. Southern Baptist congregations also have the power to hire (or fire) their own pastors as they desire.
- 39 Letter from Brooks Hays to A.C. Miller, dated 27 August 1957. Brooks Hays Papers, Collection AR 97, Christian Life Commission Correspondence, Box 2 File 6, Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee. The letter similarly quoted in (Stookey 2020, p. 31).
- 40 CLC materials are extensive and varied. The agency maintained files on right-wing extremism during this period, and materials from or about far-right groups are included throughout other files as well. See, for example, Christian Life Commission Resource Files, AR 138–2, Box 13, Folders 30–43, Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.
- 41 Darren Dochuk examines Benson's influence in rise of the Republican Party in the late twentieth century in *From the Bible Belt to Sunbelt*; however, he neglects the significance of race in this history. For more information on Benson, see (Key 2020, pp. 83–96).
- 42 See Carey Daniel, "God the Original Segregationist", 1955, Brooks Hays Papers, AR 97, Christian Life Commission Correspondence, Box 2, File 6, Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee. The sermon reproduced in this pamphlet is an enlargement of a sermon delivered by the author on 23 May 1954—just days after the U.S. Supreme Court handed down the *Brown* verdict. Stephen R. Haynes cites a different version of the same sermon in *Noah's Curse*. See also (Haynes 2002, p. 86). I also examine Hamitic mythology in greater detail in another work. See (Heise, forthcoming, pp. 265–89).
- 43 Daniel, "God the Original Segregationist", Brooks Hays Papers, Collection AR 97, Christian Life Commission Correspondence, Box 2 File 6, Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee. Emphasis in original.
- 44 Daniel, "God the Original Segregationist", Brooks Hays Papers, Collection AR 97, Christian Life Commission Correspondence, Box 2 File 6, Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.
- 45 To be clear, segregation never prevented interracial sex. Indeed, Jim Crow laws and social norms left black women and girls particularly vulnerable to sexual abuse and rape by white men. However, segregation did protect the white men, shielding them from being held responsible for sex (consensual or not) with black women and the mixed-race children they fathered. Segregation also served to uphold a vision of white southern female purity that both privileged and constrained white women in ways that contributed effectively to racial oppression and left black men and boys vulnerable to lynchings and other extra-legal punishments if they were accused of having (or even wanting) sex with white women.
- 46 Daniel, "God the Original Segregationist", Brooks Hays Papers, Collection AR 97, Christian Life Commission Correspondence, Box 2 File 6, Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.
- 47 Daniel, "God the Original Segregationist", Brooks Hays Papers, Collection AR 97, Christian Life Commission Correspondence, Box 2 File 6, Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.
- 48 Carey Daniel, "God Laughs at the Race-Mixers", Brooks Hays Papers, AR 97, Christian Life Commission, Race Relations, Box 3, Folder 1, Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee. Emphasis in original.
- 49 Recent works like Nancy MacLean's *Democracy in Chains* trace the generally obscure history of right-wing efforts to undo democratic governance in the United States from this period onward. She locates the intellectual origins of the modern "conservative" movement—a misnomer given its radical agenda—in John C. Calhoun's vigorous attempts to defend slavery reinvigorated in the mid-twentieth century to defend segregation. Privileging their own economic liberty above the political liberty of the majority, elite white men fearful of government activism in general (and government activism to expand civil rights in particular) sought to "reverse-engineer all of America, at both the state and national levels, back to the political economy and oligarchic governance of midcentury Virginia, [eventually] minus the segregation". Although not religious themselves, these men made alliances of convenience with white evangelical leaders and worked together to convert their congregations to libertarian economics, opposition to public education, and anti-government positions more generally. They may have eschewed overt racial appeals, but their political activism cannot be separated from the desire to maintain white racial and class dominance. Indeed, framing resistance to government authority as a noble effort to preserve states' rights and elite white economic liberty strongly suggest that the modern conservative movement sought "color-blindness" in name only. See (MacLean 2017), especially xv (for direction quotation), pp. 4–11, and 50–55.

- 50 Carey Daniel, "God Laughs at the Race-Mixers", Brooks Hays Papers, AR 97, Christian Life Commission, Race Relations, Box 3, Folder 1, Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.
- 51 Carey Daniel, "God Laughs at the Race-Mixers", Brooks Hays Papers, AR 97, Christian Life Commission, Race Relations, Box 3, Folder 1, Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.
- 52 Hays referred to a 1957 meeting with leaders of the Negro Baptist Convention and National Baptist Convention, insisting "there was nothing improper or shocking" in meeting fellow Baptists. See Brooks Hays to Mrs. Elmo Mancuso, letter dated July 18, 1957. Brooks Hays Papers, Collection AR 97, Christian Life Commission Correspondence, Box 2 File 6, Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee. A larger scandal erupted in 1958 when Hays visited the National Baptist Convention meeting during the annual SBC Convention in Chicago and was photographed with his arms around two black Baptist men. C. Fred Williams also mentions this 1958 event in "Principles over Popularity", p. 94.
- 53 Letter to Brooks Hays from Mrs. Elmo Mancuso, dated 15 July 1957. Emphasis in original. Brooks Hays Papers, Collection AR 97, Christian Life Commission Correspondence, Box 2 File 6, Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.

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