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**Author:** Marion Orr, Hanes Walton  
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# Life on the Leading Edge of Democratic Reform: Student Perspectives on School Desegregation

“I was afraid. Some mornings I would get up and my mama would say ‘you know you don’t have to do this thing.’ My words to her were ‘yes ma’am I do’, because if they make me quit anyone who follows would have a rough road. I got to do this thing.”

—Ulysses O. Bryant, Jr.,  
the first African-American graduate of  
Savannah High School

Eleanor Roosevelt proclaimed that Daisy Bates’ eyewitness account of the 1957 school integration crisis at Little Rock, Arkansas ought to “shock the conscience of America” into moral awareness of what African Americans had to endure for the “ideals of liberty, justice, democracy and equality” (Bates 1986). Roosevelt reminds us that eyewitness accounts can be powerfully enlightening, though social scientists have not always appreciated their value, especially where blacks are concerned. One historian of the University of Georgia’s desegregation criticizes other desegregation accounts for excessive focus on “the tactical maneuvering of southern governors, university presidents, regents, and civil rights attorneys rather than

upon the mindset of southern students.” He then turns to the eyewitness accounts of white Georgia students, altogether omitting the black perspective (Cohen 1996, 621).

As the desegregation process unfolded, historians were critically

confronting treatments of slavery that routinely diminished or dismissed the slave perspective. John Blassingame’s path-breaking corrective launched a new research tradition in the profession (Blassingame 1977).<sup>1</sup> That work suggests that African-American eyewitness accounts are fundamental to understanding the politics of race, for they help us confront and assess fully the cost of reform. We use such accounts here to portray the experiences of African-American students who integrated Georgia’s public schools.

We have selected two cities—Athens and Savannah—for our eyewitness accounts. From Athens, we chose three African-American students. Maxie Foster and Bonnie Travis desegregated Athens’ elementary and high schools. Chester C. Davenport desegregated the Univer-

sity of Georgia School of Law. In Savannah, we chose Sage Brown and Ulysses Bryant. All are alive and successful. Collectively, their recollections and personal assessments contribute an important vantage point on the complicated, and often personally horrifying, school-level enterprise of initial desegregation. Through their experiences we learn what it was like to be on the leading edge of a democratic reform effort.

## The “Southern Manifesto” and the Implementation of *Brown v. Board of Education*

Response by state leaders to the Supreme Court’s decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* ranged from “compliance” to “defiance” to “maintenance of the status-quo” (McCain 1968, 371). Political leaders in North Carolina, for example, “initially responded to the *Brown* decision in subdued tones,” were generally “unprepared to engage in hopeless defiance,” and effectively utilized “limited token integration” (Douglas 1995, 27). Mississippi’s political leaders were more defiant. Governor Hugh L. White declared: “We’re not going to pay attention to the Supreme Court’s decision. We don’t think it will have any effect on us down here at all” (Douglas 1995, 27).

Georgia Governor Herman Talmadge declared that officials there would defy the decision. “We’re not going to secede from the Union,” Talmadge said, “but the people of Georgia will not comply with the decision. Even if federal troops were sent down . . . they wouldn’t be able to enforce it” (quoted in McCain 1968, 371). Incoming Governor Marvin Griffin took the same view, successfully supporting a state constitutional amendment “that would allow the legislature to change the public education system into a private one and provide tuition grants for those attending private schools” (Georgia Secretary of State 1954, 620, 695).<sup>2</sup>

By March 1956, three ardently segregationist senators, Strom Thurmond of South Carolina, Virginia’s Harry Byrd, and Richard Russell of Georgia had produced, and the Senate’s Southern caucus had endorsed, a clarion call to massive resistance, formally titled “A Declaration of Constitutional Principles,” but better known as the “Southern Manifesto (Caro 2002, 785–788).<sup>3</sup> The Manifesto was, as Lyndon Johnson biographer Robert Caro has observed, “nothing less than an outright call by one hundred elected legislators in the

by  
**Marion Orr,**  
Brown University  
**Hanes Walton, Jr.,**  
University of Michigan

national government for massive, unified, defiance of an order from the nation's highest court" (Caro 2002, 786). Journalist Merle Miller remarked that the Manifesto "was an expression of rage and resentment at the *Brown* decision [that] . . . was cleverly formulated . . . to couple 'change' with 'unconstitutionality' and 'civil rights' with 'subversion' in the public mind" (Miller 1980, 187). The entire Georgia congressional delegation signed it and, along with other top state officials, took the lead role in mobilizing other states against compliance with *Brown*.<sup>4</sup>

*Brown* and its aftermath cannot be understood apart from the Manifesto, which provided the legitimacy of the Southern political establishment for a ready-made rationale encouraging whites to perceive themselves as the victims of reform and African-American students as its villains. The Manifesto nurtured white defiance and helped ignite white student violence across the South. That document also set the stage for what our five eyewitnesses, street-level pioneers in social reform, would later experience on desegregation's leading edge.

### Eyewitnesses in Athens, Georgia

Desegregation of Clarke County Public Schools (CCPS) and Savannah-Chatham County Public Schools (SCCPS) did not occur until 1963. After the Supreme Court heard the *Brown* case in 1952, many Southern states, including Georgia, rushed to upgrade education facilities for African Americans to deter a Supreme Court decision that would destroy segregation. In Athens, the black high school had been partially housed in a building erected in 1890 for the state's first black public college. The gymnasium for the high school had been built in the 1930s with funds raised solely by the African-American community. Pressured by an impending court decision, the CCPS broke ground in 1955 for a new high school and gymnasium completed in 1957. The new school opened with used furniture and books sent over from the white high school. When these meager efforts didn't forestall court action, the CCPS desegregated as slowly as possible.

### Bonnie Hampton Travis

In the fall of 1963, the CCPS formally desegregated when Bonnie Hampton Travis and two other African-American students entered the seventh grade at Child Street School. Another enrolled at all-white Chase Street Elementary School, another at Athens High School (Shearron 1992).<sup>5</sup> Remembering that first day, Travis recalls that both sides of the road leading into Child Street were packed with white parents, media, and the police. "I was anxious, had some anxiety and nervous and this was the longest walk," Travis recalled.<sup>6</sup> "Although I saw the police, I was not sure that they were there for us or for them. We had become a spectator sport because for every school day of that year the white parents lined the walk to the school."

Reflecting on her experience inside the school, Travis recalls, "trouble and problems came in the physical education classes and at the lunchroom." "There were no physical problems," she explains, "but lots of verbal problems. We got verbal stuff left and right. White boys were always in my face with taunts, name calling, insults and harassment." Travis recalls that the verbal abuse seemed to vary with the social-economic status of the white students. "Lower class students," she remembers, "reveled in this verbal abuse that was heaped upon us. They showed their joy and happiness with it openly by laughing, giggling and whooping it up. They not only approved of it but urged the boys on." Middle class students, she recalls, "would just smile slightly and indicate by their behavior that they were

### The "Southern Manifesto"

102 Cong. Rec. 4515-16 (1956)

[Signed March 1956 by 19 Senators and 81 Representatives from the South—including all of Georgia's congressional delegation].

We regard the decision of the Supreme Court in the school cases as a clear abuse of judicial power. It climaxes a trend in the Federal judiciary undertaking to legislate, in derogation of the authority of Congress, and to encroach upon the reserved rights of the States and the people.

The original Constitution does not mention education. Neither does the 14th amendment nor any other amendment. The debates preceding the submission of the 14th amendment clearly show that there was no intent that it should affect the systems of education maintained by the States.

The very Congress which proposed the amendment subsequently provided for segregated schools in the District of Columbia.

When the amendment was adopted, in 1868, there were 37 States of the Union. Every one of the 26 States that had any substantial racial differences among its people either approved the operation of segregated schools already in existence or subsequently established such schools by action of the same lawmaking body which considered the 14th amendment.

Though there has been no constitutional amendment or act of Congress changing this established legal principle almost a century old, the Supreme Court of the United States, with no legal basis for such action, undertook to exercise their naked judicial power and substituted their personal political and social ideas for the established law of the land.

This unwarranted exercise of power by the Court, contrary to the Constitution, is creating chaos and confusion in the States principally affected. It is destroying the amicable relations between the white and Negro races that have been created through 90 years of patient effort by the good people of both races. It has planted hatred and suspicion where there has been heretofore friendship and understanding.

With the gravest concern for the explosive and dangerous condition created by this decision and inflamed by outside meddlers:

We reaffirm our reliance on the Constitution as the fundamental law of the land.

We decry the Supreme Court's encroachments on rights reserved to the States and to the people, contrary to established law and to the Constitution.

We commend the motives of those States which have declared the intention to resist forced integration by any lawful means. . . .

We pledge ourselves to use all lawful means to bring about a reversal of this decision which is contrary to the Constitution and to prevent the use of force in its implementation.

This is available at: <http://www.cviog.uga.edu/Projects/gainfo/manifesto.htm>

happy that some one made these remarks but they would not join in and urge the boys on. Then there were a few students who clearly didn't like it but they kept their distance from us and said nothing." Several white classmates struggled to treat Travis humanely. She recalled a "unique incident" that occurred on the day that President Kennedy was assassinated. On the playground a girl told Travis that "he was just for the niggers anyway." The other white girls told her in my presence that she should apologize to me. She said nothing. Then the next day she came up to me and apologized. This was unusual, for when the boys would taunt me, the girls would never utter a word, never say anything."

In the presence of the African-American students, Child Street School administrators and teachers took a neutral stance. According to Travis, the staff would simply ask us: "Are you having any problem? Is everything all right? And how are you

doing? But beyond this they never discussed anything with us. Not only did they play a simple public relations role, our white teachers were very careful to never let us know where they stood in this desegregation struggle. Yet they talked to the white students behind our back.” Travis recounted an incident in which she returned to class to retrieve a book she had inadvertently left behind. Once back in the classroom, she found the white teacher talking to her white classmates, “telling them as I walked unexpectedly back into the class that they should not copy my hair style. At that time I wore my hair up in two pigtails and some of the white girls had copied the practice. She told them not to take any notion of my fashions. Upon seeing me enter the room, she abruptly cut off the conversation.”

In the fall of 1964, Travis moved to Clarke County Junior High for the eighth and ninth grades. While the challenges and problems were “slowly, very slowly abating,” Travis remembers continued abuse. According to Travis, a local minister stepped in to drive Travis and other African-American students “to school for protection every morning because of the threats that had come out of the white community.”

Finally, after two years at Clarke Junior High, Travis entered the tenth grade at Athens High School where there were 17 black students. Verbal assaults continued, along with occasional poor treatment by school authorities. Once, when the principal accused the black students of being noisy, Travis responded: “Why are we always the culprits?” The principal called Travis an “insolent little whelp.” This was one of the few times that Travis involved her parents, who went to the school the next day and confronted the principal. The principal never again verbally abused her. Travis says that she survived and succeeded academically through “my inner strength, courage, and family support system. I knew from the past about hoses, dogs, and lynchings. Other African Americans had faced much worse. So I simply let the verbal abuse roll off my back and picked my battles.”

### *Maxie Foster*

Maxie Foster entered Athens High School in the tenth grade in the fall of 1965 under a “Freedom of Choice” plan. His first semester set the tone for the remainder of his years there. An assistant principal opposed to integration, serving as Foster’s counselor, advised him to take all of the “advanced” senior-level senior courses. Foster eventually transferred to the appropriate courses but he has always believed that the advice was calculated to ensure his failure.

Forty years after he integrated Athens High, Foster vividly remembers the stark differences between his new school and his all-black high school. “I thought I was at the University of Georgia when I entered Athens High School coming over from Burney-Harris High School. What an impressive school, in all respects! Their facilities were the top of the line, the very best that money could buy. This was not the case for the black high school.” Ironically, Foster remembers as a student at Athens High School having to box used textbooks later given to students at the black high school. “What a strange feeling for a 16 year-old to deal with during that time,” Foster laments. By 1965 the practice of giving used books to the blacks and buying only new books for the white students had been in place since 1957.

Along with indifferent administrators and teachers, Foster experienced tremendous hostility. “The black students,” he recalled, “could not go to the bathroom all day, could not drink from the water fountains in the halls and couldn’t use the cafeteria for almost half the year because the white male

bullies roamed behind the few African-American students and physically prevented them from using these facilities.”

Violence, according to Foster, also came from individual students like the son of the Grand Wizard of the Ku Klux Klan.

High school sports have long been a popular pastime, especially in small Southern communities like Athens. Desegregation opened possible opportunities and new challenges for high school sports enthusiasts.<sup>7</sup> It created an opportunity for Athens High School to build a dominant sports program by combining the best players from the city’s white and black high schools. Foster recalls that during his first years at Athens High, a number of school boosters openly envisioned a desegregated team becoming state football champions. The desire to win also tempted the football coach, who despite membership in the KKK, included several African-American athletes in the school’s spring football practice. In the end, however, the coach would not permit any black students to join the team that year. Foster bemoans the “false optimism” the coach generated.

Undeterred, Foster became the first African American to integrate the basketball and track teams at Athens High and the school’s only black athlete. Looking back, Foster recognizes that the white men who coached the track and basketball teams “were both men of courage because they both permitted me to come and practice, and then to try-out for the varsity teams. Nevertheless, several white students from affluent families did all they could at practice to keep me from playing. I asked my mother to come to practices to ensure that fairness prevailed.” Foster made the teams and became such an outstanding performer that the white students voted him captain of the track team and basketball co-captain. They also supported him when he won the “Coach’s Award.” But his status also made him the object of taunts at out-of-town games. Being African American also forced him to stay on the bus because white restaurants would not serve him.

### **Eyewitnesses in Savannah, Georgia**

Like Athens, Savannah public schools remained racially segregated until 1963. The desegregation of the SCCPS came after the NAACP Youth Council, organized by civil rights leader W. W. Law, led a successful 15-month economic boycott of the city’s downtown shopping district. In 1962, buoyed by the determination and tenacity of the young people, the Savannah NAACP with the Rev. L. Scott Stell as lead plaintiff, sued the SCCPS, asking the court to order admission on a desegregated basis. A federal district judge ruled against Stell citing “testimony by whites that integrated schools were harmful to both whites and Negroes” (Billingsley 1999, 56). The Fifth U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals overturned the ruling, instructing the SCCPS “to submit a plan to desegregate at least one grade by September 1963” (Billingsley 1999, 56). The SCCPS decided to desegregate the twelfth grade. In the fall of 1963, 19 African-American students enrolled in previously all-white Savannah High School (SHS) and Groves High School.<sup>8</sup>

### *Ulysses O. Bryant, Jr.*

In the summer of 1963, Ulysses Bryant, Jr. had been promoted to his senior year at Sol C. Johnson High School, one of three all-black high schools in Savannah. But because Bryant and his family were active in the Savannah desegregation movement, “W. W. Law approached the family and encouraged” him “to make application to SHS to desegregate the schools.” At the urging of the federal court, the school board established an application process whereby African-American

seniors could transfer to Savannah or Groves High Schools. Reflecting on why Law approached him, Bryant observed: "He knew us and we were active in the desegregation movement. We did attend some of the rallies and participated in a few of the marches." Law was also careful to seek out African Americans who could succeed academically. Bryant, for example, was an "A" student. As he recalled, "I guess my educational background" played a role. "I was a pretty good student. I was sort of a low-key kind of book worm." Nevertheless, Bryant initially had reservations. It was his senior year of high school. "I stood very good chances of getting scholarships from the various schools [colleges]," Bryant says. "I would also be leaving behind not only friends but I also had at least one brother at the time who was also a student at Johnson High."

Savannah's desegregation plan was born of mixed motives. First, school officials surely knew that seniors would be reluctant to leave their home institutions. While the school board had developed a desegregation plan, it risked failure if no black seniors moved. The plan was a token measure that might easily have stymied integration. On the other hand, by focusing on seniors, the school board allowed the black leadership to choose students who had the strong community and familial support necessary to endure what were likely to be nine challenging months. Bryant's parents left the decision up to him. In the 1960s, Bryant's family would have been considered, at least in the black community, middle-income. His father worked on the Savannah River front as a longshoreman, his mother, self-employed, sold prepared dinners to workers there. As Bryant put it, "we weren't worried too much about any repercussions against them."

In 1963, SHS, located in one of the city's finest neighborhoods, was synonymous with prestige and privilege. As Bryant put it: "Savannah High at the time was *the* school. Savannah High, as far as the public school arena, was the school of academic notoriety. You had a lot of prominent Savannah figures—doctors, lawyers, who were alumni. Savannah High was *the* school when it came to the public schools, white or black at the time." Ultimately, Bryant decided to transfer to SHS, risking the expected college scholarships, leaving behind friends and the nurturing African-American teachers and administrators at Sol C. Johnson.

All of our eyewitnesses have vivid memories of their first days as social reformers.<sup>9</sup> Bryant remembers that he and four of the 12 black students rode together in his 1962 Chevrolet, two black police detectives escorting them. "We were greeted with a few racial slurs, but I don't recall a lot of people waiting our arrival," says Bryant. City officials had earlier dispersed "a large numbers of white students" who had gathered at the front entrance of SHS (Duffer 1963). A small group of white spectators, including the president of the Cavalcade of White Americans, were confined to the park across the street. The 12 African-American students were dispersed throughout the huge complex and among the other 1,200 students. "You could go almost an entire school day and one not see the other, on lunch or even when passing in the hallway. The only blacks that we saw were custodial workers and cafeteria workers."

Bryant, too, had to cope with abuse from many of the white students and indifference from many of the white teachers and administrators. The students, he remembers, "were open, very open with their feelings." The students used racial slurs. When exiting classes during the school day, Bryant always made certain to leave the room last, making sure not to give anyone a chance to hit him from behind. This worked well until one day Bryant "got a little careless," allowing another student to get behind him. Bryant was hit in the head

with a board and ended up in the school infirmary. The taunting was always there. "They'll walk by and nudge your elbow and knock your books out of your hand; when you bent over to pick them up, some one would come along and kick them a little further. That's the kind of torment I experienced," Bryant laments. Typically, Bryant simply took the abuse. Only once did he fight back, after a student spat in his food while eating lunch. Bryant was suspended for three days.

The abuse went beyond the school building. Once Bryant returned to his car and discovered that someone had put sugar in the gas tank. At home, he received threats. "My telephone would ring and it would be nothing but haunting, racial slurs, and threats. I got more threats it seemed at home than I had communicated to me at school," Bryant reflects. Bryant adds, however, that not all of the students treated him negatively. One student wrote in his yearbook at the end of the school year. "Some white students were as confused as we appeared to be."

According to Bryant, "it was clear" the principal "didn't want us there and he made little or no concessions for us." Bryant recalls a few supportive teachers. "For the most part the teachers didn't turn their backs on us," he remembers. "They tried to monitor our movements closely." Bryant remembers that English teacher Mary Deal "tried to reach out" to him and "to reassure" him "that everything was alright." She attempted to counsel him, Bryant added, "without losing her white students."

The academic school year ended early for Ulysses Bryant. Near the last week of his senior year he was summoned to the principal's office. One of the "liberal" white students had reported that another student supposedly had a gun and intended to shoot Bryant. Bryant was given his cap and gown on that day and told, for his safety, not to return for the remainder of year. A few weeks later, to the surprise of many of his classmates, Bryant participated in graduation ceremonies becoming the first black graduate of SHS.

## Sage Brown

Sunday school lessons at the Rev. Stell's church centered on the civil rights struggle. Sage Brown, who attended those lessons, remembers how they influenced his decision to become active in the movement. Brown was one of the NAACP's youth activists. "I was involved in the civil rights movement's demonstrations throughout that summer that led up to the integration of the schools," Brown recalls. Near the end of the summer of 1963, when the city's black leadership submitted names of black seniors to the school board to integrate Groves High School, Brown was on the list. "The NAACP and the Chatham County Crusade for Voters went back and inventoried and looked at us and decided who they thought could best survive" the school desegregation ordeal. In addition to his academic prowess, Brown was "pretty much prepared and indoctrinated" in non-violent disobedience. "Prior to June 1963, W. W. Law had a series of classes that basically you went through if you were going to be one of the student leaders. It was a role-playing like situation. You were placed in situations where you were trained not to respond" to physical violence. In September 1963, Brown would have to draw on the skills developed in Law's non-violent resistance classes as he and six other African Americans entered all-white Groves High School.

Groves High School is located in Garden City, a small Chatham County municipality on Savannah's western border. In 1963, Groves and SHS were culturally distinct. As Brown put it, the two schools were "at opposite ends of the spectrum. If Savannah High was a cultured environment, Groves was as

rural and as red-neck as you could get.” For Brown, his senior year at Groves “was a very, very difficult situation.” During the first days, police escorts met with Brown and the other students who lived in west Savannah “prior to getting into Garden City” and drove the students to the school. As Brown recalled, the officers “followed us to our classes and the police escort was there when school was over.” Brown and the other students had police protection throughout the school year. However, according to Brown, the officers (all whites) were not “supportive” of their efforts to integrate Groves High. Brown remembers that “on several occasions” the officers “intentionally dropped their guards so that the [white] students would have access” to him and the other black students. Concerned about the students’ safety, and questioning the true commitment of the police escorts, several African-American ministers began to car-pool the students to and from school. “Basically,” says Brown, “what happened was the entire year that we were at Groves several pastors from local churches came together and each day they would form a caravan and drive us into school and out of school.”

The African-American students entering Groves in 1963 were not greeted with the kind of public demonstrations displayed in Little Rock in 1957. Groves High was physically isolated on the urban fringe, in a predominantly African-American community. Brown recalls that once inside he met tremendous hostility. The principal, Donald M. Gray, “did not hide his dislike and distaste for us being there.” After only a few months, Gray was replaced by another principal “who was a little more tolerant.” Brown says he has never doubted that school officials removed Gray because of his opposition to integration. The teachers, Brown remembers, were not very supportive. Brown was often the only black in his classes. “They broke us up so that none of us was in the same class. You were always being hit with objects that were being thrown. You were always subject to verbal abuse. The teachers knew that this was going on and they would not do a thing about it,” Brown explained.

The white students, for the most part, did not embrace Brown. “Any students that showed any kindness towards us were disciplined by the other students.” Brown remembers one guy who was “friendly” toward him. “He was friendly to me one day, and when he returned the next day he had been severely beaten.” Brown recalled that one day “the entire student body jumped” the black students. “The officers allowed this to happen,” he says. Brown is certain that Groves’ location, surrounded by a black neighborhood, helped contain what could have been a life-threatening situation. The black families “that lived on Wheat Hill Road, which was the road adjacent to Groves, saw what was happening and they came out in mass to help us. Had it not been for the families . . . God only knows what would have happened.”

## **Eyewitness at the University of Georgia Law School**

*Chester C. Davenport*

Chester Davenport was born in Athens and graduated with high honors from Athens High and Industrial School in June 1959, and with honors from Morehouse College in June 1963. That fall, two years after the desegregation of the University of Georgia, Davenport became the first African American to enter its law school.

“The administration, staff and secretaries at the Law School were very supportive and friendly,” he reports. “The

Dean had known my father and family for years. Clearly this helped. And many members of the faculty, being lawyers knew how things should have been and this made them opened minded. In fact, the professor who taught me constitutional law, while an old man, was very progressive and berated the state’s leading segregationists like Herman Talmadge and Senator Richard Russell despite the fact that Richard Russell IV was in the class with me.”

As for the students, “they were in shock because they had never been around African Americans before except for their maids, butlers and yardmen. Now having someone who looked like these people but as a competitor made them avoid me. This and peer pressure kept them from sitting next to me. But by the time I went to the second class the professor had a seating chart and some of these students were assigned seats next to me. Nevertheless, this standoff attitude lasted about six months and until after the first exam.”

“When the scores came back the professor in the class told the other students that if they wanted to do better and pass the final, they should look up and discuss the materials with the top five people in the class. Being number three, I was working in the law library and looked up and saw most of them seeking me out to help and assistance them. This searching me out continued when I made the law review and after I passed the state bar exam during my second year in law school. Although I was the only African American in the law school for three years, the question of race never came up and I rarely ever thought about it. There were no significant incidents”

Lauded at a recent retirement reunion party for a classmate who had become a federal judge, classmates told Davenport “that they had learned a lot from him and that they hoped that he had learned a little something from them. The spokesperson for the class was the most conservative student in my first year class that went out of his way not to speak to me. Later that year I broke the ice by speaking to him and we became cordial over the next three years. It was nice to hear those words about my role in resocializing my classmates. Hopefully, my interaction with my classmates will have helped others of my race that they met in life. I think so.”

“My experience was good in the beginning because I didn’t wear my feelings on my sleeve and/or cuff. I listen to people, but never gave up. Ultimately, people are people and you can learn a lot from them. You need to participate and interact with the majority to see how they think and how they run the country. There is no other place to learn from as a member of the minority.”

## **Social Reform and the Southern Manifesto**

Historian John Hope Franklin observes that, “reaction to the [Brown] decision was mixed” (Franklin 1988, 367). Franklin says that the Tennessee’s *Knoxville Journal* spoke for many Southern whites when it opined: “No citizen, fitted by character and intelligence to sit as a justice of the Supreme Court, and sworn to uphold the Constitution of the United States, could have decided this question other than the way it was decided” (Franklin 1988, 367). “Throughout the South there were white people here and there who were prepared to support it . . . Although they did not consider segregation to be morally wrong, they were law-abiding . . . Their reactions to *Brown* and *Brown II* often depended on the actions of local white leaders” (Patterson 2001, 89). The Southern Manifesto, however, unified the opponents of desegregation, and undermined its implementation by encouraging whites to believe *Brown* could be derailed if they followed the “Alabama model” of

massive resistance, that had prevented a young black woman, Atherine Lucy, from entering the University of Alabama one month before the Manifesto was released.<sup>10</sup> Racist mobs forced Lucy to flee the campus and the university's trustees to suspend her. In 1957 came the events at Little Rock.

This background, in turn, conditioned the circumstances faced by our eyewitnesses in Savannah and Athens. Despite great unpleasantness the students ultimately prevailed. As Sage Brown put it, "Those were dangerous times." Ulysses Bryant described his senior year at SHS as "one of the longest nine months in my life." Major social reform is never easy, of

course. Machiavelli captured the matter in *The Prince* when he observed: "Nothing is more difficult to handle, more doubtful of success, nor more dangerous to manage, than to put oneself at the head of introducing new orders." During the implementation of *Brown*, the African-American children who desegregated formerly all-white public schools, the children who were actually the victims of the failed "American Dream," disproportionately bore the burden of social reform. It is only through the evaluation of their experiences that the real cost and nature of democratic reform can be measured and fully appreciated.

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## Notes

1. See also Blassingame (1979).
2. For a description of the implementation of the *Brown* decision at the large white private university in Georgia see Newman (1979).
3. For the text of the "Manifesto" see the box enclosed in this article.
4. Nineteen of the 22 southern senators and 77 of the 105 southern representatives signed the Manifesto.
5. The authors thank Travis' mother, Katie Hampton, for providing a copy of this news article.
6. All non-attributed quotations are from telephone interviews conducted by the authors in September and October 2003.
7. On the impact and challenges of racial issues on high school sports on a small-town community see Bissinger (2003).

8. The 19 students were: Groves High: Sage Brown, Martha Coleman, Delores Cooper, Flora Ann Goldwire, George Shinhoster, Sadie Mae Simmons, and Sara Townsend. Twelve students desegregated Savannah High: John Alexander, Eddie Banner, John Briggs, Ulysses Bryant, Jr., Frankie Coleman, Geraldine Loadholt, Lillian Meyers, Robert "Robbie" Robinson, Florence Russell, Robert Stephenson, and Anstine Thompson.
9. For eyewitness accounts of white students at Savannah High and Groves High, see Duffer's (1963) account in the *Savannah Morning News*. Duffer interviewed none of the black students.
10. For more on the "Alabama model" of defiance to the *Brown* decision see Clark (1993). For Georgia's variation on the "Alabama model" see Trillin (1964) and his slightly revised version, Trillin (1992).

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