

RAGING MOUNTAINS:  
SOUTHERN APPALACHIAN RACE REBELLIONS FROM THE 1960s-1970

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis will evaluate the notion of “Black invisibility” in the Southern Appalachian region and the lack of scholarship on race rebellions in this region during the 1960s-1970s. It will look specifically at two race rebellions, one in Asheville, North Carolina in 1969 and the other in Bluefield, West Virginia in 1968. Both rebellions revolve around the desegregation of learning institutions. These institutions include Asheville High School and Bluefield State College. A primary goal is to bring to life the narratives of Black communities in Southern Appalachia that have been silenced in scholarship. The questions that will be asked include: How were these rebellions rooted in or departures from the history of Black Appalachian racist violence? Were these rebellions isolated incidents or were they part of a long legacy of continuous protest? What were the social and political consequences of these rebellions? To what extent did school integration policy, policing, and political forces impact the communities of Bluefield, WV, and Asheville, NC? What were the short-term and long-term institutional impacts of these rebellions? Have historians exacerbated “Black invisibility” in Appalachia by disregarding these two rebellions and others in this er

## INTRODUCTION

After James Earl Ray assassinated Martin Luther King Jr. on April 14, 1968, numerous rebellions spread throughout urban areas, these rebellions left thousands of dollars of damage throughout at least fifty-four states and continued for over a week.<sup>1</sup> The rebellions after Martin Luther King, Jr.'s death, however, do not fully represent the vast amount of uprisings that occurred throughout urban centers during the 1960s and 1970s. In fact, from 1964 to 1972, historian Elizabeth Hinton documented at least 2,239 race rebellions occurring in cities, towns, and communities throughout the United States. According to Hinton, these rebellions occurred primarily, but not exclusively, in urban areas.<sup>2</sup> While urban rebellions take center stage in the stories of the Black Freedom Struggle, rebellions were not as known in Southern Appalachia, a more rural, predominantly White region. However, in Southern Appalachia, during the 1960s and 1970s, race rebellions did occur in urban areas and small towns in Tennessee, Kentucky, West Virginia, Virginia, and North Carolina.

One of these rebellions occurred in urban Southern Appalachia in Bluefield, West Virginia, at Bluefield State College in 1968. It was Thanksgiving Day, November 21st, 1968, around 7:00 pm, when a bomb tore through the Bluefield State College Physical Education Building. This event occurred after months of continual Black student protest and one day after

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<sup>1</sup> Peter B. Levy, *The Great Uprising: Race Riots in Urban America during the 1960s* (United Kingdom: Cambridge Press, 2018), 153.

<sup>2</sup> Elizabeth Hinton, *America on Fire: The Untold History of Police Violence and Black Rebellion Since the 1960s* (New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2021) 313-338.

the student's grievances concerning the school's administration and policies had been released in the local newspaper, the *Bluefield Daily Telegraph*.<sup>3</sup> Founded in 1895, Bluefield State College was an all-Black institution. However, after the decision of *Brown v. the Board of Education* in 1954, the school began to admit White students, enrolling two in 1955. The school continued to enroll more White students, and by 1966 Bluefield State College had hired its first White president, Wendell Hardaway. The hiring of Hardaway put an end to the Black presidents for years at Bluefield State College. Since Hardaway's presidency, Dr. Albert J. Walker has been the only recent Black president serving from 2002-2011. Since 2019, Robin Capehart, a White man, has served as president of Bluefield State College, the University. As the first in a long line of White Presidents, Hardaway began to make structural changes, hired twenty-three White faculty members, and closed all the dormitories, forcing students to leave school and scramble for off-campus housing. These changes eventually led to Black student protests, rebellions, and the bombing of the school gymnasium building in 1968.<sup>4</sup>

Another Southern Appalachia rebellion occurred in Asheville, North Carolina, on September 29, 1969. While Asheville began integrating its public facilities in the early 1960s, the local government had been hesitant about integrating schools. It was in 1967 that the city of Asheville pressed for the integration of all Asheville schools. In the process, the predominantly Black school Stephens-Lee High School was closed, and Lee Edwards High School, an all-White

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<sup>3</sup> "Bluefield State Phys Ed Building Ripped By Explosion," *Bluefield Daily Telegraph*, November 22, 1968.; "BSC 'Demands' Released Activities Are Suspended," *Bluefield Daily Telegraph*, November 20, 1968.

<sup>4</sup> Ruth Payne Brown, *The Transition of a Historically Black College to a Predominantly White Institution*, PhD diss (College Park: University of Maryland, 2004), 1-2, 45-51, 33-34.; "Presidential History | Bluefield State University." Bluefield State University, 2022; "West Virginia Protest." *New York Times*, March 19, 1960.

school, was turned into newly integrated Asheville High. Consequently, the students from Stephens-Lee lost their traditions, teachers, sports teams, and independence, frustrating Black Asheville High students. This frustration resulted in Black student-led protests, walkouts, and eventually, a rebellion on September 29th, 1969, in which law enforcement chased protestors from school grounds. In response, protestors threw rocks and bricks at law enforcement and school property.<sup>5</sup>

This thesis examines both rebellions through the lens of students, grassroots activists, community members, and school administrators. In place of the word “riot,” I will use Elizabeth Hinton’s term rebellion. Hinton states that rebellions “did not represent a wave of criminality, but a sustained insurgency.”<sup>6</sup> Her definition critiques previous notions that riots are apolitical and purely linked to criminal behavior. Using Hinton’s conception of uprisings, these race rebellions represent resistance in the struggle for Black freedom in Southern Appalachia, a topic virtually untouched by historians. This absence in Southern Appalachian scholarship on race rebellions during the late 1960s has often silenced the lives and narratives of Black communities in Southern Appalachia and contributed to the notion of “Black invisibility” in Appalachia. Moreover, these two studies of Black student rebellions challenge general perceptions of peaceful school integration in Southern Appalachia. The rebellion in Asheville contests the “Veneer of Racial Harmony” of the city and reveals that there was police brutality and school administration discrimination at Asheville High.<sup>7</sup> The rebellion at Bluefield State confronts the

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<sup>5</sup> Betty Jamerson Reed, *School Segregation in Western North Carolina: A History, 1860s-1970s*, Vol 31 (Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Company, 2011) 1-264.

<sup>6</sup> Elizabeth Hinton, *America on Fire: The Untold History of Police Violence and Black Rebellion Since the 1960s* (New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2021) 5.

<sup>7</sup> The “Veneer of Racial Harmony” in Asheville, NC is first addressed in Historian Darin Waters PH.D dissertation and then expanded on in Patrick Shane Parkers M.A. Thesis.; Darin J. Waters, “Life Beneath the Veneer: The Black Community in Asheville, North Carolina from



claims that resistance against discriminatory integration practices in Southern Appalachia was uncommon by revealing a rise of Black Power, the “whitening” of a Historically Black College, and the loss of Black administrative, faculty and student authority.<sup>8</sup> These rebellions were not isolated incidents but rather a part of a long legacy of continuous protest seen throughout the nation. In Southern Appalachia Black populations organized against racial discrimination, police violence and inequality.<sup>9</sup> In Asheville, school integration policy, policing, and the school board decisions contributed to discrimination, Black community erasure, and a “Veneer of Racial Harmony.”<sup>10</sup> In Bluefield, the rebellion revealed the White administration of Bluefield State College enforced the erasure of Black student and faculty authority. Black students at Asheville High and Bluefield State fought against discriminatory desegregation policies. Bluefield saw short-term and long-term institutional impacts from their rebellions which contributing to the “whitening” of the institution. Lastly, the memories and legacies of the Asheville High and Bluefield State rebellions are divergent. This comparison of Bluefield and Asheville draws from the historiography of race “riots,” Southern Appalachia race relations, the Civil Rights Movement, and *Brown v. Board*.

### **Historiography of Race Riots:**

The literature of race riots during the Civil Rights Movement developed from the 1960s and 1970s as historians and sociologists sought to understand the underlying motives and

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1793 to 1900” (Ph.D. diss., the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2011); Patrick Shane Parker, *Appalachian Activists: The Civil Rights Movement in Asheville, NC* (North Carolina: Appalachian State University, 2016) 1-111.

<sup>8</sup> Brown, *The Transition of a Historically Black College to a Predominantly White Institution*.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Waters, “Life Beneath the Veneer: The Black Community in Asheville, North Carolina from 1793 to 1900;” Parker, *Appalachian Activists: The Civil Rights Movement in Asheville, NC*, 1-111.

consequences of racist violence. While race rebellions have occurred throughout American history, the uprisings associated with the modern Civil Rights Movement are most relevant in this thesis. Race riot literature focusing on the 1960s and 1970s typically centered on the influence of government entities, policies, and Black community frustrations that contributed to urban race “riots” across the nation. Arthur I. Waskow was an early contributor to the historical literature of race rebellions with his *From Race Riot to Sit-Ins, 1919 and the 1960s: A Study in the Connections Between Conflict and Violence* published in 1966. In this work, Waskow sought to understand how racial conflicts turn into racial violence and how to “control” race riots through non-violence. Waskow developed a narrative that promoted non-violence and characterized “Black rioters” as unscrupulous. He pointed to government discrimination as a catalyst for conflict and argued that for policymakers to “control” race riots and conflict, there should be a heavier police presence, impartial police response, and changes in government policy.<sup>11</sup>

In *The Black Revolt: The Civil Rights Movement, Ghetto Uprisings, and Separatism*, published in 1971 sociologist James Geschwender, collected thirty-three articles written by social scientists. These articles traced the shift from non-violent protest during the Civil Rights Movement to violence during the Black Power movement, and the “ghetto” uprisings in Northern cities. Geschwender identified the period of “ghetto” uprisings from 1964 and 1968.<sup>12</sup> In stark contrast to Waskow, Geschwender argued that police and hope for more inclusive policies played a substantial role in race riots, specifically during the period of the “ghetto”

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<sup>11</sup> Arthur I. Waskow, *From Race Riot to Sit-In: 1919 and the 1960's: A Study in the Connection Between Conflict and Violence* (New York: Doubleday, 1966), 1-380.

<sup>12</sup> James A. Geschwender, *The Black Revolt: The Civil Rights Movement, Ghetto Uprisings, and Separatism* (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1971), 467.

uprising.<sup>13</sup> Geschwender contended that race riots during this period appeared because of a rise in hope for more “inclusive governmental policies,” dissatisfaction with public policy, and police brutality. He argued that the increasing working class of “deprived members of the Black community” also contributed to race riots.”<sup>14</sup> Geschwender asserted that the Civil Rights Movement and the development of “inclusive policies,” such as the desegregation of buses, schools, and public facilities, led to hope for change and progress within working-class Black communities. He argued that hope for change caused frustration and dissatisfaction in Black communities because they were left with no immediate policy changes.<sup>15</sup>

In his book, Geschwender created a framework for evaluating race riots during the 1960s. This framework included an analysis of the impacts of police brutality, housing disparities, and racial discrimination. While Geschwender depicted riot participants as working-class Black grassroots activists, he provided scholars with a history of race riots that characterized riot participants as complex, because they were influenced by racial discrimination and governmental entities.

Following Geschewender, in 1978 James Button wrote *Black Violence*. Button evaluated government responses to race riots and the immediate and long-term consequences that race riots had on government policy. He argued that non-violent protests and litigation in conjunction with violent Black protests led to quick policy changes that failed to provide viable solutions for socioeconomic reform and the redistribution of power. For example, Button considered public policy through liberal, conservative, and radical categories and argued for a transitional category. Button clarified that the conservative category relied on the idea that collective violence was

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid, 463-464.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, 469.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, 464-465, 467-470.

unnecessary.<sup>16</sup> The liberal category, on the other hand, “emphasizes the role of racial prejudice in contributing to violence.”<sup>17</sup> When evaluating the radical category, he contended that this category viewed collective violence as structured and purposeful.<sup>18</sup> Button argued that when evaluating public policy responses to collective violence, there needed to be a transitional category because the conservative, liberal, and radical views of violence do not fully encompass responses to racial violence. The transitional category emphasized the development of socioeconomic reform programs that bring little to no restructuring of the discriminatory political system.<sup>19</sup> Like previous authors, Button evaluated race riots from a top-down perspective by looking at government officials and the impact the riots had on federal policy. For example, he analyzed the federal findings National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders and the National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence in which they found that to decrease violence, the federal government needed to address “poverty, education, and the environment.”<sup>20</sup> Although Button used a top-down perspective, he contributed to the field of race riot history because he analyzed the consequences that race riots have on shaping government policy.<sup>21</sup>

In *Racial Rioting in the 1960s: An Event History Analysis of Local Conditions*, published in 1997, David J. Myers used sociological data “on the timing and locations of race riots from 1961 to 1968” contesting Button’s interpretations that improved social conditions lead to an

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<sup>16</sup> James W Button, *Black Violence: Political Impact of the 1960s Riots* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1978), 5-6.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid*, 6.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid*, 7.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid*, 166-167.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid*, 11-12.

<sup>21</sup> Button, *Black Violence*, 1-264.

increase in frustration and an increase in violence.<sup>22</sup> Instead, Myers determined that the opposite happens; with improved social conditions comes a decrease in violence. His evidence implied that violence correlated with median wage, the unemployment rates of Black and White laborers, and migration. Myers asserted that an increase in workers' wages decreased the unemployment rate of White laborers, which reduced racial competition and tension. He contended that racial competition and tension come from an influx of migration to U.S. cities without economic support.

While Myers did not investigate the effects of police on racial rioting, he did examine the effects of unemployment rates and migration, both of which had not been considered causal factors for race riots before his research. Unlike previous scholars, Myers suggested that only with improved social and economic conditions can there be a decrease in racial violence. Thus, he created a starting point for future scholars to expand their analysis towards different routes that include economic conditions and focuses on migration when investigating the causes of racial violence.<sup>23</sup>

In *Violence in the Model City: The Cavanagh Administration, Race Relations, and the Detroit Riot of 1967*, published in 2007, Historian Sidney Fine took both a top-down and bottom-up approach when investigating the Detroit riot of 1967. He argued that the Jerome P. Cavanagh administration launched War on Poverty programs that did not address the systemic issues within Detroit's ghettos. For example, even with the new War on Poverty programs, housing and education remained sub-par for Black communities and continued to hinder neighborhood

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<sup>22</sup> Daniel J Myers, "Racial Rioting in the 1960s: An Event History Analysis of Local Conditions," *American Sociological Review* 62, no. 1 (1997): 94.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 94–112.

development.<sup>24</sup> Another issue that Fine described as a factor in the riot was police brutality and discrimination within the legal system. He argued that violent law enforcement was the focal point of the rioters and that “many Blacks believed police were partly to blame” for the violence.<sup>25</sup> Fine also noted that along with police brutality, the Black community believed the legal system to be corrupt. An example of this corruption the community called out was “that of thirty-four Whites killed by Blacks between 1958 and 1961, the prosecutor had not once found the homicide to have been justifiable, but he had ruled the homicide justifiable in fifteen of the twenty-three slayings of Blacks by Whites, twelve of these by the police.”<sup>26</sup> In response to these statements, Fine asserted that the riot could have been prevented if law enforcement had been instructed on de-escalation techniques and were receptive to Black community concerns.<sup>27</sup> When taking a bottom-up approach to understand the causes of the Detroit riot of 1967, Fine demonstrated that a combination of actions from both the government and local communities resulted in violence. It also pressed scholars not to characterize rioters as sole antagonists but rather evaluate the impact that discrimination had on Black communities.<sup>28</sup>

Along with Fine was Thomas J. Sugrue’s *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit*, published in 2005, which analyzed how the deindustrialization of Detroit after World War II impacted racial inequality. Sugrue argued that in Detroit, deindustrialization and inequitable War on Poverty programs created economic disparity between Black and White communities. He concluded that this economic disparity ignited racial

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<sup>24</sup> Sidney Fine, *Violence in the Model City: The Cavanagh Administration, Race Relations, and the Detroit Riot of 1967* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1989), 32-37.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 101.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 102.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 339-340.

<sup>28</sup> Fine, *Violence in the Model City*, 1-648.

violence that culminated in riots such as the Detroit riot of 1967. Sugrue expanded the scope of racial violence analysis by evaluating deindustrialization and its impact on the economy in Black communities.<sup>29</sup>

In *Race, Space, and Riots in Chicago, New York, and Los Angeles*, written in 2007, sociologist Janet Abu-Lughod provided an interdisciplinary perspective on race riots. Combining sociological analysis and history, she determined race riot patterns and similarities in the three major cities of Chicago, New York, and Los Angeles. In each city, Abu-Lughod assessed how immigration, the economy, and the responses of government entities shape racial conflicts. She asserted that while there were numerous “ghetto uprisings” in the United States, the most violent and long-lasting uprisings occurred in Northern cities, which were then “ruthlessly suppressed by local police forces, often assisted by military reinforcements.”<sup>30</sup> Unlike previous scholars, Abu-Lughod claimed that a significant factor in the escalation of race riots and racial violence came from how police and White communities responded and were involved in the riots.<sup>31</sup> Abu-Lughod evaluated the New York Harlem Riot of 1943. She noted that while the riot caused two million dollars in property damage to the city, it did not do as much damage as other riots like the Detroit riot of 1943. Abu-Lughod stated that this decrease in damage was because the “1943 Harlem riot did not have White civilian attacks on Negroes.”<sup>32</sup> Therefore, Abu-Lughod pushed for scholars to recognize that while police impact racial uprisings, so do White civilians. While this analysis of civilians is beneficial, she also offered valuable insight into areas destroyed and

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<sup>29</sup> Thomas J. Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).

<sup>30</sup> Janet L. Abu-Lughod, *Race, Space and Riots in Chicago, New York, and Los Angeles* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 3,7-32.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 269-270, 293-295.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 150-152.

targeted by race riots. She found that often these sites had race-based discrimination practices against Black communities. These sites ranged from businesses to police stations and housing.<sup>33</sup> Abu-Lughod found that these patterns of targeting sites of race-based discrimination could be seen in each city she analyzed.

One of the most recent studies into race riots is Elizabeth Hinton's *America on Fire: The Untold History of Police Violence and Black Rebellion Since the 1960s*, published in 2020. Hinton's argument relied on the replacement of the term "race riot" to "rebellion." To replace the term race riot, she analyzed the cycle of racial violence. Hinton argued that rebellions occurred when laws such as the Safe Streets Act and the War on Crime were enforced in Black communities but neglected in White communities. She contended that these laws and practices, such as increased law enforcement in Black communities, contributed to continued segregation and disenfranchisement of Black populations. Hinton evaluated race rebellions from the 1960s to the modern-day rebellions that occurred after the murder of George Floyd. In examining these rebellions, she assessed housing discrimination, schooling, and police brutality, arguing that police brutality was the leading cause of protests evolving into rebellions.<sup>34</sup> Hinton's most significant contribution to historical research is her replacement of the term riot to rebellions. She argued that when defining urban riots from the 1960s, the term "riot" is counterproductive to historians and the Black community because it pairs violence with an anti-Black sentiment.<sup>35</sup> Instead, Hinton asserted that the word rebellion should take the place of riot because the urban uprisings in the 1960s "did not represent a wave of criminality, but a sustained insurgency."<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 213-221.

<sup>34</sup> Hinton, *America on Fire*, 6-16.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.



This determination forced future scholars to observe how the term riot can damage those expressing dissatisfaction with an unequal system.<sup>37</sup>

This scholarship focused primarily on Northern and urban cities; however, it suggests multiple avenues to explore Southern Appalachian rebellions. These avenues include evaluating the pace of change, the role of the police, economic opportunities, and housing conditions. It also provides an opportunity to question whether smaller cities have the same causal factors for race rebellion or does demographic differences matter.

### **Southern Appalachian Race Relations**

Despite the considerable scholarship on race riots in the urban North, the historiography of these occurrences in Southern Appalachia is sparse. However, there is a rich historiography examining race relations in this region, often focusing on antebellum Southern Appalachia and slavery. For example, sociologist Wilma Dunaway explored Southern Appalachian slavery in her book *Slavery in the American Mountain South*. She discouraged the notion that Appalachia was not immersed in a slave society. Dunaway asserted that Southern Appalachian slaveholders were not “benevolent” compared to Southern slaveholders but more violent towards enslaved people.<sup>38</sup> For example, she remarked that Southern Appalachian enslavers would implement punishments

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<sup>37</sup> Other scholarship regarding the rise of Black Power, and the violence of school desegregation illuminate other National instances of Black rebellion. This scholarship includes: Jason Sokol, *There Goes My Everything: White Southerners in the Age of Civil Rights 1945-1975* (New York: Vintage Books, 2008); Donna Jean Murch, *Living for the City: Migration, Education, and the Rise of the Black Panther Party in Oakland, California* (North Carolina: The University of North Carolina Press, 2010); Peniel E. Joseph, *Waiting ‘Til the Midnight Hour: A Narrative History of Black Power in America* (Canada, Henry and Holt Company LLC, 2006); Michael Klarman, *From Jim Crow to Civil Rights: The Supreme Court and the Struggle for Racial Equality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006); Ronald P. Formisano, *Boston Against Busing: Race, Class and Ethnicity in the 1960s and 1970s* (North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 1991).

<sup>38</sup> Wilma A. Dunaway, *Slavery in the American Mountain South* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003) 5.

such as “verbal reprimands, belittling and abuse” to control enslaved people. This abuse consisted of wearing an iron collar around one’s neck or being whipped.<sup>39</sup> Dunaway noted that while the abundance of slave ownership was limited, those who enslaved people were predominantly elites and used slave labor to dominate the economy of Southern Appalachia.<sup>40</sup> For example, sizeable Appalachian plantation owners were the most likely to enslave people, and they were also “the wealthiest, most powerful elites of the region.”<sup>41</sup> Dunaway laid the groundwork for forthcoming scholars to evaluate race relations in the Appalachian South as dynamic. She challenged the dominant narrative of Appalachian exceptionalism by providing evidence that Southern Appalachian slaveholders were violent towards enslaved people. She also illustrated that Southern Appalachian societies and economies were deeply invested in slavery.

Following Dunaway was John C. Inscoe, who edited a collection of essays entitled *Appalachians and Race: The Mountain South from Slavery to Segregation*. While this collection does not focus on mountain violence, Inscoe included an essay that investigated racial violence in the mountain south. The essay, by W. Fitzhugh Brundage’s “Racial Violence, Lynchings, and Modernization in the Mountain South,” evaluated rural Southern Appalachian racial mob violence, and focused on lynching. He expounded on the considerable turmoil between Black and White communities in Appalachia. He argued that increased mob violence and racial tension occurred in the pre-antebellum era because of the increase in migration that created “social and economic transformations.”<sup>42</sup> Brundage also claimed that there was racial harmony for Southern Appalachian workers before this era. Brundage centered his analysis on

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 165.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 25-28.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 29.

<sup>42</sup> John C. Inscoe, *Appalachians and Race: The Mountain South from Slavery to Segregation* (Kentucky: University Press of Kentucky, 2001), 307.

White mob violence towards Black workers. He noted that in Kentucky before 1900, mob violence executed both White and Black victims. Brundage remarked that White mobs often generated violence against White citizens. While he does not note any outright violence created by Black mobs, he suggested that resistance towards White mobs created a rise in violence. The example he used for this resistance involved a group of Black miners who took part in a gun battle against a White mob. Though the Black miners were eventually caught and lynched, Brundage's inclusion of this story demonstrated that Southern Appalachian Black workers were willing to fight against a discriminatory society. Although he does not explicitly analyze Black resistance, Brundage's scholarship revealed complex racial dynamics that resulted in violence and, in one instance, resistance. In this way, he provided the groundwork for future scholars to analyze Black resistance against racist violence.<sup>43</sup>

John Inscoe's *Race, War, and Remembrance: In the Appalachian South* continued the scholarship of race and racial violence in Southern Appalachia. In this book, Inscoe evaluated the relationship between Southern Appalachian slaveholders, slaves, and freedmen during the antebellum period. He argued that enslaved people were abused in the mountains, similar to other United States regions. Looking at racial violence in the region, Inscoe indicated conflict in Asheville in 1868 that transpired around a freed Black man who attempted to vote.<sup>44</sup> Inscoe also noted the dangers of generalizing racial attitudes and violence in the mountain region. He asserted that some areas in Southern Appalachia consisted of racial violence and riots while others maintained a positive attitude towards abolitionism. Inscoe stated that when scholars generalize the experiences of the Appalachian region, it erases the complexities of race relations

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 302-313.

<sup>44</sup> John C. Inscoe, *Race, War and Remembrance: In the Appalachian South* (Kentucky: University of Kentucky, 2008), 31.

in that region.<sup>45</sup> Insoe contributed to future research by creating a dynamic version of race relations and racial violence in Southern Appalachia that disparages generalization.

While there is ample research on race relations in Southern Appalachia during the antebellum era, there has also been sufficient scholarship on the Black laborers' experience during industrialization, specifically in the coal mining industry. One of the first works examining Black coal miners was a collection of essays, *Blacks in Appalachia*, by William Turner and Edward Campbell.<sup>46</sup> Their book brought forth new scholarship on the complex relationship between Black and White miners during late industrialization.

An essay included in *Blacks in Appalachia* that provided evidence for an intricate racial dynamic in coal mines was Richard A. Straw's "The Collapse of Biracial Unionism: The Alabama Coal Strike of 1908." Through his evaluation of unions, Straw determined that coal companies' policies could bring together Black and White laborers because both had to cope with the negative consequences of corrupt corporate practices. To show this alliance, he investigated the increase of Black union members in the United Mine Workers of America during the coal strike of 1908 in Alabama. Through the analysis of this union and the strike, Straw demonstrated violence and discrimination towards Black union members from local forces and, eventually the union. Straw noted a disproportionate number of arrests of Black union members during labor strikes compared to White union members. He also asserted that the operators of coal mines and Birmingham's press pushed to portray the strikes and riots as a racially motivated issue rather than a systemic class and industry issue. The press's depiction of

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 34.

<sup>46</sup> Richard Straw, "The Collapse of Biracial Unionism: The Alabama Coal Strike of 1908," quoted in, William Turner and Edward Cabbell, *Blacks in Appalachia* (Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 1985) 183-198.

these strikes as a racial problem led to the union's downfall, which caused further discrimination against Black laborers and former Black union members. This essay illustrated an expansion of discrimination in coal communities. It also created a multifaceted definition of race relations in coal towns that demonstrated how class solidarity morphed into racism.<sup>47</sup>

Following *Blacks in Appalachia* came William Trotter's *Coal, Class, and Color*, published in 1990. Trotter assessed the expansion of class consciousness and race consciousness through coal towns in West Virginia. Trotter expounded on the variations of racial discrimination because of class status to demonstrate class consciousness. He revealed the influence of class on racial discrimination by analyzing how the elite, middle-class, and working-class Black residents were involved in union strikes. For example, the elite Black press supported the paternalistic ideals of coal corporations and urged others with newspapers to show support for these ideals. Thus, Trotter argued that Black elites garnered less racially motivated discrimination and violence. On the other hand, he asserted that middle-class Black laborers were more likely to continue to work in the coal mines refuting the beliefs of working-class Black laborers, who commonly joined strikes and experienced racial discrimination and violence.<sup>48</sup> When evaluating racial violence Trotter stated that during the late 1800s early 1900s "West Virginia Blacks developed a highly militant brand of racial solidarity, marked by persistent demands for full equality, albeit on a segregated basis."<sup>49</sup> Trotter showed this militant racial solidarity by investigating an uprising at the Winding Gulf Colliery Company. In this altercation, a fight broke out before an election causing the arrest of two Black residents. Consequently, a group of Black

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<sup>47</sup> Turner and Cabbell, *Blacks in Appalachia*, 183-196.

<sup>48</sup> Joe William Trotter Jr, *Coal, Class, and Color: Blacks in Southern West Virginia 1915-1932* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1990), 217-237.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 46.

men, fearing that the men in jail were to be lynched, stormed the jail freeing the men and causing the death of a White officer and the wounding of others. Trotter argued that this occurrence was evidence for the emergence of race consciousness and, subsequently, the rise of racial solidarity.<sup>50</sup> Trotter's analysis of class consciousness and race consciousness deepened the complexity of race relations in Appalachia by linking class-based and race-based concerns.

William Turner's *The Harlan Renaissance: Stories of Black Life in Appalachian Coal Towns* took a different stance on coal labor and communities. Turner depicted Black laborers in coal communities as separated from the White community. He argued that Black laborers in Appalachian coal towns were both Black and Appalachian and benefited from the creation of coal towns.<sup>51</sup> His evidence for this assertion relied heavily on his personal experiences growing up in a coal-mining town in Lynch, West Virginia. Turner claimed that these coal towns, like the one in Lynch, created a foundation for the growth of Black Appalachians.<sup>52</sup> He argued that these towns allowed formerly enslaved people and sharecroppers to formulate a sense of independence. Through this newfound independence, Turner described the formulation of close-knit Black coal communities and kinship bonds.<sup>53</sup> Claiming that through these bonds, Black coal communities would protect one another and accept others for their "alternative lifestyles."<sup>54</sup> He contended that school integration negatively affected the Black coal community's kinship structures and the sense of independence gained through segregated company schools. Turner determined that the integration of schools damaged the Black community and their independence

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 236.

<sup>51</sup> William H. Turner, *The Harlan Renaissance: Stories of Black Life in Appalachian Coal Towns* (Wester Virginia: West Virginia University Press, 2021), 34-35.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 156-157.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 170-181.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 199.

through the loss of Black teachers, Black coaches, and school traditions. Forcing students to become reliant on White community school structures.<sup>55</sup>

Tuner offered complexity to the study of race relations in Southern Appalachia. He did not characterize coal towns as good or bad but argued that Black laborers benefited from coal communities. He did not evaluate racial structures in terms of violence but instead depicted White and Black coal communities as separate entities. Arguing that although Black communities suffered at the hands of coal companies, they also thrived because of newfound independence.

Few scholars have examined Appalachian race rebellions, and therefore, racial violence's effects of racist violence on the community are often ignored. While scholars such as Wilma Dunaway and John Inscoe generally agree that White mob violence is used to control Black communities, there is a lack of analysis of those not involved in the mob. Most early Southern Appalachian scholars have explored White violence with the occasional instance of Black resistance. However, scholar Rand Dotson recently set a foundation for analyzing the effects of White violence on Appalachian communities with his essay "Race and Violence in Urbanizing Appalachia: The Roanoke Riot of 1893."<sup>56</sup> At the same time, Betty Jamerson Reed has laid the groundwork for Black rebellions in the face of discrimination with her book *Segregation in Western North Carolina: A History, 1860s-1970s*.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 232-262.

<sup>56</sup> Rand Dotson "Race and Violence in Urbanizing Appalachia" The Roanoke Riot of 1893," quoted in Bruce E. Stewart, *Blood in the Hills: A History of Violence in Appalachia* (Kentucky: University Press of Kentucky, 2012, 2012), 237-271.

<sup>57</sup> Betty Jamerson Reed, *School Segregation in Western North Carolina: A History, 1860s-1970s*, Vol 31 (Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Company, 2011) 1-264.

Bruce E. Stewart edited *Blood in the Hills: A History of Violence in Appalachia*, published in 2011. In chapter nine, “Race and Violence in Urbanizing Appalachia: The Roanoke Riot of 1893,” Rand Dotson investigated the cause and effects of the Roanoke riot of 1893 and the lynching of Thomas Smith. Dotson contended that the Roanoke riot of 1893 ensued because of rising racial tension fueled by migration, economics, and politics. He noted that the rising number of Black migrants into the region caused a divisive racial and economic dynamic. A once predominantly White town had to “fight back” against migrants who did not adhere to the “racial order.”<sup>58</sup> This tension, as Dotson explained, began to boil over with the close town vote against prohibition. Since the vote was close, the Black vote was crucial in retaining or expelling alcohol sales. Dotson clarified that since the Black community aligned with elite Whites in voting for prohibition, this angered many working-class Whites and caused racial and class tensions to rise. This tension eventually led to the Roanoke Riot of 1893, in which a White mob participated in the kidnapping and lynching of Black man Thomas Smith.<sup>59</sup> However, this mob did not only attack Smith but other high ranking city officials, “threatening the very core of elite’s social, political, and economic status.”<sup>60</sup> Dotson asserted that this mob caused the community to reshape their criminal justice system, which led to the convictions and deaths of innocent Black residents.

Dotson’s analysis of the Roanoke riot showed its impact on the Black community. He demonstrated that while numerous White residents were horrified by the actions of the White rioters, the concept of losing their class status stood above fostering a justice system that

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<sup>58</sup> Stewart, *Blood in the Hills*, 237-271.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 237-271.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 262.



provided equality. Dotson also analyzes the unstable power dynamics in Roanoke during industrialization and the consequences of this instability.<sup>61</sup>

Another significant piece of Southern Appalachian scholarship is Betty Jamerson Reed's *Segregation in Western North Carolina: A History, 1860s-1970s*. Reed explored the education system in Western North Carolina from the Reconstruction era to the Civil Rights era and evaluated numerous districts' school reactions to various integration policies. In assessing school reactions to policies in Asheville, North Carolina, Reed also examined the student uprising at Asheville High in 1969. She clarified that before integration Asheville High was an all-White school that went by the name Lee Edwards. However, the city of Asheville pushed for integration in 1969 and changed the all-White high school of Lee Edwards to the integrated school of Asheville High. Reed provided a general outline of the events at Asheville High on September 29th, 1969. She explained that students who had previously attended the all-Black school Stephens-Lee had a list of grievances for principal Clarke Pennell and staged a walkout. This walkout eventually turned into violence when tensions rose between the Black protesting students and city's police officers. Reed also clarified that some of these grievances occurred because Asheville High did not effectively unify Stephens-Lee students with those from Lee Edwards. For example, at Asheville High, there were no trophies from Stephens-Lee, and there were discriminatory requirements for sports teams. Reed developed a foundation for evaluating the Asheville High riot of 1969, an area previously untouched by scholarship. While she does not provide a complete analysis of factors that caused the riot, leaving out other outside influences,

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 237-271.

interpersonal student relationships, and police violence, Reed provided a foundation of research into the Asheville riot of 1969.<sup>62</sup>

### **Brown v. Board and School Desegregation**

Following the lead of historians like David Cecelski and Vanessa Siddle Walker, this thesis rejects the dichotomous segregation is “bad” and integration is “good” school of thought. In North Carolina, Walker and Cecelski illuminated the profound role that Black teachers played in their communities and classrooms, as well as their central role in affirming their student’s potential.<sup>63</sup> For Walker and Cecelski the *Brown v. Board* decision had mixed effects on Southern Black communities and Black schools.<sup>64</sup> Another avenue of the study of the *Brown* Decision aligned with the idea that scholars have overemphasized *Brown*’s impact on the Black Freedom Struggle. Historian James C. Cobb defined this school of thought as the “down on *Brown*” crowd.<sup>65</sup> Scholars such as Michael Klarman, Derrick Bell, and Charles Ogletree have focused on the failures of *Brown*. For example, Michael Klarman in “*Brown* Racial Change and the Civil Rights Movement” evaluated the rise in white racial violence and argued that *Brown* caused an influx of White violence.<sup>66</sup> Bell, aligning with Klarman argued that the *Brown*

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<sup>62</sup> Reed, *School Segregation in Western North Carolina*, 42-52.

<sup>63</sup> David S. Cecelski, *Along Freedom Road: Hyde County, North Carolina and the Fate of Black Schools in the South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994); Vanessa Siddle Walker, *Their Highest Potential: An African American School Community in the Segregated South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996).

<sup>64</sup> Historian Rachel L. Martin in her dissertation evaluated the desegregation of Clinton, Tennessee high school which is in the Southern Appalachian region. She evaluated how desegregation fractured the community of Clinton which resulted in violent protests. To read more about Clinton, Tennessee, high school see: Rachel Martin, *Out of the Silence: Remembering the Desegregation of Clinton, Tennessee, High School*, PhD diss (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill Graduate School, 2014).

<sup>65</sup> James C. Cobb, *The Brown Decision, Jim Crow, and Southern Identity* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2005), 50.

<sup>66</sup> Michael Klarman, “*Brown* Racial Change and the Civil Rights Movement” *Virginia Law Review* 80 (1994).

decision did not improve schools for Black students. He also asserted that the United States Supreme Court could have improved Black schools by strictly enforcing strict adherences to the “separate but equal” doctrine of *Plessy v. Ferguson*.<sup>67</sup> Charles Ogletree, on the other hand, pointed to the deterioration of Black cultural institutions such as colleges and universities as evidence for the failure of *Brown*.<sup>68</sup> Klarman altered his historical interpretation in 2006 with his book *From Jim Crow to Civil Rights: The Supreme Court and the Struggle for Racial Equality*. Although Klarman continued to emphasize the increase in violence after the *Brown* decision, he also argued that the *Brown* encouraged activism instead of an immediate change.<sup>69</sup>

An alternative thread of *Brown* historiography focused on the benefits of the *Brown* decision. Scholars such as David J. Garrow and James Cobb argued against the “down on *Brown*” crowd and emphasized the importance of outlawing school segregation. Garrow and Cobb have worked arduously to confront the works of scholars like Klarman. Garrow argued that Klarman had ignored the influence that *Brown* had on influencing Civil Rights activists such as the Montgomery bus boycott in 1955.<sup>70</sup> Cobb went one step further in his argument against Klarman and other “down on *Brown*” historians in his book *The Brown Decision, Jim Crow and Southern Identity*. Cobb evaluated numerous historians’ findings such as Klarman and Bell to support his argument that “down on *Brown*” historians overlooked the critical role

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<sup>67</sup> Derrick Bell, *Silent Covenants: Brown v. Board of Education and the Unfulfilled Hopes for Racial Reform* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).

<sup>68</sup> Charles J. Ogletree, *All Deliberate Speed: Reflections on the First Half-Century of Brown v. Board of Education* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2004).

<sup>69</sup> Klarman, *From Jim Crow to Civil Rights*.

<sup>70</sup> David J. Garrow, “Hopelessly Hollow History: Revisionist Devaluing of Brown v. Board of Education.” *Virginia Law Review* 80, no. 1 (1994): 151–60.

that *Brown* played in escalating the work of civil rights activists. However, Cobb does little to illuminate *Brown*'s impact on the desegregation of schools.<sup>71</sup>

Other scholars, such as Ronald P. Formisano and David M. Douglass, have focused on the integration process in Southern and Northern communities. Formisano explored the Boston busing dispute calling the violent confrontations about busing “a war nobody won.”<sup>72</sup> He noted that middle-class and working-class White parents feared violent uprisings because of school desegregation, which caused an increase in “White flight” that left working-class Black and White students in poorly funded public schools.<sup>73</sup> Akin to Formisano, Douglass evaluated the desegregation of Charlotte Mecklenburg schools in North Carolina. He asserted that North Carolina’s development of the Pearsall Plan encouraged North Carolina schools to remain open by limiting the number of Black students assigned to attend White schools, taking what Douglass determined was a moderate path.<sup>74</sup>

The works by Anne Moody, and Melba Pattillo Beals have focused on Black student experiences during the desegregation of schools. Moody and Beals wrote about their personal experiences as Black students during *Brown*. Moody noted that school was a haven for her because it was a place where she could excel and compete in academics and sports. She asserted that the *Brown* decision did not immediately change her life, arguing that the murder of Emmett Till impacted her life more than the *Brown*.<sup>75</sup> Beals, on the other hand, described her experience

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<sup>71</sup> Cobb, *The Brown Decision*.

<sup>72</sup> Ronald P. Formisano, *Boston Against Busing: Race, Class and Ethnicity in the 1960s and 1970s* (North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 203.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*,

<sup>74</sup> David M. Douglass, *Reading, Writing, and Race: The Desegregation of the Charlotte Schools* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 29-31.

<sup>75</sup> Anne Moody, *Coming of Age in Mississippi: The Classic Autobiography of Growing up Poor and Black in the Rural South* (New York: Bantem Dell, 1968).

as one of the “Little Rock Nine” who integrated Central High School in 1957. She described the prejudice she experienced at Central High and her use of dark glasses not to reveal her fear.<sup>76</sup>

The *Brown* decision’s delayed implementation and its diverse effects on communities throughout the nation, including the Southern Appalachian Mountains, reflected both the themes and timeline of Jacquelyn Dowd Hall’s “Long Civil Rights Movement”.<sup>77</sup> Hall argued that the timeline of the Civil Rights Movement expands beyond the 1950s and the early 1960s. She asserted that scholars who focus on the “classical phase” of the Civil Rights Movement reinforce “new” conservatives “reworking that narrative for their own purposes, these ‘new conservatives’ ignored the complexity and dynamism of the movement.”<sup>78</sup> Hall also asserted that by not evaluating beyond the “classical phase” in the 1960s and 1970s it “erases from popular memory the way victories of the early 1960s coalesced into a lasting social revolution.”<sup>79</sup> She notes that the depiction of the Civil Rights Movement within the “classical phase” “had wide appeal in part because it conformed to white, middle-class interests and flattered national vanities.”<sup>80</sup>

This thesis will pull from several of these historiographical trends. Recent historians of urban rebellions argue that examining race riots is incomplete without evaluating discriminatory government state practices and investigating state and local law enforcement; this thesis will examine law enforcement’s role in race rebellions. In both Asheville and Bluefield, policing from local and state law enforcement served as causal factors for rebellions. School policies and administrators also produced racial inequalities and served as catalysts for these rebellions. This

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<sup>76</sup> Melba Patillo Beals, *Warriors Don’t Cry: A Searing Memoir of the Battle to Integrate Little Rock’s Central High* (New York: Pocket Books, 1994).

<sup>77</sup> Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, “The Long Civil Rights Movement and the Political Uses of the Past,” (2005) *The Journal of American History*, 1233-1263.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 1237.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 1254.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 1238.

thesis will incorporate the argument of recent historians such as Hinton that race rebellions and racial violence are the product of an unequal society. By focusing on the experience and actions of Black students, Black residents, and Black communities, this thesis explored how Black Appalachians were impacted by racial discrimination. Finally, this thesis highlights the racial violence that occurred in newly integrated spaces like Asheville High and Bluefield State College.

### **Chapter Breakdown**

This thesis will begin by situating these two rebellions in the historiography of race riots and racial violence during the Civil Rights Movement and Southern Appalachia. It will also examine the shift from defining outbursts of racial violence from the term "riot" to "rebellion." This evaluation will also address how law enforcement, urbanization, and government responses have affected race rebellions. Included in this introduction will be a second historiography on the complex attitudes towards race relations in Southern Appalachia and how they relate to urbanization, Black invisibility, and race rebellions. The historiography will demonstrate the gap in historical research in Southern Appalachia on race rebellions and contextualize my thesis into the growing field of Black Appalachian history. Following the historiography, I will describe the term riot and defend my decision to use the term rebellion in place of riot. Finally, I will introduce the Bluefield State College rebellion of 1968, and the Asheville High rebellion of 1969. This thesis will provide a case study of each of these rebellions.

Chapter One will examine the factors that contributed to the Asheville High rebellion of 1969 and the aftermath. The factors contributing to the rebellion include integrating Stephens-Lee High School and Lee-Edwards High School, as well as, the loss of Black student independence, community, and tradition. This chapter will examine these factors and how they

shaped student frustrations leading to protests through utilizing newspapers, oral histories, and personal accounts.<sup>81</sup> This chapter will examine the City of Asheville's strategy for integration to expose problems in their strategy. Asheville City Schools did not officially integrate until 1969; however, the city pushed for integration in 1965 which led to the erasure of Stephens-Lee High School. Additionally, this chapter will address law enforcement's impact on the student walkout that turned into a rebellion on September 29th, 1969.<sup>82</sup>

Chapter Two will evaluate the causes and consequences of the Bluefield State College rebellion of 1968. Bluefield State College, a historically Black college, shifted from a Black administration to a White administration 14 years after the Supreme Court decision of *Brown v. The Board of Education*. This chapter will assess the consequences of integrating this historically Black college, including the decrease in Black student enrollment, changes in student housing, and the hiring of White administration faculty. The loss of student and faculty authority infuriated Black students, and it forced them to bend to the will of a now all-White administration.<sup>83</sup> This chapter will address this frustration and develop a general understanding of Black student protests that climaxed into rebellions and the bombing of the institution's gymnasium.<sup>84</sup> This chapter also examines the administration's impact on Black student protesters, contending that the administration played a role in the erasure of Black student and

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<sup>81</sup> Reed, *School Segregation in Western North Carolina*, 52-60.; "Curfew Called After Clash," 30, September 1969, folder number 42.29 I, Pack Memorial Library.

<sup>82</sup> Reed, *School Segregation in Western North Carolina*, 1-264.; Harris, Shelby. "A Different Form of Reparations: Asheville High Student Expelled After 1969 Walkout could Get Diploma." *Asheville Citizen - Times*, Jun 20, 2021.

<sup>83</sup> Brown, *The Transition of a Historically Black College*, 1-182.

<sup>84</sup> "West Virginia Protest." *New York Times*, Mar 19, 1960; COLLEGE IS CLOSED AFTER EXPLOSION: DAMAGE PUT AT \$80,000 IN WEST VIRGINIA BLAST." *New York Times*, Nov 23, 1968.

faculty authority. Furthermore, this chapter will place the Bluefield State College rebellions into a broader context of racial conflict in Southern Appalachia.

Chapter Three focuses on the intersections and departures of memories and legacies of the Asheville High and the Bluefield State rebellions. Asheville High School and Bluefield State College/University have chosen two considerably different ways of reconciling with their race rebellions. By examining oral histories with former Black and White students of Asheville High, this chapter will determine how memory continues to impact the historical understanding of these rebellions. This chapter will evaluate how Asheville created a conversation through Facebook to unite the opinions and thoughts of those who attended Asheville High School in 1969 during the rebellion. Furthermore, it will also analyze how Bluefield State has done little to reconcile the role that the college administration had in “whitening” a once proud Historically Black College.

These rebellions contributed to shaping the Black freedom struggle in Southern Appalachia and reveal notions of “racial harmony,” instances of police brutality, Black Power and divergences in reconciliation. These divergences in reconciliation expose a reluctance to recognize racial discrimination in Southern Appalachia, in educational institutions, and in policing. The differences also expose a desire to maintain a “Veneer of Racial Harmony,” erase Black authority and Black Power, and contribute to Black Appalachian invisibility by “whitening” the narrative of these rebellions.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Waters, “Life Beneath the Veneer;” Parker, *Appalachian Activists*, 1-111.



## CHAPTER ONE

### COMBINING AND DIVIDING: THE ASHEVILLE HIGHSCHOOL REBELLION OF 1969

It was a warm spring Monday on May 17, 1954, in Asheville, North Carolina when Chief Justice Earl Warren delivered the opinion of the United States Supreme Court on the *Brown v. the Board of Education* case.<sup>1</sup> In delivering the opinion of the Court, Warren stated, “we conclude that in the field of public education the doctrine of ‘separate but equal’ has no place.”<sup>2</sup> Reactions to this ruling varied depending on state, city, region, county, and communities, with many Southern school systems delaying or reluctant to integrate.<sup>3</sup> In Western North Carolina, Asheville, did not integrate immediately after the *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling. In fact, Buncombe County Schools did not push for integration until 2 years later. As Buncombe County

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<sup>1</sup> “Temperature and Rainfall,” *The Daily Times News*, Asheville, North Carolina May 17, 1954.

<sup>2</sup> *Brown v. The Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas*, -347 U.S. 483 (1954).

<sup>3</sup> Relevant *Brown v. The Board of Education* historiography includes: David S. Cecelski, *Along Freedom Road: Hyde County, North Carolina and the Fate of Black Schools in the South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994); Vanessa Siddle Walker, *Their Highest Potential: An African American School Community in the Segregated South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996); James C. Cobb, *The Brown Decision, Jim Crow, and Southern Identity* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2005); Michael Klarman, “Brown Racial Change and the Civil Rights Movement” *Virginia Law Review* 80 (1994). Derrick Bell, *Silent Covenants: Brown v. Board of Education and the Unfulfilled Hopes for Racial Reform* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004); Charles J. Ogletree, *All Deliberate Speed: Reflections on the First Half-Century of Brown v. Board of Education* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2004); David J. Garrow, “Hopelessly Hollow History: Revisionist Devaluing of Brown v. Board of Education.” *Virginia Law Review* 80, no. 1 (1994): 151–60.; Ronald P. Formisano, *Boston Against Busing: Race, Class and Ethnicity in the 1960s and 1970s* (North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 1991); David M. Douglass, *Reading, Writing, and Race: The Desegregation of the Charlotte Schools* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1995); Anne Moody, *Coming of Age in Mississippi: The Classic Autobiography of Growing up Poor and Black in the Rural South* (New York: Bantem Dell, 1968); Melba Patillo Beals, *Warriors Don’t Cry: A Searing Memoir of the Battle to Integrate Little Rock’s Central High* (New York: Pocket Books, 1994).

Schools slowly integrated over a decade waiting until 1969 to integrate its high schools, tension within the Black and White communities, culminated in the Asheville High Rebellion of 1969.

This chapter examines Asheville through the lens of the integration crisis during the 1960s and 1970s in line with the Long Civil Rights Movement.<sup>4</sup> It will evaluate the role that segregated schools played in the Black community, specifically the East End/ Valley Street area in Asheville, and how integration and urban renewal policies affected this community.

The 1969 integration of Stephens-Lee High School and Lee Edwards High School, combined with urban renewal, police violence and Asheville School Board policies to damage Black student identity and authority of the Black

community, resulting in a rebellion at Asheville High School on September 19, 1969.<sup>5</sup>

Asheville has four major historically Black communities, including Burton Street, East End/Valley Street, Southside, and Shiloh. At the center of East End/Valley Street was Stephens-Lee High school.<sup>6</sup> Understanding the local history of the school and Black neighborhoods in Asheville is essential in illuminating how public education integration impacted small-scale

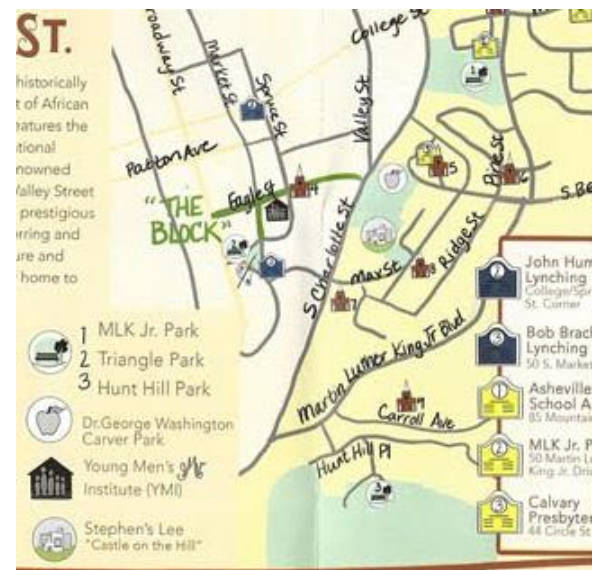


Figure 1. This image created by Buncombe County depicts a map of East End/Valley Street in Asheville, North Carolina. Stephens-Lee is located near the center of the map beside S. Charlotte St. Staff Reports, "Map of Asheville's Historic African American Landmarks," *The Urban News: Gateway to the Multicultural Community*, September 16, 2022, <https://theurbannews.com/communities/2022/map-of-ashevilles-historic-african-american-landmarks/>.

<sup>4</sup> Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, "The Long Civil Rights Movement and the Political Uses of the Past," (2005) *The Journal of American History* 91, no. 4 (2005): 1233-1263.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.,

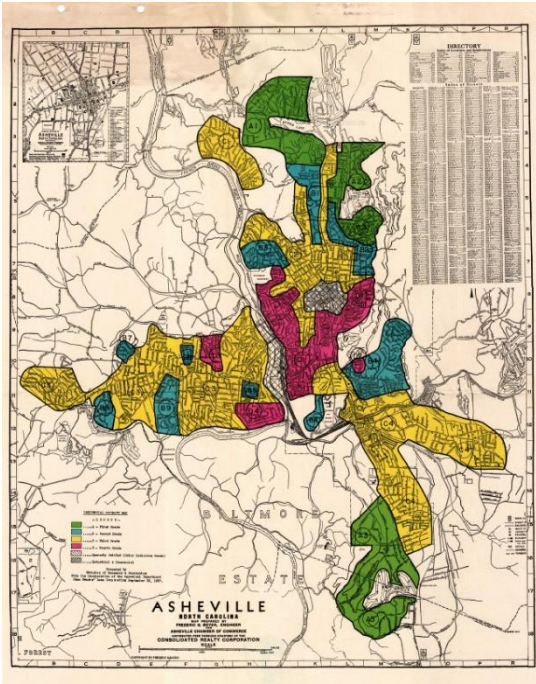


Figure. 2 1937. This image depicts a residential security map. The Black neighborhoods of Burton Street, East End/Valley Street, Southside, and Shiloh which are all located within the red sections of the map. Steven Michael Nickoloff, *Urban Renewal in Asheville: A History of Racial Segregation and Black Activism*, (Master's Thesis, North Carolina: Western Carolina University, 2015), pg 34.

communities. Researchers such as Dwana Leah Waugh, David Cecelski, and Virginia Siddle Walker have taken local approaches in analyzing the national narrative of school integration. These local approaches have developed a narrative of segregation that emphasizes the exacerbation of racial inequalities in integrated schools and Black student activism.<sup>7</sup> Michael Klarman took a national approach in his evaluation of the integration of schools but also falls in line with the works of

Waugh, Cecelski, and Walker because of his emphasis on the rise of violence and discrimination towards Black students after *Brown*.<sup>8</sup> By looking past the 1960s, Walker, Cecelski, and Waugh align with Jacquelyn Dowd Hall's definition of the Long Civil Rights

Movement.<sup>9</sup> The evaluation of the Asheville High Walkout of 1969 broadened and added to the complexity to the historiography of desegregation by illustrating that rebellions occurred in the Southern Appalachian region. The walkout/rebellion also demonstrated how the Asheville

<sup>7</sup> Dwana Leah Waugh, "From Forgotten to Remembered: The Long Process of School Desegregation in Chapel Hill, North Carolina and Prince Edward County, Virginia" (Phd. Diss. Chapel Hill: University of Chapel Hill 2012); Cecelski, *Along Freedom Road*; Walker, *Their Highest Potential*.

<sup>8</sup> Klarman, *From Jim Crow to Civil Rights*.

<sup>9</sup> Hall, "The Long Civil Rights Movement and the Political Uses of the Past," 1233-1263. Hall argued that to understand the Civil Rights Movement the timeline of the Movement should be extended past the "classical phase" of the 1950's and early 1960s. This extension of the Civil Rights Movement begins around the New Deal era and extends to the 1970s and 1980s.

community was impacted by school desegregation policies that exposed racial discriminatory practices.

To understand the Asheville High Walkout of 1969, the composition of Asheville during the 1960s, local activism, the Black East End/Valley Street community, urban renewal, and local school desegregation policies must be identified. Although the Black high school of Stephens-Lee was the only Black high school in Asheville and is the main focus of this text, there were a total of six Black schools in Asheville by 1942, these schools included “Stephens-Lee High School, Asheland Avenue School, Hill Street School, Burton Street School, Livingston Street Elementary School, and Mountain.”<sup>10</sup>

According to Leo Gaines, a former Black Asheville High student and protest organizer, in the 1960s Asheville was deeply divided by geography and Jim Crow laws.<sup>11</sup>

Leo Gaines: Asheville, in those days (1960s era) was still pretty much in the Jim Crow era, a very segregated town, and the racial dividing line was actually Patton Avenue; most of the Black population of Asheville lived on the south side of Patton Avenue, and the other side of Patton Avenue was basically white. We still had the Black and white signs up at the water fountains and rest rooms in the stores, and the Black populations pretty much stayed to themselves, and the white population stayed to themselves.<sup>12</sup>

It is because of this separation of Asheville into “two cities, rather, black and white” that a central area for the civil rights activism in Asheville was the East End/Valley Street.<sup>13</sup> This

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<sup>10</sup> *A Brief History of Asheville City Schools*, On File at the Asheville City Schools archive, n.d., 11, Quoted in Parker, *Appalachian Activists*, 26.

<sup>11</sup> Leo Gaines, interview by Dan Lewis, July 26, 2012, transcript, Facebook, <https://www.facebook.com/notes/i-survived-the-1969-asheville-high-riot/leo-gaines-after-44-years-a-student-leader-speaks-parts-1-2/1424906367556302/>.

<sup>12</sup> Leo Gaines, interview by Dan Lewis, July 26, 2012, transcript, Facebook, <https://www.facebook.com/notes/i-survived-the-1969-asheville-high-riot/leo-gaines-after-44-years-a-student-leader-speaks-parts-1-2/1424906367556302/>.

<sup>13</sup> Nan K. Chase, *Asheville: A History* (North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc, 2007) 143.; Sarah Judson, “‘I Am a Nasty Branch Kid’: Women’s Memories of Place in the Era

movement during the 1960s included primarily students who developed the organization Asheville Student Committee on Racial Equality (ASCORE). This organization led numerous forms of protests, boycotts, and sit-in campaigns with the help of students Al Whitesides, Marvin Chambers, and Annette Coleman from Stephens-Lee High School.<sup>14</sup>

The residential segregation in Asheville also led to the development of a self-sufficient Black community on East End/Valley Street. Residents of the community- maintained kinship bonds through the development of localized restaurants, gas stations, and grocery stores.<sup>15</sup> These local Black businesses includes “A.J. Jamison’s Shoemaking Service, Wilson Undertaking Co., E.W. Pearson real estate, Harris Printing Co., Murrough Undertaking Co., Noah Murrough real estate, A.L. Owens Employment Agency, Dr. L. N. Gallego, Dr J.W. Holt, Dr. U.S. Gunthrope, Service Drug Store, Dr. W.H. Mosley, J.W. William Photography, H.L. Alston attorney at law, T.D. Weaver’s Taxi Service, Collins- Alexander Taxi Service and Miller Brothers Construction.”<sup>16</sup> The East End/Valley Street was the focal point of Stephens-Lee High School.<sup>17</sup> The school was well known for their exceptional academics, marching band, and athletic programs, which inspired Black community pride. The school was also known for its cultural influence because of the numerous “band concerts, art exhibits, modern dance recitals, dramas, and chorus performances” that were usually attended by substantial crowds.<sup>18</sup> According to an interview with Sarah Williams by historian Sarah Judson, Stephens-Lee also benefited from having “teachers who were interested in us and learning because they wanted us to go farther.

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of Asheville’s Urban Renewal,” *The North Carolina Historical Review* 91, no. 3 (2014): 325. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44113200>.

<sup>14</sup> Parker, *Appalachian Activists*, 1-111.

<sup>15</sup> Chase, *Asheville: A History*, 143.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid*, 143.

<sup>17</sup> Judson, “I Am a Nasty Branch Kid,” 325.

<sup>18</sup> Chase, *Asheville: A History*, 153.

And they pushed it.”<sup>19</sup> Another student of Stephens-Lee Richard Bowman, noted accurately that teachers at Stephens-Lee were well educated:

Richard Bowman: “But, Stephens-Lee we had some of the best teachers-we had more teachers with Masters. Every summer the teachers at Stephens-Lee would go to the different colleges to work on their masters and what not in different fields. And we probably had a higher percentage of Masters at Stephens-Lee than we had at Lee Edwards High School-the white high school, here in Asheville. The teachers were very well qualified.”<sup>20</sup>

This influential connection between Black students and their teachers was a reoccurring theme in segregated schools, across the country and in Appalachia. Harry Ashmore, David Cecelski and Virginia Siddle Walker have illuminated the powerful impact that Black teachers had in their communities, classrooms, and in endorsing their student’s potential, while William Turner noted the impact that teachers had in Black Appalachian coal communities.<sup>21</sup> Ashmore noted that Black teachers were not guaranteed employment after desegregation which impacted students desire to attend new school programs.<sup>22</sup> Cecelski asserted that the removal of Black teachers reverberated throughout North Carolina and that “by 1966 and 1967, few black communities failed to raise objections to school closings and teacher displacement.”<sup>23</sup> Aligned with Cecelski, Walker contended that teachers and principals were “central to the curriculum” and would determine “if the needs of children were to be met” which “reflected the faculty’s

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<sup>19</sup> Judson, “I Am a Nasty Branch Kid,” 333.

<sup>20</sup> Interview with Richard Bowman by Kelly Naives, 8 July 1998 (K-513), in the Southern Oral History Program Collection, Series K.002: Southern Communities: Listening for Change (#4007K002), Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

<sup>21</sup> Cecelski, *Along Freedom Road*; Walker, *Their Highest Potential*; Turner, *The Harlan Renaissance: Stories of Black Life in Appalachian Coal Towns* (Wester Virginia: West Virginia University Press, 2021).

<sup>22</sup> Harry Ashmore, *The Negro and the Schools*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1954) 81-84.

<sup>23</sup> David S. Cecelski, *Along Freedom Road*, 3.

commitment to student development in a variety of areas.”<sup>24</sup> Turner argued that Appalachian Black coal communities benefited from segregated schools because teachers, complemented the “typical Eurocentric set of social science and humanities courses of study” with an “Afrocentric one.”<sup>25</sup> In conjunction with the profound role Black teachers had in their schools, both Judson and Tuner noted that the teachers and principals of segregated schools were viewed as elite and powerful.<sup>26</sup> Drawing on these historical interpretations developed regarding segregated schools, Stephens-Lee High School, like other Black high schools formed the epicenter of the Black community in East End/Valley Street because of its numerous cultural and educational influences. However, urban renewal and school desegregation polices in Asheville threatened to erode the core of this Black community.

Urban renewal had begun throughout the Asheville area during the 1950s and 1960s. In the 1950s Asheville established the Ashville Redevelopment Commission (ARC) and Asheville’s Housing Authority. In the 1960s, Asheville developed the Civic Redevelopment Project and the East Riverside Urban Renewal Project.<sup>27</sup> The East Riverside Urban Renewal plan impacted “425 acres of land, 1,300 structures, 1,250 families, and over half of the city’s African American population”<sup>28</sup> As policies began to change and urban renewal began to creep through Asheville, the once proud school of Stephens-Lee started to lose its role at the center. The East Riverside Urban Renewal Project was partially created to accelerate integration with the Asheville City School Board’s construction of “a one million dollar plus junior high school in

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<sup>24</sup> Walker, *Their Highest Potential*, 9.

<sup>25</sup> Turner, *The Harlan Renaissance*, 249.

<sup>26</sup> Turner, *The Harlan Renaissance*, 253.; Judson, “I Am a Nasty Branch Kid,” 333.

<sup>27</sup> Steven Michael Nickoloff, *Urban Renewal in Asheville: A History of Racial Segregation and Black Activism* (Master’s Thesis, North Carolina: Western Carolina University, 2015), 18.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid*, 4.

that area.”<sup>29</sup> The East Riverside Urban Renewal Project divided and displaced numerous Black Asheville residents, played a major role in the elimination of Stephens-Lee High school, and contributed to the dismantling of the East End Black community.

As the urban renewal project spread so did the push for the integration of schools. However, instead of immediately integrating schools the Buncombe County School Board opted for a “freedom of choice” solution. On the surface, this plan was intended to give students the choice of whether they wanted to attend an integrated school.<sup>30</sup> The idea of “freedom of choice” in North Carolina began with the election of Governor Luther Hodges in 1955. After the *Brown v. Board* decision in 1954, Hodges used the Governor’s Special Advisory Committee on Education to develop the Pearsall Plan. This plan placed the “problem” of integrating schools on local officials by permitting Black student’s parents to apply to attend the public school of their choice.<sup>31</sup> In *Reading, Writing, and Race*, historian David M. Douglass argued that the Pearsall Plan at first reflected insubordination to the *Brown* decision. However, he contended that by not adopting similar policies of Southern states that closed schools the plan represented North Carolina’s commitment to maintaining moderate policies after the *Brown v. Board Decision*.<sup>32</sup> Historian William Chaffe on the other hand concluded that the Pearsall Plan “represented a subtle and insidious form of racism” that “postponed meaningful desegregation in North

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid, 65.

<sup>30</sup> Clarke Morrison, "BROWN V. BOARD AT 50 SCHOOL INTEGRATION BROUGHT TURBULENT TIMES TO ASHEVILLE," *Asheville Citizen - Times*, May 16, 2004.

<sup>31</sup> Jefferson Currie II, “With Deliberate Speed: North Carolina and School Desegregation,” *Tar Heel Junior Historian*, Fall 2005.

<sup>32</sup> Douglass, *Reading, Writing, and Race*, 29-31.



Carolina for more than a decade—longer than in some states where massive resistance was practiced.”<sup>33</sup>

During the time of the Pearsall Plan, Stephens-Lee contained all- Black students and Lee Edwards contained all-White students. Asheville also contained “two white junior high schools, but no black junior high, seven white elementary schools and four black elementary schools.”<sup>34</sup> In 1962 the enrollment of these fifteen Asheville schools, “included 9,825 students, of whom 2,809 were black.”<sup>35</sup> Buncombe County used the Pearsall Plan to maintain segregation in the county’s public schools by limiting the number of students who could attend all-White schools. For example, in 1961 eleven requests from Black parents petitioned the Buncombe County School Board to attend previously all-White schools. Of these eleven requests only five were approved, and they were all for Newton Elementary school.<sup>36</sup>

The Pearsall Plan and the exclusion of several Black students provided insight into school desegregation in Asheville. This insight included the fact that Buncombe County Schools actively maintained segregation in schools after the *Brown v. Board* decision by limiting the number of Black students who were allowed to attend White schools. Of the 2,809 Black students who attended schools in the area only eleven applied to attend a White school, which is roughly 0.39 percent. Why would such a small percentage of Black students in Asheville apply to attend an integrated school in 1962? Several factors contributed to this low percentage. The first one was that the all-Black Stephens-Lee high school was a focal point in the Black community, a school that the Black community in Asheville was proud of. Part of this pride at

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<sup>33</sup> William Chafe, *Civilities and Civil Rights: Greensboro, North Carolina, and the Black Struggle for Freedom*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980) 73,81-82.

<sup>34</sup> Reed, *School Segregation in Western North Carolina*, 43.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid*, 43.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid*, 43.

Stephens-Lee included the high schools' high academic standards resulting in part from a significant number of the Black teachers who had advanced degrees.<sup>37</sup> Another contributing factor could be that the Pearsall Plan burdened Black parents with filing applications so their children could be considered for all-White schools, thereby providing White officials with authority over Black students and parents and shifting the burden of desegregation from school officials to Black parents.<sup>38</sup>

Buncombe County Schools continued to use the notion of "freedom of choice" to maintain segregation in schools. However, this approach did not go unnoticed by the Black community, and in 1964 numerous Black student's parents filed a lawsuit against the Buncombe County Board of Education in the case *Bowditch v. Buncombe County Board of Education*.<sup>39</sup> In this case the plaintiffs argued to the United States District Court for the Western District of North Carolina that the Buncombe County School's policy discriminated Black high school students because they were being forcibly bused to the segregated and overcrowded school of Stephens-Lee and were not granted transfers if they desired to attend a closer all-White school. This revealed, perhaps, another reason for the low percentage of Black student transfer applications--- a sense of futility and intransigent school officials. The plaintiffs observed that out of the twenty-two Black students who requested to transfer to previously all-White schools only twelve

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<sup>37</sup> Chase, *Asheville: A History*, 154; Not every all-Black high school possessed teachers with advanced degrees. For example, in Sunflower County Mississippi none of the teachers held advanced degrees, many did not graduate high school. See- Constance Curry, *Silver Rights: The Story of the Carter Family's Brave Decision to Send Their Children to an All-White Schools and Claim Their Civil Rights* (Chapel Hill: Algonquin Books, 1995), 33. Fear regarding the integration of schools can be seen in: Klarman, *From Jim Crow to Civil Rights*; Beals, *Warriors Don't Cry*; Ashmore, *The Negro and the Schools*; Cecelski, *Along Freedom Road*; Walker, *Their Highest Potential*.

<sup>38</sup> Chafe, *Civilities and Civil Rights*, 71.

<sup>39</sup> *Bowditch v. The Buncombe County School Board*, 345 F.2d 329 (4<sup>th</sup> Cir, 1965).

applications were granted for first, second, and third grade at Haw Creek Elementary School, while the other ten were denied. The Western District’s presiding judge James Braxton Craven, Jr., ruled in favor of the defendants.<sup>40</sup>

Dissatisfied with the decision, the plaintiffs of *Bowditch v. Buncombe County Board of Education* appealed to the Court of Appeals, Haynsworth Circuit. Appellate Judge Haynsworth both affirmed and partially remanded the previous decision by the district court. He observed that Buncombe County Schools contained 20,000 total students with 500 Black students and that out of the 500 total Black students, roughly 150-160 attended Stephens-Lee High.<sup>41</sup> Haynsworth argued that “this type of voluntary plan is adequate to accomplish a legal desegregation of the schools.”<sup>42</sup> He also argued that the Pearsall Plan did not maintain segregation but rather “eliminated all discrimination in the original assignment of the first-grade pupils and those others entering the system for the first time.” As to the reversal of the decision, Haynesworth noted that to maintain legality the Buncombe County Board of Education had to revise their previous policy and gradually integrate high schools when current elementary students were ready to progress.<sup>43</sup>

The judges Sobeloff and J. Spencer Bell, of the appellate court, dissented with Haynsworth’s decision. They noted that the Board of Education of Buncombe County continued to maintain segregated schools ten years after the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision. The judges argued that: “not only did the Board of Education of Buncombe County continue to

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<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*,

<sup>41</sup> The number of Black students that Judge Haynesworth is significantly skewed. According to Betty Jamerson Reed in 1963 there were “9,825 students of whom 2,809 were black.” Students who attended Stephens-Lee were required to attend new School South French Broad High School in 1965, “which was built to meet the separate but equal requirement” Reed, *School Segregation in Western North Carolina*, 43-45.

<sup>42</sup> *Bowditch v. The Buncombe County School Board*, 345 F.2d 329 (4<sup>th</sup> Cir, 1965).

<sup>43</sup> *Bowditch v. The Buncombe County School Board*, 345 F.2d 329 (4<sup>th</sup> Cir, 1965).

operate its schools on a segregated basis, but it administered the county high schools in a manner which failed even to comply with the old "separate but equal" doctrine of *Plessy v. Ferguson*."

The court delivered this ruling on April 7<sup>th</sup>, 1965.<sup>44</sup>

In the same year of the court ruling, Stephens-Lee was closed by the Asheville Board of Education. This closure forced Black high school students to attend South French Broad high school which was in a Southside neighborhood.<sup>45</sup> Leo Gaines, a Black Asheville High student, and Richard Bowman, a former Black Stephens-Lee student, observed the profound impact that the closing of Stephens-Lee had on the Black community of East End:

Leo Gaines: "When they closed it down, they built us a new school, over on South French Broad, which is now South French Broad Middle School. When I went to South French Broad, a lot of the teachers from Stephens-Lee came over there, and they still acted as surrogate parents to you, and not only were they teaching, they were also correcting your social attitudes.; when you were doing something wrong, they addressed that like a parent. The closing of Stephens-Lee was a great loss; the Black community was really proud of Stephens-Lee, and when we heard it was going to be closed, it really brought out a lot of anger, especially out of the alumni, which eventually led to what happened at Asheville High."<sup>46</sup>

Echoing Gaines, Richard Bowman was interviewed by Kelly Naives, and he commented on the lack of opportunities for Black Asheville residents.

*Kelly Naives: What kind of changes have gone on and what did the closing of Stephens-Lee have to do with that?*

Richard Bowman: "When Stephens-Lee was open it trained the students to be leaders and to be aggressive and go out and some of the students took advantage of that and left the city because they knew that there was no way they could be aggressive here, because

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Nickoloff," Urban Renewal in Asheville," 66.

<sup>46</sup> Leo Gaines, interview by Dan Lewis, July 26, 2012, transcript, Facebook, <https://www.facebook.com/notes/i-survived-the-1969-asheville-high-riot/leo-gaines-after-44-years-a-student-leader-speaks-parts-1-2/1424906367556302/>.

there were not job openings for blacks. So, they left the city and went to different parts of the country. They were aggressive and they succeeded in reaching higher level than they ever would have reached in Asheville.”<sup>47</sup>

When Stephens-Lee was closed it left Black East End residents without Black authority over education and weakened a vital aspect of their community. Historian William Turner argued in *Harlan Renaissance: Stories of Black Life in Appalachia Coal Towns*, that “integration became the handmaid of disintegration and evisceration.”<sup>48</sup> He argued that the desegregation of schools in Southern Appalachian coal communities allowed White authorities to implement what “they saw fit, exercising their interested and priorities, especially in terms of hiring decisions.”<sup>49</sup> Although Asheville is an urban Appalachian city and not a rural coal community like the ones Turner discusses, it still experienced similar destruction at the hands of school board officials. According to historian Sarah Judson, many Black residents who had not experienced first-hand racism and discrimination until desegregation, were now forced into white spaces.<sup>50</sup> White former Asheville High students Jim Johnson, and Kirk Johnson witnessed aspects of this destruction and discrimination:

Jim Johnson: “The closing of Stephens-Lee was probably the big thing. I know a lot of Black students who didn’t like losing their school and had to go to Asheville High.”

*Why do you think that the black students didn’t want to leave their other school and go to Asheville High?*

JJ: “I’m sure that it also, it probably created maybe an overcrowding situation at Asheville High. I’m sure that a lot of the Black students were kind of like a lot of the White students. Maybe

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<sup>47</sup> Interview with Richard Bowman by Kelly Naives, 8 July 1998 (K-513), in the Southern Oral History Program Collection, Series K.002: Southern Communities: Listening for Change (#4007K002), Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

<sup>48</sup> Turner, *The Harlan Renaissance*, 251.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid, 253.

<sup>50</sup> Judson, “I Am a Nasty Branch Kid,” 344.

they weren't too keen on the idea of integration in general maybe. That's just strictly speculation on my part."<sup>51</sup>

Kirk Johnson: What I didn't know at the time was that Stephens-Lee had been closed by court order basically or by the city's ordinances.<sup>52</sup> To facilitate integration. That meant that all the kids that went to Stephens-Lee were all of a sudden shorted their traditions. Whether that was sports or their motto, or their teachers, all that.<sup>53</sup>

In 1969, four years after the closure of Stephens-Lee and the decision of *Bowditch v Buncombe County Schools*, the Asheville City School Board developed a plan to fully integrate the city's high schools. This plan involved the merging of all-Black Stephens-Lee High School and South French Broad High School with all-White Lee Edwards High School. The merging of the schools consisted of all the students attending Lee Edwards High School and changing the name of Lee Edwards to Asheville High School.<sup>54</sup> While at Asheville High School, Black students had to adapt to the school's previous White traditions, curriculum, and celebrations without including any of their school's previous Black traditions, curriculum, and celebrations, thereby compromising their identity.<sup>55</sup>

Former Stephens-Lee students, teachers, administration, and the Black community members of East End mourned the loss of their once-excellent school. Black students of Asheville High lost their school colors, mascot, and trophies and had to follow discriminatory regulations that required Black male students to wear socks under the threat of suspension.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Jim Johnson, interview by Jubilee Padilla, March 24, 2022, transcript and recording, Western Carolina University Hunter Library.

<sup>52</sup> Similar instances of forcible school desegregation are in: Formisano, *Boston Against Busing*; Douglass, *Reading, Writing, and Race*; J. Anthony Lukas, *Common Ground: A Turbulent Decade in the Lives of Three American Families* (New York: Vintage, 1986).

<sup>53</sup> Kirk Johnson, interview by Jubilee Padilla, April 1, 2022, transcript and recording, Western Carolina University Hunter Library.

<sup>54</sup> Reed, *School Segregation in Western North Carolina*, 43-45.

<sup>55</sup> Nan K. Chase, *Asheville: A History*, 157.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid*, 157.

The sock policy was not applied as strictly on the White male students, “they would send the white boys home and tell them to get some socks and come back,” rather than suspending them.<sup>57</sup> These students also lost many of their teachers who had previously been crucial in reaffirming their potential. This loss of teachers, and school traditions caused Black students to become reliant on White community school structures.<sup>58</sup> This loss also culminated in a companionate loss of Black identity for the East End community because of the loss of Black student authority regarding teachers, traditions, and curriculum.

This weakening of Black student identity combined with the loss of community at Asheville High because of urban renewal and education integration policies frustrated numerous Black students. Some of these Black students included Leo Gaines, Jay McDowell, and Shirley Brown. These students with the help of adult advisors Nathaniel Woods, Victor Chalk, and Lady Mary developed a list of grievances.<sup>59</sup> This list of grievances included:

- The majority of majorettes or cheerleaders at AHS were white girls
- In cosmetology class, the instructor has said she could not do Negro hair.
- Athletes had been compelled to get hair cuts
- When black students are late a few times, they are sent home
- It is hard for many black students to get to school on time because bus service is inadequate.
- Negro history is taught by a white teacher, and the history textbook’s author is a white man, and neither is competent to teach Negro history.
- Black students are called “colored” and “boy” and Negroes object to use of either term.
- Black students have trouble when they go to the school lunchroom.<sup>60</sup><sup>61</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Lucy Mae Harrison, *Voices of Asheville*, D.H. Ramsey Special Collections, UNCA, quoted in Nan K. Chase, *Asheville: A History*, 157.

<sup>58</sup> Turner, *The Harlan Renaissance*, 232-262.

<sup>59</sup> Leo Gaines, interview by Dan Lewis, July 26, 2012, transcript, Facebook, <https://www.facebook.com/notes/i-survived-the-1969-asheville-high-riot/leo-gaines-after-44-years-a-student-leader-speaks-parts-1-2/1424906367556302/>.

<sup>60</sup> Ed Sitz, “Open Meeting is Scheduled in High School Disturbance,” September 30, 1969, *Asheville Citizen*, microfilm, Hunter Library, Western Carolina University.

<sup>61</sup> Another instance of Black student discrimination during school desegregation is in: Beals, *Warriors Don’t Cry*.



Figure 1. This image displays police officers lined outside Asheville High School before violence ensued. Rodger Bell, *Two Sides Meet*, 1969, <https://mountainx.com/news/tuesday-history-roger-ball-recalls-the-asheville-high-school-walkout-1969/>

To further express their grievances to Principal Clark Pennell, a group of 200 Black students staged a walkout at Asheville High School on September 29, 1969. During the protest approximately twenty-five police officers were called to

disperse the protesting students.<sup>62</sup> These police officers lined up outside the school and were led by Assistant Chief Eugene Jarvis. After assembling at the school, Jarvis and his

fellow officers chased a group of Black students off the campus and into the neighboring Vocational Education building, which Black students damaged in retaliation to police violence. The conflict continued and both officers and Black students began throwing bricks and rocks at one another resulting in six students, five police officers, and three bystanders going to the emergency room.<sup>63</sup> The destruction of property by Black students, described by many as an act of violence, could also be understood as a rebellion. As historian Elizabeth Hinton has argued that violence during racial rebellion is often influenced by discrimination and exacerbated because of police brutality.<sup>64</sup> Black student and protest organizer Leo Gaines described his experience of police brutality in an interview with former Asheville High student Dan Lewis:

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<sup>62</sup> “Curfew Called After Clash,” 30, September 1969, folder number 42.29 I, Pack Memorial Library.

<sup>63</sup> “Student Retreat” 30, September 1969, folder number 42.29 I, Pack Memorial Library.; “Curfew Called After Violence” 30, September 1969, folder number 42.29 I, Pack Memorial Library.

<sup>64</sup> Elizabeth Hinton, *America on Fire*, 6-16.



Leo Gaines: “I remember seeing the policeman go down, and then a hail of rocks flying at the police, and that forced them to back up. When they (the police) came down the steps, they forced us off the steps. We got all the girls behind us, so that they wouldn't get hit, and we stopped, just as you cross the drive (on the grass at the top of the hill) and they...I think it was Jarvis...told us to disperse, and that we were trespassing, and we wouldn't move, and so then they started coming at us with batons, and they used riot dispersal moves as they came towards us. There were all white...they didn't allow the Black policemen to participate in it.

The policemen were very angry, and when they were poking at you, they weren't pulling any punches. They were poking you, forcing you to move. The people on the front were getting pretty beat up. One girl got injured...she was one of those with an attitude that she just wasn't going to be moved. And the only place they (the police) had to go was backwards, and then somebody, some guys started throwing some rocks, and that forced the police back into the school building. After that happened, we dispersed.”<sup>65</sup>

Former students of Asheville High had divergent opinions regarding the walkout and rebellion of September 29, 1969. White student Kirk Johnson moved from Augusta, Georgia to Asheville the year of the rebellions.<sup>66</sup> White student Debbie Lewis had lived in Asheville her entire life.<sup>67</sup> However, both Johnson and Lewis experienced less direct violence than Black student Leo Gaines, and Jewish student Wendy Harner. In an interview Johnson and Lewis described their less violent experiences during the rebellion.

Kirk Johnson: “There was just chaos. People were turning the tables up over in the cafeteria. Windows were broken. That was sort of—I mean everybody was in a panic. But the school—the loudspeakers were going on and they were still trying to keep control. They said “don't leave school grounds without a pass from the dean” or whoever it was. I went to the dean's office, which was

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<sup>65</sup> Leo Gaines, interview by Dan Lewis, July 26, 2012, transcript, Facebook, <https://www.facebook.com/notes/i-survived-the-1969-asheville-high-riot/leo-gaines-after-44-years-a-student-leader-speaks-parts-1-2/1424906367556302/>.

<sup>66</sup> Kirk Johnson, interview by Jubilee Padilla, April 1, 2022, transcript and recording, Western Carolina University Hunter Library.

<sup>67</sup> Debbie Lewis, interview by Jubilee Padilla, April 21, 2022, transcript and recording, Western Carolina University Hunter Library.

a madhouse. It was like--hundreds of kids trying to get into this one door. Then a guy came through from a stairwell or something. He had blood on his head. It looked like he had gotten hit by something.”<sup>68</sup>

*You didn't see any frustration or anything leading up to what happened?*

Debbie Lewis: “No because it was an instigated thing because they brought the bricks. Those were what I considered my friends out there throwing bricks. I remembered the day. I don't know the beginning of it. I remember going down the hall, we were together, and then there was the first fight. I knew the black guy. I knew him and he was always so nice. Him and this white guy were fighting. I didn't know the white guy, so I didn't know what he was. It didn't look like he was on the defense. He looked more like he was on the offense, and I thought what is going on? Then we went outside to try and just go on and go to the car. Then this other student was coming down, he had been hit with a brick and he was bleeding. It was just very chaotic all of a sudden and with no warning.”<sup>69</sup>

Harner was a Jewish student whose father owned a grocery store of the “Black side” of town and was at the center of racial violence during and after the rebellion. She described the rebellion and the days that ensued as traumatic.

Wendy Harner: “I had a car that was Valiant, and they took the car and turned it upside down. Broke the windshield out. Took the glass from the windshield and put it into the upholstery. When the wrecker service came to upright the car, the gentlemen got in the car to start the car and he got glass all in his back and in his legs. They bombed my father's store repeatedly with Molotov cocktails. It caught the building on fire. --This was an ongoing situation. We had rocks that would come from the back parking lot all the way down to the school and they pushed me down those rock steps. I was escorted out of the school many times by the police.”

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<sup>68</sup> Kirk Johnson, interview by Jubilee Padilla, April 1, 2022, transcript and recording, Western Carolina University Hunter Library.

<sup>69</sup> Debbie Lewis, interview by Jubilee Padilla, April 21, 2022, transcript and recording, Western Carolina University Hunter Library.

The Black protestors left an ample amount of damage in their wake. The Black protestors caused damaged to the new 1.3-million-dollar Education Building and had broken several windows.<sup>70</sup> In response to this destruction White government officials such as Mayor Wayne S. Montgomery and other White citizens quickly criticized the actions of the Black students. Montgomery called for a 9 p.m. to 6 a.m. curfew and banned public assemblies, and the possession of firearms outside of one's home. He also required the cities ABC stores to close by 3 p.m.<sup>71</sup> The City of Asheville closed the public schools, which were reopened Thursday October 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1969 and were under the watch of numerous police officers.<sup>72</sup> Other White residents revealed their opinions in editorials like the one written by Buncombe County Community Relations Council, in which they asserted "racial violence solves nothing...Negro parents of the community have a responsibility to teach their children the principles of human decency."<sup>73</sup>

There were also emergency bans put in place prohibiting the sale or possession of firearms and alcohol outside of one's home and banning public assemblies such as "demonstrations, parades, marches or vigils."<sup>74</sup> The curfew negatively impacted civil rights activists Preston Dobbins and Victor Chalk. Chalk contributed to the organization of the student walkout. Dobbins was known for helping high schools and colleges organize protests. Dobbins, and Chalk were arrested and eventually released on bond. However, both men were subsequently

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<sup>70</sup> "Ruined by Rioters," 30, September 1969, folder number 42.29 I, Pack Memorial Library.

<sup>71</sup> "Curfew Called After Clash: Protest Sparks Violence," 30, September 1969, folder number 42.29 I, Pack Memorial Library.

<sup>72</sup> "Schools to Reopen; Militants Enjoined," 2, October 1969, folder number 42.29 I, Pack Memorial Library.; "Text of Decree Issued On Asheville Schools," 2, October 1969, folder number 42.29 I, Pack Memorial Library

<sup>73</sup> "The City is Now Faced With A Test of Reason," 2, October 1969, folder number 42.29 I, Pack Memorial Library.

<sup>74</sup> "Curfew Dropped; Emergency Bands Remain In Effect" 2, October 1969, folder number 42.29 I, Pack Memorial Library.

convicted in the United States District Court for the Western District of North Carolina, at Asheville. Viewing the court's decision as unjust and feeling they were subjected to unreasonable search and seizure, both men appealed their conviction to the Court of Appeals Fourth Circuit in *United States v. Chalk*. Circuit where Judge Craven affirmed the previous court's decision and stated that the "evidence seized from automobile was not subject to a motion to suppress on the ground that search was contrary to Fourth Amendment prohibition against unreasonable searches and seizures."<sup>75</sup>

Following the conviction of Dobbins and Chalk, the Asheville Board of Education announced that the high school would be reopening Thursday, October 2nd, 1969. The board obtained a court injunction that restricted "three black leaders and all other persons from interfering with the operation of the schools." These three leaders included Victor Chalk, James McDowell, and Shirley Brown.<sup>76</sup> The Asheville School Board also committed to addressing some of the grievances that Black students had listed. These commitments included hiring a full-time Black cosmetology teacher, a better transportation system for students, changing majorettes' requirements, and removing the Lee Edwards insignia off school uniforms. However, the Board refrained from addressing grievances on the hair policy and the sock policy.<sup>77</sup>

The school board and administration remained on high alert with the opening of Asheville High. Police lined the hallways and covered the campus. They intended to guard the school until Friday. Although Asheville schools reopened, high absenteeism rates at Asheville High and the surrounding schools marked the return. Asheville High reportedly had 841 out of

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<sup>75</sup> *United States v. Chalk*, 441 F.2d 1277, (4<sup>th</sup> Cir, 1971).

<sup>76</sup> "Schools to Reopen; Militants Enjoined," 2, October 1969, folder number 42.29 I, Pack Memorial Library.

<sup>77</sup> "Board of Education Acts On Student Demands," 2, October 1969, folder number 42.29 I, Pack Memorial Library.

2,040 students absent. While South French Broad had 256 out of 752 students absent and David Millard was missing 181 students out of 792.<sup>78</sup> Additionally, some White students that had once attended the Asheville High were sent to private schools. The Pearsall Plan also included “a local-option clause” which allowed North Carolina school districts to receive “state tuition aid for white students in those districts to attend public schools.”<sup>79</sup> This was seen as the best option for parents who had the means. In contrast, other students who did not have the means continued their education at Asheville High with racial tensions elevated. Kirk Johnson, for example, attended a private school after the rebellion.

Kirk Johnson: I think they wanted me to go to interview at the private schools there in Asheville. That’s how I ended up going back to school because they didn’t know how long schools would be closed. That was becoming a thing if people could afford it. They were starting to go to private schools.

*You left Asheville High and went to a private school?*

Kirk Johnson: I left. That was the last time I was there until fast forward—let’s see from ’69 up until—We moved back to Asheville in 2012. I still feel badly about doing that. I thought well they’ve gotta have fixed something. It’s been...how many years is that? Forty-three years. It was a strange feeling I still had walking up there on the sidewalk and going into the building. I couldn’t recognize much anything.<sup>80</sup>

After the reopening of the school and the rebellion of 1969, other rebellions and violence continued to occur at Asheville High. As explained by Kirk Johnson, the tension from these other rebellions has lasted into the present day. Jim Johnson also experienced this continued tension and expressed his experience during a rebellion in his junior year of high school in 1972

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<sup>78</sup> “Asheville Schools Open As Police Stand Guard,” 3, October 1969, folder number 42.29 I, Pack Memorial Library.

<sup>79</sup> Chafe, *Civilities and Civil Rights*, 72.

<sup>80</sup> Kirk Johnson, interview by Jubilee Padilla, April 1, 2022, transcript and recording, Western Carolina University Hunter Library.

or 1973. He explained that while this rebellion was similar to the one in 1969, it was less publicized.

Kirk Johnson: Then there were issues later. My sister went to Asheville High. They were younger. There were some issues but, it was more people trying to preserve their integrity of their communities. The black community had been separated for generations in general in Asheville. It was within their right to want to keep that integrity of their relationships. While mingling more and interacting more with non-blacks. Same with whites. I know that to this day my sister kind of roll their eyes when they say they're having a reunion, because they actually have two reunions.<sup>81</sup>

*I know that in our earlier exchange you had mentioned that there were riots after 1969. Can you tell me a little bit about that?*

Jim Johnson: I had a class up on the top floor when this occurred. So much of it was similar things to what happened in '69. I think all of—about all of the black students had left the building and had gone outside to protest or whatever and the police showed up. there was one fella, one student who was put in a police car. A bunch of people were trying to flip the police car over. Which they weren't successful, but they were coming pretty close. It just looked like massive chaos. the classroom doors had glass in them and a lot of that had been broken out and display cases the glass on them had been broken. The trophies had been scooped out and thrown onto the floor.<sup>82</sup>

Other instances of violence and rebellion continued at Asheville High. In October of 1971, a football game at the school resulted in violence between police and students. At the football game, Black students had gotten into an altercation with White students causing a police response. The police then beat several of the students involved in the altercation and arrested three of them. Afterwards the Asheville Police Chief J.C. Hall met with representatives of the Asheville High School Student Council to discuss ways to prevent further violence.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid, Kirk Johnson Interview.

<sup>82</sup> Jim Johnson, interview by Jubilee Padilla, March 24, 2022, transcript and recording, Western Carolina University Hunter Library.

<sup>83</sup> "Chief Hall, Students Discuss Gang Beatings," 12, October 197, book 42.29 vol. 41 A-B, Pack Memorial Library.

Three years later, on March 5th, 1974, another rebellion struck Asheville High. That morning school officials had called for an assembly. Not long after, “a desk was thrown against a trophy case in the hall. The glass was shattered, several trophies damaged. Some windows were smashed. An office was ransacked, and some trash set on fire.” The Police Department and the Fire department were both called to “contain” the disturbance. This rebellion of 1974 mirrored the one that had transpired five years earlier, in 1969.<sup>84</sup> These repeated uprising begs the question if the Asheville City School Board successfully addressed student grievances or if they continued to put them to the side.

White government officials condemned the actions of Black student protestors, in 1969, 1971, and 1974. According to Leo Gaines, speaking about 1969, “there was no intentions for it to be violent, whatsoever. Just walk out, sit on the steps, until we could get a meeting with the principal.”<sup>85</sup> The students had recognized that they had lost a sense of community and educational identity and wanted to work towards preserving their identity and Black authority.

Historian Dwana Leah Waugh investigated a similar instance of violence after desegregation at Chapel Hill High in North Carolina. She explained that Black students who were forced to combine their previously segregated school Lincoln High with Chapel Hill High, also suffered from a loss of social identity because the absence of Black influence in their new schools.<sup>86</sup> However, Waugh argued that the students did not engage in violent protest until their demands were pushed to the side by their principal Marshbanks thereby “confirming that the

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<sup>84</sup> “This Must Surely Be The Last Straw,” 5, March 1974, book 42.29 vol. 41 A-B, Pack Memorial Library.

<sup>85</sup> Leo Gaines, interview by Dan Lewis, July 26, 2012, transcript, Facebook, <https://www.facebook.com/notes/i-survived-the-1969-asheville-high-riot/leo-gaines-after-44-years-a-student-leader-speaks-parts-1-2/1424906367556302/>.

<sup>86</sup> Waugh, *From Forgotten to Remembered*, 177.

markers of their black identity wert loss.”<sup>87</sup> This analysis provided by Waugh can be used to understand the walkout/rebellion at Asheville High September 29, 1969.

Black Stephens-Lee students who were forced to go to Asheville High suffered from a loss of identity, community, educational opportunities, Black history, and Black authority after desegregation similar to that of Chapel Hill High. However, the loss of Asheville High did not only impact Black students but also the Black community of East End. City officials from urban renewal projects such as the East Riverside Urban Renewal Project and the Asheville Housing Authority, had been actively attempting to divide and destroy the Black community of East End. This destruction of Black community and Black student identity was then exacerbated by the Buncombe County School Boards plans to desegregate and the erasure of Stephens-Lee High School traditions, faculty, celebrations, and history. Black students at Asheville High School recognized the attempted eradication of their identity and school pride. They attempted to regain a sense of their identity and culture with a set of grievances given to their Principal Clark Pennell. To further emphasize the importance of their grievances created a walkout that turned into a rebellion when police attacked Black student protestors.

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid, 174-175.



## CHAPTER TWO

### REBELLION IN COAL COUNTRY: THE BLUEFIELD STATE COLLEGE REBELLION OF 1968

In the Southern Appalachian Mountains of West Virginia, Bluefield State College, now University, was known as Bluefield Colored Institute at its founding in 1895. Located on the border of Virginia and West Virginia, Bluefield Colored Institute provided a place for Black students to obtain higher education. West Virginia segregation laws prevented Black students from enrolling in White universities, and the Bluefield Colored Institute strove to encourage and invest opportunities for success for its Black students.<sup>1</sup> However, like Asheville High School, ruling of *Brown v. The Board of Education* in 1954 and the influence of White school officials restructured the now Bluefield State University into a predominantly White institution.<sup>2</sup> This restructuring that arose from *Brown v. Board* and discriminatory desegregation policies in Bluefield ultimately led to intense Black student and faculty dissent against administrative systems and a loss of Black student community and traditions at Bluefield State College. This resulted in violent protests, eventually culminating in the bombing of the college's gymnasium on Thanksgiving Day, November 21, 1968.<sup>3</sup>

This chapter will demonstrate the impact of Bluefield State College's desegregation on the institution and will argue that at Bluefield State College structural inequalities ruptured after the development of unequal desegregation policies, these policies resulted in a loss of Black authority. To establish this argument this chapter will include an analysis of how Black students

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<sup>1</sup> Ruth Payne Brown, *The Transition of a Historically Black College to a Predominantly White Institution*, PhD diss (College Park: University of Maryland, 2004), 3-4.

<sup>2</sup> *Brown v. The Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas*, 347 U.S. 483 (1954).

<sup>3</sup> Brown, *The Transition of a Historically Black College*, 130.

and faculty felt that the college's implementation of the *Brown v. Board* decision harmed their educational experience by eliminating Black faculty, reducing the number of Black student admissions, removing Black studies, and raising the prices of housing and fees such as parking and tuition. It will also use the lens of the Long Civil Rights Movement, placing the Bluefield State College bombing/rebellion in terms of the long Black Freedom struggle.<sup>4</sup>

Like the Asheville High Rebellion, to ultimately formulate an interpretation of the Bluefield State College Rebellion in 1968, one must understand the political, economic, and social makeup of Bluefield, West Virginia, and Bluefield State College during the 1960s and 70s. In the early 20th century, Bluefield was like many Southern Appalachian towns and cities because of its primary industry-coal. Since the 1920s Bluefield's coal industry experienced rapid growth. However, like many surrounding areas in the Appalachian region, Bluefield suffered from decreased usage of the mining industry and rising unemployment in the 1950s.<sup>5</sup>

Reflecting on these changes, Black Bluefield resident Reverend Irma Cabiness described what her life was like living in Bluefield. She also noted that she believed there to be a sense of community between White and Black coal miners.

*Peggy Turnbull: And this is a segregated community? How was it set up?*

Irma Cabiness: "In a way it was and in a way it wasn't. It's just that we've got accustomed to the lifestyle there of housing. The whites lived on one side of the tracks the blacks lived on the other side. But they had constant communication with each other. You couldn't tell who lived where because they were marching from one house to the other and that didn't seem to bother them."<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, "The Long Civil Rights Movement and the Political Uses of the Past." *The Journal of American History* (Bloomington, Ind.) 91, no. 4 (2005): 1233-1263.

<sup>5</sup> Bluefield City Planning Commission, West Virginia Economic Development Agency, *City of Bluefield Master Plan*, 1954, 2,5.

<sup>6</sup> Irma Cabiness, interview by Peggy Turnbull, December 17, 2002, transcript, Bluefield State University Archives, Bluefield, West Virginia, Box labeled "Oral History Transcripts," Folder December 2, 2002 Cabiness Interview, 5-6.

Irma Cabiness: “Everybody worked together, Peggy. You couldn’t tell the white from the black folds. The coal uh, was on all of them. You couldn’t tell who was who ‘til they had taken their bath”<sup>7</sup>

According to Irma Cabiness, there was a sense of community between coal miners in the early nineteenth century. However, this collaboration changed with the development of the city of Bluefield Master Plan in 1954. This Master Plan created by the city revealed the connection between loss of employment and population loss. It noted that “the city of Bluefield has experienced a substantial recent loss of population amounting to 10.5 percent between 1950 and 1960. This decline is related mainly to the severe losses in mining and railroad employment.”<sup>8</sup> The census data provided by the Master Plan showed that the Bluefield, West Virginia population was 21,506 and decreased to 19,356 by 1960. However, this decrease in population was not as drastic in the Black population as it was in the White population. The Master Plan reported 5,169 Black residents living in Bluefield in 1950 and 4,889 Black residents in 1960.<sup>9</sup> A considerable influence of this unemployment was the introduction of new coal mining technology that reduced the number of coal miners needed to produce high productivity. Without the need for workers, Black miners were fired at higher rates compared to White miners.<sup>10</sup> This elimination of miners disrupted the financial stability and coal community for residents across Bluefield.

Not only were there population and economic changes in Bluefield from the 1950s to the 1960s, but also significant social changes, such as civil rights activism and student protests.

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<sup>7</sup> Irma Cabiness, interview by Peggy Turnbull, December 17, 2002, transcript, William B. Robertson Library Archives, Bluefield, West Virginia, Box labeled “Oral History Transcripts,” Folder December 2, 2002 Cabiness Interview, 5-6.

<sup>8</sup> Bluefield City Planning Commission, West Virginia Economic Development Agency, *City of Bluefield Master Plan*, 1954,5.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, 6-7.

<sup>10</sup> C. Stewart McGehee and Frank Wilson, *Bluefield West Virginia 1889-1989: A Centennial History* (North Tazewell, Virginia: Clinch Valley Printing Co., Inc, 1995), 115-116.

These protests included sit-ins at lunch counters and at “the Granada Theater on Commerce Steet,” which “involved 200 protestors in West Virginia.”<sup>11</sup> However, one of the most notable protests in Bluefield was a twelve-mile march in 1960. This march in Mercer County, West Virginia, from Bluefield to Princeton, was to protest the K-12 school system's unwillingness to desegregate Mercer County schools.<sup>12</sup> These various protests proved that the battle for civil rights and the Black freedom struggle was not absent but woven into the lives of Southern Appalachians in Bluefield, West Virginia. The protests at Bluefield State College and the eventual bombing depict the ongoing fight for Black Freedom and the loss of Black authority at the institution was a result of discriminatory desegregation policies.

The *Brown v. the Board of Education* ruling altered many school systems, including Bluefield State College. Following this ruling, President Leroy B. Allen permitted White students to enroll in the historically all-Black Bluefield State College. As a result, the first students enrolled at Bluefield State included “several White Korean War veterans” who were “seeking quality public higher education and indeed graduated in 1957.”<sup>13</sup> For the next ten years following the *Brown v. Board* decision, the number of White students enrolled in Bluefield State would grow. By 1965 the number of White students had surpassed that of Black students, and the faculty “was 40% White.”<sup>14</sup>

It was July of 1966 when Bluefield State College officially hired their first White President, Wendell B. Hardaway, replacing the former Black President Leroy B. Allen.<sup>15</sup> Allen’s

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid, 128.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, 128.

<sup>13</sup> McGehee and Wilson, *Bluefield West Virginia 1889-1989*, quoted in Brown, *The Transition of a Historically Black College*,43.

<sup>14</sup> Brown, *The Transition of a Historically Black College*,44.

<sup>15</sup> McGehee and Wilson, *Bluefield West Virginia 1889-1989*,131.

replacement was likely influenced because of his Civil Rights Movement sympathies combined with the fact that “wealthy and politically well-connected corporate executives, the state authorities first failed to approve a well-deserved raise, and then ultimately refused to renew President Allen’s contract at Bluefield State.”<sup>16</sup> During Allen’s time as President, he had maintained a sizable number of Black faculty. However, when Hardaway attained the Presidency, he hired 23 White faculty and fired numerous Black faculty members, specifically administrative staff.<sup>17</sup> This hiring of White faculty and the firing of Black faculty shifted the structure of the college. What once had been a historically Black college became dominated by White faculty and White students, with the percentage of faculty soon becoming 30% Black and 70% White. At the same time, the student’s population consisted of 38% Black and 62% White students.<sup>18</sup>



Figure 4. This image is President Leroy B. Allen. Allen’s term ended in 1965 was the last Black President of Bluefield State until 2002. “Presidential History | Bluefield State University,” Bluefield State University, 2022, <https://bluefieldstate.edu/academics/library/presidential-history>.

This change from a Black faculty and Black student-led college was depicted in the college yearbooks from 1965 to 1968. In 1965 under President Leroy B. Allen, numerous Black faculty members appeared in the yearbook, including the director of field relations Carrolton Jackson, superintendent of buildings and grounds, William Jackson, music division, Dr. Cortez D. Reece, and director of S.U.B and activity coordinator William Colbert. In 1967 the yearbook for the college demonstrated that each Black faculty member mentioned maintained their

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid, 130; Brown, *The Transition of a Historically Black College*, 44.

<sup>17</sup> Brown, *The Transition of a Historically Black College*, 58.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, 51.

positions. However, in 1968, Reece and Colbert could no longer be seen in the yearbooks. Like Reece and Colbert, numerous Black faculty members are not depicted in the 1967 and 1968 yearbooks, such as Frankie Palmer, Dianne Bell, Barbra Lewis, Anita Brown, Mrs. L.L. Spencer, Mr. L. Thompson, and Edna Howard. These yearbooks show just how quickly the college demographics changed with the hiring of its first White President.<sup>19</sup>

Hiring a significant number of White staff was not the only change that Hardaway enacted. Some of the improvements included the development of the new 1.3-million-dollar physical education building in April 1967. According to *The Bluefieldian*, the building included:

“A total of 322 rooms and 10 corridors, the building is a four-story expensive collection of education facilities. In nice round figures, the size of the building is 252 feet in length, 116 feet in width, and 85 feet in height.”<sup>20</sup>

Other improvements were announced in May of 1967. Hardaway and his White business manager Edward Grose promoted physical improvements to the college. These improvements included building tennis courts, remodeling the women’s dormitories, a sidewalk between the dormitories and gymnasium, and adding more parking space. However, these improvements did come with financial repercussions. Grose noted in *The Bluefieldian* that along with the new building improvements, there would be increased rates for room and board beginning the fall semester of 1967, adding another financial obligation onto students and their parents.<sup>21</sup>

Many of these changes promoted by Hardaway prompted student and faculty dissent. This dissent included anonymous death threats against President Hardaway and protests in front

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<sup>19</sup> Bluefield State College, *Bluefield State College* (Bluefield, WV: 1965), William B. Robertson Library Archives; Bluefield State College, *Bluefield State College* (Bluefield, WV: 1967), William B. Robertson Library Archives, B5, Y4; Bluefield State College, *Bluefield State College* (Bluefield, WV: 1968), William B. Robertson Library Archives, B5, Y4, c.2.

<sup>20</sup> “Plans Projected for Campus Improvement,” *The Bluefieldian*, May 22, 1967, William B. Robertson Library Archives, Bluefield, West Virginia, Box “Bluefieldian 1964-1977.”

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

of his home. In response to these protests and disruptions, in October of 1967, the Governor of West Virginia, Hulett C. Smith, instructed the Human Rights Commission to investigate accusations concerning racial discrimination at the college.<sup>22</sup> After numerous hearings, the commission determined that there was evidence of racial discrimination at Bluefield State College since the hiring of President Hardaway. Dr. Ervin V. Griffin outlined these facets of discrimination in his talk at a conference for Black History at the West Virginia State College Institute in 1999. Griffin documented that the commission determined that the administration “acted with insensitivity,” created segregated spaces by not improving dormitory space, and perpetuated segregation within off-campus housing. Griffin also noted that the commission observed apparent income inconsistencies “between new white faculty and seasoned negro faculty” and that there was an increased trend in hiring white faculty and staff.<sup>23</sup>

The violations reported by the Human Rights Commission were extensive. Some of the violation conclusions included:

1. This discrimination manifests itself in inequitable financing, inadequate physical plant, insufficient faculty, and limited curricula.
2. This separate but not equal condition continues to present day.
3. The inequities of generally depressed salary schedule for faculty at Bluefield State College and other state colleges, can similarly be traced to its former status as a segregated Negro College for which lower salaries were the norm. Because of this depressed base, present faculty members both Negro and white, are victims of discriminatory practices regarding salaries and other conditions of employment.
4. Haphazard disciplinary procedures in the past year have been aggravated by a series of suspension and probations for students who were deprived of all normal recourse to due process of law, right to counsel or representation, right to confront accusers, right to provide and confront witnesses, and the right to appeal from an adverse ruling to a higher authority within the college administration. Often judgments were precipitate and punishments unduly harsh. The major impact of this unfairness has fallen upon Negro students and

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<sup>22</sup> Dr. Ervin V. Griffin, “Bluefield State College: A Time of Crisis and Reflection, Presentation on Black History” (Marshall University, Huntington, WV, 1991), 6-8, William B. Robertson Library Archives, Bluefield, West Virginia.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid, 14.

their sympathizers and was cause for the recent student discontent, protests, and demonstrations.<sup>24</sup>

In response to these numerous violations, the Human Rights Commission proposed changes for Bluefield State that Dr. Griffin documented. These proposed changes contended that the college should provide increased on-campus housing options and that the salaries of employees should be corrected to remove aspects of racial discrimination. In terms of the Black student protestors, the commission recommended that “the suspensions, probations, and penalties against students during the Fall of 1967 should be rescinded or amnestied, except for those students who participated in vandalism or acts of violence.”<sup>25</sup> Whether these recommendations by the Human Rights Commission were implemented directly after the ruling remains up for debate.<sup>26</sup> President Hardaway appeared to be more concerned about maintaining law and order than addressing the core racial disputes at Bluefield State. For example, a month after the Human Rights Commission’s investigation, Hardaway looked towards law enforcement to maintain control over the protests by Black college students and faculty.

Hardaway aimed to hire Lloyd W. Davis, a White man, as a security officer to neutralize the constant threat of protest throughout the campus. Hardaway and Detective Lieutenant Marvin J. Sears from the Metropolitan Police Department in Washington, D.C., had numerous pieces of correspondence concerning Davis’ employment. On November 2, 1967, Hardaway sent word to

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<sup>24</sup> “Background of Trouble Told in Narrative Report,” *Charleston Gazette*, December 10, 1968, Box 105, Folder 6, HRC Report 1968, William B. Robertson Library Archives, Bluefield, West Virginia.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid*, 14.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid*, 15-17.



Sears concerning Davis' skill.<sup>27</sup> Sears responded on November 7, 1967, stating that "should you decide to employ Mr. Davis, I am sure he will prove most satisfactory."<sup>28</sup> Davis was then hired November 17, 1967. Davis' duties were to:

"Provide law and order on the Bluefield State College campus and in the buildings. In this capacity, you may exercise all of the powers and authority and should be subject to all of the responsibilities of regularly elected constables in West Virginia counties."<sup>29</sup>

It is clear from this correspondence that Hardaway anticipated Davis to be able to maintain order on the campus of Bluefield State College. However, the hiring of Davis did little to stop the Black students from becoming upset about the rampant discrimination throughout the college.

Even with the hiring of Davis, protests throughout the college continued. On November 15, 1968, the *Bluefield Daily Telegraph* noted that President Hardaway had increased patrols of the college campus because of continued protests and vandalism. These rebellions included "death threats, bomb threats, tire-slashings, window-breakings and two food throwing sprees in the cafeteria."<sup>30</sup> Another violent act of rebellion involved Hardaway's home. One night in early November, two bricks sailed through his windows.<sup>31</sup> To deter further rebellions, Hardaway had asked the Bluefield city police department to increase the number of officers patrolling the

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<sup>27</sup> Letter, Wendell G. Hardaway to Marvin J. Sears, November 2, 1967, President's Office, Box 2, Folder 91: Davis Llyod (Security Officer) 7215 Wythe Avenue, William B. Robertson Library Archives, Bluefield, West Virginia.

<sup>28</sup> Letter, Marvin J. Sears to Wendell G. Hardaway, November 7, 1967, President's Office, Box 2, Folder 91: Davis Llyod (Security Officer) 7215 Wythe Avenue, William B. Robertson Library Archives, Bluefield, West Virginia.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> "Patrols at BSC are Increased," *The Bluefield Daily Telegraph*, November 15, 1968, microfilm, Craft Memorial Library, Bluefield, West Virginia.

<sup>31</sup> "BSC Windows Smashed; Damage Placed At \$2,200," *The Bluefield Daily Telegraph*, November 16, 1968, microfilm, Craft Memorial Library, Bluefield, West Virginia

campus.<sup>32</sup> Although, like the hiring of Davis, the inclusion of these patrols did little to stop violent rebellions.

The next day, November 16, 1968, thirteen windows in the Student Union building had been smashed, which caused \$2,200 in damage. After this act, President Hardaway placed the campus on a curfew. He then argued that the violent acts were a result of the recommendations of the Faculty Committee on Student Affairs involving a “food throwing spree.” The Faculty Committee on Student Affairs had “recommended suspension for one year of four students and permanent expulsion of another as a result of a food-throwing spree in the college cafeteria.”<sup>33</sup> Although, it was simple for Hardaway to blame the ruling on the cafeteria incident as a cause for the violent acts, this statement revealed a pattern that Hardaway continually failed to evaluate the broader picture of violence at the college. Collectively, the violent acts speak to protests over sustained racial discrimination.

Violence continued to surge throughout the college campus. On November 17, 1968, a bomb threat caused the Bluefield Fire Department to evacuate and search both the women’s and men’s dormitories at Bluefield State. According to the police, a bomb had been placed at the college dormitories, and it was scheduled to go off at 1:30 am. However, no explosion occurred. President Hardaway also continually received death threats. The *Bluefield Daily Telegraph* reported that some of the death threats were signed “Black Power.”<sup>34</sup> The Black Panther Party for Self Defense (BPPSD) since its founding in Oakland, California in 1966, fortified the Black

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<sup>32</sup> “Patrols at BSC are Increased,” *The Bluefield Daily Telegraph*, November 15, 1968, microfilm, Craft Memorial Library, Bluefield, West Virginia.

<sup>33</sup> “BSC Windows Smashed; Damage Placed At \$2,200,” *The Bluefield Daily Telegraph*, November 16, 1968, microfilm, Craft Memorial Library, Bluefield, West Virginia.

<sup>34</sup> “Dorms are Evacuated for Bomb Scare at BSC,” *The Bluefield Daily Telegraph*, November 17, 1968, microfilm, Craft Memorial Library, Bluefield, West Virginia.

Power Movement and influenced concepts of Black consciousness.<sup>35</sup> Historian Donna Jean Murch argued that “the Black Panther Party advocated armed revolution, but a primary school for children was its longest-running institution and arguably, its most important legacy.”<sup>36</sup> Black Bluefield students used ideas from the Black Panther Party and the Black Power movement of armed revolution to fight against White authority at their institution. Although The Black Power Movement and connections to the BPPSD are “often embraced as the quintessential northern urban Black Power movement, the Oakland Panthers consisted largely of southern rural migrants.”<sup>37</sup> The use of the discourse of Black Power by Black rural Appalachians in Bluefield demonstrates a national, urban, and rural reach to Black Power ideas. This signature on the death threats also illustrated that the violence occurring was not simply to be destructive but rather an effort to reveal the inequalities and discrimination at Bluefield State College. The Bluefield uprising reflects Elizabeth Hinton’s analysis. Violent rebellions do not represent Black criminality but rather signified Black resistance against social, economic, and political struggles.<sup>38</sup> Therefore, these violent rebellions and letters signed with “Black Power” demonstrated that Black students believed they were a part of the Black Freedom Struggle.

Statements made by Black student Edgar James on November 17, 1968, demonstrated the root of the violence Black student discrimination at Bluefield State. James was an education major and “a 25-year-old ex-Army paratrooper.”<sup>39</sup> James was at the forefront of these emerging

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<sup>35</sup> Donna Jean Murch, *Living for the City: Migration, Education, and the Rise of the Black Panther Party in Oakland, California* (North Carolina: The University of North Carolina Press, 2010) 5.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid*, 230.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid*, 229.

<sup>38</sup> Elizabeth Hinton, *America on Fire: The Untold History of Police Violence and Black Rebellion Since the 1960s* (New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2021) 5.

<sup>39</sup> “Dr. Hardaway Says Death Threats Don’t Worry Him,” *The Bluefield Daily Telegraph*, November 17, 1968, microfilm, Craft Memorial Library, Bluefield, West Virginia.

violent rebellions. A later report by the *Bluefield Daily Telegraph* on James on November 25<sup>th</sup>, 1968, noted that James was 26, married and “employed by the N&W Railway.”<sup>40</sup> When discussing discrimination at the college, James stated:

“They are carrying out mental genocide here, trying for the educational extermination of the black student. There is systematic weeding out of the black student. This is an imperialistic and oppressive system at Bluefield.”<sup>41</sup>

The *Bluefield Daily Telegraph* also mentioned that James had submitted a list of thirty-five grievances to President Hardaway. While not released to the public until later the grievances addressed the lack of Black history courses and Black faculty, and the White administration’s discrimination towards Black students and Black faculty. In that same article, Hardaway responded to James’ demands, dismissing them as “ridiculous.” Hardaway remarked, “these black students are talking about black culture. But this is black-mail, and we won’t have it.” This article also noted that Hardaway had declined to release the grievances given to him by James.<sup>42</sup> This statement by Hardaway and his refusal to release the list of grievances showed his determination to ignore and repress complaints involving Black student discrimination.

Aside from Hardaway and James' opinions, Bluefield's citizens had divergent opinions regarding the violence. Some citizens voiced their opinions in the “Letters to the Editor” section of the *Bluefield Daily Telegraph*. For instance, Andrew Fudge from Athens, West Virginia, voiced his opinion in this section. He commented that he had a daughter who attended classes at

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<sup>40</sup> “Conspiracy Charged in Bombing: Negro Leader at BSC is Arrested,” *The Bluefield Daily Telegraph*, November 25, 1968, microfilm, Craft Memorial Library, Bluefield, West Virginia.

<sup>41</sup> “Dr. Hardaway Says Death Threats Don’t Worry Him,” *The Bluefield Daily Telegraph*, November 17, 1968, microfilm, Craft Memorial Library, Bluefield, West Virginia.

<sup>42</sup> “Dr. Hardaway Says Death Threats Don’t Worry Him,” *The Bluefield Daily Telegraph*, November 17, 1968, microfilm, Craft Memorial Library, Bluefield, West Virginia.

Bluefield State. Fudge explained that his daughter described various “students who wear matches around their necks with something printed on them,” and when “she asked what it meant,” she was “told—Black Power—Burn Baby Burn.” In response to his daughter’s descriptions, Fudge stated “we have two choices as I see it—Give police laws with teeth in them to work with and they will do the job, or be unconcerned, cowardly or afraid and let this Country go to hell.”<sup>43</sup> Fudge’s statements reveal that he was against the violent rebellions at the school, a sentiment that he shared with President Hardaway.

The *Bluefield Daily Telegraph*’s reporting on Bluefield State College’s rebellions primarily provided insight into the views and opinions of the general White population in Bluefield. However, its publication of Black student’s grievances documented the discrimination at Bluefield state during the late 1960s. On November 20, 1968, President Hardaway released the list of forty-one grievances to the *Bluefield Daily Telegraph*, which then published them. These grievances written by James and Black students from Bluefield State College included:

1. We want a new President, academic dean, business manager, dean of women and also Mr. Jack Nestor (Student Union manager) and Mr. Llyod Davis (security officer must go).
2. We want courses taught in black history and black culture.
3. We want black coaches in the athletic department.
4. We want a library fully available seven days a week.
5. We want better food and three meals a day seven days a week.
6. We want use of the cafeteria, the Big Blue Lounge and the P.E. Building.
7. We want the game room open and better equipment provided.
8. We want more all-college assemblies.
9. We want more jobs available to black students.
10. We want more student control.
11. We want teachers to stop tampering with the grades of black students.
12. We want students on discipline committees.
13. We want students advised about the draft, pro and con, and we also want students’ draft status sent in promptly by the college.

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<sup>43</sup> “Letters to the Editor: Law Enforcement is Needed at BSC,” *The Bluefield Daily Telegraph*, November 18, 1968, microfilm, Craft Memorial Library, Bluefield, West Virginia.

14. We want more student news in the school newspaper, and if censored, done so by students.
15. We want the campus watchmen screened and the students made aware of who they are.
16. We want room searching stopped.
17. We want the male students reimbursed \$7 for damages done to (washing and drying) machines last year.
18. We want better food preparation in the snack bar.
19. We want the time clock (for student employees) abolished.
20. We want the windows in the Student Union replaced immediately.
21. We want out of state students admitted to this college freely.
22. We want a television in the men's dormitory.
23. We want a wide selection of books (paperbacks) available in the bookstore, both controversial and non-controversial.
24. We want books in time for the start of the semester and we want the rapid change of textbooks stopped.
25. We want more speakers and cultural programs on the campus
26. We want more consideration given to the assignment of student teachers.
27. We want vigilantes dismissed.
28. We want the parking regulations and the permit costs decreased.
29. We want Mrs. Pearson (former manager) over the bookstore with some black help.
30. We want the student to have mail boxes and the mail in the union. We want the mail not to be tampered with.
31. We want Mr. Thompson (former acting head) made head of the business department.
32. We want an office for Mr. Robertson (chemistry teacher).
33. We want Mr. Jackson (maintenance supervisor) to hire students for jobs connected with his department.
34. We want more black faculty members.
35. We want the dormitories to remain open during the holidays.
36. We want the Human Rights Commission report released to the public.
37. We want a black dietitian over the meal program.
38. We want the students' test paper returned to them after a test, to keep.
39. We want the five ousted students reinstated and their records cleared of the matter.
40. We want the students dismissed from the (teaching) block reevaluated.
41. WE WANT THE ABOVE-MENTIONED DEMANDS MET IN FULL NOW.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> "BSC Demands Released, Activities are Suspended," *The Bluefield Daily Telegraph*, November 20, 1968, microfilm, Craft Memorial Library, Bluefield, West Virginia.

These grievances developed by Edgar James and roughly 450 Black students who attended Bluefield State College provide insight into how President Hardaway and other White administrators and staff, such as Jack Nestor, the Student Union manager, and Davis, the security guard, discriminated against both Black faculty and students.<sup>45</sup> Here was the context of the uprisings/rebellions according to Black students. There was systemic racial discrimination against Black individuals that occurred throughout a historically Black college. This oppression included the purposeful rejection of Black faculty and students and economic and social oppression.

The Black student protestors mentioned the rising rates of parking permits; however, this was not the only cost increase that occurred since Hardaway became President.<sup>46</sup> Hardaway and his business Manager Edward Grose had also raised the costs of room and board during the fall semester of 1967.<sup>47</sup> Rising costs of education exacerbated racial discrimination. As mentioned in the Master Plan for Bluefield in 1954 the economy had begun to suffer because of the decline of the coal mining industry.<sup>48</sup> However, this economic downturn negatively impacted a higher number of Black miners, which in turn would impact their families.<sup>49</sup> On top of the struggling economy, both Black and White students were required to pay more for their education. This

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<sup>45</sup> “Hardaway May Get Help of State Board of Education,” *The Bluefield Daily Telegraph*, November 21, 1968, microfilm, Craft Memorial Library, Bluefield, West Virginia.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>47</sup> “Plans Projected for Campus Improvement,” *The Bluefieldian*, May 22, 1967, William B. Robertson Library Archives, Box “Bluefieldian 1964-1977.”

<sup>48</sup> Bluefield City Planning Commission, West Virginia Economic Development Agency, *City of Bluefield Master Plan*, 1954, 2,5,

<sup>49</sup> McGehee and Wilson, *Bluefield West Virginia 1889-1989*, 115-116.

new payment requirement, combined with the decrease in mining jobs and the college's failure to provide job opportunities to Black students, compounded racial and economic oppression.<sup>50</sup>

The 1967 Human Rights Commission ruling revealed the sustained burdens that the White administration of the college placed on its Black students and faculty. Number thirty-six of the Black student's grievances stated, "we want the Human Rights Commission report released to the public."<sup>51</sup> This commission, as previously revealed, had indicated in October of 1967 that racial discrimination ran rampant at Bluefield State College. The commission left a list of recommendations for the White administration. However, these student grievances exposed President Hardaway's unwillingness to comply with the commission's recommendations and to listen to Black student's voices.<sup>52</sup> For example, in grievance number twelve, the students stated, "We want students on discipline committees."<sup>53</sup> Bluefield State had already been notified of this problem concerning student participation in discipline during the findings of the Human Rights Commission in 1967. One of the recommendations that the commission made involving discipline stated:

"The administration should revise the faculty handbooks and disciplinary procedures at the institution to include student participation and that the institution follow the AAUP guidelines concerning academic freedom."<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> "BSC Demands Released, Activities are Suspended," *The Bluefield Daily Telegraph*, November 20, 1968, microfilm, Craft Memorial Library, Bluefield, West Virginia.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Dr. Ervin V. Griffin, *Bluefield State College: A Time of Crisis and Reflection*, Presentation on Black History, (Marshall University, Huntington, WV, 1991), 6-8, 14-17.

<sup>53</sup> "BSC Demands Released, Activities are Suspended," *The Bluefield Daily Telegraph*, November 20, 1968, microfilm, Craft Memorial Library, Bluefield, West Virginia.

<sup>54</sup> Dr. Ervin V. Griffin, *Bluefield State College: A Time of Crisis and Reflection*, Presentation on Black History, (Marshall University, Huntington, WV, 1991), 15.



This recommendation, along with the grievances given by the students to President Hardaway, demonstrated that Hardaway was willing to maintain aspects of racial oppression and silence Black students in an effort to promote and to expand White authority. The reluctance to provide the public with the recommendations made by the Human Rights Commission also showed a lack of transparency between the administration, faculty, and students.

Systemic and prolonged racial, economic, and social discrimination and oppression after the *Brown v. Board* decision damaged a once-thriving all-Black college. Unwilling to accept this discrimination and damage to their school, Black students voiced their outrage through rebellions. These rebellions came to a climax with the bombing on November 21, 1968.

It was 7:10 pm on Thanksgiving Day when the sound of an explosion tore through Bluefield, West Virginia. Placed through a broken section of roof were “six to eight sticks of dynamite” that left a gaping hole in the new Physical Education Building at Bluefield State College.<sup>55</sup> A large portion of the damage was concentrated on the offices used by Bluefield State coaches.<sup>56</sup> A week before the explosion Black student protestors had mentioned in their grievances that they wanted “black coaches in the athletic department.”<sup>57</sup> The *Bluefield Daily Telegraph* reported the next day, November 22, 1968, that the explosion had caused substantial damage to the \$1.6 million dollar structure; however, the *Bluefieldian* had earlier reported that the structure had cost \$1.3 million dollars.<sup>58</sup> This discrepancy can reveal one of two things. The

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<sup>55</sup> “Bluefield State Phys Ed Building Ripped By Explosion,” *The Bluefield Daily Telegraph*, November 22, 1968, microfilm, Craft Memorial Library, Bluefield, West Virginia.

<sup>56</sup> “No Injuries or Deaths Reported,” *The Bluefield Daily Telegraph*, November 22, 1968, microfilm, Craft Memorial Library, Bluefield, West Virginia.

<sup>57</sup> “BSC Demands Released, Activities are Suspended,” *The Bluefield Daily Telegraph*, November 20, 1968, microfilm, Craft Memorial Library, Bluefield, West Virginia.

<sup>58</sup> “Bluefield State Phys Ed Building Ripped By Explosion,” *The Bluefield Daily Telegraph*, November 22, 1968, microfilm, Craft Memorial Library, Bluefield, West Virginia.;

first being that there perhaps was a communication discrepancy between the college administration, students, and the school newspaper. It is also likely that a reason for the discrepancy is that either the college administration or the *Bluefield Daily Telegraph* exaggerated the cost of the building to either acquire more sympathy for the administrators, more insurance payout, or to demonize and influence how the public viewed those involved in the bombing. The *Bluefield Daily Telegraph* often disparaged the Black students involved in the protests.<sup>59</sup> This characterization by the *Bluefield Daily Telegraph* occurred before and after the explosion. For example, before the explosion the newspaper referred to the students involved in the protests as “militant Negro students” or would argue that when interviewing students, “most students contacted, white and black, said there was little to no discrimination on campus.”<sup>60</sup> This erasure of discriminatory policies and attempts to “radicalize” Black student engagement fit within local and National White media trends. For example, the newspaper described those involved in the bombing as a “group of thugs.”<sup>61</sup> These statements by the *Bluefield Daily Telegraph* characterize Black student protestors as being irrational in their protests and violence. As depicted by the Human Rights Commission and the list of student grievances, blatant racial discrimination had occurred throughout Bluefield State College.

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<sup>59</sup> “Hardaway May Get Help of State Board of Education,” *The Bluefield Daily Telegraph*, November 21, 1968, microfilm, Craft Memorial Library, Bluefield, West Virginia.; “Dr. Hardaway Says Death Threats Don’t Worry Him,” *The Bluefield Daily Telegraph*, November 17, 1968, microfilm, Craft Memorial Library, Bluefield, West Virginia.; “Campus is Closed at BSC; Reward is Set at \$5,000,” *The Bluefield Daily Telegraph*, November 23, 1968, microfilm, Craft Memorial Library, Bluefield, West Virginia

<sup>60</sup> “Hardaway May Get Help of State Board of Education,” *The Bluefield Daily Telegraph*, November 21, 1968, microfilm, Craft Memorial Library, Bluefield, West Virginia.; “Dr. Hardaway Says Death Threats Don’t Worry Him,” *The Bluefield Daily Telegraph*, November 17, 1968, microfilm, Craft Memorial Library, Bluefield, West Virginia.

<sup>61</sup> “Campus is Closed at BSC; Reward is Set at \$5,000,” *The Bluefield Daily Telegraph*, November 23, 1968, microfilm, Craft Memorial Library, Bluefield, West Virginia

The editors of the *Bluefield Daily Telegraph*, Hugh Shott, and Richard Weasley expressed their beliefs on the protests and violence at Bluefield State College. Shott and Weasley described those involved in the bombing as “would-be murderers” and stated that those involved in the bombing “could not have cared less [about injuring someone] as long as they made their point.” This expression of opinion further demonized Black student protestors. They continued to describe those involved as a “small gang of criminals” and stated that Bluefield State was “a good college.”<sup>62</sup> This language used by two editors of the *Bluefield Daily Telegraph* revealed the newspaper viewed the bombing and protests as unfounded and criminal. While it had alluded in implicit bias against Black student protestors in the media, this article provided further evidence of this bias. Therefore, when reading newspaper articles about the bombing and aftermath, one must remember that the *Bluefield Daily Telegraph* was more likely to align itself with White administrators than Black students regarding reporting notions of inclusivity and racial discrimination.

Bluefield State College was closed in the days following the bombing. This shutdown included closing the men's and women's dormitories and excluded “those with official business to transact at the college.” Bluefield State did not clearly define official business.<sup>63</sup> Additionally, the college canceled classes until after the Thanksgiving holiday.<sup>64</sup> The City of Bluefield also ordered the Police Department to maintain around-the-clock surveillance of the college. The City

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<sup>62</sup> Hugh Shott and Richard Weasley, “Bluefield Daily Telegraph Interprets: Bluefield State Must be Saved,” *The Bluefield Daily Telegraph*, November 23, 1968, microfilm, Craft Memorial Library, Bluefield, West Virginia.

<sup>63</sup> “Campus is Closed at BSC; Reward is Set at \$5,000,” *The Bluefield Daily Telegraph*, November 23, 1968, microfilm, Craft Memorial Library, Bluefield, West Virginia

<sup>64</sup> “Search Narrows in Bombing At BSC Gym as Leads Are Checked,” *The Bluefield Daily Telegraph*, November 24, 1968, microfilm, Craft Memorial Library, Bluefield, West Virginia.

Manager Howard Leist, in a letter to the Governor of West Virginia, Hullet C. Smith, stated, “I implore you as the Chief Executive Officer of the State of West Virginia to act with fortitude necessary to cause the removal of hard-core rebellious students from the midst of the student population on the campus so the police can be withdrawn.”<sup>65</sup> This around-the-clock surveillance, along with the letter to the Governor of West Virginia show how immediately impactful the bombing was on the City of Bluefield. It caused fear for the White college administrators and staff, White police officers, and White city officials of Bluefield.

How security officers could manage college disruptions and security issues after the bombing in Bluefield is shown in a letter written on October 10, 1968, by Assistant Attorney General Claude A. Joyce to Mr. Constantine Curris, who was Director of Education Programs in the Division of Higher Education in the West Virginia Board of Education. Assistant Attorney General Joyce answered Curris’s questions of November 15, 1968. One of these questions included, “are campus security officials vested with the authority to arrest any person who commits a statutory offense on campus?” To which the Attorney General responded:

“Campus security officers are appointed by the West Virginia Board of Education for the various colleges and universities under its jurisdiction. The officers so appointed are required to take the same oath of office taken by other public officers and to file the oath in the office of the county clerk in the county where they are appointed. They are also required to give bond in a penalty of not less than two not more than fifteen thousand dollars.” “A security officer may arrest any person who has committed a felony in his presence.”<sup>66</sup>

This statement made by Assistant Attorney General Joyce afforded more power to campus security officers such as Davis of Bluefield State College. However, Black students at

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<sup>65</sup>“Campus is Closed at BSC; Reward is Set at \$5,000,” *The Bluefield Daily Telegraph*, November 23, 1968, microfilm, Craft Memorial Library, Bluefield, West Virginia

<sup>66</sup> Letter, Claude A. Joyce to Constantine Curris, October 10, 1968, President’s Office, Box 2, Folder 91: Davis Lloyd (Security Officer) 7215 Wythe Avenue, William B. Robertson Library Archives.

Bluefield State had previously expressed their discontent with Davis when asking for his resignation in their list of grievances.<sup>67</sup> Therefore, the West Virginia school system, whether knowingly or not, directly went against the requests of Black students who has cited racial discrimination.

The first arrest that occurred following the bombing was that of 26-year-old Edgar James on November 24, 1968.<sup>68</sup> James, a veteran of Vietnam, had previously been a part of Black student protests and issued the student grievances to President Hardaway.<sup>69</sup> James had been charged with conspiracy and his “bond was set at \$25,000.”<sup>70</sup> One day after James' arrest came the arrest of two more Black Bluefield State College students and one Black Bluefield resident. These arrests included Shannon Dwight Banks whom *The Bluefield Daily Telegraph* described as 20 years old and a “U.S. Army private home on leave.”<sup>71</sup> The other individuals arrested included former Black Bluefield State students, 21-year-old Nathaniel B. Johnson and 20-year-old William C. Travis. Each person arrested was charged with “conspiracy to inflict injury to persons or property and possession of explosives with criminal intent.”<sup>72</sup> On Tuesday, November 27, 1968, the fifth and final suspect in the bombing/rebellion at Bluefield State College was

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<sup>67</sup> “BSC Demands Released, Activities are Suspended,” *The Bluefield Daily Telegraph*, November 20, 1968, microfilm, Craft Memorial Library, Bluefield, West Virginia.

<sup>68</sup> “Conspiracy Charged in Bombing: Negro Leader at BSC is Arrested,” *The Bluefield Daily Telegraph*, November 25, 1968, microfilm, Craft Memorial Library, Bluefield, West Virginia.

<sup>69</sup> “BSC Demands Released, Activities are Suspended,” *The Bluefield Daily Telegraph*, November 20, 1968, microfilm, Craft Memorial Library, Bluefield, West Virginia.

<sup>70</sup> “Conspiracy Charged in Bombing: Negro Leader at BSC is Arrested,” *The Bluefield Daily Telegraph*, November 25, 1968, microfilm, Craft Memorial Library, Bluefield, West Virginia.

<sup>71</sup> “Three More are Arrested in Bombing at BSC,” *The Bluefield Daily Telegraph*, November 26, 1968, microfilm, Craft Memorial Library, Bluefield, West Virginia.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*

arrested. The Black student arrested last was 18-year-old Paul Cecil Crockett Jr. Crockett was “a freshman at Bluefield State.”<sup>73</sup>

After the arrests of Edgar James, Shannon Dwight Banks, Nathaniel B. Johnson, William C. Travis, and Paul Cecil Crockett, Bluefield State College decided to reopen its doors on Monday, December 2, 1968. However, the reopening of the college came with new strict regulations and security rules. *The Bluefield Daily Telegraph* listed the rules put in place by President Hardaway and they stated:

1. Effective Monday, December 2, students will not be permitted on campus after 5pm except to attend night classes or use the library. Students must show their identity cards on entering the campus or when requested.
2. Students attending night classes must secure from the registrar or instructor an official copy of their schedule to be shown upon request of any college official.
3. Only persons using the library will be permitted on the campus on Saturdays, Sundays, and holidays.
4. Students using the library after 5p.m. or on Saturday must get an admission slip from the librarian in advance.
5. Any other persons needing to be on the campus for any reason should make arrangements with the president’s office, business manager or security officer.
6. All on-campus activities are cancelled indefinitely.
7. These restrictions are temporary only, pending the duration of emergency conditions faced by the college.<sup>74</sup>

Alongside these regulations, President Hardaway also maintained the closure of the campus dormitories, which Black students primarily occupied.<sup>75</sup> These new regulations put in place by President Hardaway further restricted Black students and went directly against Black student grievances. The Black student grievances that were directly attacked by the new

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<sup>73</sup> “Fifth Suspect Arrested in BSC Bombing,” *The Bluefield Daily Telegraph*, November 27, 1968, microfilm, Craft Memorial Library, Bluefield, West Virginia.

<sup>74</sup> “BSC Sets Tight Security Rules,” *The Bluefield Daily Telegraph*, November 30, 1968, microfilm, Craft Memorial Library, Bluefield, West Virginia.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*

regulations included “we want a library fully available seven days a week” and “we want the dormitories to remain open during the holidays.” There was still no evidence that the results of the Human Rights Commission had been released at this point.<sup>76</sup> One of the most detrimental and discriminatory aspects of Hardaway’s decisions was his choice to sustain the closure of the college dormitories.

Faced with the closure, the Black dorm residents were forced to locate off-campus or other housing accommodations. The removal of Black student housing further “whitened” Bluefield’s campus. The West Virginia chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) found the closure of these dormitories to be detrimental to Black students, so much so that they filed a “court injunction to force the reopening of dormitories at Bluefield State College.”<sup>77</sup> The NAACP legal advisor Willard Brown also noted that “we are consulting with the national NAACP about the possibility of seeking a federal court injunction.”<sup>78</sup> President Hardaway, in response to the NAACP, stated he “deeply regretted having to close the dormitories but under the condition I don’t see that we can do anything else. I do not want to be responsible for the lives of these young people.”<sup>79</sup> President Hardaway’s statement, combined with his intent on continuing the dorm closures and the response of the NAACP, reveals Hardaway’s lack of empathy for Black students, and his desire to “whiten” the college. Although Hardaway did not directly mention that the dorms contained predominantly Black students, by closing the dorms, he limited Black student access to housing, limiting the

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<sup>76</sup> “BSC Demands Released, Activities are Suspended,” *The Bluefield Daily Telegraph*, November 20, 1968, microfilm, Craft Memorial Library, Bluefield, West Virginia.

<sup>77</sup> “NAACP Wants Dorms Opened,” *The Bluefield Daily Telegraph*, December 1, 1968, microfilm, Craft Memorial Library, Bluefield, West Virginia.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

ability for Black students to return to college. This inability for Black students to return to college sustained the already discriminatory college practices.

Frustration regarding how Bluefield State administrators treated their Black students and faculty began to spread throughout the Bluefield campus. Bluefield residents expressed their opinions in the letter to the editor section of the *Bluefield Daily Telegraph*. On December 8<sup>th</sup>, 1968, two Bluefield, West Virginia residents expressed their opinions regarding the bombing and the administration at Bluefield State College in letters entitled “More Student Unrest Inevitable?” Al Simmons and J. Spencer Thompson were both residents of Bluefield. Simmons argued against the actions of Bluefield State and stated that:

“The basic question to be decided before a real community can be established at Bluefield State College is whether or not the administration and faculty are ready to deal with the students as equal partners in developing curriculum, disciplinary procedures and other areas of student concern.”

“The Bluefield State administration and government in West Virginia must soon recognize that the master slave relationship in dealing with students is a thing of the past. This applies not only to BSC but all other colleges where the student is regarded as a second-class citizen with third class rights.”<sup>80</sup>

While not having as radical views as Simmons, Thompson also felt as if the administration at Bluefield State hurt Black students and faculty. He felt as if the bombing and protests occurred because of racial frustrations. In the letters to the editor, Thompson discussed his opinion on the findings of the Human Rights Commission and Governor of West Virginia regarding the closure of the dormitories.

“It is felt by many persons of both races who have firsthand information of the resultant conditions at the school, that the Governor of West Virginia, whose Commission on Human Rights, at his instigation, investigated and substantiated accusations against white college officials, should accept some of the responsibility for the unrest and recent bombing there.”

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<sup>80</sup> “Letters to the Editor: More Student Unrest Inevitable,” *The Bluefield Daily Telegraph*, December 8, 1968, microfilm, Craft Memorial Library, Bluefield, West Virginia.



“It is certain that a very, very few people are aware of what the Negro female student have had to endure in the process of having to leave the dormitory on short notice, with no decent abode being guaranteed them after having paid to live in.”<sup>81</sup>

Simmons and Thompson provided evidence that everyday Bluefield residents were conflicted about the protests and the bombing. Although the *Bluefield Daily Telegraph* characterized Black students from Bluefield State as “thugs,” not every resident agreed with this characterization. Residents like Simmons and Thompson recognized that there had been consistent racial discrimination at the college.

Along with the mixed reactions by the public of West Virginia, the *Charleston Gazette* and Governor Hulett C. joined the conversation. They released the conclusion of the Human Rights Commission on December 10, 1968. This release of revealed the extent to which Bluefield State’s administration actively discriminated against Black faculty and students.<sup>82</sup> Therefore, providing substantiation that Black faculty and Black students were not wrong in their assertions of racial discrimination concerning the White administration and President Hardaway. Another matter that the releasing of the Commission findings did was outline the frequent Bluefield State College protests that occurred in 1967. According to the Human Rights Commission, the protests that occurred in 1967 began in early October with a “fire at Arter Hall, the “old gym” at Bluefield State College “arson was suspected but no arrests were made.”<sup>83</sup> However, the Commission observed that a rebellious situation that led the Commission to

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<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>82</sup> “Here’s Text of Report on Bluefield State College,” *Charleston Gazette*, December 10, 1968, Box 105, Folder 6, HRC Report 1968, William B. Robertson Library Archives.

<sup>83</sup> “Background of Trouble Told in Narrative Report,” *Charleston Gazette*, December 10, 1968, Box 105, Folder 6, HRC Report 1968, William B. Robertson Library Archives Bluefield, West Virginia.

investigate Bluefield State was “a student demonstration on Friday, Oct. 13, 1967 [which] brought state and local police to the student union to protect property.”<sup>84</sup> This initially peaceful student demonstration occurred during the Bluefield State Homecoming and active protestors who “carried signs and sang songs, some proclaiming “students’ rights: and others derogatory of the administration.”<sup>85</sup> However, the Commission asserted that the once peaceful protest turned violent when police escorted Hardaway to his car. According to the *Charleston Gazette* “rocks were thrown, police were struck with fists and at least one rock.”<sup>86</sup> Whether this violence was intensified by the police presence or Hardaway was not identified by the Human Rights Commission. The release of this information in December 1968 after the bombing of the gymnasium proved that there had been prolonged racial rebellions and protests against White administrators since the hiring of President Hardaway in 1967. It also demonstrated that White administrators had done little to change racially discriminatory practices in 1968 that had caused Black student and faculty dissent as early as October 1967.

The impact of the bombing and violence at the school reverberated across the college. The effect is in the 1969 yearbook with President Hardaway’s statement. Hardaway described 1968 as “characterized by restlessness, and disturbances.” Hardaway then contended that the year 1969 “is a time when more student voices are heard.”<sup>87</sup> In these statements, Hardaway did not reference the Black students at the college, but rather erased Black student voices. This

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<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>85</sup> “Background of Trouble Told in Narrative Report,” *Charleston Gazette*, December 10, 1968, Box 105, Folder 6, HRC Report 1968, William B. Robertson Library Archives Bluefield, West Virginia.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>87</sup> Bluefield State College, *Bluefield State College* (Bluefield, WV: 1969), William B. Robertson Library Archives, Bluefield, West Virginia, B5, Y4, c.2.

indicated that President Hardaway intended to leave the rebellions of 1967 and 1968 in the past rather than address his administration's systemic racially discriminatory practices. Hardaway also proved that he had no intent of changing the racially discriminatory practices at the school with the Bluefield State College catalog.

The Bluefield State College catalog from 1969-1971 changed significantly, from the 1967-1969 catalog in defining the student code of conduct. In the catalog from 1967-1969, the conduct regulations of students were two pages long.<sup>88</sup> The catalog from 1969-1971 was twelve pages long and included two sections that included student and administration conduct. A notable difference between the two catalogs was the 1969-

1971's inclusion of regulations for "Freedom of Expression and Assembly." This section of the 1969-1971 states that "as a citizen, the student is

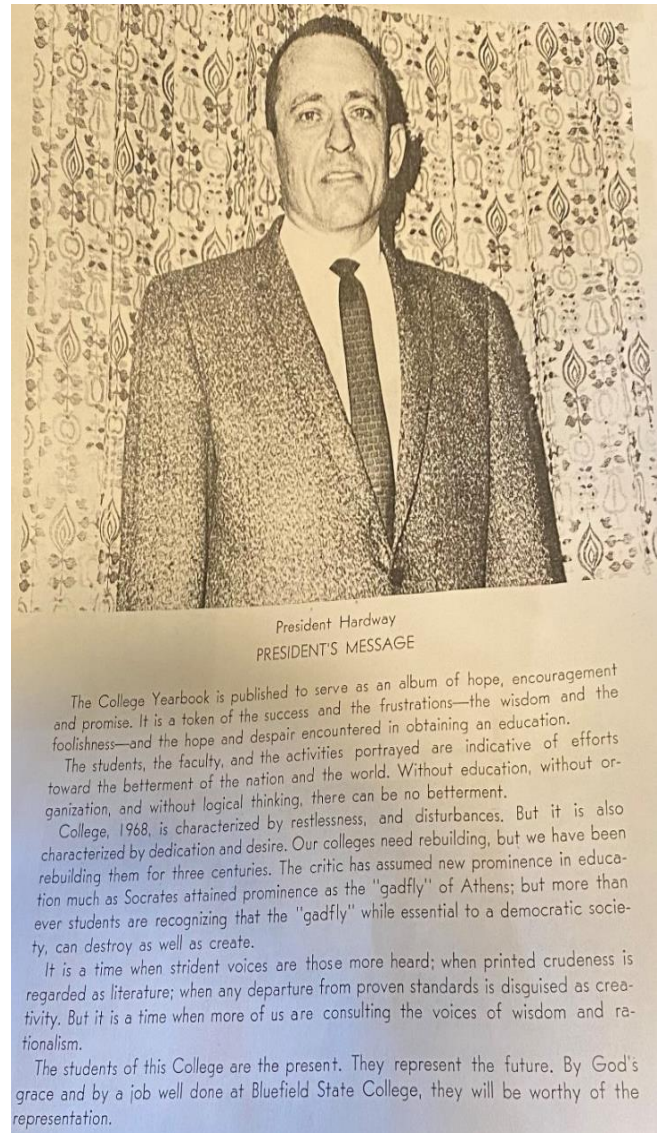


Figure 5. This image is of President Hardaway's statement made in the Bluefield State College yearbook of 1969. Bluefield State College, *Bluefield State College* (Bluefield, WV: 1969), William B. Robertson Library Archives, B5, Y4, c.2.

<sup>88</sup> "Bluefield State College Catalog 1967-1969," Bluefield State College, 1967-1969, Box 28, William B. Robertson Library Archives.

not infringe upon the basic rights and freedoms held by other members of the academic community.”<sup>89</sup> This new regulation in the catalog allowed President Hardaway to restrict Black student protest because it was categorized as an infringement on “basic rights and freedoms held by other members of the academic community.” Therefore, this amendment provided space for White Administrators to argue that any form of protest was an infringement on their rights and once again restricted the privileges of Black students.

Racially discriminatory practices had plagued Bluefield State College since the 1954 ruling of *Brown v. The Board of Education*. These discriminatory practices were amplified with the removal of Black president Leroy B. Allen and the hiring of White President Wendall Hardaway. Hardaway continuously amplified racial tensions by removing Black faculty, limiting Black student admissions, maintaining salary inequity, ignoring Black student and faculty grievances, and pursuing law and order over tackling systemic racism. Because of President Hardaway, White administrators such as Edward

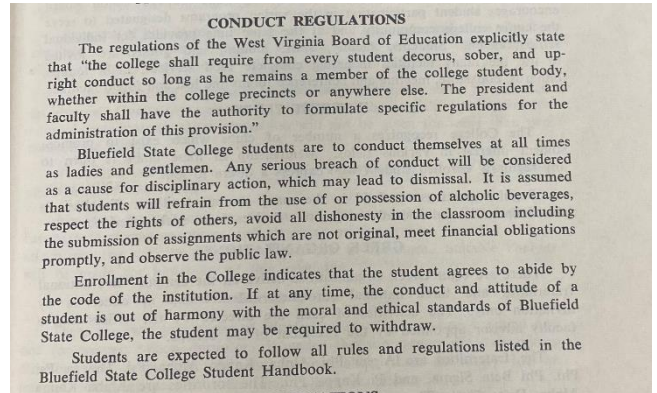


Figure 6. This image depicts the Bluefield State College code of conduct from 1967-1969. “Bluefield State College Catalog 1967-1969,” Bluefield State College, 1967-1969, Box 28, William B. Robertson Library Archives.

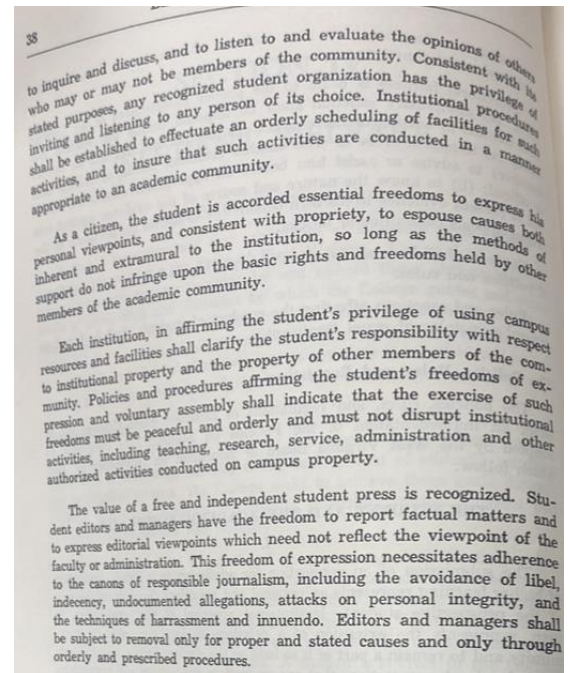


Figure 7. This image depicts the Bluefield State College code of conduct from 1969-1971. “Bluefield State College Catalog 1969-1971,” Bluefield State College, 1967-1969, Box 28, William B. Robertson Library Archives.

<sup>89</sup> “Bluefield State College Catalog 1969-1971,” Bluefield State College, 1967-1969, Box 28, William B. Robertson Library Archives.

Grose and staff like Lloyd Davis ignored systemic racism that Black students actively protested and violently rebelled against Bluefield State College.

CHAPTER THREE  
MEMORIES AND LEGACIES:  
BLUEFIELD AND ASHEVILLE'S STUDENT UPRISINGS 50 YEARS LATER

In the decades since the rebellions at Asheville High and Bluefield State both institutions, and in some ways their communities, have wrestled in largely different ways, with the meaning of their rebellions. Over time, Asheville High has been more willing to accept and reconcile with its past. Although those who attended Asheville High had conflicting memories regarding the rebellion, former Asheville High students had been willing to discuss these memories with one another in the press, and with outsiders. Many former Asheville High students have been actively involved in a local Facebook page, advocating for reparations, and by encouraging the development of a documentary of the Asheville High Rebellion of 1969. None of this has been the case at Bluefield State. As an institution it has remained reluctant to address the impacts and legacies of its rebellion. Instead confronting and acknowledging their history, the University has chosen to ignore the consequences and the role it played in the Bluefield State Rebellion of 1968. This chapter will discuss the way former Asheville High School students have addressed and remembered the 1969 rebellion, and Asheville during the 1960s and 1970s. It will contend that the “Veneer of Racial Harmony” in Asheville has been challenged by the memories of the rebellion.<sup>1</sup> This chapter will also examine the legacy of Bluefield State College/University and how this legacy has contributed to the erasure of Black authority and the “whitening” of a Historically Black College or University (HBCU).

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<sup>1</sup> Darin J. Waters, “Life Beneath the Veneer: The Black Community in Asheville, North Carolina from 1793 to 1900,” (Ph.D. diss., the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2011); Patrick Shane Parker, *Appalachian Activists: The Civil Rights Movement in Asheville, NC* (North Carolina: Appalachian State University, 2016) 1-111.

## The Memory of Asheville High School

The Asheville Rebellion had a long-lasting impact on those affected by the rebellion. In recent years, a Facebook page called “I Survived the 1969 Asheville Riot,” emerged and gained followers. This Facebook page has contained a variety of opinions, viewpoints, and photographs from those affected by the rebellion. It has functioned as both a clearing house for documents and a place where people can express their opinions about the rebellion. Some viewpoints contained in the Facebook page include a narrative of the 1969 rebellion by a White moderator, individual posts and comments on posts by former students and faculty.<sup>2</sup>

The primary moderator of the Facebook page is former White Asheville High student Dan Lewis. Lewis is a musician and songwriter who has cut many albums and performed at the Asheville Art Museum, the Bele Chere festival, and the Biltmore House.<sup>3</sup> Since 2012 Lewis has been compiling information on the Asheville High Rebellion. This information in the “Files” section of the page has included newspaper articles, oral history interviews, and photographs. Lewis noted that the purpose of the Facebook page and the files are to “gather stories and memories from every possible perspective, in hopes of finally telling the complete story” of the events on September 29, 1969, and to also “not assign blame but to resolve the issues that remain and finally integrate the Lost Class of Asheville High,” a mistake of an amateur historian.<sup>4</sup> In establishing this Facebook page Lewis provided insight into the historical memory of the

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<sup>2</sup> Dan Lewis, “Welcome all,” Facebook, September 22, 2013, <https://www.facebook.com/groups/400280840018865/announcements>.

<sup>3</sup> Asheville Music Professionals, “Dan Lewis: Old School Asheville Musician & Songwriter,” *Asheville Music Professionals*, 2023, <https://directory.ashevilmusicprofessionals.com/sixslinger>.

<sup>4</sup> Dan Lewis, “Welcome all,” Facebook, September 22, 2013, <https://www.facebook.com/groups/400280840018865/announcements>.

Asheville High Rebellion. Lewis' goal was to create a space where numerous voices involved in or impacted by the rebellion could be heard. His goal also revealed the lens in which he analyzed the rebellion. Former students and faculty have agreed and disagreed with his analysis.

When I contacted Lewis our conversation and various Facebook threads revealed how he analyzed the rebellion and his discomfort with stories that challenge his understanding. In our correspondence Lewis stated that “if you really want to create an accurate documents, you might consider checking with me before you turn it in; I am happy to assist you and try to avoid ensuring distortion and anger that often follows.” He also asserted that “for the basic story in short form, read “A Failure of Leadership,” written by me on the 1969 site.” While the development of his Facebook page and his short synopsis of the events of the rebellion of have been helpful, his Facebook page fulfilled a dual purpose. It became a repository of knowledge and a place where Lewis debates and argues with those who oppose his version of the history. For example, Lewis posted on September 28, 2019 “Angry, Betrayed, and Disappointed The Ashe-Cit-Times Story 9/29/2019.”<sup>5</sup> He wrote this post regarding a recent *Asheville Citizens Times* article written by Brian Gordon that discussed the events of the 1969 rebellion.<sup>6</sup> In the comments Lewis continued to disagree with Gordon for his interpretation of the events stating, “I’ve probably studied this longer and deeper than anyone else, and consequently have insights into it that few others do.”<sup>7</sup> In response to Lewis’ disappointment Gordon stated “Hi Dan, I stand

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<sup>5</sup> Dan Lewis, “Angry, Betrayed and Disappointed The Ashe-Cit-Times Story 9/29/2019,” <https://www.facebook.com/groups/400280840018865>.

<sup>6</sup> Brain Gordon, "In 1969, Black Students Protested for Change: Revisiting the Asheville High Walkout with those Who Lived through it." *Asheville Citizen Times*, Sep 29, 2019, <https://www.proquest.com/newspapers/1969-black-students-protested-change/docview/2611159680/se-2>.

<sup>7</sup> Dan Lewis, “Angry, Betrayed and Disappointed The Ashe-Cit-Times Story 9/29/2019,” <https://www.facebook.com/groups/400280840018865>.



by the article as fair and accurate. To me your comments don't line up with the story I wrote."<sup>8</sup> While Lewis, like anyone else, can express their opinion regarding the 1969 rebellion, however his expression at times suggests an ownership of the history.

According to Lewis, he viewed the demonstration at Asheville High School on September 29, 1969, to be an initially peaceful protest that "was escalated into a riot by the overt actions by the Asheville School board, city government and police department, along with a group of local agitators who entered school grounds to clash with police attacking students."<sup>9</sup> However, not all the Facebook group members shared the same sentiment as Lewis. For example, Andrea Clark, a Black member of the Facebook group, created a post on December 10, 2022, stating "Wasn't the riot created by the police???"<sup>10</sup> In response to this post, three White group member's responses included "not even close to the truth!" "No" and "Outsiders." One other White member of the group stated "probably," while Dan Lewis commented a link to a page titled "A Failure of Leadership."<sup>11</sup> This Facebook post was one of many that depicted inconsistent memories of the rebellion at Asheville High School in 1969. Historian Alessandro Portelli argued that "memory is neither good nor bad, memory just is. We cannot control whether we remember or forget, and have only partial control over the content and functioning of memory."<sup>12</sup> According to Portelli it is human nature to misremember events, he also contended that "memory can function as "monument" in the form of commemoration and celebration of a

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Dan Lewis, "Reparations: The AHS Student Demonstration of 1969," June 11, 2021, <https://www.facebook.com/groups/400280840018865>.

<sup>10</sup> Andrea Clark, "Wasn't the riot created by police???", December 10, 2022, <https://www.facebook.com/groups/400280840018865>.

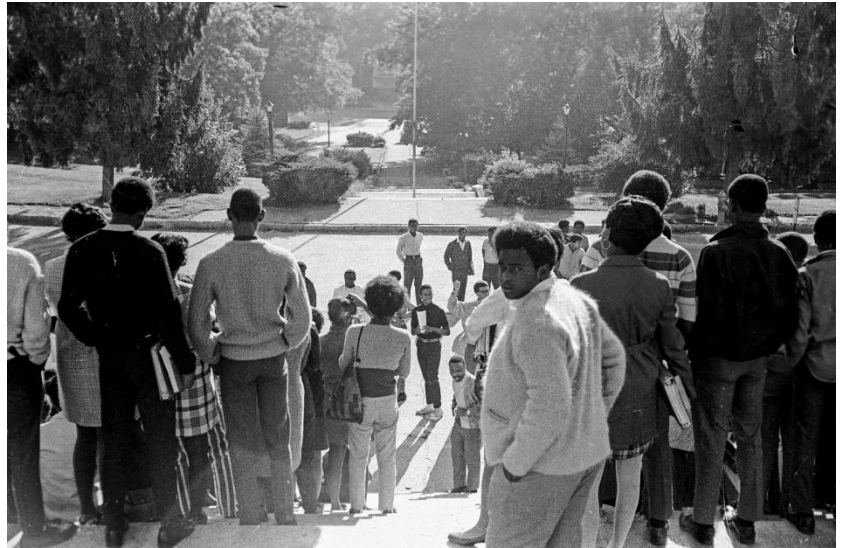
<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Alessandro Portelli, "On the Uses of Memory: As Monument, As Reflex, As Disturbance," *Economic and Political Weekly* 49, no. 30 (2014): 43.

proud collective identity, and a foundation on which individuals build their own identity.”<sup>13</sup>

However a space remained between memory and fact; memories are not always mitigated by the broad known.

Since its development, the Facebook page created by Lewis turned into a place where people could gather and share their experiences and interpretation of the rebellion that occurred at Asheville High in 1969. Some of the members on the Facebook page described their experiences of their



encounters with the rebels as traumatic. Former Asheville High instructor Allene Ball was a White Spanish teacher and is one of the outspoken Facebook group members who had a negative interaction with the rebels. She said that “I really did not realize how much all of this affected me. I think it is like soldiers returning with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.”<sup>14</sup>

Figure 8. This image, taken by Rodger Ball, depicts protestors standing outside of Asheville Highschool on September 29, 1969. Rodger Ball, “In 2011, Steve Feingold posted the iconic photo taken by June Glenn that appeared in the Asheville Citizen Times the day after the Asheville High School protest and riot,” <https://www.facebook.com/groups/400280840018865>.

In 1969 Ball also “sponsored the Varsity Cheerleaders, and the Spanish Club” at Asheville High School. <sup>15</sup> On the Facebook page “I Survived the 1969 Asheville High Riot,” in a

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid, 43.

<sup>14</sup> Dan Lewis, “From Allene Ball~ I had come to visit my Mother in Asheville, N.C.,” February 18,2014.

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/400280840018865/search/?q=allene%20ball>.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

post made by Dan Lewis, Allene Ball described how she recalled her experience during the rebellion and the impact that it continued to have on her in 2014.

“I was teaching Spanish Monday morning on September 29, 1969. At 9:00 A.M. my black kids got up and walked out of class. The faculty had been told to call African Americans black. I did not know why they had walked out. At lunch, I went to the cafeteria and heard glass breaking as rocks were thrown through the windows. The new vocational building was damaged with broken windows as well as the trophy case of Lee Edwards High School Awards.”<sup>16</sup>

When describing the aftermath of the rebellion, Ball asserted that she remembered that there were “riot inciters” who had traveled from Greensboro and influenced the violence at Asheville High. Ball stated, “The Sheriff arrested the Greensboro men with weapons charges. The Governor of North Carolina declared a State of Emergency and a 10 O'clock pm curfew. I remember my Principal sitting in his office with the Mayor and telling me "I am sitting on a powder keg."<sup>17</sup> The men from Greensboro, to whom Ball referred, were civil rights activists Preston Dobbins and Victor Chalk.

Ball remembered their presence, but an interview with Dobbins by Jacquelyn Dowd Hall offered a different story. According to Dobbins, he was frequently involved in the fight for civil rights in Asheville, specifically at Asheville High. However, he asserted that he was never actively involved in any violence. In his oral history with Hall, Dobbins described his involvement in Asheville:

“This was, I guess in the fall of '69 and during that time, as I recall, a lot of things were going on around the state with high school students, the focus had kind of shifted from colleges down to high schools.-- The same kinds of issues, more relevant courses, black history involvement with student government, black cheer leaders, all that kind of stuff. Basically the same kinds of uses that had been the focus of attention in colleges and universities and now shifting down to high

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<sup>16</sup> Dan Lewis, “From Allene Ball~ I had come to visit my Mother in Asheville, N.C.,” February 18,2014.

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/400280840018865/search/?q=allene%20ball>.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.,

schools. So, I was involved in that and I spent quite a bit of time in Asheville because that seemed to be like the place where students were really...where they seemed to be a lot more concerned...there was a guy that was working locally with them named Victor Chalk.”<sup>18</sup>

Although Dobbins admitted to being involved in the Civil Rights Movement in Asheville, he denied any involvement in the violence of the rebellion. When discussing his interactions with civil rights protestors Dobbins asserted that “I never got directly involved in any of that except to give advice.”<sup>19</sup> He also explained that in schools like Asheville High most of his involvement consisted of providing “political education, whereby I would plan things, different educational things, centered around politics and economics. I thought it would be good for people to know the kinds of things that they were not learning in high schools, the nature of capitalism, how the system works, why it works like it does.”<sup>20</sup> The *Asheville Citizen Times* and the Asheville Board of Education perpetuated of false memory of Dobbins’ direct involvement with the Asheville High Rebellion. A day after the rebellion, on Tuesday, September 30<sup>th</sup>, police sergeants W. N. Costello and R.H. Cook arrested Dobbins and Chalk at either 11:20 p.m. or 10:30p.m., depending on the source. Law enforcement charged them with “violation of curfew, possession of explosives, and possession of firearms and ammunition.”<sup>21</sup>

After this arrest of Dobbins and Chalk, the Asheville Board of Education filed an injunction that restricted “black leaders and all other persons from interfering with the operation

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<sup>18</sup> Preston Dobbins, interview by Jacquelyn Hall, December 4, 1974, transcribed by Joe Jaros, transcript, Southern Oral History Project.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*,.38.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.

<sup>21</sup> “City Police Arrest Two Militant Leaders” 1, October 1969, folder number 42.29 I, Pack Memorial Library; “Chalk, Dobbins Released on Bond,” 2, October 1969, folder number 42.29 I, Pack Memorial Library; “Two Militant Leaders Remain in Jail Here,” 2, October 1969, folder number 42.29 I, Pack Memorial Library; “Police Arrest Militant Leaders, 1, October 1969, folder number 42.29 I, Pack Memorial Library.

of the schools.” One of these Black leaders included Victor Chalk.<sup>22</sup> This injunction filed by the Asheville Board of Education reaffirmed beliefs that Dobbins and Chalk were involved in the violent outbreak at Asheville High School. This accusation by the School Board and the *Asheville Citizen Times* likely impacted the memory of those who experienced the uprising, leading some like Allene Ball and others, to believe that “outside influencers” caused the violence. The concepts of “outside influencers” is frequently seen in White racial attitudes regarding desegregation and Black rebellion. Historian Jason Sokol argued that “Black rebellion clashed so sharply with white perceptions that many disbelieved their own eyes.”<sup>23</sup> Sokol described that these perceptions influenced ideas within White Southerners who “insisted the struggles that hit their towns were the brainchild of distant enemies—of communists, the NAACP, or northern liberals. “Their Negroes” were happy, many reasoned; and in the 1960s, they had become the dupes of “outside agitators.”<sup>24,25</sup>

To further prove that he had no intention of creating violence in Asheville, Dobbins described what he and Chalk were doing the night they were arrested, September 30<sup>th</sup>, 1969. In this interview Dobbins revealed that he and Chalk received violent threats and intimidation after the rebellion at Asheville High School. Dobbins noted he was with Chalk at the “Holiday Inn” when Chalk received a phone call that influenced both men to break curfew.

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<sup>22</sup> “Schools to Reopen; Militants Enjoined,” 2, October 1969, folder number 42.29 I, Pack Memorial Library.

<sup>23</sup> Jason Sokol, *There Goes My Everything: White Southerners in the Age of Civil Rights 1945-1975* (New York: Vintage Books, 2008) Chapter 2.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid*, Chapter 2.

<sup>25</sup>This notion of “outside” agitators has also been evaluated in other historical works such as: Danielle L. McGuire, *At the Dark End of the Street: Black Women, Rape, and Resistance : A New History of the Civil Rights Movement, from Rosa Parks to the Rise of Black Power* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2010); Jeff Woods, *Black Struggle, Red Scare: Segregation and Anti-Communism in the South, 1948-1968* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 2004).

Preston Dobbins: "And he got this phone call from his mother saying that she had been getting calls from the Klan saying that they were going to burn her house. He was very active there. All day they had done this and the kids had been out of school and we had been seeing these trucks riding around with guns on the back rack and that sort of thing. So, it was very tense a very tense atmosphere. And after all this call he said, "We have to go, curfew or no curfew." "So I said, "you can't go alone."

During that time, there was always possibility of violence because the Klan was serious and they were ramrodding people in trucks and the black community was very excited as well. It was very tense."<sup>26</sup>

While memory is a tricky but vital piece of historical evidence it does not mean that what is remembered happened. It is important to add context to those memories. Therefore, recollections of an event, especially one that resulted in violence, must be analyzed critically. Historian Barbara Shircliffe evaluated the complexities of school desegregation oral history evaluation in her article, "We got the Best of that World." Shircliffe suggested that "how nostalgia functions in oral history as a "moral tale" in which individuals invoke past memories of historically black schools to explain and critique the current state of affairs."<sup>27</sup> She argued that this nostalgia in oral histories has two consequences. The first consequence was that nostalgic oral histories for "historically black schools may cloud the harsh realities of segregation and its impact on communities and children."<sup>28</sup> Shircliffe's second point was that "nostalgia may be used to minimize the problem of the resegregation of public education by suggesting that African American children were better off in segregated schools."<sup>29</sup> Shircliffe, therefore, helped interpret memories that may erase or conceal the racism within school systems. Dobbins and

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<sup>26</sup> Preston Dobbins, interview by Jacquelyn Hall, December 4, 1974, transcribed by Joe Jaros, transcript, Southern Oral History Project.

<sup>27</sup> Barbara Shircliffe, "We Got the Best of that World": A Case for the Study of Nostalgia in the Oral History of School Segregation," *The Oral History Review* 28, no. 2 (2001): 65.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 83.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 83.

Chalk were actively involved in aiding the organization of protests they were not actively involved in the rebellion. The interview with Dobbins by Hall, and the arguments of Shircliffe challenged popular assertions that he and Chalk were present at the rebellion at Asheville High School in 1969.

Along with the Facebook page and the interview of Dobbins, other oral histories demonstrate multiple versions of memory of Asheville during the 1960s and 1970s. These memories, like those of the rebellion on the Facebook page, are contradictory. Some individuals' memories of Asheville during this period remember it as an accepting and liberal place free of racial discrimination, and other individuals' memories consisted of a city rooted in discrimination and racism. These oral histories suggest that some former Asheville High School students viewed the 1960s and 1970s through the lens of race, class, and nostalgia. Shircliffe asserts that "through nostalgia, former students and teachers capture the value of black school traditions devalued by a school desegregation plan, which was largely and painfully designed to accommodate white interests."<sup>30</sup> Some of the oral histories of former Asheville High School students during the rebellion depict the desire to reconcile with the discriminatory practices of the high school, police, and Asheville School Board through these nostalgic depictions of the Black community in Asheville, North Carolina.

An Asheville High alum, Jim Johnson, was a White student who lived in the Montford Section of the city. Johnson was raised by a single mother who worked at "S.H. Kress downtown" which limited Johnson's access and privileges compared to his wealthier classmates. Johnson explained Asheville during the 1960s and 1970s as a place of "unrest" and discrimination. He asserted "that was just a tumultuous time everywhere. A lot of unhappiness, a

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid, 60.

lot of upset, a lot of protests, demands for change, that kind of thing.”<sup>31</sup> One of the instances of discrimination Johnson described occurred while he was riding the public bus to school.

Jim Johnson: “I got on the bus to come home one day, and I noticed it was an older bus. They weren’t even really using this type of bus anymore, but I guess they had kept some as backups. It was a pretty rough old bus. I got on and sat down and I just looked up there on the wall of the bus above the driver on the inside front of the bus. And it was all faded, but you could read it and it said, “Coloreds to the back of the bus.” I was just blown away because I could’ve imagined that when that was outlawed, they would’ve taken much more definitive steps to have removed that, or painted over it, or something. It just looked like it had remained there and over time had gotten worn. It was still quite easy to read.”<sup>32</sup>

Jim Johnson’s memory of Asheville was considerably different from that of White Asheville High Student Debbie Lewis. Lewis grew up in a different socioeconomic situation than Johnson. Her family fell somewhere within the middle class. Growing up, Lewis had a domestic servant, and her dad was “the maintenance of city schools” in Asheville.<sup>33</sup> Lewis described a memory she had while interacting with a Black grammar school staff member whom she called Lulu.

Debbie Lewis: “When I went to grammar school, we had a wonderful lady. She would come in the restrooms when we all would get excused to go to the restrooms. She told us to call her Lulu. We all loved her. She’d come in the restroom, and she’d just give us hugs. We’d hug her. Everything was wonderful. There was nothing about whether she was a different color than us. In fact, she was the only hug I’d get all day long. We just loved her. Then one day she came in there and she told us that no longer can we call her Lulu she has to be known as Miss. Brown. And we could no longer hug her. That’s all she said. We were all thinking what happened? Nobody explained. Don’t know if another parent said

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<sup>31</sup> Jim Johnson, interview by Jubilee Padilla, March 24, 2022, transcript and recording, Western Carolina University Hunter Library.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid, Jim Johnson.

<sup>33</sup> Debbie Lewis, interview by Jubilee Padilla, April 21, 2022, transcript and recording, Western Carolina University Hunter Library.



“nuh-uh you’re not gonna hug my child.” I don’t know. All we knew was that there had to be a distance now, between us and what we knew as Lulu.”<sup>34</sup>

This interaction with Black staff member Lulu at an early age influenced the way Lewis viewed Asheville and race. In “A Complex Bond: Southern Black Domestic Workers and Their White Employers” historian Susan Tucker explains that Southern White women have often romanticized their relationships with Black domestic workers but this romanization preserved “power over blacks and a relatively elite lifestyle, in that it could employ black women for low wages.”<sup>35</sup> This romanization of Black domestic workers could influence the way Lewis viewed Lulu. She had not understood why she could not interact with Lulu the same way. Instead, Lewis merely remembered that there was space left where Lulu once had been. Tucker asserted that this form of idealization by White women while seemingly kind, has also been influenced by White supremacist rhetoric and a willingness to maintain “unwritten laws of segregation” while also participating “in the entire system designed to keep blacks at a subsistence level.”<sup>36</sup> Although, the Lewis described her interactions with Lulu as positive, it is imperative to recognize the way in which racial discrimination played a role in this romanization and developed past romanization to the next generation.

When describing Asheville in the 1960s and 1970s, Lewis claimed, “Oh, it was great. It was really great. It was a beautiful town, and everybody got along fine. Of course, everybody had their, I guess remarks, but I wasn’t really around it.”<sup>37</sup> This comment by Lewis makes

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid, Debbie Lewis.

<sup>35</sup> Susan Tucker, “A Complex Bond: Southern Black Domestic Workers and Their White Employers,” *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 9, no. 3 (1987): 7.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid, 11.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid, Debbie Lewis.

Asheville seem like a picturesque town and affirms a “Veneer of Racial Harmony.”<sup>38</sup> However, there was not racial harmony in Asheville. There were protests against racial injustice aside from the Asheville Rebellion of 1969.<sup>39</sup> Lewis also commented that she did not understand why there was violence at Asheville High, stating that “Those were what I considered my friends out there throwing bricks.”<sup>40</sup> It is possible that Lewis’ interaction with racial discrimination at a young age shaped the way she remembered Asheville in the 1960s and 1970s. She likely preferred to view her world through an optimistic lens rather than a negative one. However, viewing Asheville through this positive lens of racial solidarity contributed to her viewing choice to either not notice or to ignore the inequity in Asheville. In *A More Beautiful and Terrible History*, historian Jeanne Theoharis has asserted that regarding segregation and discrimination “most Americans knew that this system was deeply wrong but felt there was little they could do about it or feared risking their family’s safety and security, so they hung back.”<sup>41</sup> This indifference or ignorance of racial discrimination perpetuated discrimination proving that “injustice is not always about hatred but often about indifference, fear, and personal comfort.”<sup>42</sup> Although, Lewis recognized that there was racial discrimination in Asheville in her story with Lulu, she illustrates indifference when discussing racism in the city therefore perpetuating a nostalgic view of Asheville, rather than acknowledging the systemic racism of the city that contributed to the 1969 rebellion.

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<sup>38</sup> Waters, “Life Beneath the Veneer: The Black Community in Asheville, North Carolina from 1793 to 1900;” Parker, *Appalachian Activists*.

<sup>39</sup> Various protests, boycotts, and sit-ins against racial discrimination in Asheville are documented in Parker, *Appalachian Activists*, 1-111.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid, Debbie Lewis.

<sup>41</sup> Jeanne Theoharis, *A More Beautiful and Terrible History: The Uses and Misuses of Civil Rights History* (Boston, Massachusetts: Beacon Press, 2018) 85.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid, 86.

After the walkout/rebellion of 1969 one of the Black student organizers, Leo Gaines, had been expelled from Asheville High.<sup>43</sup> Gaines had continued to fight for the rights of Black students and teachers. According to Gaines he was seen as “kind of radical, not shaking my fist or shouting, but very assertive, and would argue my point until the cows came home, because I spoke about change and the fact that change had to happen now.”<sup>44</sup> This fight by Gaines did not go unnoticed by the high school and a year after the walkout/rebellion of 1969 at Asheville High “almost all the original grievances were met except one; one of them that they absolutely would not do is let me go back to school there.”<sup>45</sup> While Asheville High School did not allow Gaines to return to the school, the Facebook page illuminated how the school eventually attempted to reconcile with Gaines’ expulsion. One of the ways Asheville High had attempted to address the failures in its school desegregation implementation was by providing Leo Gaines, a high school diploma posthumously. Although Asheville High providing Gaines with a diploma demonstrates that the high school was willing to acknowledge its history of racial discrimination, it was not awarded until after his death. While his family and specifically his daughter Brindia Gaines appreciated this diploma, Gaines was never able to appreciate the diploma himself.<sup>46</sup>

Through oral histories and Facebook posts, the competing memories regarding of Asheville in the 1960s and 1970s reveals how the past of one’s mind can be distorted by personal

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<sup>43</sup> Brain Gordon, "In 1969, Black Students Protested for Change: Revisiting the Asheville High Walkout with those Who Lived through it." *Asheville Citizen Times*, Sep 29, 2019.

<sup>44</sup> Leo Gaines, interview by Dan Lewis, July 26, 2012, transcript, Facebook, <https://www.facebook.com/notes/i-survived-the-1969-asheville-high-riot/leo-gaines-after-44-years-a-student-leader-speaks-parts-1-2/1424906367556302/>.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid, Gaines interview.

<sup>46</sup> Dan Lewis, “You are dad’s legacy,” June 10, 2022, <https://www.facebook.com/groups/400280840018865>; Ryan Oehrli, "Graduate at Last! 50-Plus Years Later, Leo Gaines Finally Receives Asheville High School Diploma," *Asheville Citizen - Times*, Jun 11, 2022. <https://www.proquest.com/newspapers/graduate-at-last/docview/2675093355/se-2>.

influences and experiences. This variation does not mean there is no validity in how individuals have viewed their experiences in Asheville. Rather it pushes one to understand the complex nature of Asheville and the rebellion. Since opinions vary it is the responsibility of historians to find the truth within the memories. Both Theorharis and Schriclife have revealed that histories regarding the Civil Rights Movement are impacted by present as much as they are the past.<sup>47</sup> However, according to Poretlli, memories also reveal how people, such as former Asheville High students create a collective identity.<sup>48</sup>

### **The Legacy of Bluefield State College's Rebellion**

Bluefield State College, now University, Civil Rights legacy is unlike Asheville's. Instead of adhering to Black students and Black faculty's grievances, Bluefield had systematically maintained educational discrimination for Black students and Black faculty. In fact, the university response to the rebellion was to eliminate educational opportunities for Black students and faculty. This educational discrimination is seen through the structural design, lack of Black faculty and students, and the absence of Black administration. Since 1968, Bluefield State has also constantly declared the University a Historically Black College/University (HBCU) amid systemic exclusion of Black people.

At Bluefield State the celebration of the institution as an HBCU coincides with the reluctance to address Black student unrest that resulted in the 1968 rebellion. At this institution toady, flags celebrate it as a HBCU while most of the White faculty, and administration does not

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<sup>47</sup> Theoharis, *A More Beautiful and Terrible History*; Shircliffe, "We Got the Best of that World."

<sup>48</sup> Portelli, "On the Uses of Memory: As Monument, As Reflex, As Disturbance," 43-47.

address institutional racial issues.<sup>49</sup> Today at the entrance to the institution, one is met with a sizable blue billboard that states, “Bluefield State College Rules and Regulations.”<sup>50</sup> This billboard was designed to discourage violence and encourage “safety.” However, this billboard also can be understood as a reminder of the rebellions at Bluefield State that resulted in the bombing of the gymnasium in 1968. After 1968, the President Hardaway committed to law and order. Law and order remained a priority. On the billboard, there is a list of nine rules and regulations. These regulations include:

1. “The campus is under 24-hour video surveillance.
2. The possession of firearms is prohibited.
3. The possession of alcohol and drugs is prohibited.
4. Parking is by permit only in designated areas.
5. All traffic rules and regulations are enforced. Violators are subject to criminal and civil penalties.
6. Vehicles which impede or obstruct traffic flow or create a potential hazard will be towed at owner’s expense.
7. No loitering or trespassing is permitted. The college reserves the right to limit access to individuals whose presence disturbs the educational mission of the institution, and such persons are subject to fine or arrest.
8. The speed limit is 15mph campus wide.



Figure 9. This billboard is the rules and regulations of Bluefield State College. It was taken in September of 2022 and is in Jubilee Padilla’s possession. Jubilee Padilla, *Rules and Regulations at Bluefield State University*, Image, Bluefield, West Virginia, September 27, 2022.

<sup>49</sup> Jubilee Padilla, *Bluefield State HBCU Flags*, Image, Bluefield, West Virginia, September 27, 2022.

<sup>50</sup> Jubilee Padilla, *Rules and Regulations at Bluefield State University*, Image, Bluefield, West Virginia, September 27, 2022.

9. All criminal misconduct should be reported immediately to the office of Public Safety by calling. The office of Public Safety is located on the ground floor of conleyhall-G01.”<sup>51</sup>

The inclusion of the parking permit section could have been included because of the controversy over the cost of permits in 1968. Although parking permits are common at most American universities, the cost of parking permits at Bluefield State were a central complaint of students in the Black Power era. In 1968, Number twenty-eight on the list of grievances created by Black Bluefield students stated, “we want the parking regulations and the permit costs decreased.”<sup>52</sup> The price of parking permits had increased during Wendall Hardaway’s Presidency which contributed to discriminatory economic practices meant to eliminate Black students from the institution.<sup>53</sup> This billboard demonstrated that not having a parking permit was considered a significant violation, even if the student could not afford the permit, a violation that because of Hardaway and the connection with the 1968 rebellion, had been rooted in racial discrimination.

The rules and regulations at the entrance to the University also demonstrated that Bluefield continued to be concerned about violence and the influence of “outsiders.” The seventh regulation on the billboard states, “the college reserves the right to limit access to individuals whose presence disturbs the educational mission of the institution” This regulation could allow the institution to remove anyone on campus that was attempting to start a rebellion similar to the

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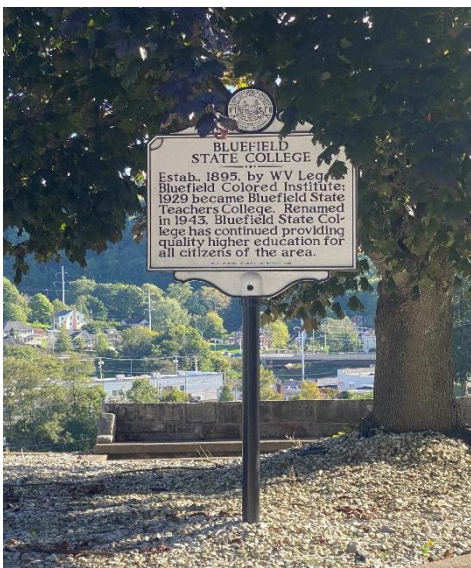
<sup>51</sup> Jubilee Padilla, *Rules and Regulations at Bluefield State University*, Image, Bluefield, West Virginia, September 27, 2022.

<sup>52</sup> “BSC Demands Released, Activities are Suspended,” *The Bluefield Daily Telegraph*, November 20, 1968, microfilm, Craft Memorial Library, Bluefield, West Virginia.

<sup>53</sup> “Plans Projected for Campus Improvement,” *The Bluefieldian*, May 22, 1967, William B. Robertson Library Archives, Box “Bluefieldian 1964-1977;” “BSC Demands Released, Activities are Suspended,” *The Bluefield Daily Telegraph*, November 20, 1968, microfilm, Craft Memorial Library, Bluefield, West Virginia.

one in 1968.<sup>54</sup> This unease regarding outsiders is also linked to the bombing at Bluefield State College in 1968. One of the students charged with involvement in the bombing was “outsider” Black Bluefield resident Shannon Dwight Banks. He was considered an “outsider” because he was not actively enrolled in the college.<sup>55</sup> This fear of “outsiders” also influenced the memory of those in Asheville; however, this fear in Asheville was not significant enough for the Asheville School Board to create a sign specifically out casting a variety of individuals.

Along with the billboard, located at the top of the hill at Bluefield State University, is a



historical plaque. This plaque stated, “Estab., 1895, by WV Leg. As Bluefield Colored Institute; 1929 became Bluefield State Teachers College. Renamed in 1943, Bluefield State College has continued providing quality education for all citizens in the area.”<sup>56</sup>

It is questionable that Bluefield State University meets what most understand to be a Historically Black College/University that provided “quality education for

all.”<sup>57</sup> Bluefield State University continued to have a heavy presence of White executive staff in 2022. This White executive staff included: Executive Vice President and

Figure 10. This image depicts the historical plaque on the top of the hill in front of the administration building at Bluefield State University. Photo taken by Jubilee Padilla in September 2022. Jubilee Padilla, *Bluefield State Historical Plaque*, Image, Bluefield, West Virginia, September 27, 2022.

<sup>54</sup> Jubilee Padilla, *Rules and Regulations at Bluefield State University*, Image, Bluefield, West Virginia, September 27, 2022.

<sup>55</sup> “Three More are Arrested in Bombing at BSC,” *The Bluefield Daily Telegraph*, November 26, 1968, microfilm, Craft Memorial Library, Bluefield, West Virginia.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Jubilee Padilla, *Bluefield State Historical Plaque*, Image, Bluefield, West Virginia, September 27, 2022.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

General Counsel Brent Benjamin, Assistant to the Provost; Darlene Gilley, Chief Financial Officer; James Ronald Hypes, Executive Secretary; Carolyn Jamkhandi, Director of Academic Success Center; Carolyn Kirby, Provost and Vice President for Academic and Student Affairs; Ted Lewis, Vice President of Capital Projects, Charles McGongale; Chief of Staff Keith Olson; and most notably the President of the University Robin Capehart.<sup>58</sup> It is apparent from this list that offices that had once been held by Black staff before *Brown v. the Board of Education* are now dominated by white executive staff.

This switch in staff began during Black President Leroy B. Allen's term but was escalated during White President Wendall Hardaway's tenure.<sup>59</sup> This momentum of hiring White staff, White faculty, and admitting White students continued to increase over time, and by 1987, there were 6% Black faculty, and 10% Black students, while the White faculty was 94% White and the White students was 90%.<sup>60</sup> By the mid-to-late 1990s was "97% attended and operated by Whites" and in 1995 there was a faculty population of 0% Black and 100% White, while the student population was 7% Black and 93 % White.<sup>61</sup> Other HBCU's such as Fisk University, Tuskegee University, and Allen University have experienced different racial demographics.<sup>62</sup> Along with this heavy percentage of White faculty and White students there had

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<sup>58</sup> "Directory," Bluefield State University, 2022, <https://bluefieldstate.edu/community/directory>.

<sup>59</sup> Ruth Payne Brown, *The Transition of a Historically Black College to a Predominantly White Institution*, PhD diss, (College Park: University of Maryland, 2004),51,58.

<sup>60</sup> C. Stewart McGehee and Frank Wilson, *Bluefield West Virginia 1889-1989: A Centennial History*, (North Tazewell, Virginia: Clinch Valley Printing Co., Inc, 1995), quoted in Brown, *The Transition of a Historically Black College*, 52.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid*, 50.

<sup>62</sup> In 2019 HBCU Fisk University had an undergraduate population of 86.2% Black and 0.6% White. In 2021 HBCU Tuskegee University had enrolled 85% Black students and 2% White students. In 2022 Allen University's enrollment demographic breakdown was 94 % Black students and 1% White students.; Fisk University, "Spring 2019 Enrollment Statistics Report," March 20,2019.; Institute of Education Sciences, "IPEDS Data Feedback Report 2021-



not been another Black President of University until 2002. From 2002 to 2011 Black President Dr. Albert J. Walker worked at the University. Out of the twenty-one Presidents and Interim Presidents from 1896 to 2022 at the University, a total of eight of them have been Black men.<sup>63</sup>

The fact that Bluefield State College had developed an increasingly White presence did not go unnoticed. In 1997 a website called “Fighting.to.Survive” published an article about Bluefield State College titled “A Different World: At 92 Percent, whites change flavor of Bluefield.” This article observed that Bluefield State had transformed into a predominantly White college. The article argued that the reason for this transition was because of a “host of factors, including a major population shift in the region and a dwindling economy.”<sup>64</sup>

The article also referenced the bombing and rebellion that occurred in 1968. However, it does not elaborate on what caused the rebellion, nor any actions by President Hardaway and other administrative staff that encouraged racial tension. Instead, the article states that “Some believe the changes at Bluefield State were planned carefully. Others say the school was just a victim of its surroundings.”<sup>65</sup> One of the individuals interviewed for this article in 1997 was Black student Ameka Perry. Perry stated, “It is frustrating to walk across campus and see nothing but white.”<sup>66</sup> She also mentioned that Bluefield State had not provided a Black history for fifteen years before 1997. The lack of Black history illuminates the erasure of Black institutional policies stemming from the rebellion in 1968. The article, however, portrays the college positively,

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Tukeseegee University,” 2021.; Institute of Education Sciences, “IPEDS Data Feedback Report 2022-Allen University,” 2022.

<sup>63</sup> “Presidential History | Bluefield State University,” Bluefield State University, 2022.

<sup>64</sup> “A Different World: At 92 Percent, whites change flavor of Bluefield,” *Fighting.to.Survive.*, February 24, 1997, Box 109, William B. Robertson Library Archives.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*

attributing the shift to a predominantly White institution to the dramatic Black population decrease in Bluefield, West Virginia. The article states:

“The most startling change of all came because of a literal retooling of the area’s coal industry. Modernization brought more machines—meaning fewer men were needed in the mines. Between 1950 and 1990 the population of McDowell and Mercer counties fell 35 percent from 173,000 to 113,000. The black population plunged from 32,000 to 14,000—56 percent. Statewide blacks are just 3 percent of the population.”<sup>67</sup>

While population decrease began to intensify in the 1950s because of coal mining and railroad work, this initially included primarily White Bluefield residents.<sup>68</sup> This population decrease could provide an explanation for the decrease in Black students and Black faculty at Bluefield State University. However, this population decrease did not contribute to President Hardaway’s choice to systematically eliminate Black students and faculty during his presidency, and elimination that is still present. For example, according to Bluefield State College Student Diversity Demographics in the fall of 2018 86% of the students attending undergrad at the institution were White. While 7% of the students attending the institution were Black.<sup>69</sup>

In 2013, the National Public Radio (NPR) took a different and less positive approach than Fight to Survive. In an article called “The Whitest Historically Black College in America” NPR journalists Shereen Marisol Meraji and Gene Demby, asserted that Bluefield State University “receives the federal funding that comes with its designation as a historically black institution, today Bluefield State College is 90 percent white.”<sup>70</sup> The article also discussed the rebellions that

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Bluefield City Planning Commission, West Virginia Economic Development Agency, *City of Bluefield Master Plan*, 1954,5.

<sup>69</sup> IFEDS Fall Enrollment Reports, Bluefield State College, *Diversity and Demographics*.

<sup>70</sup> Shereen Marisol Meraji and Gene Demby, “The Whitest Historically Black College in America,” *National Public Radio*, October 18,2013, <https://www.npr.org/sections/codeswitch/2013/10/18/236345546/the-whitest-historically-black-college-in-america>.

occurred at Bluefield State College during the late 1960s. The article noted that the alumni they interviewed stated that as a result of the rebellions and bombing in 1968 “many black students felt that it was the pretext Hardaway needed to turn the school all white.”<sup>71</sup> In fact, this elimination of Black students was a part of the legacy of the bombing in 1968. According to the NPR article, a significant portion of this demographics change was because dorm closures forced Black students to move away from Bluefield since students had no place to live.<sup>72</sup> The article revealed divergent memories for the causes of Black student erasure at Bluefield. The “Fight to Survive” article and the NPR article illustrate this divergence with their reasoning for why the racial demographics of the school changed. The “Fight to Survive” article attributed the demographic change to a decrease in population and a poor economy. While the NPR article attributed the decrease in Black students to the inaccessibility of dorms after the 1968 rebellion.<sup>73</sup>

This article, the billboard, the historical plaque, and the elimination of Black administration and Black Presidents solidified Bluefield State University as a White HBCU. It showed the legacy of the rebellions at Bluefield State College, and this legacy is not one of positive change or a move toward revising the discriminatory policy. The legacy of the Bluefield State College rebellions is that of continual systemic institutional segregation and discrimination, and the erasure of Black students and Black history.

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>73</sup> Ibid; “A Different World: At 92 Percent, whites change flavor of Bluefield,” *Fighting.to.Survive.*, February 24, 1997, Box 109, William B. Robertson Library Archives; There were also population shifts after the Asheville High Rebellion in 1969, because White students began attending private schools.; Kirk Johnson, interview by Jubilee Padilla, April 1, 2022, transcript and recording, Western Carolina University Hunter Library.; Population changes and the decrease of middle-class White students attending integrated schools after rebellions is depicted in: Ronald P. Formisano, *Boston Against Busing: Race, Class and Ethnicity in the 1960s and 1970s* (North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 1991).

## Conclusion

Asheville High School and Bluefield State dealt with the memory and legacy of their rebellions in some significantly different ways. Asheville High students and faculty have chosen to address the rebellion of 1969 and have been willing to discuss their experiences. Former Asheville High student Dan Lewis facilitated this discussion by developing his Facebook page “I Survived the 1969 Asheville Riot.” On the other hand, Bluefield State University had been less prone to address its history and connection to Black Power. Bluefield State had instead either ignored or not recognized the impact of the rebellions on shaping the school into a “White Historical Black College/University.”

Beyond the actual participants and the local historians commenting on Asheville, these rebellions have been largely segregated from the Black Power Movement and Black rebellion. In Asheville, the story remains focused on school integration ignoring the larger political landscape of urban renewal, police violence, and school board discrimination. This silence of rebellions contributes to the erasure of Black voices in the “whitening” of Appalachian history. This “Veneer of Racial Harmony” in Asheville has downplayed and perhaps at times even erased the Civil Rights Movement in Asheville.<sup>74</sup>

It was not until 1985 with *Blacks in Appalachia*, edited by William Turner and Edwards J. Cabbell, that Black Appalachian history started to be academically explored. However, this exploration of Southern Black Appalachian history has often neglected the Civil Rights Movement and Black rebellions in its historiography. The limited Southern Appalachian Civil Rights Movement historiography has overlooked the impact of Black Appalachian rebellions.

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<sup>74</sup>Parker, Patrick Shane. “Appalachian Activists: The Civil Rights Movement in Asheville,” (NC. Master’s Thesis. North Carolina: Appalachian State University, 2016), 2.

This historiography includes: Jack Guillebeaux's essay "Not Just Whites in Appalachia," John M. Glenn's *The Highlander: No Ordinary School*, Richard Robbins' *Sidelines Activist: Charles S. Johnson and the Struggle for Civil Rights*, and Betty Jamerson Reed's *School Segregation in Western North Carolina: A History, 1860s-1970s*.<sup>75</sup> However, both the rebellions in Asheville and Bluefield prove that rebellions occurred during Civil Rights Movement in Southern Appalachia. However, the history of both places and the aftermath has been turned into a footnote that should be integrated into the national civil rights narrative, because of their substantial impact on the movement in the Southern Appalachian region. This persistent erasure of the Civil Rights Movement and Black rebellions contributes to the "whiteness" of Appalachia in popular memory as seen in J.D. Vance's book and film *Hillbilly Elogy*.<sup>76</sup> In recent historical works these popular memories of Southern Appalachian "whiteness" and "otherness" are myths that Appalachian historians have been disproved.<sup>77</sup> However, by not including the Civil Rights

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<sup>75</sup> William Turner and Edward Cabbell, *Blacks in Appalachia* (Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 1985) 207-210; John M. Glenn, *Highlander: No Ordinary School*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Tennessee: The University of Tennessee Press, 1996) 1-413; Richard Robbins, *Sidelines Activist: Charles S. Johnson and the Struggle for Civil Rights* (Mississippi: The University Press of Mississippi, 1996) 1-223.; Betty Jamerson Reed, *School Segregation in Western North Carolina: A History, 1860s-1970s*, Vol 31 (Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Company, 2011) 1-264; Parker, *Appalachian Activists*, 1-111; Jessica Wilkerson, *To Live Here You Have to Fight: How Women Led Appalachian Movements for Social Justice*, (Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 2019) 1-255.

<sup>76</sup> J.D. Vance, *Hillbilly Elogy: A Memoir of a Family and Culture in Crisis*, (New York City, New York: Harper Publishing, 2016) 1-272.

<sup>77</sup> William Turner and Edward Cabbell, *Blacks in Appalachia* (Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 1985); Mary Beth Pudup, Dwight B. Billings, and Altina L. Waller, *Appalachia in the Making: The Mountain South in the Nineteenth Century* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1995, 103-132.; John Alexander Williams, *Appalachia a History* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2002); Richard B. Drake, *A History of Appalachia* (Kentucky, The University Press of Kentucky, 2001); Henry D. Shapiro, *Appalachia on Our Mind: The Southern Mountains and Mountaineers in the American Consciousness 1870-1920* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1978); John Inscoe, *Race War and Remembrance in the Appalachian South* (Kentucky: University Press of Kentucky, 2008); John Inscoe, *Appalachians and Race: The Mountain South from Slavery to*

Movement and Black rebellions in places like Asheville and Bluefield historians have perpetuated Black erasure.

There are multiple paths across the South to integration. These paths to integration shape Civil Rights Memories. For Asheville and Bluefield, the path towards integration involved rebellions against racially discriminatory systems such as urban renewal, school administrations, school boards, and law enforcement. The rebellions for Asheville and Bluefield shaped the way integration was remembered at each institution. Asheville while acknowledging their divergent memories have created a space in which the narrative of the rebellion is seemingly restricted from “outsider” interpretation. Bluefield, on the other hand, has been reluctant to address the rebellion, creating a gap in memory that disregards the influences of Black Power and discriminatory school administration.

However, the exclusion of the rebellions in Asheville in 1969 and Bluefield in 1968 has shaped historical memory by creating a false concept of “racial harmony” and encouraging Black Appalachian erasure. These rebellions depict Black Appalachian students as advocates for civil rights. They illuminate segregation and the policies of desegregation that impacted Black Southern Appalachians that ultimately led to violent rebellions. The rebellions in Asheville and Bluefield challenge the misleading narrative of “racial harmony,” Appalachian “whiteness,” and resist the erasure of Black history.

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