





The Integration of the Episcopal Day School of Christ Church, Pensacola:  
A Local History of Race

by

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## Introduction

Robert Joseph, Ph.D. is an alumnus that any school would be proud to claim. Joseph has two degrees from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and another two from Carnegie Mellon University. He has had a fascinating career in technology and is currently the Director of Industrial Strategy for Stanley Black & Decker. Again, his success would make him a memorable graduate, but as a kindergartner in 1966, Robert Joseph became the first African American student at the Episcopal Day School of Christ Church Parish, Pensacola, Florida.

On the morning of October 13<sup>th</sup>, 2017, the day after I was selected as the eighteenth rector of Christ Church and weeks before any announcement was made, my new bishop asked me if I would like to meet the ‘most important person at Christ Church.’ Eleanor Currin is the widow of the Rev. Dr. Beverly Madison Currin (Matt), the fifteenth rector of Christ Church. Eleanor told me, “I am glad that you are here, but you won’t be the rector of Christ Church longer than Matt, because of forced retirement.” (I was thirty-eight when I started, Currin was thirty-six. Were I to remain until mandatory retirement, I would have been here two years less). On their sun porch are photos of a short priest in the oval office with President Bill Clinton, and his office was just like he left it when he died the year before. I was intrigued and curious what kind of man led Christ Church for thirty-six years.

Around Christ Church, you hear lots of stories about Dr. Currin, like the story of his first encounter with a parishioner in Pensacola. Ray Hart was on the call committee and he was charged with meeting Currin and the moving truck at the rectory. (A pregnant Eleanor stayed behind in South Carolina with their toddler, Madison.) As Currin exited

his car, Ray welcomed him to Pensacola and asked if there was anything he needed his first night in town. Currin looked at the man and said, “There is only one thing that I need this night. A bottle of bourbon.”<sup>1</sup>

There are many stories about Currin’s wit and boldness, but you also hear about his accomplishments. You hear of the building campaigns, the memorable sermons, and the growth in membership. You hear of the first woman on the vestry and the founding of the Diocese of the Central Gulf Coast. And you hear about how Currin integrated the church and the Episcopal Day School.

As Eleanor described him, “Matt was not someone to let the world put him down or give up.” He went about his ministry with an air that he was accomplishing significant things. Peter Wong, who served as a youth minister under Currin towards the end of his career, saw that “Matt had a strong sense that he was going to end up on the right side of history,” and when it comes to race, he certainly was.

One of Currin’s mentors was the Baptist preacher Carlyle Marney. Marney believed that racism “is the combination of our limited notions of community multiplied in effect by our prejudgments of value.”<sup>2</sup> Currin believed the institutional church had a limited notion of community and a failure of nerve in addressing racial injustice. “In America, about the only persecution of the Church is when it becomes involved in race relations and speaks out against the political, economic, and social customs of our society. The persecution then usually takes simply the form of canceled membership and cut pledges.”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Interview with Lucy Rentz, Ray Hart’s daughter.

<sup>2</sup> Carlyle Marney, *Structures of Prejudice* (Nashville, Abingdon Press, 1961), 129.

<sup>3</sup> Beverly Madison Currin, *If Man is to Live: A Rediscovery of the Meaning of the Atonement* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1969), 135.

This project is an exploration of the decision to accept Robert Joseph, an African American five-year-old, into the Episcopal Day School of Christ Church Parish. I have just completed my first year at Christ Church, and this project is a way of learning more about my congregation and the city where I now live. It is also an opportunity to consider the role of race in a region, a state, a city, a school, and a congregation. In his installation sermon, Presiding Bishop Michael Curry asked the Episcopal Church to focus on two things: evangelism and racial reconciliation.<sup>4</sup> This project is a step in understanding our local racial history, for that knowledge will guide any efforts that Christ Church might take towards racial reconciliation.

The first chapter will explore the racial history of Pensacola before the twentieth century and highlight the unique history of diversity found in this Spanish port city. The second chapter will tell the tragic story of race in Pensacola from 1900 to 1966 (the date of the integration of EDS). Almost overnight, Pensacola became another city of the South, suffered through the Jim Crow era, and started the fight for Civil Rights. The third chapter will examine the history of Christ Church, Pensacola up to 1966, particularly its efforts to start a school and its racial history. The fourth chapter looks at Dr. Currin's tumultuous first three years as rector and will recount the story of the integration of Episcopal Day School and Robert Joseph.

There are a few things that I feel the need to admit at the start of this project. First, I am white. More than that, I am an upper middle-class rector of an overwhelmingly white congregation in an overwhelmingly white denomination. This project does not—cannot—focus on what it was like to be black in Pensacola at any given point in history.

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.episcopalchurch.org/posts/michaelcurry/sermon-installation-27th-presiding-bishop>

Instead, this project looks at our shared history focusing on significant events and individuals that shaped how our community viewed and responded to race.

I am also a young priest starting a new ministry at a large congregation; therefore, it makes sense that Currin is the person in this narrative with whom I most associate. I kept wondering “What would I have done?” If my job was in question, if people were already mad at me for other reasons, if I was in the middle of a capital campaign, if I was a thirty-something rector living in the shadow of my predecessor, if the city around me was in turmoil over issues of race and civil rights, would I have taken such bold action? Or would I have asked the Joseph family to “wait until things cool down”? Would I put my career in jeopardy to do the right thing? One of the reasons that this story fascinated me is because it highlights the risks associated with being a rector of a church. The challenge of church leadership is doing what the Holy Spirit compels us to do but also to bring the congregation along with you. Too many priests have fallen into error on either extreme. They have either been too scared to be bold, or they have taken bold steps only to realize that they were standing all alone. Matt Currin was the rector of Christ Church for thirty-six years after he made the decision to integrate the school, so perhaps there is something for other rectors to learn from his story.

Another admission involves the interviews for this project. My final chapters deal with the recent history of Christ Church and the Episcopal Day School and rely heavily on interviews. Once I had finished the interviews, I realized that almost all interviewees were white. This is not an omission or an intentional slight but an indication of the demographics of the church and school. In 1966, there were two black families in Christ Church and only one black family at EDS, the Josephs. There were no black teachers,

administrators or board members of EDS in 1966 (in fact, Evelyn Joseph would be the first African American selected to the EDS board in the 1970's).

My final admission is that I am not a trained historian. In many ways, a project on ethics or philosophy or theology would have been more aligned with my education and background. Therefore, I relied heavily on the guidance of real historians, namely Jane Dysart, professor emeritus at the University of West Florida, Jacki Wilson, Archivist of the University of West Florida Historic Trust, and the Rev. Dr. Benjamin King, my project advisor and associate professor of Church History at the School of Theology, the University of the South. While I am acknowledging debts of gratitude, I would like to thank Bob and Susie Stumpf for their meticulous proof reading.

## **Chapter 1**

### **Enslaved Persons and Free Blacks in Pensacola**

Various factors in Pensacola's history and location have left the African American story in this part of the world largely overlooked. For one thing, Pensacola is a unique place geographically. It is not really a part of the Old South and is easily distinguishable from other southern cities like Montgomery or New Orleans. Additionally, Pensacola is a unique city within Florida because of its proximity to Alabama on two sides (north and west), and it is often called 'south Alabama' as a derogatory phrase by the rest of Florida.

Pensacola also has a unique history. It is the oldest European settlement in the current United States, founded six years before St. Augustine, which holds the claim as America's oldest city. A hurricane struck several months after the settlement was established, and the colony was abandoned two years later before being reestablished a century later. Pensacola was a Spanish colony, then briefly a French colony, then a Spanish colony, then a British colony, then a Spanish colony until it became a part of the United States in 1821.

Because of its history and geography, it is hard to categorize Pensacola as Southern or Floridian; thus, the place of Pensacola is often overlooked or diminished within books and articles about slavery in the South, the Civil Rights movement in Florida, the history of the southeast, etc. Despite being the largest city in Florida for decades and one of the most significant locations in US military history, there is surprisingly little written about the history of slavery and race relations in Pensacola.

An additional complication in understanding the history of slavery and the Civil Rights movement in Pensacola is a general attitude that things were not nearly as bad in Pensacola as other cities. This is true for Florida in general. The historian Paul Ortiz calls this phenomenon ‘Florida Exceptionalism’, which he wants to discredit. Florida exceptionalism rests on three assumptions. First, “race relations have been relatively benign in Florida, and that the Sunshine State stood apart from the racially oppressive Old South.”<sup>5</sup> Second, the large number of northerners who moved to Florida brought more progressive attitudes towards race. Third, blacks in Florida were not as organized or aggressive in the fight for equality in particular between World War II and the 1960’s.<sup>6</sup> Or as the political scientist, V. O. Key Jr. wrote in 1949, Florida was “scarcely a part of the South...a world of its own.”<sup>7</sup>

If Florida was ‘exceptional’ within the South, then Pensacola is seen as ‘exceptional’ within Florida. As we will see, there are many historical reasons that the situation of slaves and freedmen and women was better here than in other parts of the South, but we should be wary of an attitude of Floridian Exceptionalism that exists in both the scholarship and the community that the injustices done towards blacks were worse everywhere else. For instance, in 1939, a Federal Writers Project field worker, Martin Richardson, described Pensacola as a place with “a thoughtful and considerate amity between races and a fortunate absence of the bitter exploitation of slave by masters

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<sup>5</sup> Paul Ortiz, “Towards a New Civil Rights History in Florida”, in *Old South, New South, or Down South? Florida and the Modern Civil Rights Movement*, ed. Irvin D. S. Winsboro (Morgantown: West Virginia University Press, 2009), 221.

<sup>6</sup> Ortiz, “Towards a New Civil Rights History in Florida”, 222.

<sup>7</sup> Lisa M. Steinhauer, “Wait has almost always meant Never: The Long Road to School Desegregation in Palm Beach County,” in *Old South, New South, or Down South? Florida and the Modern Civil Rights Movement*, ed. Irvin D. S. Winsboro (Morgantown: West Virginia Press, 2009), 156.

so commonly found in regions purely agricultural during the early days of Florida.”<sup>8</sup> I have found the same sort of attitude in my interviews with Pensacolians: that things were not perfect in Pensacola, but they were better than the rest of the South.

The problem with Florida Exceptionalism and what might be called Pensacola Exceptionalism is that it diminishes the cruelty and subjugation of African Americans in Pensacola and can whitewash our history. It is a form of historical whataboutism. We do not have to consider our legacy of racism because “whatabout Atlanta” or “whatabout the firehoses and church-bombings of Birmingham.” There is a need to reconsider our history and listen to the voices from our past, such as the following letter from an African American in Pensacola in 1891:

Well, sir, I will tell you what they are doing with us down South. They are shooting us down as so many partridges; don't allow editors to speak the truth always through their papers to the people; kicking us off trains whenever they see fit to do so; distribute the school funds as their conscience directs, charging us very often as high as 24 per cent per annum for money when we are compelled to borrow it from them, and thousands of other things too numerous to mention.<sup>9</sup>

While an in-depth analysis of slavery and racial injustice is beyond the scope of this project, I believe a brief look at Pensacola's history up to the Civil Rights movement and the decision to integrate Episcopal Day School in 1967 will be helpful. I will argue that things in Pensacola really were better for slaves and freedmen up to and immediately after the Civil War in comparison to other cities in the South, but things deteriorated from there. By the 1920's, Pensacola was struggling with its own systemic racism that was not that dissimilar from other cities in Florida and the rest of the South.

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<sup>8</sup> Larry Eugene Rivers, *From Slavery in Florida: Territorial Days to Emancipation* (Gainesville: University of Florida, 2000), 79.

<sup>9</sup> Ortiz, “Towards a New Civil Rights History in Florida,” 224.

Slavery has been a part of Pensacola's history since the conquistador, Don Tristan de Luna y Arellano entered Pensacola Bay in 1559. De Luna left from Mexico City with 500 soldiers and 1000 servants and colonists on 11 ships. The demographics of the 1000 servants and colonists were not broken down, but consisted of "women and children, negroes, and Indians."<sup>10</sup> While most of the Africans were slave labor, there was at least one free black man named Francisco. While not much is known about the enslaved Africans in America's first settlement, there is currently an ongoing archeological project directed by the University of West Florida to study the recently discovered original settlement.<sup>11</sup> It is possible that we may soon know more about De Luna's expedition in general and the role of Africans in particular.

After two years, the first colony failed, and Pensacola was resettled in 1698 as a Spanish colony called 'Panzacola.' Overall, slavery in Spanish colonies was different than English colonies like Jamaica or Virginia. The historian Larry Eugene Rivers argues that "although racial prejudice existed in Spain and its New World colonies, evidence suggests that Spanish law and custom afforded slaves rights not systematically found in the Old South or in other slave systems with European origins."<sup>12</sup> Unlike the plantation system, the Spanish colonists used a task system, where slaves were given a task or quota to fulfill. For example, a lumber mill may require a certain number of logs per week. These tasks were often manageable and any remaining time could be used for the slaves' own enterprises, like a personal farm or trade.<sup>13</sup> Tom Moreno, a creole and the last

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<sup>10</sup> C. S. Satterwhite, "The African Presence in 'America's First Settlement,'" *inweekly*, December 8, 2017, <http://inweekly.net/wordpress/?p=28637>.

<sup>11</sup> See UWF's press release [http://uwf.edu/media/university-of-west-florida/about-uwf/images/luna-settlement/LunaMediaKit\\_2015\\_Web.pdf](http://uwf.edu/media/university-of-west-florida/about-uwf/images/luna-settlement/LunaMediaKit_2015_Web.pdf) accessed Jan. 18, 2018 or a great ongoing series on [archeology.org](http://archeology.org).

<sup>12</sup> Rivers, *Slavery in Florida*, 2.

<sup>13</sup> Rivers, *Slavery in Florida*, 67-84.

surviving slave in Pensacola, was interviewed in 1937 as part of the Federal Writers Project, and said, “I am of Spanish descent and was brought up in the Spanish way. The Spanish was very good and kind to the colored folks. They got good treatment.”<sup>14</sup> (Tom Moreno was christened at Old Christ Church in 1841.)<sup>15</sup>

Pensacola under Spanish rule was a diverse population of Native Americans, free and enslaved Africans, and mulattos/creoles<sup>16</sup>. This diversity would remain a key aspect of Pensacola’s identity. In fact, as a way to undermine British interests in the New World, Spain encouraged slaves to flee from British colonies like South Carolina and Georgia to Spanish colonies like Pensacola. In 1733 King Philip V of Spain offered freedom to any runaway slave after they converted to Roman Catholicism and served the crown for four years.<sup>17</sup> According to the historian Matthew J. Clavin, “Pensacola in particular held advantages for fugitive slaves, because unlike the mature ‘slave societies’ emerging near St. Augustine and along the eastern edge of the Mississippi, it remained an isolated and unstable ‘society with slaves.’”<sup>18</sup>

Except for a three-year period when Pensacola was a French colony, Spain ruled the area until the end of the French and Indian War in 1763 when the maps of North America were redrawn. Pensacola was made the capital of British West Florida which covered the Florida Panhandle to the Apalachicola River, southern Alabama and

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<sup>14</sup> Found in Georgia M. Smith, *The Ebony Tale of Pensacola: African-European Culture with Caribbean, Louisiana and Alabama Ties*, Self-Published Thesis, 1998, 155.

<sup>15</sup> Smith, *The Ebony Tale of Pensacola*, 155.

<sup>16</sup> Different historians have differing classifications for people of mixed races (creoles, mulattos, etc.). Some use particular words to describe particular groups, others use one or the other to describe anyone of mixed race. If there is confusion between these terms in my project, it reflects confusion in the source material.

<sup>17</sup> Patrick Rioran, “Finding Freedom in Florida: Native Peoples, African Americans, and Colonists, 1670-1816,” *The Florida Historical Quarterly*, Vol. 75, No. 1 (Summer, 1996), 30.

<sup>18</sup> Matthew J. Clavin, *Aiming for Pensacola: Fugitive Slaves on the Atlantic and Southern Frontiers* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015), 17.

Mississippi, and southeastern Louisiana. Most of the Spanish citizens fled to other Spanish colonies. A group of Yamasee and Apalache Indians, as well as creole and free black soldiers who had fought with the Spanish fled Pensacola to San Carlos in Veracruz, Mexico where they formed a permanent settlement.<sup>19</sup> This exodus of free blacks foreshadows a similar trend when the United States took ownership of Pensacola in 1821.

Up until 1763, Pensacola had been primarily a port town whose residents were described as “traders, smugglers, privateersmen, Indians, half-breeds, runaway negroes, and white men who had fled from the American territory for good cause.”<sup>20</sup> The British had designs to turn it into a proper colony. In particular, they planned for West Florida to become an agricultural colony like Virginia or South Carolina. One of the first actions of the new British government headquartered in Pensacola was to establish the Act for the Regulation and Government of Negroes and Slaves which “severely restricted the rights of blacks, Indian, mulatto, and mustee slaves”<sup>21</sup> and institutionalized systemic slavery with regulations and punishments. Special attention was given to laws governing runaway slaves in response to Spain’s encouragement of slaves to flee British colonies.

Pensacola never developed into the major agricultural colony that the British imagined, but during this period, hundreds of enslaved Africans were imported to work the few large plantations, labor on smaller farms, or to work as a ‘house slaves’.<sup>22</sup> There

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<sup>19</sup> John J. Clune, Jr. and Margo S. Stringfield, *Historic Pensacola* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2009) 88. See also Robert L Gold, “Conflict in San Carlos: Indian Immigrants in Eighteenth-Century New Spain”, *Ethnohistory*, Vol. 17, No. ½ (Winter-Spring, 1970), pp.1-10.

<sup>20</sup> Quoted in Matthew J. Clavin, “Interracialism and Revolution on the Southern Frontier: Pensacola in the Civil War,” *Journal of Southern History*, 80,no. 4 (November 2014) 794.

<sup>21</sup> Clavin, *Aiming for Pensacola*, 16. For more on the establishment of British rule in Pensacola see Clarence E. Carter, “The Beginnings of British West Florida,” *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, Vol. 4, No. 3 (December 1917), pp. 314-341.

<sup>22</sup> For an interesting look at the relationship between British women and their slaves see Deborah L. Bauer, “‘...in a strange place...’: The Experiences of British Women during the Colonization of East & West Florida.” *The Florida Historical Quarterly*, Vol. 89, No. 2 (Fall 2010), pp. 145-185.

was also an increased stratification where European whites formed the top layer of society, and Native Americans, free blacks, creoles/mulattos, and enslaved people formed the bottom. While there was clearly a distinction in class between Spanish colonist and all other races, during Spanish rule the lines were more blurred. For example, many Spaniards took black or Native American wives. During the British period, however, class distinctions were magnified and strictly enforced. British flags flew over Pensacola for less than twenty years, but the way that Pensacola was organized both as a city and a society was greatly influenced by this stratification.

In the early years of the American Revolution, America was looking for allies against the British empire. The Continental Congress passed the following resolution which Benjamin Franklin communicated to the king of Spain:

That if his Catholic Majesty will join with the United States in a War against Great Britain, they will assist in reducing to the Possession of Spain the Town and Harbour of Pensacola, provided the Inhabitants of the United States shall have the free Navigation of the Missisipi [sic], and the Use of the Harbour of Pensacola; and they will (provided it shall be true that the King of Portugal has insultingly expelled the Vessels of these States from his Ports, or has confiscated any such Vessels) declare War against the said King, if that Measure shall be agreeable [sic] to and supported by the Courts of Spain and France.<sup>23</sup>

In response, the Spanish general, Bernardo Galvez, led an army from Havana through British West Florida, taking Baton Rouge, Mobile, and laying siege to Pensacola. This force was made up of Spanish regulars, creole units from Cuba and Hispaniola, as well as 174 free black and mulatto militiamen from Louisiana<sup>24</sup> and additional black grenadiers and scouts.<sup>25</sup> The British forces were besieged in Fort George, which is incidentally three

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<sup>23</sup> From letter from Benjamin Franklin on April 7, 1777 found in the National Archives. <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Franklin/01-23-02-0376> accessed Jan. 15, 2018.

<sup>24</sup> Albert W. Haarmann, "The Siege of Pensacola: An Order of Battle," *The Florida Historical Quarterly*, Vol. 44, No. 3 (Jan. 1966), 195.

<sup>25</sup> Clavin, *Aiming for Pensacola*, 23.

blocks from Christ Church Pensacola and EDS and on the same block as EDS' new Hilton-Green campus. We know that blacks also fought for the British from several references in Galvez' diary.<sup>26</sup>

The Spanish forces took heavy losses (mainly at the hands of Britain's Native American allies), but a lucky canon shot hit Fort George's powder magazine, which broke the British defense. The Siege of Pensacola did not greatly influence the Revolutionary War, but it did lead to a return of Spanish rule. Fulfilling Congress' promise to Spain in exchange for aid, The Treaty of Paris in 1783 granted Spain sovereignty of East and West Florida.<sup>27</sup>

The Spanish censuses of Pensacola give us a glimpse of its diversity and the way that diversity grew under Spanish rule. In 1784, one year after the Treaty of Paris, the population of Pensacola was 593: 225 white men, 156 white women, 10 free male blacks and mulattoes, 18 free female blacks, 101 male black and mulatto slaves, and 83 female black and mulatto slaves. In 1820, the last Spanish census before Pensacola became a part of the United States has the population at 695 people: 441 white and 254 free blacks with no listing for slaves.<sup>28</sup> Again according to the census, the white population remained fairly constant (381 to 441), but the free black population grew exponentially from 28 to 254.

There are many reasons to believe that Pensacola was a multicultural town where free blacks were integrated into society, not as equals, but as valued parts of the community. The historian Victoria Gould attributes this to the combination of a vibrant

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<sup>26</sup> Haarmann, "The Siege of Pensacola", 196-197.

<sup>27</sup> Clavin, *Aiming for Pensacola*, 24.

<sup>28</sup> James R. McGovern, ed., *Colonial Pensacola: Volume 1* (Pensacola: University of West Florida, 1972), 20.

port and a rustic, frontier nature. In her view, Pensacolians “did not exist in a world in which a strict interpretation of race and class ordered the population. Instead, their world was fraught with economic uncertainty, a reality that served to knit them together, despite their diversity...where ability and adaptability outweighed considerations of color and class, racial mixing was tolerated and even encouraged.”<sup>29</sup>

Neighborhoods were racially mixed. Free blacks owned businesses and served in the militia. The only church in Pensacola, St. Michael’s Catholic Church (down the street from Christ Church today) had integrated services.<sup>30</sup> People shared the same water holes and wells. Fugitive slaves continued to flee to Pensacola and find refuge.<sup>31</sup> This blended society was a shock to Americans, including Rachel Jackson, the wife of the first governor of Florida, Andrew Jackson: “The inhabitants all speak Spanish and French. Some speak four or five languages. Such a mixed multitude, you, nor any of us, had any idea of. There are fewer white people by far than any other, mixed with all nations under the canopy of heaven, almost nature’s darkness.”<sup>32</sup> Historians John J. Clune Jr. and Margo S. Stringfield conclude that the “mixing pot of humanity on the shores of Pensacola Bay was one of the most accepting of North America.”<sup>33</sup>

Once again, slavery in a Spanish colony was different than the plantation system. According to Clavin, slaves “worked in the homes of officers and bureaucrats as domestic servants, along the waterfront as stevedores and shipwrights, or on the edge of

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<sup>29</sup> Virginia Meacham Gould, “The Free Creoles of Color of the Antebellum Gulf Ports of Mobile and Pensacola: A Struggle for Middle Ground,” in *Creoles of Color of the Gulf Coast*, ed. James H Dorman (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1996), 34.

<sup>30</sup> Clavin, *Aiming for Pensacola*, 25.

<sup>31</sup> Clavin, *Aiming for Pensacola*, 28-38.

<sup>32</sup> Clune and Stringfield, *Historic Pensacola*, 137.

<sup>33</sup> Clune and Stringfield, *Historic Pensacola*, 137.

the city as cowboys and lumberjacks.”<sup>34</sup> Slaves were often rented out because they had skills other than farming.<sup>35</sup> But they were still slaves and they longed for freedom. This is evident in the rise of abolitionism during the War of 1812.

As a way of undercutting Spanish and American power, British forces began a propaganda campaign encouraging slaves to escape and join the fight against their oppressors. There is an irony that Britain used the same tactic that the Spanish had used against them a half-century early. This is also evidence of a theme that plays throughout Pensacola’s history. Blacks, both free and slaves, were manipulated and exploited by various European powers in their competition for power in the region. The same British Empire that enacted strict slavery codes now promised freedom because it furthered their global political goals.

For a short time during the War of 1812, British forces held Pensacola, and Pensacola continued to be a magnet for runaway slaves. An Irish abolitionist, Lieutenant Colonel Edward Nichols, was responsible for working with Native Americans, creoles, and runaway slaves to defend the region from American forces. He dreamed of an integrated army where British, black, and Native Americans, primarily the Creek, would fight together as one. “What a glorious prospect for British soldiers to set them free, how grateful will they be to you, how ready to mix their Blood with yours in so good a cause additional lustre will beam on that Standard under whose waft no slave can combat.”<sup>36</sup> Hundreds of runaway slaves and displaced Native Americans were drawn to Pensacola to fight for their freedom. One Southern congressman lamented that Pensacola was

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<sup>34</sup> Clavin, *Aiming for Pensacola*, 27.

<sup>35</sup> Rivers, *Slavery in Florida*, 82-83.

<sup>36</sup> Clavin, *Aiming for Pensacola*, 43.

becoming “a place of asylum, refuge, and resort for Nicholls, for Indians, for Negroes, for Woodbine, and for the dregs of mankind collected together to perpetrate violence in the extreme.”<sup>37</sup>

In September of 1814, Nichols led his multiracial army towards Mobile to take Fort Bowyer, but they were soundly beaten by US forces sent by General Andrew Jackson to reinforce the fort.<sup>38</sup> In response, Jackson marched on Pensacola with 4,000 troops, taking control of the city in the Battle of Pensacola. Slave owners protested that as they fled, the British absconded with two thirds of the city’s slaves.<sup>39</sup> As the British were pulling out of West Florida, Nichols led hundreds of trained ‘black warriors’ to a fort on the Appalachicola River, called ‘Negro Fort’, on a rise that will eventually become Fort Gadsden.<sup>40</sup> There were as many as 600 former slaves from Pensacola, Alabama, Georgia, and other Southern states, who found their way to Negro Fort, and for over a year this settlement existed independent of American or European power. While the slaves were from all over the South, the three commanders (“los tres capitanes”), Garcon, Cyrus, and Prince, were all runaway slaves from Pensacola.<sup>41</sup>

Before he fled Florida, Nichols gave every runaway slave in Negro Fort documents of emancipation<sup>42</sup> and left three thousand muskets, ammunition, and several cannon.<sup>43</sup> Following the War, the Spanish forces in Pensacola were not strong enough to

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<sup>37</sup> Clavin, *Aiming for Pensacola*, 45.

<sup>38</sup> William S. Coker, “The Last Battle of the War of 1812: New Orleans. No. Fort Bowyer!” *Alabama Historical Quarterly*, Vol. 43. No 01 (Spring 1981), 42-63.

<sup>39</sup> Clavin, *Aiming for Pensacola*, 46.

<sup>40</sup> Rivers, *Slavery in Florida*, 7.

<sup>41</sup> Clavin, *Aiming for Pensacola*, 53-54.

<sup>42</sup> Clavin, *Aiming for Pensacola*, 49.

<sup>43</sup> Frank L. Owsley and Gene A. Smith, *Fillibusters and Expansionists: Jeffersonian Manifest Destiny, 1800-1821*, (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1997), 103-104.

retake Negro Fort, but they sent waves of delegations to try to talk a group of black soldiers who considered themselves free to voluntarily return to slavery.<sup>44</sup>

The very existence of a free settlement of runaway slaves infuriated many. They were accused of piracy (which may have been true), with one Pensacola slave owner claiming that the economy will not thrive until “the hornet’s nest of negroes is broken up.”<sup>45</sup> The US government was concerned that the fort blocked trade down the Apalachicola River, and asked the governor of Cuba to remove it.<sup>46</sup> But the existence of Negro Fort seemed to irritate Andrew Jackson most of all. Under the guise of protecting American interests, Jackson wrote to the Spanish governor of West Florida asking permission to march American forces to Negro Fort and take care of the problem. Showing his disdain for the Spanish sovereignty of Florida, two weeks before he wrote that letter, Jackson ordered General Edmund P. Gaines to begin the assault. Jackson wrote to Gaines, “I have little doubt of the fact, that this fort has been established by some villains for rapine and plunder, and that it ought to be blown up, regardless of the land on which it stands; and if your mind shall have formed the same conclusion, destroy it and return the stolen Negroes and property to their rightful owners.”<sup>47</sup>

The US forces surrounded Fort Negro and demanded a full surrender. The defenders rejected the offer. A lucky cannon shot hit the fort’s magazine (reminiscent of Galvez’ lucky shot on Fort George), and 270 of the fort’s defenders died in the explosion. After the fighting was over only a few dozen soldiers of Negro Fort survived, and they

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<sup>44</sup> Jane G. Landers, *Atlantic Creoles in the Age of Revolutions* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011), 126-127.

<sup>45</sup> Clavin, *Aiming for Pensacola*, 55.

<sup>46</sup> <http://www.exploresouthernhistory.com/fortgadsden.html> accessed Jan. 15, 2018.

<sup>47</sup> Adam Wasserman, *A People’s History of Florida 1513-1876: How Africans, Seminoles, Women, and Lower Class Whites Shaped the Sunshine State*. 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, self-published 2009, 109.

were captured and re-enslaved.<sup>48</sup> This ends a remarkable story in Floridian history where a self-governed settlement of runaway slaves gained independence until the future first governor of Florida and president of the United States, himself a slaveholder, illegally invaded a foreign territory to destroy it.

In 1821, Pensacola, along with the rest of present day Florida, became an American colony with Andrew Jackson as its first territorial governor. Florida was made a state in 1845. Before that, the fifth rector of Christ Church, The Rev. Frederick F. Peake, wrote to his father in 1843, “The town contains only about 22 or 2400 inhabitants- a majority of them Spanish, Creoles, and Negroes.”<sup>49</sup> A visiting reporter from the *Western Carolinian* described Pensacola as having “a greater diversity of character, color, and physiognomy, and withal a greater variety and confusion of tongues, than any one place, of the same magnitude, could boast of since ancient days of Babylon.”<sup>50</sup> Another writer in the *Pensacola Gazette* described downtown: “There may be seen the Dignitary, the Lawyer-the Doctor, the Merchant-the Grocer, the Printer-the Mechanic-French-Spaniards-Americans, English, German, Dutch, the schoolboy-negroes, mulattoes, of all hue-tongues and garb.”<sup>51</sup>

Besides the creoles, slaves, and free blacks, there was a “special class of Negro in Pensacola at the beginning of Territorial Days,”<sup>52</sup> wives or concubines and the children of Spanish soldiers and bureaucrats who were left behind when Spain abandoned Pensacola.

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<sup>48</sup> Clavin, *Aiming for Pensacola*, 58.

<sup>49</sup> Letter from Peake to his father, February 14, 1843, Leora M. Sutton Papers, M2986, University of West Florida Archives.

<sup>50</sup> Clavin, *Aiming for Pensacola*, 75.

<sup>51</sup> Clavin, *Aiming for Pensacola*, 76.

<sup>52</sup> Leora M. Sutton, “Blacks and Slavery in Pensacola 1780-1880”, 1977, 10. I found this document in the University of West Florida’s Historic Trust Archives. It appears to be a well-researched paper or thesis which dug through letters and interviews to find first-hand accounts.

Many were left with property and freedom, but they could not will their property to their children and also needed a 'guardian.' The transfer of power from Spain to America thrust these women and children and other black Pensacolians into a new and uncertain world.

The civil rights historian and psychologist, Marvin Dunn, sees a pressure for Pensacola to become more like the rest of the South. "As whites moved into Florida in the pre-Civil War period (many with their own slaves), they demanded the suppression of this unruly amalgamation of reds and blacks."<sup>53</sup> The new territory of Florida passed laws to solidify the racial bifurcation of the American South. People of color could not vote or own guns. Interracial marriage, which was prevalent up to this point in Pensacola, was outlawed. While those laws were unjust, a larger injustice was done to free blacks in the requirement to have a white guardian who "shall have the same privilege over each and every of such free negroes [sic], of free mulattoes as masters, except the right of property in every other respect."<sup>54</sup> Any free black found without a guardian would be fined ten dollars. Guardians could rent out free blacks, and all free blacks charged with vagrancy could be auctioned to the highest bidder.<sup>55</sup> Clavin believes that these laws, which originated in the new capital of Tallahassee, were largely ignored.<sup>56</sup> Nevertheless there is evidence that the free black community were greatly distressed by the guardian system. The *Pensacola Gazette* for April 4, 1857 included this notice:

The Exodus: On Tuesday last thirty-five free colored persons took their departure from this city for Tampico, and in a few days the balance of those remaining will also leave for the same place. It was a painful sight to see them parting from their friends and their

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<sup>53</sup> Marvin Dunn, "The Illusion of Moderation," in *Old South, New South, or Down South? Florida and the Modern Civil Rights Movement*, edited by Irvin D. S. Winsboro (Morgantown: West Virginia University Press, 2009), 25.

<sup>54</sup> Clavin, *Aiming for Pensacola*, 67.

<sup>55</sup> Wasserman, *A People's History of Florida*, 146.

<sup>56</sup> Clavin, *Aiming for Pensacola*, 67.

native country to seek homes in a foreign land. They take with them the sympathy of all our citizens on account of the causes which have led them to leave us, and also our best wishes for their future happiness and prosperity in their new home.<sup>57</sup>

One of the women who boarded the *Pinta* in hope of freedom, reportedly threw a rock over the side of the ship saying she would return to Pensacola when the rock floated to the top of the Gulf.<sup>58</sup>

Further evidence of the harsh new reality for black Pensacolians as an American colony were the local laws and ordinances. The penalty for a black person swimming in the bay was ten lashes (the issue of segregated beaches would continue in Pensacola for years to come). The penalty for a slave who destroyed someone else's property like a fence was six months in prison or thirty-nine lashes.<sup>59</sup> Indeed, slavery continued to be a fact of life within the city and a fundamental part of the economy. Many white families had household slaves, and some of the larger business, like the Arcadia Manufacturing Company, owned slaves. Advertisements in the local paper hired out slaves with particular skills,<sup>60</sup> but the single largest employer of slave labor was the United States government.

In 1826, recognizing the value of Pensacola Bay as a safe harbor, the United States built the Navy Ship Yard (where the Naval Air Station currently sits). While many officers brought their own personal slaves, the Navy was not permitted to own slaves directly, therefore they rented them from local slave-owners. Scholars estimate as many as one thousand bondsmen worked for the Navy at any given time.<sup>61</sup> Renting the

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<sup>57</sup> <https://www.nps.gov/guis/learn/historyculture/african-americans.htm> accessed Jan. 15, 2018.

<sup>58</sup> Wilma King, *Essence of Liberty: Free Black Women During the Slave Era* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2006), 161.

<sup>59</sup> Sutton, "Blacks and Slavery in Pensacola", 16.

<sup>60</sup> Rivers, *Slavery in Florida*, 82-83.

<sup>61</sup> Ernest F. Dibble, "Slave Rentals to the Military: Pensacola and the Gulf Coast," *Civil War History*, Volume 23, Number 2, June 1977, pp 101-113.

enslaved to the federal government was a steady form of income for many wealthy Pensacolians. In keeping with the complex nature of slavery in Pensacola, most slaves that were rented to the Navy lived nearly free lives that were not distinguishable from free blacks in the era, with the obvious caveat that they had no freedom and their masters received the financial benefits of their labor. Tom Moreno, mentioned above, reported that “at the Navy Yard in Pensacola they treated them well. You couldn’t whip a slave there.”<sup>62</sup> One such enslaved person, Adam, worked as a blacksmith bending iron and steel for new ships. He lived with other black employees near the shipyard and had very little engagement with his master. But he resented the dollar per day that his owner received, so he escaped through the Underground Railroad where he found freedom in Canada.<sup>63</sup>

While the likes of Adam were fleeing from Pensacola, many more were fleeing to it. Clavin has researched old newspapers for ‘runaway slave advertisements’ and local judicial history to paint a picture of Pensacola’s role in the Underground Railroad during and before the Civil War. Pensacola was an attractive destination for runaway slaves for four reasons. First, the Spanish policy to grant freedom to runaway slaves gave Pensacola a reputation amongst slaves in the South. Second, as a port city, there was hope of passing as free or hiding on a ship and traveling to safety. Third, the area surrounding Pensacola was a wild, relatively lawless place where they may be able to hide amongst the Creek and Seminole people who would not cooperate with the American military. Finally, the large free black and mulatto community in Pensacola allowed runaway slaves to hide in plain sight if they could find forged documentation.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Smith, *The Ebony Tale of Pensacola*, 156.

<sup>63</sup> Clavin, *Aiming for Pensacola*, 122 citing “The Fugitive Slave in Portsmouth,” *Liberator*, August 16, 1850, 3.

<sup>64</sup> See Clavin, *Aiming for Pensacola*, 93-146.

Even before the Civil War magnified Pensacola's status as a haven for runaway slaves, the story of Jonathan Walker thrust the city into the forefront of the nation's abolitionist debate. Walker was a ship's captain from New Bedford, Massachusetts, a famous sanctuary for many runaway slaves including Frederick Douglass.<sup>65</sup> Under the mentorship of the Quaker abolitionist, Benjamin Lundy, Walker became an ardent supporter of the Underground Railroad. Walker led a scouting mission on behalf of a wealthy abolitionist who purchased one hundred thousand acres in Mexico to see if that would be a good destination to relocate runaway slaves, but he and his party were assaulted and robbed by bandits.<sup>66</sup> On his way home, Walker stopped in Pensacola and eventually moved there because of the need for qualified sea captains.

Once in Pensacola, Walker befriended local slaves and free blacks and became outraged at their treatment. Walker's response was to become a stationmaster for the Florida line of the Underground Railroad. It is not clear to what extent Walker was successful in his efforts, but in 1844, he was approached by seven slaves who asked if he would help them flee. On July 22, the seven men left the Navy Yard and boarded Walker's ship bound for the Bahamas.<sup>67</sup> After running low on supplies, their vessel was apprehended by a civilian captain who handed them over to the U.S. Navy. Upon their return to Pensacola, all of the slaves were returned to bondage. Four of the slaves were kept in jail for weeks where they were severely beaten. While Walker awaited trial in the next cell, one of slaves, Silas, fearful of continued beatings, committed suicide "by

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<sup>65</sup> Clavin, *Aiming for Pensacola*, 14.

<sup>66</sup> Jack Dempsey, "The Man with the Branded Hand", *Michigan History Magazine*, 99.1 (January-February 2015), 45. Clavin, *Aiming for Pensacola*, 125.

<sup>67</sup> Clavin, *Aiming for Pensacola*, 127.

cutting open his belly and throat with a razor.”<sup>68</sup> These were not the only horrors that Walker would witness while imprisoned.<sup>69</sup>

For four months, Walker was in chains in a Pensacola jail cell before he was convicted on four counts of stealing “goods and chattel.”<sup>70</sup> His punishment was a fine of \$150 per slave, standing on a pillory for one hour, and having the letters S. S. (slave stealer) branded on the palm of his right hand.<sup>71</sup> Soon after, the slave owners sued him for an additional one hundred thousand dollars in damages, but the civil suit never materialized, and Northern abolitionists paid the fine and Walker’s legal fees.<sup>72</sup> Following the trial, Walker moved back North.

Walker’s story was picked up by Northern newspapers and abolitionist publications. Pretty soon Walker became a national figure, and a tract about his life, *Trial and Imprisonment of Jonathan Walker, at Pensacola Florida, for Aiding Slaves to Escape from Bondage*, was published by the American Anti-Slavery Society in Boston in 1845. This autobiographical account was the American Anti-Slavery Society’s second most successful publication behind the *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave*.<sup>73</sup> Walker became a symbol for the abolitionist movement, a household name across America and overseas, and an inspiration to the poet, John Greenleaf Whittier in “The Branded Hand”:

Then lift that manly hand  
Bold ploughman of the wave;  
Its branded palm shall prophesy  
Salvation to the slave<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Clavin, *Aiming for Pensacola*, 131.

<sup>69</sup> See Clavin, *Aiming for Pensacola*, 137 for a description of systematic torture called ‘paddling’.

<sup>70</sup> Clavin, *Aiming for Pensacola*, 131.

<sup>71</sup> <https://www.nps.gov/people/jonathan-walker.htm> accessed Jan. 15, 2018.

<sup>72</sup> <https://www.nps.gov/people/jonathan-walker.htm> accessed Jan. 15, 2018

<sup>73</sup> Clavin, *Aiming for Pensacola*, 136.

<sup>74</sup> [http://www.aaregistry.org/historic\\_events/view/abolitionist-branded-slave-stealer](http://www.aaregistry.org/historic_events/view/abolitionist-branded-slave-stealer) accessed Jan. 15, 2018.

At the start of the Civil War, there were two major forts in the Southern states that were controlled by Union troops, Fort Sumter in Charleston, South Carolina and Fort Pickens in Pensacola, Florida. Fort Sumter fell to Confederate forces 1861 marking the beginning of armed conflict between the North and the South. Fort Pickens, on the other hand, remained under Union control for the entirety of the war. Geography had a lot to do with this. Fort Pickens stands at the end of Santa Rosa Island, which stretches 45 miles ending in a narrow pass leading into Pensacola Bay. The island is as narrow as 300 yards making Fort Pickens nearly impossible to take by land. Since the Confederacy did not have a strong Navy, Fort Pickens stayed in Union control and for all practical purposes shut off Pensacola Bay and sea traffic to Pensacola. For 16 months, a strange standoff existed, where the Union controlled Fort Pickens, but the Confederacy controlled Fort Barancas and the Navy Yard less than a mile across the bay.

Throughout its history, Pensacola had been a destination for runaway slaves, but for the first sixteen months of the Civil War, the trickle of people seeking freedom became a flood. In 1861, a group of slaves crossed the bay to Fort Pickens in the hopes that they would be set free. Instead, they were put in chains and delivered by boat back to the Navy Yard. Once returned to their masters, they were flogged and put back into bondage.<sup>75</sup> Soon afterwards, Colonel Harvey Brown took command of Fort Pickens. Unlike his predecessor, Brown had strong abolitionist views and realized that freed slaves would be a good source of information and labor.<sup>76</sup> Brown announced to his forces, “I shall never send the negroes back, as I will never be voluntarily instrumental in returning

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<sup>75</sup> Clavin, “Interacialism and Revolution,” 791.

<sup>76</sup> Clavin, “Interacialism and Revolution,” 793.

a poor wretch to slavery.”<sup>77</sup> Pretty soon word got out that if you could make it to Fort Pickens then you would be free. There is no way to tell how many of the enslaved made it to Fort Pickens, but Clavin chronicles many first-hand accounts of attempts to do so.<sup>78</sup>

After New Orleans fell to Union forces in May of 1861, the Confederacy abandoned the city of Pensacola as indefensible. General Bragg ordered the retreating army to “burn all from Fort McRee to the junction with the Mobile road. Report as you progress.”<sup>79</sup> This explains why there are no antebellum buildings in downtown Pensacola with a few notable exceptions including Old Christ Church, which was used as a chapel, hospital and prison for Union troops for the remainder of the war. Most of Pensacola fled with the retreating Confederate army, including most of the members of Christ Church who fled to Montgomery; but the report that only forty people remained in Pensacola must be an exaggeration, however.<sup>80</sup> As the smoke cleared, Union forces quickly reestablished the town, especially the port and the Navy Yard, and flew the American flag over Pensacola once again. Four quotations found in letters from Major Willoughby Babcock of the Seventy-Fifth New York Infantry Regiment, a Union officer with strong abolitionist opinions who was named provost marshal and military governor of Pensacola, shed light on the continued flow of former slaves into Pensacola, which was

the point to which the negroes fled after the outbreak of the war, from all surrounding districts, as it was for some time the only point in the extreme South which was held by federal troops where they could feel safe.<sup>81</sup>

The women and children are sent to New York...The men being willing to work are enrolled as Uncle Sam’s laborers, paid \$15 a month and one ration per day. They are

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<sup>77</sup> Clavin, *Aiming for Pensacola*, 148.

<sup>78</sup> Clavin, *Aiming for Pensacola*, 148-158.

<sup>79</sup> George F. Pearce, *Pensacola during the Civil War: A Thorn in the Side of the Confederacy* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2000), 144.

<sup>80</sup> Clavin, “Interracialism and Revolution,” 806.

<sup>81</sup> Clavin, *Aiming for Pensacola*, 151.

boatmen, teamsters, and ordinary hands, and do more work than any other men on the island.<sup>82</sup>

Negroes are now coming in from the country above...One of them, Robert came in yesterday and told me his story, his name...master, business, route here etc. He belonged to one James Abercrombie 40 miles up the Escambia River, didn't know how old he was, he was raised in Old Hancock, Georgia...[Robert said his wife had started with him.] Where is she now? De dogs ketched her, massa. We send these fugitives all to Pickens, where they are enrolled in the Qr. M [Quartermaster] Dept. fed and paid as well as worked. They work well and are proud of Uncle Sam's livery. Those who escaped to Pickens months ago now get leave to come here [Pensacola] in good clothes with money in their pockets the very gold and not confederate shinplasters and form a sort of colored aristocracy, buying corn beer, strolling freely about and doing much flirtation with the colored girls.<sup>83</sup>

My official duties bind me not to advise any slave to run away, but in proper cases I find my conscience pliant enough to inform other officers what slaves might as well go to Fort Pickens and be free!<sup>84</sup>

Clavin argues that under Union control, Pensacola continued as a diverse community with relative racial harmony. Whites and blacks worked together, ate together, and often drank too much together. Religious services conducted by military chaplains at the only surviving church (presumably Old Christ Church) were integrated. Local residents “regularly assembled, both black and white, to hear the word of life, sometimes from the lips of Lieut. Kane, of the Maria Woods, and occasionally from those of Mr. Diossy, a Methodist Protestant minister serving in the Twenty-eighth Connecticut Volunteers.”<sup>85</sup> A school was founded to educate black children, and many of the former slaves who had fled to Pensacola learned to read and write at the hands of military tutors.<sup>86</sup>

Like the Spanish and the British before them, the Union officers recruited former slaves, creoles, and freed blacks into military units. First under Major Babcock and then

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<sup>82</sup> Pearce, *Pensacola during the Civil War*, 169.

<sup>83</sup> Pearce, *Pensacola during the Civil War*, 169.

<sup>84</sup> Clavin, “Interracialism and Revolution,” 809.

<sup>85</sup> Clavin, *Aiming for Pensacola*, 173.

<sup>86</sup> Pearce, *Pensacola during the Civil War*, 183.

General Neal Dow, a former conductor of the Underground Railroad who had been banished to Pensacola over controversial actions to free slaves, volunteers were recruited to ‘colored’ regiments. In 1863, Brigadier General Daniel Ullman organized the Fifth Regiment Infantry Corps d’Afrique, which some consider ‘the first colored organization authorized by the government.’<sup>87</sup> One recruit to Ullman’s Fifth was John Sunday, a former slave of mixed race who went on to become a prominent businessman in Pensacola.

The number of black and mixed military units in Pensacola grew. Many of these troops raided plantations in Florida and South Alabama freeing slaves and growing the size of the army with new recruits. In March of 1865, twelve thousand black and white troops out of Pensacola defeated Confederate forces at Fort Blakely in South Alabama in one of the last major battles of the Civil War. Chaplain Charles Waldron Buckley was surprised by the spirit of unity and camaraderie between the races. “I never witnessed such a friendly feeling between white and colored troops,” he boasted. “During the whole march, I have not heard a word of reproach cast upon a colored soldier. But on the other hand, I have seen the two divisions exchange gifts and talk with each other with apparent equality.”<sup>88</sup>

At the conclusion of the Civil War, a new Pensacola was forged. Families that had fled when the Confederacy abandoned Pensacola returned, including the Rev. Jackson Scott and the congregants of Christ Church. Some former slaves, both those who fled to Pensacola and those who were originally enslaved in Pensacola, made their home in the rebuilt town, while others went searching for family and opportunities elsewhere. The

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<sup>87</sup> Clavin, *Aiming for Pensacola*, 167.

<sup>88</sup> Clavin, “Interracialism and Revolution,” 824.

military kept a strong presence in the community through Fort Pickens and the rebuilt Navy Yard.

During Reconstruction, there are reasons to believe that efforts were made to build a society without severe racial distinctions. Favorite son, Stephen Mallory, a former secessionist Senator and Confederate Secretary of the Navy, told a crowd of people in the town square: “Let us fully and frankly acknowledge, as well by deeds as by words, their (African Americans’) equality with us, before the law and regard it as no less just to ourselves and them than to our State and her best interest to aid in their education, elevation and enjoyment of all the rights which follow their new condition.”<sup>89</sup> Evidence from Gary W. McDonogh supports this claim:

Pensacola presents a situation found in few, if any, other Florida communities. Instead of a white section, a colored section, a Jewish section, and so forth, there are no sharp dividing lines at all; in the sections predominantly white, there are usually a number of Negro homes, and in the Negro sections are found many white families living in complete harmony with their neighbors. Residents of the city attribute this state of affairs to the friendliness and cooperativeness between the predominant races that existed long before the last vestiges of slavery were gone, and that survived even the dark days of Reconstruction, when carpetbaggers, scalawags, and others were successfully straining the relations between the races in nearly every other city. While both races have their churches, it is not uncommon to find a generously interracial congregation in many of them. This is particularly true of the Catholic churches....

A thoughtful and considerate amity between races, a fortunate absence of the bitter exploitation of slave by master so commonly found in regions purely agricultural during the early days of Florida, and the frequent changes of governments, are possible factors in the great contribution that the Negro has been able to make to the history of Pensacola.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> Clavin, *Aiming for Pensacola*, 175.

<sup>90</sup> Gary W. McDonogh, *The Florida Negro: A Federal Writers’ Project Legacy* (Oxford: University Press of Mississippi, 1993), 89-90.

The Republican Party dominated Pensacola politics from 1868 to 1885, electing more than twenty-one African Americans to different offices, including mayor.<sup>91</sup> Salvador T. Pons was a mulatto born in Mexico. Pons was a Roman Catholic bricklayer who was elected to the Florida House of Representatives four times. He served as a Pensacola councilman, city clerk, and was Pensacola's first and only black mayor in 1874. The former Confederate Mallory called Pons "the honest honorable and fit representative of Escambia County."<sup>92</sup> Elijah Zebulon was a freed slave who eventually opened his own grocery store and was elected to the Florida House of representatives and Pensacola Postmaster.<sup>93</sup> Richard Gagnet was the Pensacola marshal from 1878-1880<sup>94</sup> and a vocal leader in the city's politics. John Sunday, the recruit in the Fifth Regiment Infantry Corps d'Afrique above, was a prominent leader in the community and elected to multiple offices. While fighting with the Fifth, Sunday became close with Ulysses S. Grant and would remain in contact with the future president throughout his life.<sup>95</sup> Sunday was a mechanic turned real estate developer, whose net worth in 1903 Booker T. Washington estimated at \$125,000.<sup>96</sup> *Bliss' Quarterly* described Sunday as "one of the wealthiest men in the state and is beloved of his people."<sup>97</sup>

John Sunday was not the only black business leader in Reconstruction Pensacola. Mathew M. Lewey, who published the first black newspaper in the state called *The*

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<sup>91</sup> Canter Brown, Jr., *Florida's Black Public Officials, 1867-1924*, (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1998), 47.

<sup>92</sup> Brown, *Florida's Black Public Officials*, 116.

<sup>93</sup> Brown, *Florida's Black Public Officials*, 86.

<sup>94</sup> Brown, *Florida's Black Public Officials*, 91.

<sup>95</sup> John Appleyard, "Sunday was a leader in post-Civil War Pensacola," *Pensacola News Journal*, September 26, 2015. Found at <http://www.pnj.com/story/life/2015/09/26/appleyard-history-column/72753596/>.

<sup>96</sup> Donald H. Bragaw, "Status of Negroes in a Southern Port City in the Progressive Era: Pensacola 1896-1920," *The Florida Historical Quarterly*, Vol. 51, No 3 (Jan. 1973), 293.

<sup>97</sup> Brown, *Florida's Black Public Officials*, 130.

*Florida Sentinel*, moved the paper from Gainesville to Pensacola.<sup>98</sup> The People's Drugstore and Pensacola Drug Store were both owned by African Americans, and Sam Charles, known as the "shoe king" of Pensacola maintained the finest shoe shop in town.<sup>99</sup> All three of those businesses were in the premier shopping district, upper Palafox Street. A description of Sam Charles in 1920 said he

owns two successful shoe stores. Mr. Charles has been in business for twenty-eight years and his main store is located on the main street in Pensacola, where he employs ten or twelve persons. His business yields him an income of approximately \$7,000 a year. His store is patronized by both white and colored people, and in addition to a large mercantile division he carries a splendid line of shoes. His store is well appointed and would be a credit to any community.<sup>100</sup>

Blacks served on juries and were successful trial lawyers.<sup>101</sup> There were two private schools run by African Americans for black children.<sup>102</sup> Booker T. Washington estimated that half of black families in Pensacola owned their own homes.<sup>103</sup> Both private school education and home ownership are signs of a strong middle class, and there was optimism that Pensacola's black community would spur economic growth. One local wrote at the time: "Pensacola, with its great shipping facilities, its railroads and the contemplated ones, its energetic businessmen, the rapid progress being made by the colored people, the manner in which it is building up at present give promise of a great city."<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> There are not many copies of this paper available, but there are some in the archives of UWF. See a description at <http://uwf.digital.flvc.org/islandora/object/uwf%3A48804> accessed Jan. 15, 2018.

<sup>99</sup> Bragaw, "Status of Negroes...", 287.

<sup>100</sup> J. L. Nichols and William H. Crogman, *Progress of Race or the Remarkable Advancement of the American Negro: From Bondage of Slavery, Ignorance, and Poverty to the Freedom of Citizenship, Intelligence, Affluence, Honor and Trust* (Napierville: J. L. Nichols and Company, 1920), 234.

<sup>101</sup> McDonogh, *The Florida Negro*, 89.

<sup>102</sup> Bragaw, "Status of Negroes...", 291.

<sup>103</sup> Bragaw, "Status of Negroes...", 286.

<sup>104</sup> Brown, *Florida's Black Public Officials*, 46-47.

There are indicators that some professions like carpenters and builders had equal pay for white and black men who worked side by side.<sup>105</sup> There were two black pilots in Pensacola who were part of the local Bar Pilots Union and received the same salary as the white pilots.<sup>106</sup> And McDonogh notes the presence of African Americans in prominent jobs. “In many of Pensacola's largest stores Negroes have been employed as clerks, and often in even more important positions, for years. Among the more notable instances were the big Roberts Grocery Co., Green's, and others; John Gagnet was bookkeeper and accountant for the Harrison Bros. Furniture Co. for the greater part of his life.”<sup>107</sup> This is in stark distinction to the shops and businesses that will be the target of protests in the 1960's, as we will see in the next chapter.

## Conclusions

A fascinating story shows the emerging political and economic power of the African American community in the years following the Civil War. An organized group of black workers defied the local government, state government, and the US military and eventually forced the state legislature to heed their demands. In the late 1860's, stevedores in Pensacola formed a union called “Pensacola Workingman's Association.” The union was predominantly but not exclusively black. Pensacola's thriving lumber industry depended on this union, and their wages and work conditions were fair. Canadian lumberjacks began traveling to Pensacola to work in the late fall and winter when they were inactive back home. Competition over jobs ensued and tensions between

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<sup>105</sup> Bragaw, “Status of Negroes...,” 288.

<sup>106</sup> McDonogh, *The Florida Negro*, 90.

<sup>107</sup> McDonogh, *The Florida Negro*, 90.

the union and the Canadians grew until January 5, 1873, when several hundred armed stevedores stood between the foreigners and the docks. Historian Jerrel H. Shofner describes what happened:

With the blacks in pursuit, the Canadians fled through the streets, seeking hiding places. While the mayor and his small police force as well as the county sheriff stood by helplessly, the Negroes actually occupied Pensacola. Armed black men patrolled the streets throughout the day, searching hotels and private homes for the detested Canadians. Occupants of dwellings often more frightened than angry, were forced to stand in the streets during the search. There was considerable shooting during the evening, with Callahan (the union leader) suffering the only serious gunshot wound, and his stevedores were in undisputed control of the town by nightfall.<sup>108</sup>

The British Consulate tried to get the US military or US marshals to protect British subjects, but he was unsuccessful. On February 26<sup>th</sup>, armed laborers ran Canadian workers off again, leading one Pensacola citizen to complain that “armed negroes...seem to have entire control of the city.”<sup>109</sup> The eventual resolution occurred when the Florida legislature passed a law in 1874 requiring stevedores to get a license requiring six months of residency before it could be issued.

My research on the role of slavery and the free black community in colonial Pensacola to the era of Reconstruction has been formative for me as the rector of Christ Church for several reasons. In the struggle for racial justice, there is a sense that Pensacola has something to reclaim, not to create *ex nihilo*. Again, I cannot stress enough that blacks in Pensacola were not considered equals, and there were grave injustices done based solely on the color of someone’s skin. If nothing else, people profited from owning other human beings. But all that said, there is a theme of diversity written large over our history. In 1887, *Bliss Quarterly* provided this account of Pensacola: “One thing worthy

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<sup>108</sup> Jerrell H. Shofner, “The Pensacola Workingman’s Association: A militant Negro Labor Union during Reconstruction,” *Labor History*, Fall 72, Vol. 13, Issue 4, pg. 557.

<sup>109</sup> Shofner, “The Pensacola Workingman’s Association,” 558.

of mention in this connection is the friendly relation that exists in our city between the races. A close observer will find that the prejudices here are much less than in many Southern cities.”<sup>110</sup> Booker T. Washington considered Pensacola “one of the more progressive colored communities” in the South and that African Americans had “relations of helpful cooperation with the members of the white population.”<sup>111</sup> In our past, we were a haven for runaway slaves and an important hub of the Underground Railroad. Black men and women shaped our community and forged our history. That part of our history should be reclaimed. That story needs to be told, and unfortunately, we have done a poor job of telling that story. I have been sharing my research with members of Christ Church, and people have been consistently unaware of our interracial history. Why are there no statues of John Sunday or Salvador Pons or Willoughby Babcock?

At the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Pensacola was approaching a fork in the road. In one direction is a version of the city that embraces its history and its diverse population. Pensacola was producing a generation of black leaders who had shed the shackles of slavery and were leading the community politically, economically and socially. This version of Pensacola had miles to go to reach true equality, but with its history, the future was bright. In the other direction lies the version in which Pensacola would become another city of the ‘Old South.’ Instead of blazing a new trail, they would bow to external pressures and become another city where blacks and whites were divided. The era of Pensacola being a refuge for those seeking freedom and justice would end, and a truly oppressive system of laws, economic pressures, and social norms would make sure that Pensacola’s black community stayed at the back of the bus. In the next chapter, I will

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<sup>110</sup> Smith, *The Ebony Tale of Pensacola*, 161.

<sup>111</sup> Clavin, “Interracialism and Revolution,” 825.

discuss the decline of the status of African Americans in Pensacola which in turn led to the Civil Rights movement.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Jim Crow and the Fight for Civil Rights: 1900-1967**

#### **The Decline in the Status of African Americans in Pensacola**

At the turn of the century, the social standing of African Americans in Pensacola plummeted. Any Pensacola Exceptionalism that had resulted in racial diversity and liberty faded. As Clavin concludes:

A thriving shipping industry and the opening of the Naval Air Station in the first decades of the twentieth century brought a flood of white southern laborers, who migrated to the city in record numbers and implanted the prejudiced and provincial views they brought with them from nearly every corner of the former Confederacy. Soon, a bifurcated community, divided along rigid racial boundaries and characterized by separate neighborhoods, workplaces, and institutions, replaced the once multiracial, multiethnic, and multinational society, as both de jure and de facto racial segregation became the norm. Interracialism and the memory of its having ever existed in Pensacola then disappeared from the city almost entirely.<sup>112</sup>

James R. McGovern agrees, “The city’s blacks, representing over fifty percent of the population in 1900, lost ground economically and politically during early decades of the twentieth century. They experienced the full effects of the Jim Crow system and suffered serious economic decline.”<sup>113</sup> Donald Bragaw pinpoints this decline to “toward the end of the century’s first decade”<sup>114</sup>

So what happened? What caused this decline of social acceptance, economic health, security, and economic and social status for African Americans in Pensacola?

Four primary causes have been identified: 1. rapid demographic change, 2. political

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<sup>112</sup> Matthew J. Clavin, “Interracialism and Revolution on the Southern Frontier: Pensacola in the Civil War,” *Journal of Southern History*, 80, no. 4 (November 2014) 825.

<sup>113</sup> James R. McGovern, “Pensacola, Florida: A Military City in the South,” *The Florida Historical Quarterly*, Vol. 59, No. 1 (July 1980), 30.

<sup>114</sup> Donald H. Bragaw, “Status of Negroes in a Southern Port City in the Progressive Era: Pensacola 1896-1920,” *The Florida Historical Quarterly*, Vol. 51, No 3 (Jan. 1973), 282.

change removing black influence in Pensacola's government, 3. the rise of Jim Crow, and 4. the subsequent loss of economic opportunities.

### *1. Changing Demographics*

At the turn of the century, blacks were a slight majority in the city of Pensacola, and this brought a certain amount of political and economic influence, as seen in the prominent African Americans businesses listed in the previous chapter. By 1920, blacks made up around a third of the population (20,631 whites to 10,404 blacks).<sup>115</sup> According to Bragaw, "The population balance which had allowed for accommodation of all races, and thus a measure of Negro social acceptance, was permanently destroyed in the period 1905-1910."<sup>116</sup>

There was a swell in the population of whites in Pensacola caused by the mass migration of whites from other parts of the South. Pensacola had a strong economy. The lumber industry had not died out yet. The port was an economic hub for the region. And most importantly, the United States made the strategic decision to expand the Navy, which led to thousands of jobs at the Navy Yard and the new Naval Air Station. As the economy faltered in the rest of the South, Pensacola saw a massive wave of laborers looking for work.

A survey of birth certificates from 1900, 1905, and 1910, shows that 95% children born in Pensacola had parents who were born in Deep South. In 1940, of the 2,786 parents, only 590 were from Pensacola while 789 were from Alabama alone.<sup>117</sup> In a very short time, Pensacola was overrun with people who did not know its unique history and

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<sup>115</sup> Bragaw, "Status of Negroes," 284.

<sup>116</sup> Bragaw, "Status of Negroes," 302.

<sup>117</sup> McGovern, "A Military City in the New South," see the footnote on page 25.

had different inherited views on race. The demographic changes from 1890 to 1910 and the increase of lower class white laborers from places like Alabama and Mississippi transformed racial relations in a negative way.

One of the new tensions between blacks and whites in Pensacola was the competition for jobs. The people moving to Pensacola were primarily laborers looking for jobs that had previously been done by lower middle-class and poor whites and blacks in Pensacola, which led to resentment between the races. McGovern writes: “White immigrants who swelled the city’s population during the boom period and who were very similar to blacks in background and skills, contributed to a climate of intolerance especially when they began to compete for the same jobs.”<sup>118</sup>

The demographic shift led to further distinction between the races. Up until 1905, Pensacola neighborhoods were relatively integrated,<sup>119</sup> but things changed as more white families moved into town. An article in the *Pensacola News Journal* in 1911 calls for segregated neighborhoods both to prevent African Americans decreasing the value of homes in the rest of the street and to “eliminate friction between the races.”<sup>120</sup> Neighborhoods became less diverse as the original generation of white home owners died and newer white families did not want to live in a racially mixed area.<sup>121</sup>

It seems reasonable to assume that as things deteriorated for African Americans in Pensacola, many moved to other parts of the country in pursuit of a better life. This would explain why the black population did not grow between 1900 and 1930 although

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<sup>118</sup> James R. McGovern, *The Emergence of a City in the Modern South: Pensacola 1900-1940*, (DeLeon Springs: E.O. Painter, 1976), 63.

<sup>119</sup> McGovern, *The Emergence of a City*, 64.

<sup>120</sup> *Pensacola News Journal*, February 24, 1911, 4.

<sup>121</sup> McGovern, *The Emergence of a City*, 166.

blacks from outside the state moved in. Such northward migration would be consistent with other Southern black families, as Isabel Wilkerson outlines: “Many black parents who left the South got the one thing they wanted just by leaving. Their children would have a chance to grow up free of Jim Crow and to be their fuller selves.”<sup>122</sup> Thus, in the early twentieth century, there were advertisements placed in Northern newspapers requesting assistance for black Pensacolians to move North. In 1917, one wrote, “Please send me at once a transportation at once. I will come if I live...Send it to me as soon as possible because these white men are getting so they put every one in prison who are not working. I can not get any [work], I can do any kind of common labor.”<sup>123</sup> Another wrote, “I am a poor colored man 42 years of age and looking for a free state to live in and work to do that I can get some wages for as the wages are poor down here and no privlodge [sic] at all.”<sup>124</sup>

McGovern sees another demographic shift that changed Pensacola’s view on race. It was not only that a new kind of white person was moving to Pensacola; there was a new group of black families moving from other parts of the Deep South looking for a better life. McGovern describes them as “often ignorant or contemptuous of the prevailing social norms established by whites and produced a negative impression on the race as a whole.”<sup>125</sup> While McGovern’s view carries racist undertones (it was written in 1976), there is a possibility that the African Americans who moved to Pensacola did not understand its history any better than the white migrants, creating friction between the

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<sup>122</sup> Isabel Wilkerson, *The Warmth of Other Suns: The Epic Story of America’s Great Migration* (New York: Vintage Books, 2010.)

<sup>123</sup> Paul Ortiz, *Emancipation Betrayed: The Hidden History of Black Organizing and White Violence in Florida from Reconstruction to the Bloody Election of 1920* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 135.

<sup>124</sup> Ortiz, *Emancipation Betrayed*, 135

<sup>125</sup> McGovern, “A Military City,” 30.

white and black communities and even friction between the established black community and the migrants.

One final demographic shift is the change in the role of creoles. As we saw in the previous chapter, Pensacola had a large and significant creole community. Every city directory before 1900 listed creoles as a separate class between whites and colored. While the lines between creole and black were sometimes blurred, they were socially distinct with creoles being more accepted in white society, especially if they had lighter skin and straight hair. But the 1900 city directory listed all creoles alongside blacks, with the exception of a few creoles who were now classified as white.<sup>126</sup> Bragaw sees the new classification of creoles as evidence of a shift in perception of race into a binary system of white and everyone else: “In the passing of the once-acceptable Creole society, there is evidence of the growing intolerance of ‘colored’ regardless of their past position or status.”<sup>127</sup>

In 1937 Martiel McCray made a sociological study of the Pensacola creole community, which found “The Creole’s attitude toward the Negro is very antagonistic. He feels superior in every respect. On the other hand, he is an ardent admirer of the white races even though he is thought of by them as a Negro.”<sup>128</sup> McCray found that creoles as a distinct group clung to their old ways but were slowly dying off. They still gathered at St. Joseph’s Catholic Church and had their own dance halls, but there was pressure for them to identify as black. An example of that pressure would be creole parents who

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<sup>126</sup> Donald Bragaw, “Loss of Identity of Pensacola’s Past: A Creole Footnote,” *Florida Historical Quarterly*, 50, no. 4 (April 1972).

<sup>127</sup> Bragaw, “Loss of Identity,” 418.

<sup>128</sup> Martiel Aerial McCray, “A Sociological Study of the Creole Community of Pensacola, Florida” Unpublished thesis for masters at Atlanta University 1937. Found in the archives of the Historic Trust of the University of West Florida.

wanted to send their children to black schools because they were superior to the creole school. Over the two decades previous to 1937, the creoles had lost their place in society. They did not want to be considered black, and they were not welcomed by whites.

Demographically, the Pensacola that emerged in the 20<sup>th</sup> century was markedly different than the Pensacola of the previous two centuries.

## 2. *A Political Coup*

As we saw in chapter one, at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, there was a rising black political class. With the changing demographics and the increase of white migrants from the Deep South, you would think that Pensacola would slowly shift to an all-white government. The truth is much more sinister. Political power was abruptly taken from local Pensacolians by the state governor.

Edward A. Perry, a member of Christ Church and sometime vestryman, was elected governor of Florida in 1884. Perry had served as a General in Robert E. Lee's Army of Northern Virginia, eventually returning to Pensacola to practice law. Despite being a local candidate, Perry barely won the popular vote in Pensacola, partly because he was perceived as being in the pocket of William Dudley Chipley, a railroad baron and the most powerful man in the region.<sup>129</sup> Chipley, Perry, and the rest of the Southern Democrats were ardent opponents of carpetbaggers and any other form of federal intervention in the state of Florida. One of Governor Perry's accomplishments was the ratification of a new state constitution that made all county and state positions elected by

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<sup>129</sup> Lucius and Linda Ellsworth, *Pensacola: The Deep Water City* (Tulsa: Continental Heritage Press, 1982), 90.

popular vote,<sup>130</sup> although the voters of Escambia County rejected the new constitution because it disenfranchised blacks and poor whites.<sup>131</sup>

In January 1885, Perry took several steps to remove the carpetbaggers' influence on his home town. First, Perry replaced two resigning Republican supreme court justices with two Democrats who supported his candidacy. Second, a special law was pushed through the state legislature abolishing Pensacola's town charter and giving the governor the authority to appoint its mayor and council.<sup>132</sup> This was challenged by Republicans as an illegal power grab. A lower court ruled Perry's actions unconstitutional, but with Perry's recent appointees, the Florida Supreme Court upheld the law.<sup>133</sup> Perry then removed the Republican leadership in Pensacola and replaced them with white, conservative Democrats, with one token African American discussed below.<sup>134</sup> The new city council changed the way that city elections were held. At around the same time, the state legislature diminished the voting power of blacks with a complicated system and a new poll tax. The long-term result for Pensacola was that no African Americans were elected mayor or to the city council until 1983. After the governor revoked the city charter and appointed white conservative leadership who were not elected, the new city government put a system in place that did not elect a single African American in Pensacola for almost 100 years.

It appears that there were three African Americans on the city council in 1885. John Sunday was a wealthy, influential real estate developer who is mentioned in the

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<sup>130</sup> George Rainsford Fairbanks, *Florida: Its History and Its Romance* (Jacksonville, H. and W. B. Drew Company, 1901), 230.

<sup>131</sup> Ellsworth, *The Deep Water City*, 90.

<sup>132</sup> Brown, *Florida's Black Public Officials*, 54.

<sup>133</sup> Brown, *Florida's Black Public Officials*, 58.

<sup>134</sup> Brown, *Florida's Black Public Officials*, 56.

previous chapter. According to the lists in Brown's *Florida's Black Public Officials*, there were two other city councilmen of color, Heraldo Hernandez and Augustus DuPont. In the city council appointed by Perry, there was one, the Rev. George W. Witherspoon, who served from 1885 to 1889. According to my limited research, there was not another black city councilman until 1983, following the 1982 amendment to the Voting Rights Act of 1965. After the success in Pensacola, Perry revoked the charters in Jacksonville and Key West with the same result.<sup>135</sup>

Witherspoon deserves special attention because he illustrates the way that white political power can create divisions within the black community. Witherspoon was a shoemaker and an AME minister known for his fiery sermons and his leadership amongst African Americans. After flirting with a campaign for the United States Congress as a Republican, Witherspoon allowed Perry to appoint him as the only city councilman representing a minority and began campaigning for the Democrats. Soon after his appointment, he encouraged blacks "to join the Democrats in all undertakings of reform, particularly in municipal affairs."<sup>136</sup> Many African Americans saw him as a traitor and a puppet, and as soon as his term as city councilman ended, he left town.

After governor Perry's successful coup, Pensacola's African American population were pushed out of participating in local and regional politics through a series of Jim Crow laws, intimidations, and fear mongering. In 1908, the *Pensacola News Journal* encouraged all whites to vote Democratic out of fear of "Negro domination if white laborers split their vote between several parties."<sup>137</sup> Since 1900, Pensacola has

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<sup>135</sup> Brown, *Florida's Black Public Officials*, 67.

<sup>136</sup> Brown, *Florida's Black Public Officials*, 58.

<sup>137</sup> Bragaw, "Status of Negroes", 300.

consistently matched the voting results of other Southern states like Alabama or Mississippi, polling for candidates who have made race a factor such as Henry Ford in 1923<sup>138</sup>, George Wallace in 1968, and Donald Trump in 2016.

Despite the reversal of political fortunes, or rather because of it, there was black resistance and attempts to reengage in the political process. The local branch of the NCAAP was reformed in 1920's and claimed to register over 1,500 new voters.<sup>139</sup> In support of this effort, an AME official wrote an editorial in the *Pensacola News Journal* explaining to the white population why they want to register more minority voters.

We are urging our folks to register and vote for the same reason that other people are registering and voting. We want full protection of the law, representation where we are concerned, decent public accommodations; for equal pay, better schools and a living wage for our teachers, womanhood respected regardless of color, good roads, a fair share of public improvements and the free and unabridged right to vote like any other American citizens.<sup>140</sup>

During World War II with support from black officers at the Naval Air Station, the Pensacola Improvement Association was founded in 1942 to organize the black vote.<sup>141</sup>

But African American attempts to claim political rights and influence were met with suspicion and threats. After attempts to organize black women to register to vote following the nineteenth amendment, Pensacola laundry owner J. N. Andrews expressed his fear that engagement in the political process may make black women feel too good to wash white folks' dirty laundry: "I have always wanted the colored people to have everything that is their right...But I do not recognize their right to meddle with other

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<sup>138</sup> McGovern, *Emergence of a City*, 108.

<sup>139</sup> Ortiz, *Emancipation Betrayed*, 234.

<sup>140</sup> Ortiz, *Emancipation Betrayed*, 175.

<sup>141</sup> McGovern, *Emergence of a City*, 167.

people who are quietly attending to their business. And if they force the issue we will take steps to rid our town of such pests.”<sup>142</sup>

The disenfranchisement of Pensacola’s African Americans, the fear-mongering, and the threats were typical of what other Southern cities experienced following Reconstruction. But the sudden collapse of their political influence and the rapid oppression by Perry and others was a shocking reversal of the diverse, relatively inclusive Pensacola found before 1900.

### 3. *The Rise of Jim Crow*

With the changing demographics and the political upheaval, African Americans in Pensacola became increasingly vulnerable to forced segregation and other Jim Crow laws. These laws are depressingly predictable and consistent with the rest of the Deep South. Some of these laws came from the Florida legislature, like requiring segregated jail cells, ticket windows at railway stations, and schools/colleges. In contrast to Pensacola’s heritage of racially mixed marriages and creole society, the legislature outlawed cohabitation and miscegenation,<sup>143</sup> and Florida removed the only African American judge, James Dean, for allegedly marrying a white man to a black woman even though the white man claimed to be creole.<sup>144</sup>

The Opera House which had been integrated before 1900 was segregated<sup>145</sup>, while the Saenger Theatre built in 1925 was constructed with a colored balcony as well as colored restrooms. Before the Saenger and the Sears Department store were built in the

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<sup>142</sup> Ortiz, *Emancipation Betrayed*, 195-196.

<sup>143</sup> Bragaw, “Status of Negroes,” 299.

<sup>144</sup> Ortiz, *Emancipation Betrayed*, 52.

<sup>145</sup> McGovern, *Emergence of a City*, 65.

1920's, there were no colored bathrooms downtown.<sup>146</sup> In 1915, the new Catholic hospital was built with beds “completely segregated from the balance of the floor by large folding doors...devoted to the care and treatment of Creole and Negro Patients.”<sup>147</sup> In 1909, a laundromat advertised that it only allowed white patrons for sanitary reasons.<sup>148</sup> Blacks could not use Sanders Beach (a few blocks from the historic creole neighborhood) or Paradise Beach; instead they were forced out of town to Twilight Park or Pitt's Beach.<sup>149</sup>

Pensacola played a major role in the fight over segregated seating on streetcars.<sup>150</sup> Pensacola's state representative, and active member of Christ Church, John Campbell Avery Jr., introduced a bill in 1905 requiring street cars to separate white and black riders, which passed unanimously.<sup>151</sup> The black community in Pensacola immediately called for a boycott. M. M. Lewey (the publisher), C. F. Call (whose father was the AME preacher who founded Allen Chapel), and other black leaders told the state legislature that they did not want to intermingle the races, but “by past experience the actual operation and enforcement of the laws intended to separate the races upon public conveyances have operated at the injury of your petitioners, and discriminated unjustly.”<sup>152</sup>

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<sup>146</sup> Georgia M. Smith, *The Ebony Tale of Pensacola: African-European Culture with Caribbean, Louisiana and Alabama Ties*, Self-Published Thesis, 1998, 172.

<sup>147</sup> McGovern, *Emergence of a City*, 47

<sup>148</sup> *Pensacola News Journal* October 10, 1909.

<sup>149</sup> McGovern, *Emergence of a City*, 114.

<sup>150</sup> For a good discussion of the streetcar segregation see, August Meir and Elliott Rudwick, “The Boycott Movement Against Jim Crow Streetcars in the South, 1900-1906,” *The Journal of American History*, Vol. 55, No. 4 (Mar., 1969), pp. 756-775.

<sup>151</sup> Ortiz, *Emancipation Betrayed*, 122.

<sup>152</sup> Ortiz, *Emancipation Betrayed*, 122.

Their boycott was successful. A local street car company complained that ninety percent of their black customers had stopped riding and that a group now welcomed black travelers at the train station to give them a button that said ‘WALK.’ The Florida Supreme Court struck down the Avery Bill, and the *Pensacola News Journal* reported that “the negroes began to ride early and it was noticeable that they almost invariably occupied the front seats.”<sup>153</sup> Unfortunately, their victory was short lived; the Avery Bill was reintroduced with less prejudicial language and became law.

This list of Jim Crow laws is representative, not exhaustive, and is in accord with other Southern cities. Before we move to the violence and fear that were used to enforce subjugation, it is important to remember that what made Pensacola different from other cities was the role of the U.S. Navy there. By 1930, it is estimated that the Navy was responsible for a quarter of the salaries in Pensacola.<sup>154</sup> Even when the rest of the country was struggling through the Great Depression, the federal government was spending a fortune building the Navy into a global power.<sup>155</sup> African American officers and enlisted men from all over the country would be stationed at Pensacola. Many of these servicemen were disdainful of the segregation that they encountered when they left the base. British pilots in the RAF who trained in Pensacola were also shocked by the segregation and wrote home to tell their families about getting kicked off buses for giving their seat to a pregnant black woman.<sup>156</sup> Moreover, African Americans from Pensacola who joined the military were exposed to an integrated life for the first time. A Pensacola

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<sup>153</sup> Ortiz, *Emancipation Betrayed*, 123.

<sup>154</sup> McGovern, “A Military City,” 33.

<sup>155</sup> In the 1930’s, the US government spent twenty million dollars in Pensacola (\$366 million in today’s dollars) and in the 1940’s, the US government spent one hundred and sixty million dollars (\$2.2 billion in today’s dollars), according to McGovern, “A Military City,” 38.

<sup>156</sup> See Gilbert S. Guinn and G.H. Bennett, *British Naval Aviation in World War II: The US Navy and Anglo-American Relations*, (London: Tauris Academic, 2007), 58-60.

leader in the Civil Rights movement who had grown up in Alabama, the Rev. H. K. Mathews, wrote: “My first real interaction with whites occurred in the Army while I served in a desegregated unit. I felt that black and white soldiers pretty much approached each other as equals because we were all in the same fix...My impression from whites after dealing with them in the Army was that they were the same as me.”<sup>157</sup>

Occasionally, there were altercations between black officers and locals in restaurants, bars, etc. when they were refused service. The Navy asked Pensacola to hire black police officers in the 1940’s. The city declined.<sup>158</sup> While Pensacola is economically dependent on the Navy, there has been continued friction over the issue of race. In 1944, Florida Congressman Bob Sikes publicly protested to Navy brass after he heard reports that white and black sailors at the Pensacola Air Station were housed together, and the Navy had to reassure him that they were not.<sup>159</sup>

An example of the results of racism in Pensacola is provided by one of its most famous citizens, who joined the Air Force during this period. Daniel (Chappie) James was born in Pensacola, went to black schools, and attended the Tuskegee Institute. At the start of WWII, James became a pilot as part of the famous ‘Tuskegee Airmen’. While stationed in Michigan and Kentucky, he and his fellow officers regularly entered the officer’s clubs that was for whites only, forcing them to close each time they arrived. He fought in WWII, Korea and Vietnam before eventually becoming the first black four-star general in the United States military when he was named the commander in chief, North

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<sup>157</sup> H. K. Mathews, *Victory after the Fall* (Montgomery: NewSouth Books, 2007), 49-50.

<sup>158</sup> McGovern, *Emergence of a City*, 168.

<sup>159</sup> Gary R. Mormino, “GI Joe Meets Jim Crow: Racial Violence and Reform in World War II Florida,” *The Florida Historical Quarterly*, Vol 73, No. 1 (Jul. 1994), 25.

American Air Defense Command/Aerospace Defense Command.<sup>160</sup> In 1970 the Pensacola Kiwanis named James the “Man of the Year.” James flew back from overseas to receive the award and visit his family. On the way home, his family stopped at a bar to get a drink, but he was denied service because he was black, despite the fact that he was in uniform. James told the owner, “Never mind, I’ve been thrown out of better bars than this.”<sup>161</sup> A four-star general in command of thousands of troops could not order a beer in his home town. He later said, “We’ve got another mile to run in the race for equality, but we’ve got a lot better track to run on and the trophies at the end are a lot better than they use to be.”<sup>162</sup>

Despite having dozens of black policemen and several black marshals from 1868-1900, Pensacola would not have another African American in law enforcement until 1954 (though they were not able to arrest a white person).<sup>163</sup> African Americans in Florida were removed from jury pools from 1900 to 1943.<sup>164</sup> And like the rest of the South in this period, there was the ‘justice’ of the white mobs.

In 1903, a black porter insisted on eating his lunch at a lunch counter reserved for whites, and a crowd of angry patrons beat him to death. The *Pensacola Daily News* reported with satisfaction that the killing “gives somewhat of an idea as to how a black man endeavoring to force his way in the matter of social equality is treated.”<sup>165</sup> In 1908, a

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<sup>160</sup> “James, Former NORAD Chief, Dies” *The Washington Post*, February 26, 1978.

<sup>161</sup> Ralph Nowak, “Gen. Chappie James is the Boss of America’s ‘Defense Business’ and its Four Star Salesman, *People Magazine*,” July 18, 1977 found at <http://people.com/archive/gen-chappie-james-is-the-boss-of-americas-defense-business-and-its-four-star-salesman-vol-8-no-3/>. Also interview with William Stafford 12/16/17.

<sup>162</sup> Virginia Parks, *Pensacola: Spaniards to Space Age* (Pensacola: Pensacola Historical Society, 1986), 106.

<sup>163</sup> Smith, *Ebony Tales*, 166.

<sup>164</sup> McGovern, *Emergence of a City*, 167.

<sup>165</sup> Ortiz, *Emancipation Betrayed*, 62.

mob of around a thousand lynched Leander Shaw who was accused of raping a white woman. In 1909, Dave Alexander confessed (under suspicious circumstances) to murdering a police officer. A mob wearing masks walked into the jailhouse and walked out with Alexander. Both of these lynchings occurred in Ferdinand Plaza on Palafox street. The City Council condemned the lynchings and popular opinion disapproved of the unruly violence, but although the police chief arrived and found a dead Alexander surrounded by a mob, he later testified that he did not recognize anyone in the crowd. Another witness testified that when the mob arrived, a police officer opened Alexander's cell door and as they drug him out, he said "Goodbye nigger."<sup>166</sup> With an all-white police force and an all-white jury, justice for African Americans was hard to find. One Pensacola man lamented, "A white man tried to commit a rape on a young colored girl Wednesday. Certainly no lynching."<sup>167</sup>

In the 1920's, riding a wave of anti-immigrant populism, the K.K.K. grew in visibility and audacity as they tried to scare blacks, foreigners, and any white who was sympathetic to integration. In 1921 three carloads of men with hoods and masks stopped in front of a restaurant and handed the owner a note that read, "You are an undesirable citizen. You violate the federal prohibition laws of decency, and you are a running sore on society. Several trains are leaving Pensacola daily. Take your choice, but don't take too much time. Sincerely, in earnest, K.K.K."<sup>168</sup> I spoke to several members of Christ Church who told me that their parents or grandparents were afraid of finding a burning

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<sup>166</sup> McGovern, *The Emergence of a City*, 67-68.

<sup>167</sup> Ortiz, *Emancipation Betrayed*, 62.

<sup>168</sup> McGovern, *The Emergence of a City*, 110.

cross on their door because they had more progressive views on race. And as late as 1975, the K.K.K. marched down Palafox.



Figure 1: May 24, 1975. In the background, you can clearly see the dome of Christ Church. The building with the sign “Broxton Furniture” will eventually be converted into the new campus of the Episcopal Day School.<sup>169</sup>

One example of police brutality occurred when Sargent Jim Edson was in charge of the Escambia County sheriff’s crowd control. In 1975, he was caught on tape bragging

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<sup>169</sup> <http://www.pnj.com/picture-gallery/news/2017/08/17/photos-kkk-marches-in-pensacola-in-1975/104700026/> accessed Jan. 15, 2018.

that he and the deputies played a game called Selma where you “grab a club and hit a nigger...Now I don’t want you to think that I’m a racist, I like black folks...I’d like two of them in my yard for the dogs to play with. Niggers are better than Milkbones.” After this news broke, not only did Edson keep his job, but he was named officer of the year.<sup>170</sup> This reflects Pensacola’s dark, bloody history. But it is our history. It is our legacy. And we need to own it. In the same way that we need to reclaim our history of diversity and liberty, we need to repent from our history of oppression and subjugation.

#### 4. *The Loss of Economic Opportunity*

The changing demographics and the increased segregation and discrimination led to a loss of economic opportunity. As we saw in the shifting demographics, there was increased competition between the black community and the poor whites that were moving into Pensacola from Alabama and the rest of the South. Also, the majority of African Americans were segregated out of the economy except for basic jobs that payed low wages. The evidence of this decline is overwhelming, and does not need to be covered here, so instead the transformation of downtown Pensacola (along Palafox) will be highlighted.

In 1890, half of the business on Palafox were owned by African Americans. By 1910 there was only one, Sam Charles’ shoe shop.<sup>171</sup> The center of commerce for black Pensacolians shifted to the corner of Belmont and Devilliers on the west side of town, a

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<sup>170</sup> J. Michael Butler, *Beyond Integration: The Struggle in Escambia County, Florida, 1960-1980* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2016), 156.

<sup>171</sup> Bragaw, “Status of Negroes,” 287.

few blocks from St. Cyprian's, the traditionally black Episcopal Church in Pensacola.<sup>172</sup> For example, the Palafox Drug Company, a profitable drug store downtown owned by Dr. H. G. Williams, was forced to move to 550 N. Devilliers.<sup>173</sup> Georgia Smith claims that all the black businesses were told to close or move.<sup>174</sup> In 1900, there were still three black attorneys in town, and they all practiced along Palafox. All three were either arrested or had their licenses revoked, and there were no black attorneys listed in the 1910 directory.<sup>175</sup>

During the first half of the twentieth century, the black middle class all but vanished. In the 1940's, less than one percent of African Americans would be categorized as business or professional class, and blacks were more reliant on jobs through the federal government than whites.<sup>176</sup> Home ownership declined as well. In comparison to Booker T. Washington's observation that half of black community in Pensacola owned their own homes, that number had dropped to about twenty percent by 1930.<sup>177</sup> The rising black middle class found in Pensacola in 1870 to 1900 crumbled as Pensacola became just another southern city.

The relationship between African Americans and labor unions deteriorated as well. Before 1900, African Americans played a significant role with the rise of labor unions in Pensacola, especially the Knights of Labor.<sup>178</sup> By 1912, after years of African

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<sup>172</sup> For a presentation of Belmont-Devilliers in its heyday, see R. D. Pierce, *DeVilliers*, (Bloomington: AuthorHouse, 2005).

<sup>173</sup> Smith, *Ebony Tales*, 168.

<sup>174</sup> Smith, *Ebony Tales*, 166.

<sup>175</sup> Bragaw, "Status of Negroes," 290.

<sup>176</sup> McGovern, *Emergence of a City*, 166.

<sup>177</sup> From United States Federal Census, Negroes in the United States, 1920-1932, Bureau of the Census, Washington D.C. 1935. I came up with this percentage by dividing the number of homes owned by black families by black population taking into consideration the median family size.

<sup>178</sup> For more on the state of labor unions in Pensacola see Wayne Flynt, "Pensacola Labor Problems and Political Radicalism, 1908," *Florida Historical Quarterly*, Vol. 43, No. 4 (Apr., 1965), pp.315-332.

Americans being squeezed out of unions by new white members, M. M. Lewey wrote in his newspaper, “The Negro has no use for the labor unions for the single purpose that the labor unions have no use for him.”<sup>179</sup> Surely this divorce was significant to the economic future of minorities in Pensacola.

## **A Time for Change**

There has not been much research on the Civil Rights movement in Pensacola, with the exception of J. Michael Butler’s *Beyond Integration: The Black Freedom Struggle in Escambia County, 1960-1980*. Working with primary sources, I found four interrelated movements from 1940-1967 that struggled for equality and justice in Pensacola: the attorney John Moreno Coe, the organized protests led by the Pensacola Council of Ministers and the NAACP, the City Council’s Biracial Committee, and the protracted legal battle to integrate the school system, primarily *Augustus versus the Escambia County Board of Education*.

### *1. John Moreno Coe*

The historian Sarah Hart Brown argues that a group of young, progressive, white lawyers were early pioneers of the Civil Rights movement, in particular Benjamin Eugene Smith of New Orleans, Clifford Judkins Durr of Montgomery, and John Moreno Coe of Pensacola. Their work, and the work of other lawyers like them in the 1940’s and 1950’s, brought the national legal battle for the rights of African Americans to local Southern

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<sup>179</sup> Bragaw, “Status of Negroes,” 298.

cities. Their willingness to fight for African Americans and others on the margin took a toll on their reputations, their careers, and their families.

John Moreno Coe had deep roots in Pensacola. Moreno is a family name: Don Francisco Moreno had an original Spanish land grant, and the Morenos were slave owners.<sup>180</sup> Coe's paternal great-grandfather served with Andrew Jackson, the first governor of Florida. He maternal great-grandfather was appointed marshal of West Florida by John Quincy Adams. Coe's Landing is a spot on the Apalachicola River near the Coe family plantation, where his ancestors owned slaves. Coe's aunt was married to U.S. Senator and Confederate secretary of the navy, Stephen R. Mallory.<sup>181</sup>

Coe was a self-educated man. He taught himself the law in the office of a distant relative and was accepted by the Florida Bar in 1917 when he was twenty years old.<sup>182</sup> By all accounts, Coe was a talented lawyer with a successful practice. Handling maritime disputes, probating estates, and handling plaintiff cases may be what paid the bills, but his passion was the defense of African Americans and other disenfranchised groups. Coe was willing to defend people that other lawyers simply would not. For example, in 1939 he defended a local black man who had shot a police officer.<sup>183</sup> In 1940, he defended a black man convicted of rape.<sup>184</sup> In 1944, he defended several black clients who wanted to register as Democrats in Escambia County.<sup>185</sup> In 1949, he represented six African Americans applying for admission to the University of Florida.<sup>186</sup> In 1951, he joined the

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<sup>180</sup> For one example, see Don Antonio Moreno in Jane G. Landers, *Atlantic Creoles in the Age of Revolutions* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011), 124.

<sup>181</sup> Sarah Hart Brown, *Standing Against Dragons* (Louisiana State Press: Baton Rouge, 1998), 42-43.

<sup>182</sup> Brown, *Standing Against Dragons*, 42.

<sup>183</sup> This case was part of several cases that came before the U.S. Supreme Court in *Norris v. Alabama*, 294 U.S. 587. The guilty verdicts were overturned because blacks were systematically excluded from the jury.

<sup>184</sup> See *State v. Will Lewis*

<sup>185</sup> See *State of Florida v. Ben L. Davis*.

<sup>186</sup> Brown, *Standing Against Dragons*, 42.

legal team for Willie McGee, a black man accused of raping a young white girl in Laurel, Mississippi after McGee's earlier lawyers were financially ruined or beaten on the courthouse steps.<sup>187</sup>

In 1955, Coe represented Joe Nathan Walker, an 18 year-old African American, in both civil and criminal court. According to Walker and his girlfriend, they were sitting in a parked car when two sheriff's deputies stopped and asked them what they were doing. He replied, "Just sitting here talking. Is there any law against that?" The two deputies took offense, and as he got out of his car, struck him in the head with a blackjack and continued to beat him once he was knocked down. When his girlfriend interjected, they threatened her. The deputies found a knife amongst some tools under Walker's seat, and they were arrested. Coe called the beating "an uncalled for act of brutality"<sup>188</sup> but, according to the deputies, Walker attacked them with the knife, and they were defending themselves. In the end, Walker was convicted of improper exhibition of a dangerous weapon and two counts of aggravated assault. In a letter to a friend, Coe wrote, "In my law practice since 1929, I have been particularly interested in defending cases of Negroes who were subject to discrimination and oppression. I handled at trial and in the Supreme Court the Chavis and Cromwell cases, which resulted in permitting Negroes to register and vote in the Democratic primary. I defended Will Lewis in the recent case in which indictment for rape was quashed because his race was systematically excluded from the

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<sup>187</sup> Brown, *Standing Against Dragons*, 103.

<sup>188</sup> *Pensacola News Journal*, September 21, 1955 pages 1-2A

grand jury.”<sup>189</sup> Coe took pride in fighting for the rights of any client, for as he said, “As long as any man is oppressed...the liberties of all are imperiled.”<sup>190</sup>

As early as the 1940’s, Coe dreamed of an unsegregated Pensacola. In a 1951, he defended three African American adults (two of whom were WWII veterans) who were denied entry into a local vocational school. As a part of this case, Coe wrote, “The relief thererin granted is exactly what I want and it is conceivable that I might break segregation, as I am dealing with adults and not children, and may come within the exception suggested on that ground in that opinion.”<sup>191</sup> Unfortunately for Coe and the future of education in Pensacola, Coe lost this case. If he had won, it would have been the first crack in the segregated educational system in Escambia County.

Coe’s willingness to represent black clients earned him the respect of the black community in Pensacola who affectionately called him “Lawyer Coe,” but he and his family paid a heavy price for his role in high profile cases involving African Americans. He lost clients. His family received threatening phone calls. Once a rock was thrown through the family’s home with a note saying “Beware!”<sup>192</sup> Coe was forced to resign from the American Legion, and he was kicked out of the Pensacola Kiwanis Club despite his twenty-five year membership and leadership in the national Kiwanis organization. He wrote, the “distinguished brethren of the Kiwanis Club of Pensacola ...tried me for impure thoughts and expelled me therefrom... We had a hell of a trial. I pled with the boys...for an intelligent understanding of things democratic and American and free.”<sup>193</sup>

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<sup>189</sup> Sarah Hart Brown, “Pensacola Progressive: John Moreno Coe and the Campaign of 1948,” *Florida Historical Quarterly*, Volume 68, Number 1 (July 1989): 4.

<sup>190</sup> Brown, *Standing Against Dragons*, 25.

<sup>191</sup> Brown, *Standing Against Dragons*, 108.

<sup>192</sup> Brown, *Standing Against Dragons*, 46-47.

<sup>193</sup> Brown, *Standing Against Dragons*, 87.

In the fever of the Red Scare and McCarthyism, such a figure was also vulnerable to charges of communism, and Coe was involved with many organizations seen as suspicious by many Pensacolians. He was a member of the ACLU and the state chairman of Henry Wallace's Progressive party. Coe traveled the country as the president of the National Lawyers Guild, a left leaning alternative to the American Bar Association. The NLG raised funds to defend civil rights cases. Coe also served as the president of the Southern Conference Educational Fund,<sup>194</sup> which was accused of sponsoring the Communist Party. Further, Coe defended others accused of being subversives or communist, and he successfully sued to invalidate city ordinances making it illegal for someone registered as a communist to reside within the city limits.<sup>195</sup>

For all of these reasons, there were whispers that Coe was a communist dissident. The whispers became a direct accusation when in 1956, the former communist and professional witness, J. B. Matthews,<sup>196</sup> informed the Florida Legislative Investigation Committee of Coe's connections with agencies that were supposed communist fronts. The *Pensacola News Journal* was given a list of the 24 organizations and printed an article implying that Coe was himself a communist.<sup>197</sup> As an aside, J. B. Matthews was later forced to resign from McCarthy's Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations after he wrote an article claiming that "the largest single group supporting the Communist apparatus in the United States today is composed of Protestant clergymen."<sup>198</sup>

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<sup>194</sup> For interesting view on the SCEF, see "The Attack on Southern Conference Education Fund" written by the Student Civil Liberties Coordinating Committee. [http://www.crmvet.org/docs/63\\_scef\\_attack.pdf](http://www.crmvet.org/docs/63_scef_attack.pdf) accessed Jan. 15, 2018.

<sup>195</sup> Brown, *Standing Against Dragons*, 93.

<sup>196</sup> Not to be confused with H.K. Matthews, the civil rights leader.

<sup>197</sup> Brown, *Standing Against Dragons*, 171.

<sup>198</sup> J. B. Matthews, "Reds in Our Churches," *American Mercury*, 77 (July 1953) 4-5.

Along with thousands of other progressives, Coe was invited to travel as a guest of Fidel Castro for the second anniversary of Cuba's Communist Revolution in 1961. When he returned, the *Pensacola News Journal* published several articles on the trip and Coe's involvement, including one article that was bluntly titled, "Is Coe a Communist?" The backlash affected Coe and his family. Writing to a friend, he described the reporting by the *News Journal* as fair, but "with the result that a large blast of scurrility descended on me and mine. I can stand it, but mine it hurts."<sup>199</sup>

No one who actually knew Coe thought he was a communist. One informant told the FBI, "He may be a liberal, but I have never heard of him being a radical or a communist."<sup>200</sup> But that is the point. Coe's willingness to fight for his black defendants, fight unjust laws in the courts, and his progressive tendencies led to the general public's anger and suspicion. Further it led to an investigation by the FBI. His children remember FBI agents sitting outside of their house recording the names of everyone who came to visit. Coe was a man of principles, but at that time in Pensacola and the rest of the South, if your principles caused you to side with African Americans, then you paid for your convictions, and so did your family. At a 1962 conference of the National Lawyers Guild, the SCEF, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, and the Southern Christian Leadership Committee (founded by another suspected communist, Martin Luther King, Jr.), Coe was one of two white and four black attorneys recognized for their efforts against segregation. Coe made an address at the final banquet.<sup>201</sup> Interestingly when the Florida Bar Association invited Coe to its 1967 meeting to mark his 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of

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<sup>199</sup> Brown, *Standing against Dragons*, 193-194.

<sup>200</sup> Brown, *Standing against Dragons*, 97.

<sup>201</sup> Brown, *Standing against Dragons*, 200.

practicing law, he declined out of “lack of enthusiasm for the power elite of the bar, who are chiefly in attendance there.”<sup>202</sup>

John Moreno Coe helped lay the foundation for the Civil Rights movement in Pensacola, but he missed being a part of the main thrust of the movement because of timing. “Coe fought intolerance and repression for fifty years but because of failing health never become deeply involved with the new black civil rights organizations of the 1960s.”<sup>203</sup> In 1963, a *Pensacola News Journal* article recorded his trip to Washington in 1963 to testify before the House Subcommittee on Civil Rights in defense of John. F. Kennedy’s proposals which would eventually become the Civil Rights Act of 1964. During his testimony, he said, “When our Negro fellow citizens are protected by the commands of their government from those daily slights and insults which have galled them through life...they cannot but repay with appreciative loyalty the new-found human dignity which they will enjoy.”<sup>204</sup>

While Coe was a Presbyterian and was never connected to Episcopal Day School, I have included this brief sketch of Coe’s life for two reasons. First, Coe was a precursor of the Civil Rights movement in Pensacola. His legal defense of poor African Americans against a rigged system and his attacks on unjust laws like segregation and all white juries set the stage for the work of people like W. C. Dobbins who would follow. Second, Coe is an example of a man of conviction who was willing to stand against the tide and do the right thing, and for those convictions Coe paid a price. I see a parallel between John Moreno Coe and the subject of chapter four, Dr. Currin.

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<sup>202</sup> Brown, *Standing against Dragons*, 247.

<sup>203</sup> Brown, *Standing against Dragons*, 31.

<sup>204</sup> “Coe Asks House to Adopt Civil Rights Proposal.” *Pensacola News Journal*, August 2, 1963, 5C.

## 2. *Protests, boycotts, and sit-ins*

In 1959, William Curtis Dobbins moved to Pensacola to become the new pastor at St. Paul United Methodist Church. He was an active member of the local NAACP chapter and shared his convictions on social justice through a regular column in a local newspaper, the *Colored Citizen*.<sup>205</sup> His message resonated with other pastors in the area, and he formed the Pensacola Council of Ministers (PCM) to organize black churches. Dobbins also poured his energy into the NAACP Youth Council becoming their advisor. From 1960 until he was transferred in 1964, Dobbins was the central leader of the Civil Rights movement in Pensacola. In his autobiography, H. K. Matthews describes Dobbins' legacy: "I think Pensacola, especially the African-American community, should never forget him. He had nothing but respect from the black community before his departure. He opened our eyes to social injustices, and we respected his leadership. He got the ball rolling..."<sup>206</sup>

Beginning in January 1961, Dobbins led the NCAAP, especially the Youth Council, and the PCM in an effort to desegregate businesses along Palafox. They started with lunch counters. Their process was extremely organized. First, they would contact a business or businesses and politely ask them to allow African Americans to be treated like white customers. When they did not receive a response, they would organize a sit-in or a boycott. Dobbins would personally select youth with impeccable reputations. They had to be at least fifteen years old, good students, and their parents could not work for a white person (for fear of retribution). Under the watch of adult sponsors, the youth would

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<sup>205</sup>Butler, *Beyond Integration*, 37.

<sup>206</sup> Matthews, *Victory after the Fall*, 79.

enter the store at different times, pretend to shop, and then as one, sit at the counter or table and try to order. If they were served, they were to pay for the food, but not eat it. If they were not served, they were to quietly wait for two hours.<sup>207</sup> They duplicated this process at Woolworths, Kress, J. J. Newberry's, Walgreens, etc.

Store managers were faced with an impossible decision. Serve the black customers and anger their white customers. Do not serve the black customers, and they would keep coming and scaring off business from whites who did not want the attention. Close the doors and lose business. Either way, the stores lost money. There were counter-protesters, arrests, threats, and occasionally violence, but Dobbin's volunteers peacefully continued to enter shops and expected to be treated as equals.

The sit-ins were highly effective. The Pensacola Chamber of Commerce voted to negotiate a settlement, and the City Council formed a "Special Committee" of whites and blacks to work out a solution. This is not to be confused with the Biracial Committee discussed later. While some of the stores refused to abide by the terms of the resolution, the Retail Merchants' Association announced their plan to integrate all of their dining facilities on March 12, 1962.<sup>208</sup> There is a plaque downtown commemorating this date.

After their success with lunch counters, the PCM and NAACP began a boycott of other downtown businesses that did not hire African Americans. While their message targeted black customers, the crowds of youth and adults outside of a store discouraged shoppers of all races. Eventually the owners would hire black workers or go bankrupt. Ernest Nolan, who owned Nolan's grocery store, complained that he lost ninety percent

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<sup>207</sup> Butler, *Beyond Integration*, 38-42.

<sup>208</sup> Butler, *Beyond Integration*, 46.

of his sales until he hired several black cashiers.<sup>209</sup> Within a year, more than thirty businesses had been boycotted and in turn, hired black employees or integrated their stores. Buoyed by this success, Dobbins hoped to bring Martin Luther King, Jr. to town, but a trip to Pensacola never materialized.<sup>210</sup>

The formation of the Biracial Committee (discussed below) created a temporary ceasefire while the PCM/NAACP waited to see what the committee could accomplish by voluntary integration and dialogue. It was during this ceasefire that Dobbins was transferred by the Methodist Church to Sylacauga, Alabama, leaving a leadership void within the black resistance. When asked for a letter of reference, the mayor of Pensacola, C. P. Mason, replied, “He is...known by most of the City officials. While in Pensacola he was pastor of the St. Paul Methodist Church and was active in civic and political circles. Rev. Dobbins was believed to be admired and respected for his leadership.”<sup>211</sup>

For several years, the Civil Rights movement was disorganized, until H. K. Matthews became the chief spokesman for the black community. Matthews was the pastor of Allen Chapel, AME from 1960 to his arrest in 1975. Matthews had served alongside Dobbins in the PCM and participated in the boycotts, but Matthews and Dobbins were different sorts of leaders. By his own admission, Matthews was more divisive. While protesting Escambia High School, Matthews called Pensacola “a racist redneck community” and any black parent who ignored the boycott and sent their kids to school “a bunch of dumb niggers...we got to deal with those folks.”<sup>212</sup> He became angry

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<sup>209</sup> Butler, *Beyond Integration*, 47.

<sup>210</sup> Letter from Dobbins to King found in the King Center Archives <http://www.thekingcenter.org/archive/document/letter-w-c-dobbins-mlk> accessed Jan. 15, 2018.

<sup>211</sup> Howard King Biracial Committee Book. On file in the African American collection of the University of West Florida's Historic Trust.

<sup>212</sup> Matthews, *Victory after the Fall*, 136.

with the NAACP for being too cautious, so he founded a local chapter of the SCLC (Southern Christian Leadership Council) promising that the SCLC would expose “Uncle Toms.”<sup>213</sup> He admitted “a brash air about me and thought that those who [disagreed with his leadership] did not belong in the movement.”<sup>214</sup> According to Matthews, he would “wear down white leaders through my picketing and agitating,” and then they would want to compromise to more moderate black leaders like the Rev. Billie Joe Brooks or Calvin Harris.<sup>215</sup>

Matthews was a divisive figure for both the white and black communities, and under his leadership, the Civil Rights movement became more confrontational and aggressive. The *Pensacola News Journal* editors did not hide their disdain: “To many minds, here in Escambia County, the Rev. H. K. Matthews has long been a thorn bush obstructing the long, and gingerly-trod, road to racial harmony, instead of the fighter for racial justice he purports to be.”<sup>216</sup> Such views represented white public opinion in 1966. In 1969, Matthews led a picket line accusing Sacred Heart Hospital of job and wage discrimination and, as the spokesman of the protesters, delivered a series of demands including rehiring and promoting a particular worker. Sister Ann Williams, a nun in leadership at Sacred Heart Hospital, claimed she was unqualified for the job, but eventually the NAACP youth council and the hospital came to terms.<sup>217</sup>

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<sup>213</sup> Matthews, *Victory after the Fall*, 113.

<sup>214</sup> Matthews, *Victory after the Fall*, 107.

<sup>215</sup> Matthews, *Victory after the Fall*, 110.

<sup>216</sup> “Matthews Sentence: Why the Disparity?” *The Pensacola News Journal*, July 18, 1975.

<sup>217</sup> “11 Black Employees Leave Hospital Jobs in Protest,” *Pensacola News Journal*, Sep. 5, 1969 and “Sacred Heart Hospital, NAACP Comes to Terms,” *Pensacola News Journal*, Sep. 6, 1969.

The racial tensions continued to escalate from 1966 to 1975 when Matthews was arrested and sent to prison for allegedly threatening to assassinate police officers.<sup>218</sup> While protesting the police shooting of a young black man under suspicious circumstances, Matthews led a group of over five hundred protesters in a chant, “two, four, six, eight, who we gonna [disputed word], Raines (the deputy involved in the shooting) Sheriff Untreiner and all these deputies.”<sup>219</sup> Jim Edson, the deputy caught on tape bragging about playing Selma, claims the chant said “assassinate”. Some witnesses claimed they said “incarcerate”, while those who heard a recording of the incident thought it sounded like “castigate.” Matthews claimed that a different pastor, the Rev. J. L. Savage led the chant to assassinate.<sup>220</sup> Despite not being able to hear Matthews on the tape, and after a trial filled with dubious testimony, he was convicted of extortion.<sup>221</sup> His arrest discouraged and divided the Civil Rights movement in Pensacola. The SCLC elected a new president, F. L. Henderson, who held a press conference portraying Matthews as a radical leader who did not represent the SCLC and “is not authorized to speak, collect, or solicit funds for this organization.”<sup>222</sup> In April of 1975, Brooks, the president of the NAACP, made an announcement that it was disassociating from three of the more radical figures, including Matthews, and stating: “It is not the policy of the NAACP to encourage citizens to break the law, and it is not the policy of the organization to castigate citizens for non-involvement.”<sup>223</sup> Despite having his sentence commuted by

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<sup>218</sup> For more on the arrest of Matthews see Butler, *Beyond Integration*, 180-195 and Matthews, *Victory after the Fall*, 211-244.

<sup>219</sup> Butler, *Beyond Integration*, 143-144.

<sup>220</sup> “Matthews: We’ll Never Be Jailed,” *Pensacola News Journal*, June 11, 1975.

<sup>221</sup> Butler, *Beyond Integration*, 188. For a full account of the trial see 180-195.

<sup>222</sup> Butler, *Beyond Integration*, 192.

<sup>223</sup> “Local NAACP Withdraws from Protests,” *Pensacola News Journal*, April 26, 1975. The two others were the Rev. Otha Lovette and the Rev. R. N. Gooden.

Governor Askew, Matthews became a pariah in the city and eventually moved to pastor a church in Brewton, Alabama. The contributions and sacrifices that Matthews made would be better appreciated over time. He has been honored at several events, and now has a park named after him.

There are other significant protests that occurred in Pensacola, such as the Atlanta Five and from 1972 to 1977 the Escambia County High School (ECHS) race riots. ECHS was integrated with one black student, Linda Wingate, in 1966. As the number of black students increased, so did racial tensions within the school, often centered around the mascot, the Rebels, and the use of the Confederate flag. The first riot involving 400 students occurred in December of 1972 leading to a boycott of the school.<sup>224</sup> Matthews and Brooks met with administrators from the school and worked out a compromise involving Confederate symbols, but when kids returned to school in January white parents demanded that students be able to vote on whether to remain the Rebels and use Dixie as their fight song. The white students overwhelmingly voted to keep things the way that they were.<sup>225</sup> The boycotts continued. Local politicians became involved, with some stirring the pot and stoking racially based fear. On March 22, when African American students returned to class, they were told that they would not be able to make up their work. They protested, and another riot ensued.<sup>226</sup> Thus a pattern was established where there would be conflict, then violence, then a boycott. At one point, the PCM even organized black schools housed in several churches for any family that wanted to boycott the public schools. The most significant riot occurred on February 1976,<sup>227</sup> meaning that

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<sup>224</sup> See *Pensacola News Journal* December 13 and 14.

<sup>225</sup> Butler, *Beyond Integration*, 102-103.

<sup>226</sup> Butler, *Beyond Integration*, 113.

<sup>227</sup> Butler, *Beyond Integration*, 197-207.

for over four years, the largest high school in the county was engulfed in racial violence. It took a court decision in 1977 to remove the Confederate mascot, flag, and song from ECHS. Interestingly, the judge's ruling was not against the symbols per se but the way that some white students used them against black students, to which the white students readily admitted in court.<sup>228</sup>

### 3. *Biracial Committee*

After the successful lunch counter protests and boycotts of 1961 and 1962, the city was scrambling to respond. Businesses were being disrupted. People were unhappy; others were scared. Many people wanted the whole thing to go away, and all the while, they were watching more dramatic protests in Birmingham and Atlanta on the evening news. Yet, Dobbins and his followers were not going away. They had miles to go to reach equality and justice.

In early 1963, a young attorney, Robert (Bob) Gaines was on the Community Council, an advisory committee to the City Council. Gaines remains a prominent leader in Christ Church, although he now resides in a nursing care facility. Gaines believed that a deeper understanding of people's concerns would "solve many problems of the community,"<sup>229</sup> and he petitioned the city to form a Biracial Committee. On June 27, the city appointed six leaders from the community to a Biracial Committee to "study Negro-Caucasian problems in the Pensacola area". Three members were white (Frank A. Fricker, the Rev. Paul Duffy, and Dr. E. V. Anderson), and three members were black (Dr. E. S. Cobb, Howard King, and Robert Walker).

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<sup>228</sup> Matthews, *Victory after the Fall*, 144.

<sup>229</sup> Minutes of July 19, 1963 meeting of BRC. Howard King file.

J. Michael Butler dismisses the Biracial Committee as a mouthpiece for white interests and a tool of oppression, and he considers the effort completely ineffective. “City leaders intended the group to serve as a conduit between elected officials, businessmen, and black organizations to minimize racial unrest in Northwest Florida while preserving the power of white elites over the integration process. The Biracial Committee, in short, was an extension of the city’s white power structure and represented its desire to control black mass activism at the local level.”<sup>230</sup> He may be right. That may have been the City Council’s plan, but after reading Howard King’s minutes from three years of the Biracial Committee, I have some sympathy for the impossibility of their job.

As Butler rightly admits, the BRC was given no real authority. Within months of its inception, Dobbins and Calvin Harris asked the BRC to resign because they had no binding authority.<sup>231</sup> When they asked the Pensacola Police Chief to investigate the alleged mistreatment of Joseph Benboe, the chief replied that he would look into it but told them that the BRC has no legal jurisdiction over the police department.<sup>232</sup> Escambia County which has considerable more power than the city (this is an issue of size and population density), refused to participate in the process.<sup>233</sup> The only thing the BRC could do was talk, listen, and ask people to change. The committee brought together stakeholders in the community, tried to recognize areas that needed to change, and then asked people to voluntarily change. For example, after the NAACP sent a request to integrate all the theaters in town, the Vice-Chairman, Wallace King, sent a letter to T. G.

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<sup>230</sup> Butler, *Beyond Integration*, 51.

<sup>231</sup> *Pensacola News Journal*, September 27, 1963.

<sup>232</sup> September 26, 1963 letter from D. P. Caldwell to BRC, Howard King files.

<sup>233</sup> *Pensacola News Journal*, July 29, 1963.

Solomon of Gulf States Theatres. King informed him of the Biracial Committee's goals, and asked the following questions:

- A. Are you planning to desegregate your drive-in theatres in Pensacola?
- B. If so, at what stage in the overall desegregation of other facilities in the Pensacola area would you plan your participation?
- C. Would you be agreeable to a trial period for one of your locations to accept negro servicemen in uniform?

He then offered to meet with Solomon individually or as a committee and informed him that "Our committee is not an action or pressure group. We are formed as a communication medium between the races and as an investigative body."<sup>234</sup>

The Biracial Committee provides a window into the issues and concerns of the mid-1960's racial dialogue. Here are some of the concerns that were raised:

1. The NAACP sent a long list of requests including black Clerks at City Hall, at least two black firemen, black sales persons at downtown stores, black trainees for Southern Bell Telephone Company, open all short order business like Krispy Kreme to everyone, open local movie theatres and the YMCA/YWCA to everyone, and allow black policemen to patrol downtown and arrest any violator of the law.<sup>235</sup>
2. The need for a black recreation center and lobbying City Council to purchase Magee field for that purpose.
3. Discriminating signs designating colored bathrooms and water fountains on city property.<sup>236</sup>
4. The Rev. Paul Duffey shared the concern that arms sales were up sharply.<sup>237</sup>
5. A Complaint from a military officer that the Pensacola Christian School did not accept his child. (It does not specify a race, but we can assume the family is black). The Chairman agreed to contact the school.

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<sup>234</sup> Letter from King to Solomon. Howard King files.

<sup>235</sup> Letter to BRC from NAACP. Howard King files.

<sup>236</sup> For example, April 12, 1965 BRC minutes. Howard King files.

<sup>237</sup> July 28, 1964 BRC minutes. Howard King files.

6. Many complaints communicated through the black members of the committee that people were passed over for jobs.<sup>238</sup>
7. Concerns from the black community involving the police.<sup>239</sup>
8. Complaints about how the school board processed applications to switch to white schools.<sup>240</sup>
9. In 1965, complaint about the ‘notable differences that exist in the standards of education at the various schools’.<sup>241</sup>

The Navy also brought their own concerns. At the August 27, 1963 meeting of the Biracial Committee, Vice Admiral Fitzhugh Lee and other Navy officers represented a delegation of investigators from Washington who were sent to “review the conditions at the Naval Air Station and conditions as related to servicemen, their dependents and their community.”<sup>242</sup> Through the written minutes, you can feel the committee’s anxiety about the Navy pulling resources from NAS or the federal government getting involved in integration. Besides illustrating the concerns of the black community, the discussions of the Biracial Committee also reveal the fears of the white community that there would be too much change too soon. Wallace King asked that the “Naval Authorities not push faster than lasting progress could be made.”<sup>243</sup> In response to the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Howard Mitchell “stressed the importance of a ‘cushion’ for the revolutionary changes that our community will be required to make.”<sup>244</sup>

And the minutes show the fear of black protests. In response to a request for less talk and more action or the PCM would take to the streets, Wallace King replied,

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<sup>238</sup> For example, November 24, 1964 meeting in Howard King files. “Rev. Calloway mentioned that he had been contacted by several young ladies that had completed a course in salesmanship but could not obtain employment.”

<sup>239</sup> The Benboe situation mentioned above would be an example.

<sup>240</sup> For example, see the Monthly Report for October 15-November 12, 1963 Howard King Files. This would be one year after the first children integrated white schools. But before forced integration in 1969.

<sup>241</sup> July 12, 1965 BRC minutes, Howard King Files.

<sup>242</sup> August 27, 1963 BRC minutes, Howard King files.

<sup>243</sup> August 27, 1963, BRC minutes, Howard King files.

<sup>244</sup> September 29, 1964, BRC minutes, Howard King files.

“Demonstrations and boycotting or any type of ultimatum is going to be damaging to the total effects.”<sup>245</sup> In another interview, King asked “that the Negro community refrain from any type of demonstrations or ultimatums at this point so as not to ‘solidify resistance’ to integration.”<sup>246</sup> The committee asked the Rev. Calloway to influence his fellow black pastors to preach “love instead of hate, and optimism in lieu of pessimism.”<sup>247</sup> In short, the PCM and the NAACP (along with the Navy) were successfully applying pressure to bring about change. After a compromise was reached with the NAACP to abstain from protesting while they worked to accomplish some concrete goals, the Biracial Committee concluded: “It is our earnest conviction that if a program for voluntary action is not initiated and supported by the white citizens of our community, pressure will be brought into the situation either by local Negroes or by the Federal Government.”<sup>248</sup>

The Biracial Committee serves as a microcosm for the fight for civil rights in Pensacola in the mid-1960’s. There was a growing demand for equality and justice and a lack of patience for delays and caution. There were fear and resistance to the new society that was replacing the old one. There were people on both sides working to make things better. There were people actively fighting against any progress towards equality. And there was lurking beneath it all a powerful racism, both overt and subconscious.

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<sup>245</sup> *Pensacola News Journal*, September 27, 1963.

<sup>246</sup> *Pensacola News Journal*, October 16, 1963.

<sup>247</sup> February 25<sup>th</sup>, 1964, BRC minutes, Howard King files.

<sup>248</sup> BRC minutes, January 8, 1964, Howard King files.

#### 4. *Augustus and the Fight for School Integration*

In Pensacola before 1962, segregation was a fact of life. Rita Jones says, “when I was a child, the white and black children played together before school, but when it was time to go to school, we went left and the white kids went right.”<sup>249</sup>

In 1954, the *Brown v. the Board of Education* deemed the separate but equal decision of *Plessy v. Ferguson* discriminatory and unconstitutional, and a year later the Supreme Court decided that all school districts should integrate with “all deliberate speed.” School districts that fought integration could not openly deny the decision of the Supreme Court, but they could delay and put up obstacles. In a “Survey of School Desegregation in the Southern and Border States, 1967” delivered to Congress, a group of investigators found that all Southern states had passed “pupil placement laws,” which created a system for school districts to decide the appropriate school for each child and the means by which a parent could apply for their child to attend a different school. According to the report, “On their face the pupil placement laws were not invalid. In practice, most school boards initially assigned all students by race under the pupil placement laws, subject to the right of any student to apply for reassignment.”<sup>250</sup>

By 1965, most Southern school districts had begun integration, but they used the pupil placement laws to segregate schools by race, and then deny all but a few applications for reassignment. The end result was that school districts could claim to be integrated, but very few white children attended a school with more than a handful of black children, and even fewer black children attended a majority white school. “Despite

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<sup>249</sup> Smith, *Ebony Tales*, 161.

<sup>250</sup> “Survey of School Desegregation in the Southern and Border States, 1965-1966,” 12, <https://www.law.umaryland.edu/marshall/usccr/documents/cr12sch611.pdf> accessed Jan. 15, 2018.

a large increase in the number of school districts beginning desegregation in 1965, according to the highest estimate no more than 1 Negro child out of every 13 in the Deep South actually attends school with white children.”<sup>251</sup> This was what happened in Pensacola.

Under Florida’s pupil placement law, school boards were given the power to set their own criteria for transfers. Escambia County adopted the following criteria:

1. Adequacy and availability of educational facilities.
2. Effect upon established educational programs...
3. Scholastic aptitude as measured by standardized tests.
4. Mental ability as measured by standardized tests.
5. School citizenship records and academic grades.
6. Sociological attributes based upon standardized tests and personal investigations...
7. Health, safety, and economic welfare of students and their families.<sup>252</sup>

These criteria were used to deny requests by all black families until 1962. In 1959, twenty-one African American fathers wrote a letter to the school board. On the basis of *Brown*, they requested that the school board reorganize the schools so that children “cannot be denied admission to any school or be required to attend any school solely because of race and color.”<sup>253</sup> These parents saw what was really happening. The school board was hiding behind the pupil placement law in order to delay integration. They believed that “immediate evidence of good faith should be shown as we are firmly convinced that the time for delay or evasion is past.”<sup>254</sup> No action was taken in response to this letter.

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<sup>251</sup> “Survey of School Desegregation,” 31. For example, in Alabama only .43 percent of black students were in a school with white children. In Mississippi and Louisiana, it was .59 percent and .69 percent respectively.

<sup>252</sup> *Pensacola News Journal*, August 23, 1956.

<sup>253</sup> Escambia County School Board minutes, October 12, 1955, in the ‘Integration 1959-1963’ file of the University of West Florida Historic Trust Archives.

<sup>254</sup> *Ibid.*

In that same year, Dr. Charles Augustus applied for his daughter, Karen, to attend O. J. Semmes Elementary School. O. J. Semmes was an excellent school two and a half blocks from their home, but O. J. Semmes was a white school, and the Augustus family was black. Augustus asked the parents of Lillie Mae Robinson to apply as well so that Karen would not be the only black child in first grade.<sup>255</sup> The school board denied their request, and the families appealed. The school board then sent a letter that illustrates the delay and deny strategy used to fight integration. The school board asked the family to provide:

1. Specific reason reassignment is requested
2. Specific reasons why the applicant thinks the child should be admitted to Semmes School, taking into account sociological, psychological, ethical, cultural background, and social scientific factors relative to possible socio-economic class consciousness among the pupils already attending the school and your child.
3. The reasons you believe your child will make a normal adjustment to this changed environment and will not be prevented from receiving the highest standard of instruction within her ability to understand and assimilate.<sup>256</sup>

The parents asked for a public meeting, but when there was no resolution, they sued the school board.

Filed on February 1, 1960, *Augustus v. the School Board of Escambia County* became the legal arena for all racial discrimination lawsuits until it was finally closed in 2004.<sup>257</sup> For example, all the litigation surrounding the racial unrest at Escambia County in the 1970's was litigated under *Augustus*. The lead attorney was Charles Wilson, a local African American attorney who was extremely important to the Civil Rights movement

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<sup>255</sup> At this time, there was no kindergarten in public schools. Interview with Elizabeth Vickers, Dec. 14, 2017.

<sup>256</sup> *Pensacola News Journal*, November 13, 1959.

<sup>257</sup> [https://www.law.umaryland.edu/marshall/usccr/documents/022007\\_FloridaDesegreport.pdf](https://www.law.umaryland.edu/marshall/usccr/documents/022007_FloridaDesegreport.pdf) accessed Jan. 15, 2018.

in Pensacola, but he was joined at different stages of the trial by national icons Constance Baker Motley and Thurgood Marshall. Originally the case was adjudicated by G. Harold Carswell, who would later become famous for his unsuccessful nomination as a U.S. Court justice and his failed campaign for the U.S. Senate.<sup>258</sup>

After a setback and subsequent appeal, the first black students attended white schools in 1962. On May 23 of that year, the school board announced that thirteen black children were accepted, using the pupil placement law, to transfer to white schools.<sup>259</sup> On August 27, 1962, twenty-one African American students attended ten county schools that had previously been all white.<sup>260</sup> According to the *Pensacola News Journal* and local historian, John Appleyard, the day went off without much drama. Appleyard says, “happily the day passed without incident,” and the superintendent shared this positive outlook. “There was strong opposition, too, but this was the law of the land, and people who live in Escambia County are good, law abiding citizens. They are for the most part good Christians, too...and that helped a lot.”<sup>261</sup> Interestingly neither of the children named in the *Augustus* suit were included in that first class; one possible reason is that O. J. Semmes was not one of the schools that received a black student in 1962.<sup>262</sup>

According to some local histories, 1962 marks the end of segregation, but the reality is more complex. For the next seven years, the school board dragged their feet on full integration. In 1964, only 112 out of 7,914 black children attended a majority white school, and zero out of 40,072 white children attended a majority black school.<sup>263</sup> Put

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<sup>258</sup> And his conviction for propositioning and assaulting a male undercover detective in men’s room.

<sup>259</sup> *Pensacola News Journal*, May 24, 1962.

<sup>260</sup> *Pensacola News Journal*, August 28, 1962

<sup>261</sup> John Appleyard, *The History of Education in Escambia County 1870-2005*, self-published in 2005.

<sup>262</sup> Butler incorrectly infers that Karen Augustus was a part of the first wave of African American children attending white schools in 1962. *Beyond Integration* 33.

<sup>263</sup> Butler, *Beyond Integration*, 35.

another way, at predominantly white schools, there were 112 black students and 40,072 white students, or 0.2% of the student body at an ‘integrated school’ were black. In 1965, 33 out of 51 white schools had no black students, and zero black schools had a white student.<sup>264</sup> While Pensacola could say that they had an integrated school system, between 1962 and 1969, it did not feel integrated for black families. Six years after Pensacola allowed its first black students at white schools, Dr. S. W. Boyd, an African American dentist, said, “The main problem is that the school board and school administration have not carried out their responsibility to integrate schools since they were advised to so a number of years ago.”<sup>265</sup>

In 1967, Judge Carswell ordered that the school board to take action to desegregate all schools in all grades, but it was not until August 21, 1969, when U.S. district judge Winston Arnow approved a binding amended plan, that full integration occurred.<sup>266</sup> But even in 1969, Arnow did not go so far as to require busing. The timing is significant because the Episcopal Day School was integrated in the fall of 1966, two years before Carswell ordered desegregation of all schools and three years before his order was implemented.

## **Conclusion**

This was a time of turmoil for the community. Even as late as 1976, a school board advisory committee member working to ease racial tensions was the target of threats,

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<sup>264</sup> Butler, *Beyond Integration*, 35.

<sup>265</sup> Lucius Ellsworth and Linda Ellsworth, *Pensacola: The Deep River Port* (Tulsa, Continental Heritage Press, 1982), 142.

<sup>266</sup> *Pensacola News Journal*, “Integration Chronology,” July 13, 1986 page 1.

burning crosses, and the victim of an arson attack.<sup>267</sup> But things were especially difficult for the children who were the pioneers of integration. Looking back on integration as an adult, Karen Renee Augustus, who eventually did attend a white public school, told the *Pensacola Journal*: “If it had to be done over again, I wouldn’t want to be the one thrown into the kettle. But it was a traumatic experience for everyone. It must have been as hard for some of the white children as it was for me.”<sup>268</sup> Another student who integrated Pensacola High School said, “If I had to do it again, I wouldn’t, it was not an environment that makes you feel good about yourself.”<sup>269</sup> Based on the numbers of black students in white schools in those early years of integration, most of these children would have been the only black student in their grade and maybe the only black student in their school.

But the tide was turning. The fight for equality pushed onwards. And in the midst of this racial revolution in Pensacola in 1966, Robert Joseph attended his first day of kindergarten at Episcopal Day School. But before we can tell that story, we need to understand the history of Christ Church.

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<sup>267</sup> *Pensacola News Journal*, Feb. 22, 1976.

<sup>268</sup> *Pensacola News Journal*, May 20, 1979.

<sup>269</sup> Butler, *Beyond Integration*, 34.

## Chapter 3

### A History of Christ Church

Like many Episcopal congregations, Christ Church Pensacola is a church that appreciates its history. Before Pensacola became a British colony in 1763, all forms of Protestant religion were outlawed. Afterwards, the Bishop of London, who had pastoral oversight of all Anglicans in the British colonies in North America, sent a series of priests to Pensacola to minister to its people and administer the sacraments. Over the course of eighteen years, four English priests landed in Pensacola: William Dawson, William Gordon, Nathaniel Cotton, and George Chapman.<sup>270</sup> None stayed in Pensacola more than two years, and there is no account of a lasting legacy. After Pensacola became a Spanish colony again in 1781, Protestantism was outlawed, and any attempts to organize an Anglican presence came to an end.

In 1827, six years after Florida became an American territory, the Episcopal Church sent the Rev. Ralph Williston to minister to Tallahassee, and he stopped in Pensacola for three weeks. While he was there, he organized a meeting of laypeople (among them Commodore Melancthon Taylor Woolsey, the famous Navy officer) consisting of twelve Episcopalians, ten Methodists, two Presbyterians, and two Baptists to organize a Protestant congregation. The group decided to form an Episcopal Church and seek a permanent rector.<sup>271</sup> In 1829, the ‘Church Wardens and Vestrymen of Christ’s

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<sup>270</sup> William Stevens Perry, *The History of the American Episcopal Church, 1587-1883. Volume II: The organization and Progress of the Church 1783-1883* (Boston: Osgood and Company, 1885), 207-208.

<sup>271</sup> Lelia Abercrombie, “Early Churches of Pensacola,” *The Florida Historical Quarterly*, Vol. 37, No. 3, 451.

Church in Pensacola' was incorporated by the legislature of the Territory of Florida and purchased a piece of property off Seville Square,<sup>272</sup> and Addison Searle became the first rector.<sup>273</sup> Searle only stayed a few months. In fact, between 1829 and 1855, there were nine rectors whose average tenure was less than two years and none was longer than five. On January 17, 1838, Christ Church was one of the seven founding churches of the Episcopal Diocese of Florida.

In 1832, the new parish built the first Protestant church in Pensacola which is now called 'Old Christ Church' and is still the oldest church in the state of Florida on its original foundation. Because of the destruction of the city by the Confederate Army as they abandoned Pensacola, it is one of the few remaining antebellum buildings other than individual homes. During a stop on a voyage to Mobile, the Rt. Rev. Jackson Kemper consecrated Old Christ Church on March 4, 1838 (which according to his letters and diary was an unpleasant visit; Kemper was not impressed by Pensacola or Christ Church).<sup>274</sup>

John Jackson Scott, who served in 1848-1853 and 1855-1889, is one of three rectors who served over 30 years at Christ Church (the others being Henry Bell Hodgkins and Beverly Madison Currin). Jackson Scott grew up on Dew Rose plantation near Hilton Head, South Carolina,<sup>275</sup> was educated at the College of William and Mary, the Virginia Theological Seminary, and Columbia College (now Columbia University), and was

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<sup>272</sup> Julia J. Yonge, *Christ Church Parish, Pensacola Florida 1827-1927* (self-published, 1927), 6-7.

<sup>273</sup> Beverly Madison Currin, *From One Generation to Another*, self-published, 1977, 7.

<sup>274</sup> See Currin, *From One Generation to Another*, 12-19.

<sup>275</sup> G. Brown Goode, *Virginia Cousins: a study of the ancestry and posterity of John Goode of Whitby, a Virginia colonist of the seventeenth century...*, (Richmond: J. W. Randolph and English, 1887), 357.

ordained by the Rt. Rev. Leonidas Polk.<sup>276</sup> In a letter to Bishop Polk, Scott opined, “This Parish is far from that I could wish it to be-or from what I anticipated before I had an opportunity of inspecting it, and though there is so much to be done here, I hardly know where to begin.”<sup>277</sup> Scott was a Southerner through and through. He was an ardent supporter of John C. Calhoun, a member of Sewanee’s first Board of Trustees, and the owner of slaves.

Scott served as the rector of Christ Church from 1848 until 1853 when he resigned to accept a post as military chaplain in Mobile. One of his concerns was the salary. “The rector’s salary is only half enough to live on, and this should be remedied, not for ourselves, but for the honor of the church, and for the glory of God.”<sup>278</sup> Christ Church struggled to find Scott’s replacement, eventually hiring the founding vicar of St. Luke’s Episcopal Church in Jacksonville, Alabama, David Dubois Flowers. Tragically, Flowers, his wife, and their infant son died of yellow fever after only ten weeks in Pensacola.<sup>279</sup> In 1855, Christ Church extended a call to Scott to return and he remained at Christ Church until 1889, making him the longest tenured rector of the parish. As was typical of certain high churchmen, Scott oversaw a peculiar controversy over rented pews. Like many congregations Christ Church rented its pews to wealthy families to fund the church. A notice in the *Pensacola Gazette* on August 29, 1834 announced, “The pews of the Episcopal Church will be rented for the ensuing year, on Monday, the 11<sup>th</sup>,

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<sup>276</sup> Currin, *From One Generation to Another*, 12-20. See also *The Spirit of Missions: Edited for the Board of Missions of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America*, Volume III, (New York: Swords, Stanford and Co, 1838), 269.

<sup>277</sup> Currin, *From One Generation to Another*, 31.

<sup>278</sup> Beverly Madison Currin, *The Search for the Lost Rectors: reflections on the history of Old Christ Church and Pensacola in the nineteenth century*, (Pensacola: University of West Florida, 1999), 31.

<sup>279</sup> Currin, *The Search for the Lost Rectors*, 32.

inst. at 10 o'clock A. M. by order of the Wardens and Vestry. Thos. M. Blount."<sup>280</sup> But on August 31, 1857, the vestry passed the following resolution:

Whereas the House of God should be free and open to all-the poor and rich-the high and lowly...and whereas distinction of persons should not be manifested whilst all are humbly engaged in his worship...Resolved that it is the opinion of the Vestry that the Seats in every part of Christ Church appropriated to the Congregation should be free to all seeking therein religious instruction and consolation.<sup>281</sup>

After a congregational vote, the vestry placed a sign on the front of the church informing everyone that all pews were free. This open seating did not extend to African Americans or slaves.

At the start of the Civil War, Scott offered his services to General Bragg as a military chaplain, and he was the only priest in the Diocese of Florida who served in the Confederate Army.<sup>282</sup> He was a delegate to the Convention of Bishops and Laymen of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the Confederate States of America, held in Christ Church Columbia, S. C., in 1861.<sup>283</sup> When the Confederate Army abandoned Pensacola in 1861, most of the residents fled to other parts of the South, especially to Montgomery. Scott and his family followed his parishioners into exile and organized the Church of the Holy Comforter, Montgomery to minister to their needs.<sup>284</sup> Describing this period, Scott writes in the parish register, "The Church or Parish was commenced and founded by the Rev. J. Jackson Scott, S.T.D., Priest of the Diocese of Florida, driven from his Parish in

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<sup>280</sup> Yonge, *Christ Church Parish*, 11.

<sup>281</sup> Currin, *From One Generation to Another*, 41.

<sup>282</sup> Joseph D. Cushman, "The Episcopal Church in Florida During the Civil War," in the Christ Church folder, University of West Florida's archives. Cushman was a history professor at Florida State University.

<sup>283</sup> Yonge, *Christ Church Parish*, 21.

<sup>284</sup> Holy Comforter would go dormant after Scott returned to Pensacola at the end of the Civil War, but would be reorganized in 1885.

Pensacola at the evacuation of that city by the Confederate forces and the entrance into it by the Federal Army...”<sup>285</sup>

While the majority of Christ Church was worshipping in Montgomery, the Union forces used Old Christ Church as a hospital, a barracks, a chapel,<sup>286</sup> which Scott described as the “desecration and mutilation” of the church at the hands of Union soldiers.<sup>287</sup> The organ was destroyed, the parish school building was left unusable, and the floor boards of the chancel had been ripped open. A member of Christ Church, George Hallmark, claimed that while he was held prisoner in the church, he saw soldiers rob the graves of the three rectors buried beneath the church.<sup>288</sup> Describing the damage to Christ Church and St. John’s Warrington, Scott wrote, “In a brief space all our cruel enemy left us of this house we had built for the good of man and the glory of God, was a heap of ashes.”<sup>289</sup> The damage to the church and the desecration of the rector’s graves added to the rhetoric of Northern Aggression.

The vestry minutes make no reference to the Civil War, ending April 1861 and resuming in December 1866. A bit like the reunion of the Episcopal Church at the national level, for white Episcopalians it was as if nothing happened in between. From 1886 until Scott’s retirement in 1889 at the age of seventy-four, Christ Church regrouped, rebuilt, and grew into one of the largest congregations in the Diocese of Florida. Jackson Scott was a beloved rector, but his legacy with regard to race will be discussed later in this chapter.

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<sup>285</sup> Currin, *The Search for the Lost Rectors*, 42.

<sup>286</sup> Currin, *The Search for the Lost Rectors*, 42.

<sup>287</sup> Yonge, *Christ Church Parish*, 21.

<sup>288</sup> This myth was the basis of a major archeological study of Christ Church when it was renovated in 1988 led by Dr. Judy Bense of UWF. Fascinatingly, they were able to prove that the bodies had been disturbed. This is the overarching theme of Currin’s *The Search for the Lost Rectors*.

<sup>289</sup> Diocese of Florida Journal 1967, cited in Cushman, “The Episcopal Church in Florida”.

The next rectors had shorter tenures. Percival Whaley moved the church to a more accessible part of town and had the vision to build a church that seats six hundred, despite the congregation being significantly smaller at the time. Christ Church was left indebted, but Whaley oversaw the construction of a beautiful and unique church. John H. Brown had a relatively uneventful ministry that spanned a decade and the First World War. George Hendree Harrison served for fifteen years. Harrison's son, Edward, was later an assistant rector at Christ Church, and his grandson, Edward Harrison Jr., was the rector of St. Christopher's, a congregation in Pensacola founded by Christ Church that will be discussed shortly.<sup>290</sup>

Henry Bell Hodgkins was the second of three rectors who served for over thirty years. At the age of thirty-five, Hodgkins was called as the rector of Christ Church on May 7, 1936.<sup>291</sup> To the older generation at Christ Church today, he remains the stately, dignified priest of their youth, but Hodgkins had some growing pains. Facing financial stresses, he resigned twice in his first three years, but the vestry refused to accept his resignation.<sup>292</sup> Hodgkins served in the Navy Reserve, and on December 19, 1941, he was called to active duty in World War II. For three years, Hodgkins left the running of Christ Church to assistant priests making the occasional trip home from the naval base in Atlanta, but in 1944, Hodgkins resigned so that Christ Church could hire a full-time rector. But Hodgkins' replacement, Charles O. Farrar, left after ten months. So in 1945,

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<sup>290</sup> While completing this project, I officiated at the burial service for Laura Harrison, the widow of Edward Harrison, Sr. At the time of her death, she was the oldest member of Christ Church at 101 years old. In establishing an Episcopal dynasty, George Hendree Harrison also had a grandson of the same name who was a priest in the Diocese of Atlanta, and a great-grandson, the Rev. George Hendree Harrison, Jr., who at the time of writing is currently the rector of St. Anne's Episcopal Church in Athens, TN.

<sup>291</sup> Beverly Madison Currin, *The Vision Glorious: A History of Christ Church, Pensacola in the twentieth century*, self-published, 1995, 74.

<sup>292</sup> Currin, *The Vision Glorious*, 75

the vestry unanimously decided to call Hodgkins, who was at the time serving as the Senior Chaplain of the U.S. Coast Guard Academy in New London. He sent the following telegram, “Kill the fatted Calf. Accept December first. Bishop approving. Love and kisses, Henry Bell Hodgkins.”<sup>293</sup>

For the next twenty-one years, as the church grew, ‘Henry Bell’ became one of the most respected men in Pensacola. His years of service during World War II only endeared him more to the congregation, many of whom were Navy veterans as well or had children who served overseas. Four things from Hodgkins’ tenure are important for what followed. First, he was almost nothing like his successor, Matt Currin. Second, he founded the Episcopal Day School in 1952. Third, with Hodgkins’ blessing, Christ Church’s assistant rector, Van Davis, established St. Christopher’s in 1955. From its inception, St. Christopher’s had a healthy congregation and budget because somewhere between eighty-six and one hundred and ten families transferred from Christ Church to the new church plant. Many of the families that transferred were young professionals with children. Van Davis was a young, charismatic priest, and St. Christopher’s was built closer to the new residential developments attracting young families, which left maybe (in the estimate of one parishioner) only ten couples under the age of forty.<sup>294</sup> Fourth is the lack of engagement in this period with the Civil Rights movement. Like many Episcopal churches, there was a reluctance to be agents of change. But Hodgkins may have been more alive to the issues of race than appears at first. For instance, in a parish publication he includes a poem from the Harlem Renaissance poet, Countee Cullen, entitled “A Lady I Know”:

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<sup>293</sup> Vestry Notebook, 1945, Christ Church Archives.

<sup>294</sup> Interview with Rod Magie.

She thinks that even up in heaven  
Her class lies late and snores,  
While poor black cherubs rise at seven  
To do celestial chores.<sup>295</sup>

Even before that, in the 1953 report from the Director of Religious Education, Marian Latz, one of the scheduled events was Race Relations Sunday, where they watched a movie and had a discussion.<sup>296</sup> And as we will see later this chapter, there was some interest from Hodgkins and the vestry to invite the black congregation of St. Cyprian's to Christ Church while they were without a priest.

On the other hand, in a May 27, 1964 letter to the Senior Warden, Admiral J. W. "Black Jack" Reeves shared his concerns that the Episcopal Church, on a national level, was violating its tax exempt status by engaging in politics and encouraging "unlawful actions (like) demonstrations, trespass on private property and the like." Church officials were "playing the communist game... They care nothing about the colored race... Those who think they are helping the colored race are doing harm to it and to their Country as well." He then requests that Christ Church "associate itself with the action of the Resolution of Trinity Episcopal Church in St. Augustine and with the action of the Diocese of Louisiana."<sup>297</sup> Bearing in mind that Pensacola was a Navy town and Reeves was a retired admiral, the letter carried weight when it was read at the following vestry meeting. Copies of a resolutions from Trinity in St. Augustine and a similar one from the Diocese of Louisiana (dated January 23, 1964) were also included in the minutes. The resolution from Trinity reads in part:

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<sup>295</sup> Henry Bell Hodgkins, *Quotes and Rhymes from Other Times*, self-published, 1962. Found in the Christ Church Archives and the Sewanee Library.

<sup>296</sup> 1952 Vestry Book.

<sup>297</sup> Letter to Dr. John M. Packard, May 27, 1964 in the 1964 Vestry Book in the Christ Church Archives.

Whereas, this Vestry is mindful that the presiding Bishop and other leaders of the National Council have encouraged Episcopalians to involve themselves in activist movements; and

Whereas, this Vestry deplores the participation of Church Officials and the Laity in any activities, demonstrations, marches, sitins or other actions which violate or willfully ignore the law, or which disregard the property rights of others or to make a mockery of the Church by using it as a tool.<sup>298</sup>

The resolution then asks the Diocese of Florida and other churches to take similar actions. Trinity had been the center of the debate over civil rights in the Episcopal Church since the wives of three bishops traveled to St. Augustine to fight segregation. One, Esther Burgess, the wife of John Burgess, the suffragan bishop of Massachusetts, was arrested for having a drink at a motel (Esther Burgess was African American). On Sunday morning, the bishops' wives accompanied a delegation of African Americans who tried to worship at Trinity, but the vestry cancelled services to deny them entrance.<sup>299</sup> A month later, Henri Stile, a black priest on the Episcopal Society for Cultural and Racial Unity staff, tried to attend services and was sent away by ushers. (Ultimately, the conflict cost the rector his job when the congregation turned on him after he relented and allowed African Americans to worship at Trinity.) So Admiral Reese and others wanted to show their support of Trinity and their disapproval of acts of civil disobedience. At the Christ Church vestry meeting, a "lengthy debate" was ended when local judge Grover Robinson, Jr., moved to table the motion.<sup>300</sup> The motion was tabled again at the next vestry meeting with the stated intention to readdress the motion after General Convention. The issue was never raised again.

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<sup>298</sup> Resolution by the Vestry of Trinity Episcopal Church, St. Augustine, Florida, Censuring the National Council of the Protestant Episcopal Church on the Civil Rights Issue. Found in the 1964 Vestry Book in the archives of Christ Church.

<sup>299</sup> Gardiner H. Shattuck, Jr., *Episcopalians and Race: Civil War to Civil Rights* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2000), 137-138.

<sup>300</sup> June 29, 1964 Vestry Minutes found in the Christ Church Archives.

Reeves sent a second letter, this time to the rector, with his pledge card restating his concerns. He said that he “would leave Christ Church and the Pensacola community except for the fact that certain personal circumstances prevent it. Thus, I must stay here and I must support Christ Church. But I think it is my right, and indeed my duty, to see that those concerned-as the Bishop and the Vestry-are informed of my view.”<sup>301</sup> Two years later, after Hodgkins had announced his retirement, Admiral Reeves sent another letter in which he claimed that, because only money can effect change, so Christ Church should withhold their giving to the Episcopal Church. He told Hodgkins:

You are, I believe, in general agreement with my ideas. However, we have a new Rector coming and he may have different ideas. It is this that causes me to restate my position. I think that the new Rector should be made aware of the views of some of the members of the parish. The answer to this problem is certainly not revolution, but it should lie in evolution, not just in standing pat on the status quo. And I think the leaders of the hierarchy should be made aware of how at least some of their parishioners feel.”<sup>302</sup>

It is safe to say that Admiral Reeves spoke on behalf of a large portion of Christ Church. They may have seen that change is necessary, but they wanted change to be slow and orderly. They wanted to protect their identity and way of life. They opposed protests and what they saw as radical views. They did not want the church involved in politics or civil rights. They wanted things to stay the same. Christ Church in 1966 was resistant to social action.

Hodgkins sent a letter of retirement dated June 30, 1965.<sup>303</sup> Hodgkins’ stated health problems were more of a dip than a trend, and it is widely speculated that he regretted retiring so early (he was sixty-four years old). The shadow Hodgkins cast over his successor was great, and he still carried enormous sway within Christ Church and the

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<sup>301</sup> November 17, 1964 letter found in the 1964 Vestry Book in the Christ Church Archives.

<sup>302</sup> January 16, 1966 letter found in the 1966 Vestry Book in the Christ Church Archives.

<sup>303</sup> June 30, 1965 letter found in the 1965 Vestry Book in the Christ Church Archives.

city of Pensacola. In an article written about Hodgkins' retirement in the diocesan newsletter, the author implied that Hodgkins may have retired, but he did not lose his influence: "His retirement is de jure, not de facto, for his natural and deep attachment for the affairs of his home town forbids any real withdrawal."<sup>304</sup>

So, in 1966, a church with a rich history was losing its beloved rector. The next three years would be chaotic as a new young rector arrived who was very different than Henry Bell Hodgkins. This new rector would start a capital campaign, talk openly about money, preach politics from the pulpit, and integrate the church and school. But before we consider Matt Currin, we should consider two additional aspects of Christ Church's history from its founding to 1966: the church's efforts to start and support a school and the role of African Americans within the congregation.

### *1. A Christ Church School*

There has been a desire for an Anglican School in Pensacola since it was a British colony. In a letter sent to the Bishop of London in 1770, the Rev. Nathaniel Cotton wrote, "I pay constant attention to the Education of the rising generation, and beg leave to recommend in the future appointment of School-masters in these distant colonies, that he should be in Orders, to supply the Place of the Rector in case of Death or illness, as they must be long destitute, as there is only two Clergymen in the Province."<sup>305</sup> There is no evidence that a school was ever founded in Pensacola's short British period.

The first Episcopal school in Pensacola was founded in 1842 when the Rev. Frederick F. Peake started the Pensacola Collegiate Institute to educate the children of the

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<sup>304</sup> *Around the Diocese* (Diocese of Florida), Vol. VIII, No. 9, November 1965, page 4.

<sup>305</sup> Yonge, *Christ Church Parish*, 2.

city. The school had ceased to exist by 1856 when Jackson Scott opened Christ Church School. However, an 1859 listing of libraries in the United States lists the Pensacola Collegiate Institute as the only library in the city of Pensacola.<sup>306</sup> It is possible that the library remained after the school closed. Alternatively the listing was referring to Scott's school, which he started in 1856, eventually purchasing a building for \$2,000.<sup>307</sup> According to Scott, the purpose of the school was "the imparting and dissemination of knowledge under the sanction of religion and under the direction of the Church of God, the true branch of which exists in this land, and is known to us as the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America."<sup>308</sup> In 1860, the school had twenty students and an endowment of five hundred dollars.<sup>309</sup> The Civil War interrupted plans for the school. By 1867, the building had been repaired, and the school averaged between eighteen and twenty-five students and who were "from the poor."<sup>310</sup> In the 1885 directory of academies and colleges, there are two religious schools listed in Pensacola, the Sisters of Mercy School and "Christ's Church School, Rev. J. Jackson Scott, D.D., LL.D, rector, Seville sq."<sup>311</sup> It is not clear what happened to the Christ Church School, but the school building was sold in 1899.<sup>312</sup> It is possible that the school was a particular passion for Scott, and without his leadership it failed.

The next attempt to start an Episcopal School occurred in 1952 under Hodgkins, when the vestry gave "considerable thought ... to a full day Kindergarten."<sup>313</sup> The public

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<sup>306</sup> William J. Rhees, *Manual of Public Libraries, Institutions, and Societies, in the United States and British Provinces of North America*, (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott and CO., 1859), 590.

<sup>307</sup> Yonge, *Christ Church Parish*, 20.

<sup>308</sup> Currin, *From One Generation to Another*, 46.

<sup>309</sup> Diocese of Florida, *Diocesan Journal* 1860.

<sup>310</sup> Currin, *From One Generation to Another*, 45.

<sup>311</sup> John Appleyard, *The History of Education in Escambia County 1870-2005*, self-published in 2005, 12.

<sup>312</sup> Currin, *From One Generation to Another*, 62.

<sup>313</sup> May 12, 1952 vestry minutes.

schools in Pensacola were struggling: from 1949 to 1953, Escambia County was in the lowest quartile in teachers with college degrees, the schools were overcrowded, and there were no programs for exceptional students or students with special needs.<sup>314</sup> A month later,

Dr. Hodgkins requested permission to use the New Educational Building to begin a Kindergarten in September. He stated that the project had been underwritten for one year and that two qualified teachers and one maid would be hired. The school would be non-sectarian and would devote one half hour to religious education. The fee would be approximately fifteen dollars a month.<sup>315</sup>

The motion was unanimously approved, and the Episcopal Day School of Christ Church Parish was born. I have not been able to find evidence of who underwrote the first year of EDS; therefore, I do not know if this was the rector's vision or that of a lay person.

Regardless, Hodgkins was passionate about the school and would tell people that the purpose of the school was "that the children of men may become children of God."<sup>316</sup> In the fall of 1952, EDS started with thirty-one kids in two classrooms with five openings.<sup>317</sup>

People in the EDS and Christ Church community often speculate that the school was founded to avoid integration and keep an all-white school. This speculation is probably not accurate, because *Brown v. the Board of Education* was two years later (although it was filed in 1951). David Nevin and Robert E. Bills have investigated the rise of "segregationist academies" in the South. They see a rise in private schools in the mid 1960's that were created to escape integrated schools.<sup>318</sup> They do not see any correlation with schools started in the early 1950's. So integration more likely affected

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<sup>314</sup> Appleyard, *The History of Education in Escambia County*, 59-64.

<sup>315</sup> June 13, 1952 vestry minutes.

<sup>316</sup> Currin, *Vision Glorious*, 7.

<sup>317</sup> September 8, 1952 vestry minutes.

<sup>318</sup> David Nevin and Robert E. Bills, *The Schools that Fear Built: Segregationist Academies of the South* (Washington, Acropolis Books, 1976).

EDS's growth in the 1960s than its founding in 1952. (There is still a Pensacola connection with these segregationist academies. Abeka, the publishing arm of Pensacola Christian Academy, was one of the two primary publishers of curriculum for all-white Evangelical schools.<sup>319</sup> Abeka's influence in home schooling and Evangelical private schools is still strong. In 2015, they had a reported operating income of almost forty-three million dollars.<sup>320</sup>)

In the 1952 annual report, Hodgkins praised the teachers and the school for a great first semester, but petitioned the congregation for its support. "All we need is the support of the members of this parish. It is our hope that in the fall of the year, we can have a first grade with a qualified teacher and an adequate enrollment of 20 to 25 children. Whether or not the school continues in its present status or increases in grades depends on the support of Episcopalians and not non-conformists."<sup>321</sup> It seems he was worried about the school being overrun by parents with a different vision for the school, but despite his plea, the first grade was not started until 1955 with enrollment limited at twenty-five.<sup>322</sup> So when Matt Currin arrived in 1966, EDS was a small but established school of all-white children.

## 2. *Race and the History of Christ Church Parish*

A previous chapter looked at slavery and race in Pensacola, so here the focus is on Christ Church in particular. Antebellum Christ Church felt a burden for the spiritual

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<sup>319</sup> Nevin and Bills, *The Schools that Fear Built*, 79-80.

<sup>320</sup> <https://projects.propublica.org/nonprofits/organizations/593458436> accessed Jan. 15, 2018.

<sup>321</sup> 1952 Annual report in 1952 Vestry Book.

<sup>322</sup> *Pensacola News Journal*, July 31, 1955. The advertisement promises "Modern Equipment, Ample Space, Fireproof building." It is lamentable that EDS does not have many records from this period. The school does not have archives before 2000. The main source material for the school is the church's archives, and those records are limited.

health of the enslaved and free blacks but worked under the assumption of the inequality of the races and that people could be property. In parish registers before 1860, there are many entries with the demarcation “colored” and with the enslaved listed as “the servant of x.” In reports to the Diocese of Florida, the sacraments are split by race. Even when Jackson Scott and most of Christ Church were worshiping in Montgomery during the Civil War, he sent the Bishop of Florida a report of “Baptism-Adults, white, 3; colored, 2; infants, white 43; colored, 17; total, 65. Confirmations by the Bishop of Ala.-White 14; colored, 4: total, 18. Marriages-White, 9; col’d, 3; total, 12. Burials, 64.”<sup>323</sup>

The third rector, Ashbel Steele, organized a Sunday school for African Americans at the Navy Yard.<sup>324</sup> We know that no black families rented pews, but Joseph Saunders led a Sunday afternoon service for African Americans where any white family that attended sat in the balcony.<sup>325</sup> But we do not know how the Sunday morning services were segregated. In short, Christ Church was made up of whites and blacks but with the societal segregations and inequality of that era.

There are two facts about early rectors that should be noted. The Rev. Joseph H. Saunders, moved to Pensacola in 1836 and died of yellow fever in 1839. Upon his death, his widow and young children moved back to North Carolina. One of Saunders’ sons was William L. Saunders who would become a colonel in the Confederate Army, the editor of

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<sup>323</sup> Currin, *From One Generation to Another*, 43-44. I am intrigued by why all the sacraments are divided by race, but burials are not. The optimist in me wishes the reason is we are all the same in death, but that is probably naïve.

<sup>324</sup> Currin, *From One Generation to Another*, 11.

<sup>325</sup> Currin, *The Search for the Lost Rectors*, 24.

the *News and Observer*, and the North Carolina Secretary of State.<sup>326</sup> William Saunders was also the Emperor of the Invisible Empire, another name for the Ku Klux Klan.<sup>327</sup>

Second, the Rev. J. Jackson Scott owned slaves. Scott was born on a plantation in South Carolina which had slaves, but he also owned slaves while he was the rector of Christ Church. This has been folklore at Christ Church, but the evidence can now be found in the slave schedules of the 1850 and 1860 federal census. ‘John J. Scott’ owned twenty-nine slaves in 1850 and twenty-six slaves in 1860.<sup>328</sup> The slaves ranged from three months old to 80. Some are black; others are creole. Thus, the longest tenured rector of Christ Church, a man who Matt Currin regularly called his hero, and the priest who is memorialized on our high altar, was a slave owner.

Christ Church eventually became truly segregated. Our records say that Jackson Scott founded Zion Chapel in 1887, which later changed its name to St. Cyprian’s, to serve the African Americans in Pensacola. Christ Church secured a building for this new mission on Palafox St., near Chase St.<sup>329</sup> The report from the Archdeacon of the Colored Work of the Diocese of Florida, Brooke G White, sheds light on the mentality of the Episcopal Church’s efforts to reach African Americans in the South, so is worth quoting at some length:

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<sup>326</sup> Recently, Saunders has been in the news because of a student campaign to rename Saunders Hall on The University of North Carolina Chapel Hill’s campus.

<http://www.newsobserver.com/news/local/education/article22503351.html> accessed Jan. 15, 2018.

<sup>327</sup> Joseph H. Saunders, “UNC and Southern Reconstruction Revisited,” *The News and Observer*, June 14, 2015. (This article was written by the Rev. Joseph H. Saunder’s great, great, great grandson)

<http://www.newsobserver.com/opinion/op-ed/article23880409.html> accessed Jan. 15, 2018.

<sup>328</sup> The 1850 and 1860 slave schedules can be searched on Ancestry.com. I am placing copies of these documents in the Archives of Christ Church. One lists ‘J. J. Scott’ and the other ‘John J. Scott.’ It is possible that there is another John J. Scott who owned slaves in Pensacola. John Jackson Scott usually went by ‘J. John Scott,’ but the slave schedule is not written in his handwriting. My assumption is that the pollster shortened his middle name. The fact that these documents affirm the oral history is convincing that this refers to John Jackson Scott, rector of Christ Church.

<sup>329</sup> “St. Cyprian’s Episcopal Church celebrates 110 years,” *Pensacola News Journal*, June 20, 1997.

They (African Americans) need to be taught the Catholicity of the Church and to be made to understand that this church is not one of the innumerable Protestant sects by which we are surrounded...

The church is attracting the attention of the better class of negroes. Her incomparable liturgy, her ecclesiastical year, her Godly ways are drawing the peoples of these United States to her. The negro is greatly drawn towards the church. He is naturally ritualist and his emotional nature is greatly charmed with an service. The Methodist and Baptist negro preachers are learning this fact and it is not surprising to hear of a liturgical form of service used among them even of surplices and sponsors...

Beginning at the western portion of the Diocese I desire to put on record my highest commendation of the good work that has been done at St Cyprian's Mission Pensacola. The rector of the parish the Rev PH Whaley through a building and loan association has bought a lot and erected a cosy little chapel assuming personally a debt of \$400. The services of the church are kept up at this mission by Mr John A Gibson a colored man who was formerly a Methodist preacher but who is now a candidate for holy orders and the Sunday school by Mr. Dorr a most faithful and devoted churchman. I know of no more promising field for a colored parish than in Pensacola. With a learned and Godly colored clergyman in charge of St Cyprian's I believe we could soon have a flourishing parish.<sup>330</sup>

In 1897, St. Cyprian's is described: "Here a small company of about twenty-five communicants have neither church building, nor school house, with not a foot of land. A gentleman, formerly a Methodist minister, Mr. John Gibson the principal of the large Colored public school acts as lay reader being also a candidate for Holy Orders. Given a church building and a clergyman in Priest's Orders to go to Pensacola, great things might be accomplished for the Church."<sup>331</sup> When Christ Church moved to its new location in 1903, St. Cyprian's worshiped at Old Christ Church until 1922.<sup>332</sup> And in 1907, the Rev. David D. Moore was ordained its vicar.<sup>333</sup> Before then it seems to have merged with St. Mary's Colored Episcopal Church.<sup>334</sup> St. Mary's held its first services on March 23, 1902

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<sup>330</sup> "Journal of the Fiftieth Annual Council of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the Diocese of Florida held in Tallahassee, May 3 and 4, A. D. 1893" (Jacksonville, Dacosta Printing Company, 1893), 42-43.

<sup>331</sup> *The Spirit of Missions: A Monthly Magazine of Church Missions at home and abroad*, Vol. 58 (New York: Church Missions House, 1897), 250.

<sup>332</sup> *Escambia County Beacon*, July 14, 1972, page 3.

<sup>333</sup> *Living Church*, November 27, 1909, found online.

<sup>334</sup> *Escambia County Beacon*, July 14, 1972, page 3.

at the Pensacola Drug Store, which as we saw in chapter one was owned by an African American.

By the time Christ Church moved into its new building in 1903, it was truly segregated. White Episcopalians went to Christ Church (or St. John's, Warrington, etc.), and black Episcopalians went to St. Cyprian's or St. Mary's. Christ Church would remain an all-white church until 1966 when its new rector, Matt Currin, arrived, but again, Christ Church was open to having St. Cyprian's join them for worship as early as 1951. In the January 1951 meeting, the vestry shows concern that St. Cyprian's was without a rector for over two years and wanted the rector to invite them to Christ Church. The bishop asked them to delay that invitation for thirty days while he worked on sending a new priest to St. Cyprian's, but the vestry told Henry Bell Hodgkins to send the invitation if nothing was done after the allotted time.<sup>335</sup>

For the last one hundred and thirty years, Christ Church has had a complicated relationship with St. Cyprian's. There is deep affection between the churches, but not equality. Christ Church has been the large, white, wealthy church down the street. Christ Church has shown generosity at times, and there have been moments of cooperation, but it would be naïve to think racism has not had a role to play in the relationship between the two churches. The parishes have a shared history, even if it is complicated.

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<sup>335</sup> January 8, 1951 and February 5, 1951 vestry minutes found in the Christ Church Archives.

## Chapter 4

### Matt Currin and the Integration of Episcopal Day School

#### *I. A New Rector*

On November 19<sup>th</sup>, 1965, after thirty years of relative stability, Christ Church announced their new rector, Dr. Beverly Madison Currin, PhD., Dean of the Cathedral Church of St. Luke and St. Paul, Charleston, SC. Stability is not a word that could be used to describe Matt Currin's first year in Pensacola. "The most trying time for me was during that period. I had been here six months, and the parish and the Day School were integrated all within a week. We were the first all-white church in the state of Florida to be integrated, and the first private school to be integrated in northwest Florida."<sup>336</sup> Integration was only one of the factors that caused stress and friction within the community. Before turning to integration in the next chapter, therefore, it is necessary to see the friction Currin caused.

Having felt a call to ordained ministry, Currin attended Duke Divinity School after his undergraduate degree from Elon College (now Elon University), and went on to receive a Ph.D. from Union Theological Seminary in Richmond, Virginia. It was in Richmond that Currin became an Episcopalian, when a friend invited him to attend Grace and Holy Trinity. Describing the decision to pursue ordination in the Episcopal Church, Currin told the *Pensacola News Journal*, "I had freedom to ask questions, and I like the isometrics of the Episcopal Church—stand to praise, sit to listen, kneel to pray. I kind of made my own little journey to this church, a place where you don't have to leave your

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<sup>336</sup> Troy Moon, "Currin's Legacy," *Pensacola News Journal*, October 27, 2002, 4e.

mind at the door.”<sup>337</sup> After the General Convention voted in 1976 to begin ordaining women, Currin told the paper, “We have the best, most open, progressive and loving church in Christendom.”<sup>338</sup>

Currin was ordained at Grace and Holy Trinity and served there as an assistant rector until he took a call to be the rector of St. Luke and St. Paul in Charleston. Currin had a successful ministry at St. Luke and St. Paul, including overseeing the transformation of the church into the cathedral of the Diocese of South Carolina,<sup>339</sup> but there was conflict as well. While Matt and his wife Eleanor were on vacation, a young African American military family came to Sunday service. One of the ushers, who was also on the vestry, asked them to leave. When Currin returned and heard about the incident, he was furious. In response, he excommunicated the usher, despite his long history at the church.<sup>340</sup> In one of his books, Currin claims that the family joined the church making St. Luke and St. Paul the first integrated church in the Diocese of South Carolina.<sup>341</sup> This story is reminiscent of something that one of Currin’s heroes, Carlyle Marney, once said. When someone asked the Baptist minister what he would do if an African American asked for membership in the church, Marney replied, “As of right now, I am this man’s pastor... We will meet in two weeks to decide whether I am his pastor and your pastor, or just his pastor.”<sup>342</sup>

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<sup>337</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>338</sup> Sharon DeMarko, “Episcopal Stands for People,” *Pensacola News Journal*, October 30, 1976, 1F.

<sup>339</sup> At an interview with Eleanor Currin, she stated: “The church left the Episcopal Church: that would have cleft his heart in two.” Dec. 6, 2017.

<sup>340</sup> Interview with Eleanor Currin. Dec. 6, 2017.

<sup>341</sup> Beverly Madison Currin, *The Vision Glorious: A History of Christ Church, Pensacola in the twentieth century* (self-published 1995), 7. Unfortunately claims such as ‘the first integrated...’ or ‘the biggest...’ are difficult to verify.

<sup>342</sup> Curtis W. Freeman, “All the Sons of Earth: Carlyle Marney and the Fight against Prejudice,” *Baptist History & Heritage*, Spring 2009, Vol. 44, Issue 2, p 80.

When Christ Church started the search for a new rector, the vestry thought that the church needed young blood, although what churches think that they want and what they actually want are often two different things. Crawford Rainwater, who would become a major supporter of Currin, made a motion that no one over the age of forty-five be considered for rector, but the motion did not pass.<sup>343</sup> Interestingly, only one of the seven finalists that were eventually chosen was older than forty-five. Currin came highly recommended by the Suffragan Bishop of the Diocese of Southern Virginia. Bishop Rose had known Currin while he was in Richmond, and he had a strong link to Christ Church. Rose had served as Henry Bell Hodgkins' assistant from 1939-1943, so his letter of recommendation carried weight with the search committee. Bishop Rose wrote of Currin:

He is an extremely talented preacher, and capable of communicating in language easily understood by the people, in spite of the fact that he has an earned Th.D. In other words, he is a brain, but carries it modestly and easily. He has real pastoral gifts and is excellent in counseling...He is warm and personable with a happy disposition. Everyone likes and admires him. His Churchmanship is moderate and, in general, he is a moderate person...I might mention that he is quite short in stature.<sup>344</sup>

During the committee's interview with Currin, he warned them that if he was selected he would integrate the church and the school.<sup>345</sup> The committee was not scared off and unanimously recommended him to the vestry for approval. The committee's notes describe his wife as "quiet, polite, unassuming."<sup>346</sup> They describe his appearance as "very short and slight of stature. Pleasant face and frequently smiles. Lack of size does not disturb him."<sup>347</sup> There is no mention of his politics or views on race. Upon the

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<sup>343</sup> August 1, 1965 Vestry Minutes.

<sup>344</sup> July 29, 1965 letter found in 1965 Vestry Book, Christ Church Archives. Matt's height was a theme in the interviews that I conducted. He was 5'3".

<sup>345</sup> Interview with Eleanor Currin, Dec. 6, 2017.

<sup>346</sup> Eleanor Currin is my favorite person at Christ Church, but if that is how the committee described her, then they did not know her very well.

<sup>347</sup> 1965 Vestry Book in the Christ Church Archives.

recommendation of the committee, the vestry unanimously elected Currin as their new rector.<sup>348</sup>

Even before he officially started as rector, Currin was making changes. At the December vestry meeting, the Senior Warden read a letter from Currin asking for repairs to the rectory, canceling of the Annual Dinner, and changing the way vestry elections had been held. But if the vestry was surprised that their new rector was shaking things up, Currin was just getting started.

One of the most jarring changes for the church was how the new rector handled stewardship. Currin would talk openly and bluntly about money, which was a stark change from his predecessor. Hodgkins believed that the finances of the parish were the concern of the vestry, so he took a more tactful, subtle approach to preaching stewardship. In Currin's view, the people of Christ Church were not giving as much as was their Christian obligation, "so I preached about money, and we had lay talks for several weeks in which laymen not only talked about the needs of the parish and the needs of the parishioners to give, but they concluded their talk by announcing what they were going to give in 1967."<sup>349</sup> Many people were offended by Currin's strategy and his willingness to talk openly about money. One of the people put off by his approach was his predecessor. On the Monday morning following Currin's stewardship sermon, Hodgkins called him into his office at home to share his displeasure.<sup>350</sup>

While trying to build up the annual budget, Currin also broke one of the cardinal rules of being a rector. He started a major capital campaign less than six months on the

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<sup>348</sup> October 18<sup>th</sup>, 1965, vestry minutes.

<sup>349</sup> Currin, *Vision Glorious*, 15.

<sup>350</sup> Interview with Eleanor Currin, Dec. 6, 2017.

job. There had been plans to rebuild the inadequate parish hall for several years before Currin arrived, but the project had stalled out. The vestry under Hodgkins had raised a small amount of money for the new parish hall, but the funds had been used for other needs of the parish. Despite the tensions in the church, his inexperience, and the lack of accumulated trust with the congregation, Currin pushed forward with almost reckless courage. He told the vestry that they needed to get going:

There has been entirely too much delay already. The Parish is at a stand-still, and can begin going backward or forward to greater things as this wonderful parish should, or we start back down hill to nothing. I am perfectly satisfied the people of Christ Church Parish are able to build a suitable Parish House, and build it now. All we need is to quit delaying, and dragging our feet and get going. I know it can be done, I know it must be done, and done now.<sup>351</sup>

A building committee was formed, and they raised a portion of the required funds. The remaining \$350,000 was borrowed, putting Christ Church in considerable debt. Many of the older, more fiscally conservative were concerned about this decision, but there were some young leaders in the church willing to take the risk. The Honorable William Stafford, who at the time was a young attorney voted to the vestry in 1967, saw that there were “a bunch of young guys, Wylie Hogeman, Roger Doyle, and me, who were all the same age as Matt. We did not agree on politics, but we were all young enough to think we could do anything. For the parish hall, we didn’t have all the money, but Matt was headstrong enough, that we went ahead and did it on faith.”<sup>352</sup> These young leaders, as well as more established parishioners like Crawford Rainwater and Henry Hiles, were supportive of Currin’s push to build the parish hall quickly, but it added to a growing sense of unease amongst the people of Christ Church.

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<sup>351</sup> April 13, 1966 Vestry Minutes in the Christ Church Archives.

<sup>352</sup> Interview with the Hon. William Stafford, Dec. 9, 2017.

Currin was willing to make difficult decisions. In fact, many people believed he reveled in stirring the pot. A vestryman at the time, Frank Creel, used to say “Matt can’t stand prosperity,” meaning every time things would settle down, Currin would find a new challenge or controversy.<sup>353</sup> In 1966, the first two African American families joined Christ Church. Josephine Newton, a school administrator, joined with her two children, and Evelyn Joseph and her son, Robert, transferred their membership from St. Cyprian’s.<sup>354</sup> Also in 1966, Robert Joseph was enrolled at Episcopal Day School. At the same time, the first woman was elected to the vestry, Mary Perkins. Any of those decisions could have been a critical controversy in his rectorship, but Currin kept plowing forward.

In the midst of conflict, Currin was “always center stage, the foreground, and he loved it.”<sup>355</sup> Robert Joseph described him as “a maverick. He knew his heart, he knew what was right, and he was able to convince other people that it was the right thing to do.” But sometimes it was as if Currin simply enjoyed troubling the waters. He used to tell people that Jesus and Mary Magdalene were married just to get a rise out of them.<sup>356</sup> When Congressman Bob Sykes retired, Currin would tell people that he was running for Congress, and no one knew if he was serious or not. He even had “Currin for Congress” shirts made.<sup>357</sup> One year, Pensacola held a PGA event on Easter weekend. During the Easter sermon, Currin spoke out on how terrible it was to play golf on the Feast of the

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<sup>353</sup> Interview with Dr. Richard Hooper, Dec. 14, 2017.

<sup>354</sup> Evelyn’s husband, Robert Joseph, remained a member of Allen Chapel AME.

<sup>355</sup> Interview with Dr. Richard Smith, Dec. 22, 2017.

<sup>356</sup> Interview with Don Partington Dec. 5, 2017.

<sup>357</sup> Interview with Eleanor Currin, Nov. 22, 2017.

Resurrection, even though there were several famous professional golfers in the congregation who would be teeing off later that afternoon.<sup>358</sup>

Currin had an abrasive side. One former employee said, “Lots of people liked him, but the streets of Pensacola are strewn with the bodies of people who he could not or would not tolerate, mostly because they would get in his face about petty stuff.” Another parishioner said, “If Matt wanted to do something, you either got on board with it or you got out of the way.” A retired pastor in town said, “Matt took a lot of heat, but Matt had a rough edge to him. Matt could shove you off if you did not agree with him. He had a confrontational personality.” When a woman stood to leave during a controversial sermon, Matt stopped preaching and yelled, “There she goes again.”<sup>359</sup> Eleanor Currin added, “He got called into the bishop’s office over that one.” At one of the first conventions of the Diocese of Central Gulf Coast, seeing the ash trays built into every seat, the bishop asked everyone to refrain from smoking. Currin stood up and said, “I will abide by the request of the chair, but as it says in the sixth chapter of Isaiah, God did not speak until the room was full of smoke.”<sup>360</sup>

But, in the eyes of parishioners, Currin’s single biggest character defect was that he was not Henry Bell Hodgkins. As a vestryman at the time said, “Henry Bell is the most opposite person to Currin.” For example, on July 4<sup>th</sup>, Hodgkins would read the preamble of the Declaration of Independence and the congregation would sing patriotic songs, but on Currin’s first July 4<sup>th</sup>, he refused to do so. The current and former rector had a cool relationship. There was not open warfare, but it was known that there was

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<sup>358</sup> Interview with Dr. Henry Langhorne, Sr. Nov. 29, 2017.

<sup>359</sup> Interview with Wylie Hogeman, Nov. 27, 2017 and Eleanor Currin Nov. 22, 2017.

<sup>360</sup> Conversation with Ken Karadin.

tension between the two. Hodgkins stopped attending Christ Church and started worshipping with his former assistant, Van Davis, at St. Christopher's.<sup>361</sup> When Hodgkins died while performing a Eucharist in Cashiers, however, Currin went to North Carolina to be with his wife and bring him home. At Hodgkin's funeral, Bishop David Rose leaned down and whispered to Currin, "We have just buried all of your problems."<sup>362</sup> Both served Christ Church Parish well, but they were very different people. During Currin's first two years, he was living in Hodgkins' shadow, which added to the conflict between him and his parishioners.

Looking back on his ministry, Currin reflected, "I have always taken the pulpit seriously, and there have been times when I have taken sides on political issues that were not popular. Maybe that was the thing to do and maybe it was not. I've probably been wrong more times than I've been right, but that's not the issue. I don't think I have ever claimed to be always right, but I have always claimed to be forthright."<sup>363</sup> Too many preachers, in Currin's opinion, failed to proclaim the truth of the Gospel because of a failure of nerve. The Church was failing the world, because Christians were too scared to pursue the true and right ends of its mission. In a sermon following the assassination of Robert Kennedy, Currin preached:

And, finally, how many of us speak out for what we believe even when we know it is unpopular? Or do we remain quiet and let our own hostility be nurtured in a growing soil of anger and resentment and prejudice. Surely part of the erosion of freedom in the nation is because of the failure of the Church and you and I who make up the church. Times such as these call for honor, and dignity, and integrity and challenge...Senator Robert Francis Kennedy will not have died in vain if we, all of us regardless of political party, work together for unity, and understanding, an end to violence and bigotry and hatred and prejudice.<sup>364</sup>

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<sup>361</sup> Although his wife stayed at Christ Church.

<sup>362</sup> Interview with Eleanor Currin, Nov. 22, 2017.

<sup>363</sup> Troy Moon, "Currin's Legacy," *Pensacola News Journal*, October 27, 2002, 4e.

<sup>364</sup> Untitled Sermon, pages 3-4. Special collections Department, John C. Pace Library University of West Florida. M2002-07 Reverend Beverly Madison Currin Papers Box 2 Folder 7 R.

His most controversial sermon was given on Easter, 1967. In a town dominated by the Navy, Currin questioned the moral legitimacy of the Vietnam War. After proclaiming the radical power of the resurrection to transform all parts of reality, he turned to U.S. foreign policy.

And now apply it if you dare to our nation, our government. Apply it to our foreign policy, to our so-called Christian world-view. Dare we do it? I think we must, if we really meant that pious phrase 'one nation' (which we aren't), 'under God' (which we aren't, but if we dared and if we were I ask you, I don't answer you, I ask you...could we continue to rain bombs on those who disagree with our world-view...?).

Killing and destruction are not instruments of the Kingdom of Heaven. You know it, and I know it...so maybe Jesus was wrong. And maybe we as a nation are right? But we can't both be right, can we?<sup>365</sup>

That afternoon, vestry members began receiving phone calls. Wylie Hogeman remembers: "We had dozens of people asking for Matt's removal. They thought he was the worst mistake for the church." Pledges were cancelled. After all of the other changes Currin had implemented, this was the tipping point. Integration, women on the vestry, and capital campaigns made people uncomfortable, but in a Navy town, Currin's views on the Vietnam War made people furious. This was not an internal problem. The entire town was talking about the new preacher at Christ Church. When Dianne Davis, who was married to a Navy pilot, moved to Pensacola, friends told her not to go to Christ Church because "the young rector is against the Vietnam War, but I got to know him. He said he was against war, not Vietnam, and then we became friends."

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<sup>365</sup> "Easter 1967." Special collections Department, John C. Pace Library University of West Florida. M2002-07 Reverend Beverly Madison Currin Papers Box 2, Folder 1967.

In one of his books, Currin claims that the storm faded quickly. As he tells it, Admiral Reeves called and asked to listen to the Easter sermon. They listened to a tape of it together, and Reeves came to the conclusion that what people were saying about the sermon was not based on the actual words that Currin spoke. “After they get through with your sermons at the cocktail circuit, they end up being something other than what you really said.”<sup>366</sup> According to Currin, “‘Black Jack’ put a stop to that controversy.”<sup>367</sup>

From interviews with current parishioners, it is clear that the controversy did not end as quickly or as easily as Currin recalled. There was a swell of people asking for Currin to step down or at least be reined in, but if anything, Currin pushed back harder. On Pentecost of the same year, Currin doubled down on his Easter sermon.

Someone the other day accused me of trying to destroy the Church, apparently because from my preaching I have attempted to apply the teachings of Jesus to the political, economic, and social problems of our day and age...There has always been a subtle temptation to water down the Gospel to accommodate the desires of man, to appease his conscience rather than challenge him to greater things, to be expedient rather than stern. And yet, the Gospel demands a man’s surrender; and Christ demands a man’s whole being.

I have often thought how popular I could have been had I taken the easy approach to the Gospel. It is tempting, at times, to ignore the social ills of society and to forget certain hard teachings of our Lord, to tell you how good you are rather than how great you could become. But would you really want a priest who waters down the Gospel? Doubtless some would say yes. Some want peace at any price! Not me, I would rather be the minority with Jesus than a majority without Him. And I think a majority of you would too...

One Churchman told me Jesus was only an Idealist and Christianity had nothing to say about Vietnam...This is why so few young people have much for the Church. They are tired of tea meetings...and insipid discussion groups. They are tired of not talking about their problems.

We shall not compromise the Gospel for the sake of parish budgets or building programs or even for the sake of popularity. The only solution to dissension is conversion, conversion to Jesus Christ and the cause for which He gave His life...the establishment of the Church.<sup>368</sup>

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<sup>366</sup> Currin, *Vision Glorious*, 25.

<sup>367</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>368</sup> “Whitsunday 1967.” Special collections Department, John C. Pace Library University of West Florida. M2002-07 Reverend Beverly Madison Currin Papers Box 2, Folder 1967.

Tensions grew even greater, and more and more people called for his resignation or removal. Vice Admiral J. P Whitney, who was Junior Warden at the time, slid a letter under Currin's office door asking him to resign because of "his controversial sermons and other criticisms of my 'liberal' view."<sup>369</sup> To the shock of Admiral Whitney and the rest of the vestry, Currin read the letter at the next vestry meeting and then played the particular sermon that Whitney had criticized.<sup>370</sup> The vestry minutes state, "There was some general discussion of the letter and sermon, but no resolution was offered and no action taken."<sup>371</sup>

The pressure reached a boiling point, and three vestry members set up an appointment with the Bishop of Florida to discuss Currin's removal as rector. Bishop West asked Currin to attend. Two vestry members, Henry Hiles and Crawford Rainwater, attended as well to show support for Currin's ministry. Halfway through the meeting, Bishop West asked Currin to leave the room. At the end of the meeting, Bishop West decided not to take any action against Currin and advised him to "stay close to Crawford Rainwater."<sup>372</sup> The vestry was told that Bishop West had asked Christ Church to give Currin another year and see if he grew into the role.<sup>373</sup>

How did Currin survive his first two years at Christ Church? For one thing, Currin had a way of using humor to disarm a situation. After Currin sided with the teachers'

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<sup>369</sup> Currin, *Vision Glorious*, 27.

<sup>370</sup> The sermon is from October 8, 1967, but I could not find it in the UWF archives.

<sup>371</sup> October 12, 1967 vestry minutes in the Christ Church Archives.

<sup>372</sup> John Appleyard, *The Rainwaters: A Family History*, self-published: 2005. Crawford and Betty Rainwater were vital leaders during Currin's time at Christ Church, especially in their generosity. On different occasions, they paid off the debt on the parish hall, donated the Kney organ, and established Christ Church's endowment.

<sup>373</sup> Interview with Wylie Hogeman who was not present at the meeting with Bishop West.

union strike that crippled Escambia County schools,<sup>374</sup> Bill Stafford went into his office to tell him “you can’t turn that collar back around when it is convenient for you. Everyone does not agree with you. You should not publicly speak on political issues.” Currin pushed back, and the two men started yelling at each other. The argument got so heated that Currin’s secretary came in to make sure things had not gotten out of hand. Suddenly Currin stopped and said, “Bill, I am so encouraged that you care so much about our church.” Stafford was deflated, started to laugh, and “out of that single joke spun a close friendship.”<sup>375</sup>

Over time, Currin learned to pick his battles. Writing decades later, Currin reflected, “Was I moving too fast? My own youthful enthusiasm was on the one hand a tremendous asset but on the other hand it was getting me in trouble. I had to remind myself that this was an older and very conservative congregation.”<sup>376</sup> He decided to follow the advice from his homiletics professor at Duke, James T. Cleveland: “Love your congregation into action.”<sup>377</sup>

Currin was still provocative, but less so. He led from the front, but he was not miles in front of the congregation. Currin softened his message and condemned “political” sermons. On May 22, 1970, the Executive Council of the Episcopal Church denounced the Vietnam War. Several weeks later, Currin rebuked the Episcopal Church and preached that the “church has no right to take a stand on issues where there is no clear-cut moral distinctions. There are too many sides, for example, to the whole

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<sup>374</sup> Currin was one of a group of civic leaders who took out an advertisement in the Pensacola News Journal publicly affirming the teachers’ decision to strike. See *Pensacola News Journal*, March 2, 1968.

<sup>375</sup> Interview with the Hon. William Stafford, Dec. 9, 2017.

<sup>376</sup> Currin, *Vision Glorious*, 11.

<sup>377</sup> Currin, *Vision Glorious*, 31.

Southeast Asia question to say [what] the Presiding Bishop said.”<sup>378</sup> Preachers who get into politics “are simply avowing the real issue of life and death of sin and salvation.”<sup>379</sup>

And further, regarding Cambodia:

What the church should say about this, if it is true to its heritage, is that the decision you make should be under the Lordship of Christ... (Jesus) said nothing about slavery. He said nothing about unjust taxes...Those who would condemn the church today would have had a field day with Jesus! If Jesus was wrong, then I, for one, would rather be wrong with Jesus than right with the critics of the church, both on the left and on the right.<sup>380</sup>

Somehow Currin’s sermon came to the attention of James J. Kilpatrick, the nationally syndicated, ultra-conservative columnist. Kilpatrick blamed declining church attendance on liberal pastors who preach politics, and lifted up Currin as the right type of pastor who will steer the church’s attention back to spiritual concerns. Kilpatrick grossly mischaracterized Currin, but for once, Christ Church was in the news because the rector sounded too conservative.

His tone may have softened, but Currin was always committed to the convictions of the gospel. His primary motivation was to do the work that is the logical outcome in belief in Jesus Christ. That is why he preached against war. That is why he pushed the church to be more than they were comfortable being. That is why he integrated the church and school.

In his most widely read book, *If Man is to Live*, Currin calls on the church to be authentic, which will inevitably make it different. Writing decades before Stanley

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<sup>378</sup> *The Daily Times-News* (Burlington, North Carolina) July 15, 1970. I do not have a copy of this sermon, but it was widely quoted in newspapers around the country.

<sup>379</sup> James J. Kilpatrick, “Dr. Matt Currin’s Views are Right,” *Pensacola News Journal*, July 14, 1970, 4A.

<sup>380</sup> *The Daily Times-News* (Burlington, North Carolina) July 15, 1970.

Hauerwas and William Willimon<sup>381</sup>, Currin saw the church as a colony in a foreign land bringing God's redemptive love into the world.<sup>382</sup>

If the colony is to be redemptive for the world then it must be concerned with community affairs—slum clearance; adequate and representative city councils; labor and management relationships; equal opportunity for all God's children, regardless of race or ethnic origin; medical ethics; housing for the elderly and destitute; social action programs. When the colony is concerned only with its own membership it has isolated itself from the world into which it was set down for redemption and reconciliation.<sup>383</sup>

For Currin, the church had lost its primary purpose. “For Christians are frequently guilty of this supreme mistake in religious affairs—to be fussily religious and yet let it change neither their characters nor personalities.”<sup>384</sup> Instead of doing the work of Jesus, Christians stay busy with different purposes and “leave Christianity to old ladies and prayer groups.”<sup>385</sup> “Instead of confronting man with the power of the gospel to change the world, the Church has quietly slept while Rome burned! The Church has been as guilty of sin and irrelevancy as any institution in America.”<sup>386</sup>

For Currin, the primary sin of the church is a lack of courage. In a sermon from 1967, Currin asks the parish,

Who among us has not been a coward and weakling because we are afraid of unpopularity or ridicule? “Let him who is without sin cast the first stone,” said Jesus. How many of us would rather let a brother down or a cause down rather than take any risks for ourselves. Yes, life is always sifting us and proving whether we are men or not.”<sup>387</sup>

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<sup>381</sup> Stanley Hauerwas and William H. Willimon, *Resident Aliens: A provocative Christian assessment of culture and ministry for people who know that something is wrong* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989).

<sup>382</sup> Beverly Madison Currin, *If Man is to Live* (Nashville, Abingdon Press, 1969), 18.

<sup>383</sup> Currin, *If Man is to Live*, 145.

<sup>384</sup> Currin, *If Man is to Live*, 70.

<sup>385</sup> Currin, *If Man is to Live*, 72.

<sup>386</sup> Currin, *If Man is to Live*, 145.

<sup>387</sup> Unnamed sermon, 1967 folder, Special collections Department John C. Pace Library University of West Florida, M2002-07, Reverend Beverly Madison Currin Papers Box 2.

This lack of courage would be the death of the Church. “No wonder so many people, clergymen included, have virtually given up on the Church as anything more than an extension of the country club.”<sup>388</sup>

All of the changes and controversies that surrounded Currin during his first two years at Christ Church were driven by his understanding of religion as neither a service or a set of dogmas. It is not about personal piety or prosperity. “We have been led to believe that religion is an insurance policy with a small premium and a way in which to get God to do our bidding.”<sup>389</sup> Instead religion is about the redemptive power of God changing the world. Currin’s ecclesiology explains his courage and impatience. It explains why he wanted women on the vestry and African Americans in the pew. It is why he grieved the death and violence of the Vietnam War. It is why he accepted a black kindergartener into the Episcopal Day School. Matt Currin had his flaws, but he was driven by the power of the Gospel to be an agent for change.

## *2. The Integration of Episcopal Day School*

Bruce Partington was one of the speakers at Matt Currin’s funeral. Bruce is a member of Christ Church and an alumnus of Episcopal Day School. Bruce was Robert Joseph’s chapel buddy, a program where middle school students are partnered with kindergartners to sit with during chapel. In his eulogy, Bruce said, “During this time period, Matt was fighting, and winning, battles that we children had no idea about--like the integration of the church and school. For us, the Joseph family –the African American family who

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<sup>388</sup> Currin, *If Man is to Live*, 41.

<sup>389</sup> “To the Better End,” 1967 folder, Special collections Department John C. Pace Library University of West Florida, M2002-07, Reverend Beverly Madison Currin Papers Box 2.

helped Matt to integrate church and school—and others later, just became part of our Church and School communities, but for Matt, it was courageous at the time.”<sup>390</sup>

Evelyn Joseph and her son, Robert, started attending Christ Church sometime between Dr. Currin’s arrival in January and June of 1966 when the vestry considered Robert’s application to attend EDS.<sup>391</sup> Before that, she and her children attended St. Cyprian’s, although her husband Robert Joseph, Sr., a BBQ stand owner, remained a member of Allen Chapel AME.<sup>392</sup> Evelyn says that she joined Christ Church because St. Cyprian’s was always changing priests and was not moving in the direction that she wanted it to go. Also, she had become impressed with Currin.

Soon after attending Christ Church, Evelyn filled out an application for Robert to attend EDS. Her reasons were simple. “We were at Christ Church. EDS was our school. It was my church so it was my school... I wasn’t thinking about integration so much as the education of my son.”<sup>393</sup> In a newspaper article twenty years ago, she expanded, “I wanted my son to become a member of the Episcopal Day School to make sure he had a good Christian background in his school years. There were some problems with racism, but the Rev. Currin managed it and overcame it.”<sup>394</sup>

Looking back on his mother’s decision, Robert felt that she wanted to expose him to a bigger world, to have different opportunities than he would have at the public school in his neighborhood. In the opinion of Bruce Partington’s father Don, Evelyn knew that “her children were going to grow up in a white world, and they needed to go to school in

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<sup>390</sup> Bruce Partington’s eulogy can be found in the Christ Church archives.

<sup>391</sup> Evelyn’s daughter, Jacquelyn, was not born yet.

<sup>392</sup> Evelyn transferred her membership from St. Cyprian’s to Christ Church on June 3, 1968, although her family had been attending Christ Church for years before that.

<sup>393</sup> Interview with Evelyn Joseph, Jan. 6, 2018.

<sup>394</sup> “Christ Church celebrates its long history of 170 years of God’s work.” *Pensacola News Journal*, June 6, 1997.

that world.”<sup>395</sup> Dick Smith, who later mentored Robert in computer programming, was similarly “impressed by the lengths (Evelyn) would go to make sure that Robert would have all the opportunities he could.”<sup>396</sup>

Regardless of the reason, the application was submitted. It was not a secret that Currin wanted to integrate the school, and he had the perfect family to be pioneers. Evelyn was well received at church and was a respected educator who taught homebound children of all races. Currin described Joseph as “a beautiful, handsome, extremely intelligent and talented little boy.”<sup>397</sup> Rod Magie, a leader in Christ Church at that time, believes that “Matt instantly realized that a better first case could not be had than this wonderful mother and son. It was a done deal, and no ad hominem objection was possible under the circumstances.”<sup>398</sup>

At the June 1, 1966 vestry meeting, Currin asked the vestry to affirm the school board’s decision to accept Robert Joseph into the school. There are three things of note in the following excerpt from the minutes of that meeting. First, Currin reported that the bishop, the headmaster, and the school board had already approved this decision. Second, they made the decision not to publicize the integration of EDS, at a time when Pensacola was in the middle of the fight for integration, the vestry did not want to be on the front page of the paper. Third, Henry Hiles, the Senior Warden, wanted the vestry to be ready to defend their rector once news got out. The assumption here is that there were going to be people who were unhappy and would blame Currin:

The Rector informed the Vestry that application has been made by a Mr. & Mrs. Joseph (Negro) for admission to the Day School Kindergarten of their child. Dr. Currin took the

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<sup>395</sup> Interview with Don Partington, Dec. 5, 2017.

<sup>396</sup> Interview with Dr. Richard Smith, Dec. 22, 2017.

<sup>397</sup> Beverly Madison Currin, *The Vision Glorious: A History of Christ Church, Pensacola in the twentieth century* (self-published 1995), 13.

<sup>398</sup> Email interview with Rod Magie, Nov. 28, 2017.

matter up with Bishop West, the School Board, the Headmaster, and the teachers. All of the above, including Bishop West, agreed the application should be accepted, and if the proper fees are paid and requirements met the child should be enrolled in the Kindergarten. On motion by Crawford Rainwater, seconded by Henry Hiles and passed unanimously, the Vestry endorsed the action taken by the School Board. The Senior Warden said he thought it advisable not to give the matter any more publicity than necessary, and that those Vestrymen present having heard in detail the action taken by the Bishop and School Board be ready to defend the Rector should anyone in the Parish or elsewhere question the accepting this negro child into the school.<sup>399</sup>

It is possible that the vestry was aware of the national attention given to another Episcopal school in the South. The rejection of Martin Luther King, Jr.'s child at the Lovett School in Atlanta, Georgia led to over a year of protests by the Episcopal Society for Cultural and Racial Unity.<sup>400</sup> The conflict between the school, the bishop, and the ESCRU resulted in Lovett becoming a vaguely religious school unaffiliated with the Episcopal Church. It was a fight with no winners. It is possible that the vestry wanted to avoid such a fight. It is also possible that the vestry was convinced that integrating the school was the right thing to do. Either way, the decision was made. The first African American child would attend EDS in the fall of 1966 and the Episcopal Day School would be integrated.

For the first few months, integration was a non-event, at least for the students and teachers of the school. Beneath the surface, some of the parents were incensed, but they waited until a regularly scheduled parents' meeting to bring their anger to the fore. After the normal announcements about field trips and grading policies, someone stood up and said, "Is there nothing we can do about that little Negro boy in our school?"<sup>401</sup> That is

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<sup>399</sup> Present at the vote were Beverly M. Currin, Rector; Henry Hiles, Senior Warden; William Fleming, Junior Warden; J. S. Hayes, Treasurer, Malcolm Brown, R. Morey Hart, Wylie Hogeman, Crawford Rainwater, Grover Robinson and William Wilson, Captain George Ghesquire, and Doctors Charles Benton, Frank Creel, John Packard and Henry M. Yonge.

<sup>400</sup> Gardiner H. Shattuck Jr., *Episcopalians and Race: Civil War to Civil Rights* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2000), 135-137.

<sup>401</sup> Currin, *Vision Glorious*, 14.

how Currin described the event in one of his books. Other people have reported that the parent used a racial slur instead.<sup>402</sup> It should be noted that Evelyn and Robert Joseph, Sr. were sitting in the front row when the question was asked. The person who asked the question was standing with a pack of parents in the back of the room. It was clear that this group of parents were organized and had arrived together to object to an African American child attending their school. When asked if there was anything that they could do, Currin replied, “Not one thing.”

Currin recalled “Then every parent, except those at the back table, stood up and applauded long and loud...I had thought I was all by myself. How wrong I was. The integration of the Episcopal Day School was no longer an issue. It was over, and the parents were supportive.”<sup>403</sup> Others remember it differently. After the original question was asked, the room broke into loud discussion. Some people were supportive of Currin’s decision. Others were not. One man spoke over everyone else, and said “If we are going to have to swallow this bitter pill, then you could have at least talked with us about it.” More people shouted agreement and shared frustration that the school board and the vestry would make such a decision without talking to the parents. Currin slammed his hand against the table and shouted, “I am the rector, which means I am the director, and I will shut this school down if I have to.” Currin took full responsibility for the decision. He did not deflect or share the blame with the vestry or the school board or the bishop. He stood alone on his convictions. Elizabeth Vickers, a parent at that meeting, reflected, “Matt Currin, in my estimation, stood six feet tall that day.”<sup>404</sup>

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<sup>402</sup> For example, interview with Eleanor Currin, Nov. 22, 2017.

<sup>403</sup> Currin, *Vision Glorious*, 14.

<sup>404</sup> Interview with Elizabeth Vickers, Dec. 14, 2017.

The fallout of the decision to allow Robert Joseph into the school was significant. Many parents pulled their kids out of school. Dianne Davis remembers, “When we came, we signed up at the day school, but the person we were going to carpool with pulled out of EDS because of a black child. Which is a shame because Robert is the finest young man.”<sup>405</sup> The following year, enrollment at the school was down by thirty percent, although it was only a one year blip, and by 1968, the school was near capacity again.<sup>406</sup>

While the school suffered a loss of students, the majority of the anger was directed at Currin. “I received phone calls from parents demanding to know why they had not been informed. Letters protesting not only the integration of Episcopal Day School but of me in particular as Rector of the parish began to arrive...I had become the enemy for some in the school and in the parish.”<sup>407</sup> Three men showed up at Currin’s house in the middle of the night to threaten him. Years later, Currin would sarcastically describe them as the Night Riders.<sup>408</sup> Someone threw a vodka bottle with a burning rag under Currin’s car in a poor attempt at a Molotov cocktail.<sup>409</sup> There was never any real violence, but it was a possibility. Two years before, the house of Iona Godfrey, an African American civil rights activist, whose six-year-old son had integrated Lackawanna Elementary school, near Jacksonville, Florida, was bombed.<sup>410</sup>

People were angry and they blamed Currin, although most of the people who were angry were not members of Christ Church, and some of them did not even have children

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<sup>405</sup> Interview with Dianne Davis, Dec. 14, 2017.

<sup>406</sup> 1967 and 1968 Episcopal Day School Annual Reports found in corresponding Vestry Books in the Christ Church Archives.

<sup>407</sup> Currin, *Vision Glorious*, 13.

<sup>408</sup> Interview with Don Partington, Dec. 5, 2017.

<sup>409</sup> Interview with Eleanor Currin, Nov. 22, 2017.

<sup>410</sup> Abel A. Bartley, “Old South or New South, or was It?” in *Old South, New South, or Down South? Florida and the Modern Civil Rights Movement*, ed. Irvin D. S. Winsboro (Morgantown: West Virginia Press, 2009), 57.

in the school. In 1966, there were only around thirty integrated public schools in Pensacola, and most only had a handful of black children. The idea that an Episcopal private school would accept a black child was infuriating to people who were upset at the progress of integration in the public schools.

But for the Joseph family, the school year went on as normal. Referring to that time, Joseph says: “Remember I was in kindergarten so I did not know what was going on, and I am thankful for that.” He did not realize that there was any friction at all until he was in college. “When I first came to Christ Church and Episcopal Day School as a kindergartner, Dr. Currin made me feel that I belonged. It was not until I was in college at M.I.T that I learned of the challenges that he faced in order for me to be the first African American child to attend Episcopal Day School...I didn’t see any prejudicial treatment or racist issues whatsoever in the time I was there.”<sup>411</sup> In Joseph’s view, it was Currin who shielded his family from any racism within the community of EDS. Evelyn agrees with Robert, but she shielded her children as well.<sup>412</sup> As a teacher herself, Evelyn made it clear to her children that education was primary, and she was not going to let anything get in the way of her children’s education. During her time at Christ Church, she would be a chalice bearer, chairman of the Christian education committee and serve on the antique show and flower festival. She would be the first African American elected to the vestry and as a delegate to diocesan convention. Sandra Early describes Evelyn as someone who “had a way of talking that made you feel that she was holy. Evelyn acted like we were the same. I think I looked up to her because she could almost shine with heavenly light.”

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<sup>411</sup> Troy Moon, “Currin’s Legacy,” *Pensacola News Journal*, October 27, 2002, 4e.

<sup>412</sup> When I told this story to an African American mom at EDS, and I told her that the children felt accepted because the priest protected them, she said, “It was his mother. His mother protected him.” When I asked how she knew that, she replied, “Trust me. It was his mother.”

With Currin and Evelyn’s protection, Robert thrived at the Episcopal Day School. He made friends easily. He was an excellent student. He was on the eighth-grade basketball team that won the first conference championship for EDS with Robert making the game winning shot as time ran out.<sup>413</sup> “The crowd went wild. It was like a movie.”<sup>414</sup> Robert felt supported by the staff of the school and “never had a teacher tell me that I could not do anything.”<sup>415</sup> Robert did not feel treated any differently than the other children at EDS.

One of the reasons that Robert fit in at EDS was his involvement at Christ Church. At the time, the majority of the students and faculty at EDS were members of the church. Robert was an acolyte, attended Camp Beckwith, was active in Episcopal Young Churchmen, and even preached the sermon on Youth Sunday his senior year. According to Robert, the church and the school were one big community that knew and valued him: “I really enjoyed Christ Church because it was an extension of the kids that I knew and grew up with. I was very active in Sunday School and youth activities.”<sup>416</sup> As his little sister Jacquelyn put it, “I was at the church for some reason seven days a week. I spent so much time with these other kids, went to school and church together. It wasn’t until we got to high school that we all broke apart.” Christ Church, especially Currin, made the Josephs feel welcome and made it clear that they were a part of the community. Jean Karadin, Robert’s acolyte master, claims, “At church, Robert’s race wasn’t a big deal, he was just Robert.”<sup>417</sup> If people had a problem with Robert being African American, they

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<sup>413</sup> “Episcopal Captures Tournament,” *Pensacola News Journal*, March 12, 1975, 2b.

<sup>414</sup> Interview with Robert Joseph, Nov. 24, 2017.

<sup>415</sup> Interview with Robert Joseph, Nov. 24, 2017.

<sup>416</sup> Interview with Robert Joseph, Nov. 24, 2017.

<sup>417</sup> Interview with Jean Karadin, Dec. 7, 2017.

kept such opinions to themselves. Sandy Early taught Robert history in 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, and 8<sup>th</sup> grades, and said, “Good student. He was totally accepted. I do not remember anyone at the school having a problem with having a black student. We had a spirit of kindness and acceptance. Personally, people might have had a problem with it, but they would not have brought it up because it was not ok.”

Robert remembers one child who gave him a hard time because he was black. “The one guy who would call me names. And I would kick his butt, and then he would do it again. Seemed like a nice guy but seemed like he had to say something about me.” The fact that Robert remembers only one shows how it was the exception not the norm. His sister had a similar experience six years later:

I never felt any different. It wasn't until 7<sup>th</sup> or 8<sup>th</sup> grade, that something happened...I was standing at the old playground with a group of friends. One of my best friends said, ‘you don't know anything because you are just a nigger,’ and laughed. She had no idea what she was saying. She thought she was being funny. I was pretty mad, but other kids talked to her and sorted her out.<sup>418</sup>

Jacquelyn knew that she was different; she was always aware that she was the only black female in her grade, but she felt accepted.

The children may not have seen a big difference between Robert and Jacquelyn and the rest of the students, but the parents had a heightened awareness. Evelyn sent out invitations for Robert's sixth birthday. Patsy Langhorne, who had twin boys in Robert's class, was nervous that no one would come. She called every parent in the class and told them, “You either drive them to the party or have them ready outside your house and I will drive them.”<sup>419</sup> Elizabeth Vickers, who had a daughter in that class, remembers a mom calling her and asking, “Did you get an invitation? What do you think we should

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<sup>418</sup> Interview with Jaquelyn Joseph, Jan. 6, 2018

<sup>419</sup> Interview with Patsy Langhorne, Nov. 29, 2017.

do?”<sup>420</sup> Elizabeth’s answer was to drive both children to the party.<sup>421</sup> When the Langhorne twins wanted to have Robert over to their house to play, Patsy was delighted but made the boys promise to stay in their yard. While Robert was welcome in their home, “I did not know what ugliness he would encounter in the neighborhood.”<sup>422</sup>

The Episcopal Day School was a good school for Robert. He thrived in its academic environment and welcoming community. But Robert was good for Episcopal Day School as well. One year, Diane Currie was teaching Robert’s history class, and the class was discussing the Civil War. As was often the case in the South, the Civil War is talked about nostalgically as The Lost Cause. A student spoke with regret that the South did not win and wondered how great things would be if they had. Robert raised his hand and said, “But Mrs. Currie, if the South had won, I would still be a slave.” The child next to him said, “No, not you Robert.” For many in the class, it was the first time that they had connected slavery with someone they knew and liked.<sup>423</sup>

When Robert graduated from Episcopal Day School in eighth grade, he went on to Catholic High School where he continued to excel. He played basketball and ran track. He was on the yearbook staff, the debate society, and Junior Achievement. Robert achieved the rank of Eagle Scout in Troop Five, which is sponsored by Christ Church and included many of his friends from EDS.

While Robert was at Catholic High he took a summer physics class at Pensacola Junior College from a University of West Florida professor who also attended Christ

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<sup>420</sup> Patsy remembers the first birthday party being at Robert’s house, in a predominantly black neighborhood. Elizabeth remembers it being at the Howard Johnson. It could be two different birthday parties that they are remembering.

<sup>421</sup> Interview with Elizabeth Vickers, Dec. 14, 2017.

<sup>422</sup> Interview with Patsy Langhorne, Nov. 29, 2017.

<sup>423</sup> Interview with Robert Joseph, Nov. 24, 2017.

Church, Dr. Richard (Dick) Smith. During the class, he learned to program computers using cards, and he was hooked. Robert asked Dick Smith where he would need to go to college to program computers the rest of his life. Smith replied, “RPI, Duke, or MIT.” Robert was accepted to all three and choose the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Robert played varsity basketball while at MIT and was a team captain in the 1982-1983 season.<sup>424</sup> In four and a half years, Joseph graduated from MIT with a bachelor’s and master’s degree in electrical engineering. His master’s thesis was in circuit board routing in an intelligent way, using artificial intelligence to rout circuits.

When Robert Joseph returned to Pensacola, Smith, along with another Christ Church member, Fred Neal, was starting a company, Software Tools, to do interactive video work. Smith contacted Joseph to hire him to write code for the new company but was told he did not want work as an employee; he wanted to invest and be a part owner. Thus, while still a student at MIT, Joseph became an owner of a startup company. The company did not take off, but it is an example of his courage and ambition.<sup>425</sup> After graduation, Joseph earned a second master’s degree and a Ph.D. in computer science at Carnegie Mellon University.<sup>426</sup> In addition to his advisor, he worked with Nobel Prize for Economics winner, Herbert A. Simons.

Robert Joseph has since led a successful life, and it is hard to say how much Episcopal Day School contributed to that success. But his involvement at Christ Church introduced Robert to Smith, who in turn introduced him to computer programming and

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<sup>424</sup> [http://mitbasketball.blogspot.com/2010/11/all-time-captains-list-and-110th\\_24.html](http://mitbasketball.blogspot.com/2010/11/all-time-captains-list-and-110th_24.html) accessed Jan. 15, 2017.

<sup>425</sup> Interview with Dr. Richard Smith, Dec. 22, 2017.

<sup>426</sup> His doctoral thesis was entitled “Graphical Knowledge Acquisition for Visually-Oriented Planning Domains.”

suggested attending MIT. And it is probable that the experience of being the only African American student in his grade, and the first in his school, shaped him.<sup>427</sup>

## Conclusion

The sociologists Richard L Zweigenhaft and G. William Domhoff have surveyed African Americans who participated in the A Better Chance (ABC), a program that provided scholarships to low income families to attend some of the premier boarding schools in the country. The program took predominantly minority children out of their neighborhoods and inserted them in schools with children from upper class families. The survey found that almost every child excelled academically; over ninety-nine percent of the students who graduated from an ABC school went on to college.<sup>428</sup> ABC produced many accomplished alumni, including the Massachusetts governor Deval Patrick, CEO Theo Killion of Zale Corp., and singer-songwriter Tracy Chapman. Attending such boarding schools arguably elevated ABC scholars to the upper middle class. The ABC graduates had a heightened awareness of class and saw themselves fitting it to a different world than they had grown up in, but their educational experience did not strip away their racial identity: “Even though class has become more important for ABC graduates and the fact that they are educated professionals is central to their social identity, the importance of race has not diminished.”<sup>429</sup> They found themselves able to live in both white and black worlds.

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<sup>427</sup> By middle school, there was a second African American child in Robert’s class.

<sup>428</sup> Richard L. Zweigenhaft and G. William Domhoff, *Blacks in the White Establishment? A Study of Race and Class in America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), 5.

<sup>429</sup> Zweigenhaft and Domhoff, *Blacks in the White Establishment?* 174.

The Episcopal Day School is not an elite boarding school, but it is a challenging school composed of predominantly upper middle to upper class white children. Robert Joseph and his sister, Jacquelyn, were thrust into a different world. They were accepted but were always aware that they were different. Their mother's prioritizing of education and the formation of EDS created opportunities for them that were not available to every African American child born in the 1960's. Jacquelyn, who is now a respected social worker, says that EDS "molded my ability to function in different environments. When I went to Vanderbilt and now, it is easy to move around in different groups. I can mold my behavior and who I am to the different settings... It made me able to see the world from a different perspective. I can look at situations in a more global perspective."<sup>430</sup> For Robert, relationships are more primary than race. He says

Racism is a very gray subject. Part of these things happened because of preconceived notions, but they also happened because of personalities. I try to be, and have been fortunate enough to be blind for the most part to racism and able to see it more as personalities. If I get a negative vibe from someone, I tend to ask, what is it about them or my personality that is off, and what can be done to reach a common ground to move forward... Having said this, I'm in no way saying that racism is not present. On an individual basis, I try not to look at things from a perspective of race, but how can we get to common ground.<sup>431</sup>

According to Joseph, he was a student like every other kindergartner, except that he was black. It is a credit to his teachers, the parents of the other students, and Currin that he never felt that his presence was a big deal. There were some people that saw him as an intrusion or a betrayal, but they either grew in understanding, grew quieter, or found some other school for their children. Robert Joseph and his sister Jacquelyn are remarkable people made even more remarkable because theirs was the first African American family to send their children to EDS.

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<sup>430</sup> Interview with Jacquelyn Joseph, Jan. 6, 2018.

<sup>431</sup> Interview with Robert Joseph, Nov. 24, 2017.

## Conclusion

*For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups  
one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of  
hostility. Ephesians 2:14*

Thirty-two years after he integrated the Episcopal Day School of Christ Church Parish, the Rev. Dr. Beverly Madison Currin was still dreaming of racial equality. In an editorial in the *Pensacola News Journal* criticizing the city of Pensacola's decision not to rename a downtown street after Martin Luther King, Jr., Currin wrote

Having been involved in working for equal rights of all citizens here for more than 30 years, and one who believes in justice and the respect of the rights and needs of all our citizens, let us move out of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and into the 21<sup>st</sup> century as a community united in respect for one another and a community where all are welcome and recognized as vital parts of America's First Place City.<sup>432</sup>

For Currin, one of the primary purposes of the Church is to work towards the transformation of a city divided by race and prejudice into that 'community where all are welcome and recognized as vital parts' of the city. This transformation of community starts with the transformation of individuals, as broken men and women are redeemed by the love of God.

If the Church is a redeemed colony we will find among its membership those who have had their torn lives mended, those whose lives were once hopeless and now have hope, lives of those who wallowed in the mire of life's sordid relationships and who have discovered the divine love, lives that had lost all self-respect only to discover in Christ a new standing because they have found acceptance and understanding.<sup>433</sup>

This 'redeemed colony' can then work to redeem the community in which it resides.

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<sup>432</sup> Beverly Madison Currin, "City council missed its chance to honor King," *Pensacola News Journal*, Mar. 22, 1998.

<sup>433</sup> Beverly Madison Currin, *If Man is to Live: A Rediscovery of the Meaning of the Atonement* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1969), 143.

Preaching to a relatively wealthy, white church, Currin invited the congregation to care about the ‘other,’ not because it is the right thing to do but because concerns of justice are foundational principles of what it means to be followers of Jesus Christ. As Christians, we do not sit on the other side of some imagined social divide from African Americans, the homeless, or any other ‘type’ of person. As Christians, we are one. In *The Beloved Community*, Charles Marsh sees the very act of joining in worship as an act of reconciliation.

When one steps into the church, even into the most racially homogeneous congregation, one steps into a transglobal association of astonishing diversity, into the deepest interracialism. One might be correct to complain of a privileged congregation that it too much reflects its social location; but that same congregation ministers to the lonely, to the depressed, and to the bereaved, even as it quietly reevaluates its mission to the world, often increasing its financial gifts to antipoverty work at home and abroad in response to testimonials and sermons...Eleven o’clock may be the most segregated hour of the week as far as any particular parish goes, but it is the most integrated hour of the week as far as the kingdom goes.<sup>434</sup>

Racial reconciliation starts with taking ownership of your history. For Pensacola, that means owning the positives. For centuries, this city was a harbor for runaway slaves. There was a strong black and creole community that produced leaders within the community. Men like W.C. Dobbins should be remembered for their struggle for justice and equality. When it comes to our racial history, there is a lot for Pensacolians to be proud of.

But we must also own the darker side of our history. We are a town built on slavery from its inception until the Civil War. We are a community that robbed an entire race of opportunity from 1900 to the 1970’s. We have our share of racial violence and

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<sup>434</sup> Charles Marsh, *The Beloved Community: How Faith Shapes Social Justice, from the Civil Rights Movement to Today* (New York: Basic Books, 2005), 214-215.

systematic racism. And the end result is that we created a racially divided community. ‘Pensacola exceptionalism’ cannot mask the reality of racism and oppression woven throughout our history.

More work needs to be done researching Pensacola’s history. Working on this project, I regularly encountered areas where little to no scholarship has been done. It is my hope that future scholars will examine the following topics:

1. Two times in history, when Pensacola transferred from a Spanish colony to a British colony in 1763 and a Spanish colony to an American territory in 1821, free black families fled to Mexico. There is a story here about the difference between Spanish and British/American views on race and the nature of the communities created in Mexico that needs to be told.
2. Bernardo Galvez is an underreported hero of the American Revolutionary War.
3. Governor Edward Perry’s revoking of the Pensacola town charter (and subsequently the town charters of St. Augustine and Jacksonville) and creation of a political structure that would alienate African Americans for almost a century needs further study.
4. A survey of the experiences of African American officers at military bases in the South would be revelatory.
5. More research needs to be done in the civil rights movement in Pensacola. J. Michael Butler’s work is a good start, but more comprehensive work is needed.
6. The litigation of *Augustus vs. the Board of Education*. For the forty-two years that this case was open it covered integration, the rioting in Escambia County High School, claims of discrimination, and other civil rights concerns.

Learning about my new community's history has led to some personal convictions. First of all, in my role as the rector, I am committed to encouraging diversity at the Episcopal Day School. While there is certainly diversity within the school now, the student body does not mirror the demographics of this town. Pensacola is twenty-six percent African American,<sup>435</sup> and EDS is nowhere near that number. I do not believe that the admissions process is racially biased. An African American family that applies has as much chance of being accepted as any other race. There are two reasons that EDS has a lower percentage of African Americans as Pensacola as a whole. First, there is not much economic diversity within the school, and within our city there is drastic income inequality between races. The average white household makes almost double the average black household.<sup>436</sup> Any attempt to increase the racial diversity at EDS will have to start by increasing scholarship opportunities to increase economic diversity. Second, we can do more to celebrate the things that make us different. I have had several conversations with minority families in the school, and I have come to the conclusion that there is more to be done to teach our children to accept and value the things that make us different. We are a welcoming community, but there are opportunities to build our intentional hospitality of people of all types and varieties. In one conversation, an African American parent told me, "we always feel accepted, but we do not always feel included." Acceptance is an important first step. Inclusion is more difficult but equally important.

Diversity in a school like EDS can help heal racial divides within the larger community. In "Integration and Pluralism," Thomas Pettigrew argues that the separation

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<sup>435</sup> <https://statisticalatlas.com/place/Florida/Pensacola/Race-and-Ethnicity> accessed Jan. 17, 2018.

<sup>436</sup> Non-Hispanic White Households average \$54,000 a year. Black Households average \$27,500 a year. <https://statisticalatlas.com/place/Florida/Pensacola/Household-Income> accessed Jan. 17, 2018.

of different races, especially as children, is the foundation for prejudice. “A strong case can be made that this residential separation of black from white Americans is the bedrock structural foundation of modern discrimination in the United States.”<sup>437</sup> The lack of ‘comingling’ in our communities leads to distrust, fear, and discrimination. The Episcopal Day School of Christ Church Parish hopes to create the leaders our community will need in the future, so an increased exposure to diversity will benefit our city in the long run. In this way, economic diversity scholarships help in two directions. It would benefit the recipients of such scholarships, and it would benefit the student body as a whole. Robert Joseph was not an economic diversity scholarship recipient, but he shows the power of diversity in both directions. Joseph benefited from the opportunities and formation offered by EDS, and the rest of the student body benefited from having Robert as a part of their community.

The second personal conviction involves St. Cyprian’s. If Christ Church is going to engage in racial reconciliation, the logical place to start is with the congregation with whom we share a history. Up until 1887, we were one community, unequal and unjust, but one, and since then our histories in Pensacola have been intertwined. Surely there are ways to strengthen the bonds between the two congregations and work together to bring about the Kingdom of God in our city. It is possible that any effort to grow closer could start with Christ Church apologizing for any and all prejudice, paternalism, or discrimination that we have shown our brothers and sisters at St. Cyprian’s. Or maybe, it is a series of conversations about where each church currently stands and where they feel that God is leading them in the future. Or maybe, we need to set aside time for the two

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<sup>437</sup> Thomas F. Pettigrew, “Integration and Pluralism,” in *Modern Racism: Profiles in Controversy*, edited by Phyllis A. Katz and Dalmas A. Taylor (New York: Plenum Press, 1988), 26.

communities to pray together. Regardless, I think Christ Church, and I, as their rector, will need to listen more than we speak and work under no assumptions of what 'should' be done. There are other efforts to build relationships with traditionally black congregations (such as the inclusion of Allen Chapel in the Palafox pastors group that works together on interfaith services and programs), but there should be a special bond between St. Cyprian's and Christ Church.

My third conviction is to do my part as a leader in Pensacola to celebrate and share our diverse history. Most people have no idea about the work that Matt Clavin is doing chronicling the flow of runaway slaves to Pensacola. Very little is known about Salvador Pons, the only black mayor in Pensacola history, or M. M. Lewey, the publisher of the first African American newspaper in the state of Florida. There are no statues for civil rights activists W. C. Dobbins, Calvin Harris or Charles Wilson, the attorney who oversaw *Augustus vs. the Board of Education*. Recently, there have been some signs of a growing awareness of the role of African Americans in our history. Fiesta of Five Flags is an annual event that is part history pageant, part debutante ball, and part Mardi Gras. Since 1949, it has celebrated Pensacola's history and encouraged tourism in the area. This past year, it added its first African American participant and role. For the two weeks of festivities, Keith Hoskins, retired Navy Captain, former Blue Angel pilot, and former base commander of the Naval Air Station, represented John Sunday, the African American state representative, city councilman, and land developer from the Reconstruction Era. Again, there may be growing interest, but more can be done to tell the stories of Pensacola's fascinating African American history.

My work on this project has led to a crisis of conscience. Do I have the courage to stand on my convictions, convictions founded on my faith in Jesus Christ, regardless of the consequences? If I had lived in Pensacola in 1790, would I have had the courage to welcome runaway slaves into my community and church? If I had lived in Pensacola in 1895, would I have spoken up as the governor of Florida systematically disenfranchised the African Americans in my community? If I had lived in Pensacola in 1955, would I have objected to forced segregation? If I was the young rector of a large downtown church in 1966 and an African American family filled out an application to enroll their child in my school, would I have acted or postponed justice? Matt Currin and I are two different types of leaders. I resist conflict, and Currin seemed to thrive in it. But I want to be courageous like Matt Currin. I, too, want to be on the right side of history. As a leader, I want to be willing to take risks and take my punches in order to stay true to the teachings of Jesus.

As a church leader, I am worried about what I see in our nation when it comes to race. I worry that racism has become a subtler but no less powerful force. I worry about the racial divergence of economic opportunity and the statistics of risk for young African Americans. I am not the savior of the world (the world already has a Savior and He is much better at that job than I would be), but there are things that I can do to bring about the radical love and justice of the Kingdom of God. I can proclaim the Gospel of truth and love. I can lead my congregation in work that lifts up all of God's children. I can "strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being." And there may come a time, as a rector, when I have to take a risk to do what's right.

When I began this project, I expected Robert Joseph's experience at EDS to be more complex. From what I heard about him, I knew that he excelled at the school, but I assumed that there would be more struggles and discrimination. I assumed that it would have been harder to be the first African American at a school. But the story that I presented in the final chapter of this project is primarily Robert's story. In his view, he was just a kid, like all of the other kids. He was accepted and felt like a part of the community. While a lot of the credit for Robert's positive experience goes to his parents, the teachers and staff of EDS, the people who are Christ Church Parish, and Dr. Currin, I have come to believe that God was doing something remarkable. For the love of God knows no race or distinction; we are all one in the Lord.

In 1966, in a city with a history of both diversity and oppression, in a historic church grieving the retirement of a beloved rector with a new rector in hot water, in a city in the midst of a storm of racial unrest, in a school district obstructing integration, a young African American family applied for enrollment in the Episcopal Day School. Thank God, they did, and thank God the leadership of Christ Church and EDS had the courage to say 'yes' to what God was doing. May we have the same courage in our day.

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