INTRODUCTION

Not Here, Not Now, Not Us

> Little Rock did not bring on disaster. Disaster was deliberately thrust upon a majority of progressive and law-abiding citizens by extremists and outsiders seeking to serve their own ends.
>
> —Little Rock School Superintendent Virgil Blossom[1]

> Well, Little Rock, we believe, was selected by those who were pushing for integration as a city to be made an example of, and all the forces of government and the forces of liberalism and all the forces of integration were sent to Little Rock to make this the battleground and fight it out, fight the issue out and settle it here, so as to place other school districts in the state and in the South in an indefensible position.
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> —Rev. Wesley Pruden[2]

On the morning of September 4, 1957, 16-year-old Elizabeth Eckford awoke early, so keyed up about her first day at Little Rock's Central High School that she could hardly wait to be up. As she ironed the black and white dress she had made for the occasion, her brother turned on the television. A local newscast related that large crowds were gathering at the previously all-white school to prevent the entry of Elizabeth and eight other African American students scheduled to start school that day. Her mother, anxious about her daughter's safety, yelled from the kitchen for them to "Turn that TV off!" Her father paced throughout the house, unable to calm his fears. Before Elizabeth left for school, her mother summoned the family to the living room for a prayer.[3]

As she walked the block from the bus to her new school, Elizabeth was unaware of crucial decisions made by others. Because the Eckfords did not have a phone, state NAACP leader Daisy Bates had intended to send

someone to their house that morning to notify Elizabeth where to meet the other black students and an interracial escort of ministers before entering the school. Distracted and exhausted, Bates had forgotten to do so. Isolated from the others, Elizabeth found herself on her own in a dangerous situation. Unbeknownst to her, Governor Orval Faubus had ordered the Arkansas National Guard to prevent the entry of the African American students.[4]

Elizabeth assumed that the soldiers were there to offer protection to her and to Central High's other black pupils. Believing that one of the Guardsmen had directed her to go to a particular entrance, she walked down the street between a hostile crowd of whites and the guards. She tried twice to cross the National Guard lines, but was refused access to the school. In the meantime, segregationist whites closed in around her, shoving and yelling epithets. One woman urged her to "go back where you came from," while others cried "Lynch her! Lynch her!" The frightened girl made her way to a bus stop, where a Guardsman ordered the crowd away from the bench. Grace Lorch, a white woman who belonged to the local NAACP chapter, stayed with her, fending off the crowd while Elizabeth waited for a city bus to take her to safety. Lorch told members of the crowd that Elizabeth was "just a little girl" and that "Six months from now you'll be ashamed at what you're doing." In a gesture that would make him a lightning rod for segregationist anger, *New York Times* reporter Benjamin Fine put his arm around the frightened adolescent and urged her, "don't let them see you cry." When a few segregationists tried to block entry to the bus, Lorch also threatened to punch them in the nose. She then rode the bus with the silent and terrified young woman, who got off at the School for the Blind, where her mother worked. There she found safety and comfort in her mother's arms.[5]

Elizabeth Eckford's ordeal received world-wide publicity. The picture of Central High School student Hazel Bryan, her face contorted with hate, taunting a frightened but dignified Eckford became a national and international symbol for racial politics in Little Rock. The *Arkansas Gazette* editorialized that the picture of Eckford in front of "the shouting white girl with her pretty face distorted by unreasoning hate and fear" spoke for itself. Central High School Vice Principal Elizabeth Huckaby described the pictures in her journal as reflecting "the dignity of the rejected Negro girl, the obscenity of the faces of her tormentors." One Central High alumnus

wondered whether Bryan was "the flower of white Southern womanhood?" Gentility, as Beth Roy has noted, "was a deeply gendered act; men could be rough-and-tumble while women carried the torch of right behavior." Bryan apparently had dropped the torch.[6]

If southern white women had a special responsibility to embody and enact southern gentility, something was clearly amiss in Little Rock. The contrasting images presented by Little Rock's youthful antagonists threatened to undermine the historic associations between race and respectability for southern white women. With her shy demeanor and fashionable but proper attire, Elizabeth Eckford embodied an innocent, demure young womanhood. Bryan, by contrast, projected a disorderly and subversive womanhood, one that violated white middle-class taboos against *visible* manifestations of racial hatred and against provocative and disagreeable behavior by women. The day after the incident, Vice Principal Huckaby chastised Bryan for her role in the mob, beginning a series of highly class-based confrontations between school administrators and dissident students over the latter's role in segregationist protests. As the reactions to Bryan indicated, any form of public activism involved segregationist women in a troubling contradiction: they had to flout the gender conventions of southern society in order to strengthen them.[7]

The resistance to desegregation evidenced by the disorders at Central High School and by later segregationist actions makes Little Rock an especially illuminating case study of the problem of enforcing federal desegregation laws in the first ten years after the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision. Officials and citizens in Arkansas used many of the evasive strategies that characterized massive resistance to desegregation elsewhere. These strategies included the passage of myriad state laws whose constitutional validity was suspect, state and private harassment of the NAACP and of individuals associated with desegregation, foot dragging by local school officials, and interference from a state government intent on impeding any compliance with federal law.[8]

Little Rock was poised to become a singularly powerful regional, national, and international symbol of violent resistance to federal desegregation efforts and to racial change. After a federal court injunction forced the governor to remove the state troops from Central High, Little Rock police attempted unsuccessfully to prevent mayhem when the African American students entered the school on September 23, 1957. Confronted by a

menacing segregationist mob that they did not believe they could control, local police removed the black students at midday. In order to enforce federal authority, President Dwight Eisenhower federalized the Arkansas National Guard and sent the 101st Airborne Division to Little Rock. With their assistance, the nine African American students entered Central High again on September 25, eight of them for the duration of the academic year.

Once Eisenhower ordered federal troops to Arkansas, Little Rock became *the* central symbolic event in the racial and sectional politics of the 1950s. For civil rights activists and other supporters of integration in the nation, it was a critical early site where the enactment of a violent and hateful resistance to African American advancement served as a foil for the display of a courageous and justifiable challenge to oppression by black citizens. For segregationists, the events in Little Rock represented a very different sort of morality play, one in which jack-booted federal authorities overrode the wishes and interests of the white majority as they sponsored a dangerous inversion of the South's "cherished traditions" and the nation's racial heritage.[9]

The law in question was that mandated by the U.S. Supreme Court in its 1954 decision in *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas*. In a short opinion, the justices unanimously held that segregated public schools violated the equal protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment and were thus unconstitutional. Specifically, the justices declared that "in the field of public education the doctrine of 'separate but equal' has no place." That doctrine had become a revered ideal in the minds of many southern whites since the 1896 decision in *Plessy v. Ferguson*. In public schools, it was more honored in the breach than in the practice as the "equal" part of the principle fell into immediate and sustained disuse in southern law and policy.[10]

In 1954, the Court left the issue of implementation of its decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* to further arguments, which informed its decision a year later in a case dubbed *Brown II*. That opinion was vague about timetables, asking only that school officials proceed "with all deliberate speed" as they forged school systems "not based on color distinctions." The Court held that the trial courts would retain jurisdiction over districts under court orders "to consider whether the action of school authorities constitutes good faith implementation." The requirement that school of-

ficials create and implement "racially nondiscriminatory" practices provided great latitude for local authorities to define the meanings of "race neutral" laws and practices in postwar America. Because Arkansas cases were heard in the United States Court of Appeals for the Eighth Circuit, which included the plains states and none from the Deep South, they would be decided by judges who might be more supportive of the intentions of the first *Brown* decision.[11]

The fact that the school board in Little Rock had initially stated its intention to comply and in 1955 had drafted a plan for desegregation made the situation more promising there than in many southern communities. Ironically, the school board's victory in a 1956 lawsuit initiated by local NAACP officials meant that the district operated under a court-ordered desegregation plan, albeit one that moved much more slowly than the African American litigants would have preferred. That lawsuit also points to the critical role African American activists played in contesting segregation in Arkansas and in shaping the terms and outcomes of the struggle in Little Rock.[12]

The critical actions taken by NAACP leaders and African American citizens in Little Rock reveal the importance of local activism to the national organization's legal strategies and successes. The national NAACP's relationship to school desegregation in Little Rock was purely reactive; local leaders alone initiated the 1956 lawsuit that placed the Little Rock School Board under a court order to desegregate. Once Faubus put state troops around Central High School, local NAACP leaders consulted closely with the national organization about political and legal strategies to reopen the school on a desegregated basis and to protect the African American students enrolled there. Moreover, local activists and NAACP leaders worked together to contest the narrow formalism advanced by moderates seeking minimal compliance with the *Brown* decision. In Little Rock, grassroots activism and litigation were intimately related, not opposing points on a continuum between community-based militance and an elite politics of "polite protest" and legalistic approaches.[13]

When initially confronted with the need to accommodate the Supreme Court's mandate in the *Brown* cases, white Arkansans' reactions ranged from a reluctant and cautious acceptance to extreme hostility. After the situation exploded in the fall of 1957, most whites in Arkansas came to feel that they had been singled out for unwarranted hardships that included

international misrepresentations, social conflict, violence, lost business, and significant disruptions to their daily lives and relationships. Many whites expressed the strong conviction that Little Rock was not the appropriate place to start school desegregation. Moderates claimed that Arkansas was a progressive state improving its race relations through a careful adherence to white voluntarism. They believed, however, that their ability to sustain continued racial progress required that they be allowed to do so "quietly" and on their own initiative. Staunch segregationists, by contrast, did not claim the mantle of racial "progress," largely because they touted a rigid system of racial segregation as the prerequisite for racial harmony.[14]

Moderates and segregationists alike advanced conspiratorial explanations for Little Rock's plight. After claiming that large numbers of outsiders had been ready to descend on Little Rock in September 1957 in order to prevent desegregation, the Rev. Robert Brown, Episcopal Bishop of the Diocese of Arkansas, concluded: "It would seem to those who know the South, and its attitude towards these problems, that Little Rock, a moderate city in the Southwest, was chosen by design to be the ground for the battle" because its moderation made it a target for each side and its significance would be far "bigger than Little Rock." In 1959, a committee of the Arkansas Legislative Council concluded that the fall 1957 events that had occurred in Little Rock were "planned, schemed, calculated and had as [their] motivating factor the international Communist conspiracy of world domination squarely behind the entire shocking episode."[15]

The idea of outside interference allowed locals to deny any responsibility for events occurring in their midst and to project racism and violence onto people from another place, social class, or political standpoint. The problem, in short, was "not us," but rather nameless outsiders seeking to fight their racial battles by proxy. This view not only enabled Little Rock residents to save face, it also allowed them to believe that their actions and political commitments were not at issue. For the moderates, it also justified a politics of inaction sustained by the conviction that outsiders had precluded effective action on their part. "Being southern," as historian Sheldon Hackney has observed, "inevitably involves a feeling of persecution at times and a sense of being a passive, insignificant object of alien or impersonal forces." As a result, southerners have "fostered a world view that supports the denial of responsibility and locates threats to the region outside the region and threats to the person outside the self."[16]

In fact, the crisis over school desegregation was constructed by multiple actors, inside and outside of Little Rock, who often worked together to secure their goals. However much some citizens wished for a complete autonomy from "outsiders," Little Rock was inextricably linked to other parts of the state, the region, the nation, and the world. Indeed, some of the individuals who most fervently wished for isolation on the issue of race had worked energetically to forge economic, political, and cultural ties to various "outsiders." The terms used by many in Arkansas, however, precluded acknowledging this or discussing how to operate in an interdependent world divided by race and other significant social and cultural fissures.

In Little Rock, as in many other places in the South, the most common white plea was for more time—time to adjust, time to secure more social acceptance of racial change. A segregationist, for example, wrote to the *Arkansas Gazette* in 1955 and, citing biblical arguments against integration, expressed his belief that "we should wait for this until nearer the end of time. We do not want something that will cause our hearts to almost stand still and ache." In 1957, Governor Faubus pointed to the state's segregationist legislation and asked for time "to litigate these measures to final conclusions in order that we may see clearly and unmistakably what is the law of the land—either state or Federal." The plea for more time was a panacea for individuals who believed that the postponements they sought might become, in fact, indefinite ones.[17]

In the meantime, conflicts over school desegregation generated a great deal of political heat. That heat derived not only from the disturbing effects of racial change but also from their relationship to other transformations in American society and culture. In the postwar period adult southern whites and the region's male civic leaders found their power imperiled by the unsettling effects of changes in economic structures, the rise of a youth culture, the increasing power of national media, changing sexual mores and practices, and dramatic shifts in gender and family relations. Moreover, these domains of social and cultural life were densely interconnected. African American campaigns for increased rights and opportunities threatened to destabilize not only the southern system of race but also the class compact among whites that the system secured. Women were entering paid employment in growing numbers and participating in the public world of volunteer associations and social movements even as the dominant ideology proclaimed that their only legitimate place was at home.[18]

In the postwar period, changes in teen dating patterns and sexual prac-
tices meant that high schools became a critical site where young people
found intimate partners and spouses. Consequently, as David Goldfield
observed, the prospect of the racial integration of public schools "aroused
deep-seated fears that propinquity would ultimately become intimacy." As
more adolescents formed intense heterosexual pairs and decided to "go
steady," parents worried that the relationships would lead to premarital
sexual intercourse and tried to control their children's social world. Their
anxieties were well founded. Teen pregnancy rates skyrocketed, reaching
their twentieth-century peak in 1957.[19]

When Elizabeth Eckford and the other African American students
sought to enter Central High School, they were defying more than Arkan-
sas's state sanctioned inequality in educational opportunity. Similarly,
when Hazel Bryan and other white antagonists at the school challenged
the right of black students to be there, they were defending a social order
different from the one their parents had experienced or imagined in their
youth. The defiant behavior of white antagonists in school provoked a range
of reactions in their parents, from unequivocal support to hostility. In the
civil rights struggle in Little Rock, children became significant political
actors, sometimes serving as surrogates for their parents and sometimes
representing their own concerns and goals.[20]

For all social groups, the law became a crucial venue for political action.
Because American courts have the authority to decide whether laws con-
form to the requirements of the federal and state constitutions and can
invalidate those that do not, judges at all levels have played a crucial role
in American politics and political culture. The centrality of the courts in
the formation and legitimation of political claims and public policies
makes them sites for struggles over fundamental political questions and so-
cial values. The role of the courts in defining and enabling the rights, respon-
sibilities, and benefits of citizenship places them at the center of debates re-
garding racial and other hierarchies and gives them a central ideological
significance in the nation's political culture.

This study examines Little Rock as a site for the creation of a class-
conscious thinking about race that would inform "color-blind" law in the
South and the nation long after the decision in *Brown v. Board of Educa-
tion*. From the conception of the Little Rock school desegregation plan to
the application of pupil placement policies, Little Rock's school officials
and civic leaders helped to forge the post-*Brown* era of "race-neutral" law

that was suffused with racial meanings and racist intentions. The focus on law, society, and political culture distinguishes this study from Tony Freyer's scholarship on Little Rock, in that it focuses less on the formal language of court decisions and more on the social logic of the laws and policies being contested, the cultural meanings found in the testimony in court cases, and the role of law in reflecting, legitimating, and transforming political rhetoric and social relations. In particular, it examines the middle-class ideologies revealed and enacted in the school board's policies and legal strategies and in the political actions of the moderates.[21]

Recently, scholars have offered persuasive analyses of the complexities of the resistance of southern whites to the egalitarianism of the civil rights movement while examining the recuperation of racist assumptions and practices in the accommodations of southern whites to the legacies of that movement. They stress the self-conscious adoption of race neutrality as a political vocabulary and legal strategy in the South's responses to African American demands for greater rights and opportunities. Focusing their analyses on class differences among southern whites, these historians have documented the role of white elites and upwardly mobile suburbanites in promoting white flight from the central cities and their schools, the rise of modern conservatism, and the embrace of an ostensibly race-neutral law and politics in the region and the nation. Although this study, like the others, examines class relations as a systematic aspect of New South politics since the *Brown* decision, it differs in that it also analyzes gender and sexuality as critical aspects of southern responses to racial challenge.[22]

Along with the arch segregationists, Little Rock's moderates clogged the courts with cases designed to thwart progressive court decisions and laws, and both factions pioneered in the use of litigation as a conservative political tool. In addition, both groups paved the way in the use of law breaking as a fundamental tactic for disaffected conservatives, a successful strategy that would become a staple of conservative politics in the years to come. Little Rock's civil rights activists, by contrast, used litigation as a critical form of protest directed at undermining social and political hierarchies and redefining the terms of political and legal discussions. In particular, they contested the legal formalism and racist implementation practices embedded in the school board's desegregation policies.[23]

Little Rock's business elite faced multiple challenges in its quest for economic and political power. Dramatic changes in the economy of the postwar South had disturbed customary social, political, and demographic

patterns. The displacement of rural workers of both races by mechaniza-
tion on the plantations created pressures on business and government lead-
ers to provide industrial jobs for whites who moved into the cities of Ar-
kansas in the postwar period. Indeed, business and government leaders
embraced development as a priority for their state. After World War II, the
economic elite of Little Rock, in alliance with the state government,
worked to attract new businesses and jobs from outside the South. Gover-
nor Faubus wholly endorsed this goal, signing a law creating the Arkansas
Industrial Development Commission, which became, in the words of his-
torian James Cobb, "one of the most aggressive and highly visible indus-
trial recruitment agencies in the South." Faubus also supported an amend-
ment to the state constitution that enabled local governments to finance
land acquisition and build facilities for the companies they lured from out
of state. Clearly, the support of state government was an integral part of
the development plans of men intent on forging the New South economy
in Arkansas.[24]

The control of politics and the uncontested right to define the public
good were therefore essential to the economic ambitions of business lead-
ers. Moreover, as Elizabeth Jacoway has noted, Little Rock's business elite
"had just launched a movement to clean up city government and make it
more amenable to the needs of the business community." Business leaders
viewed both objectives of this movement as equivalent goals. Not surpris-
ingly, they were hostile to the idea of sharing public power in the work-
place or in the polity. Their "imagined community" was not in fact a de-
mocracy of white men. It was instead a hierarchy in which a politics of
deference to elite white men enabled those men to secure profits for them-
selves and jobs for others. For the business leaders, economic development
in a context of political inequality was necessary and sufficient for the cre-
ation of a just economic order and political stability in the region. Indeed,
their conviction that they were apostles of progress justified an exclusion-
ary politics and sanctified their efforts to retain power at all costs.[25]

The civic elite expected deference from working-class people in the
workplace as well as in the political arena. The promotional literature used
by the Little Rock Chamber of Commerce in the 1950s touted the tracta-
bility of the city's white labor force. The city's economic leaders assured
corporate leaders considering a move to Arkansas that the state's "freedom
to work" amendment and its "anti-violence law" contributed to the "har-

monious industry-labor relationship" they would find in the state. More-over, the oversupply of labor, caused by mechanization in the state's rural areas, meant that workers would accept lower wages. As a result, employers would benefit because Little Rock not only had a "tremendous *quantity* of workers seeking industrial employment" but also offered workers whose rural roots "had [instilled] in them an inclination to work conscientiously at whatever tasks are assigned to them." These workers were "native-born and quick to learn; they are not susceptible to radical ideas."[26]

The values embraced by business leaders anticipated those that would later be labeled as neo-liberal. Their system of beliefs and practices pro-moted economic expansion as a social panacea, solidified the political pri-ority accorded to growth politics in urban America, combined *laissez-faire* pronouncements with business subsidies from government, and placed worker subordination, opposition to unions, and low wages at the center of its development policies. Little Rock's civic and economic elite regarded the issue of racial justice as a political threat to more important goals and took for granted that development would provide African Americans with an appropriate level of economic opportunity.

Little Rock's business leaders generally tried to exercise political power from behind the scenes, thus distancing themselves from public visibility and accountability. In this way, they could deny the connections between their economic and political roles and minimize the risks to their busi-nesses entailed in public activism. The businessmen were socially conserva-tive and sought to avoid public association with controversial issues. They hoped to keep segregation because they believed in racial hierarchies and in particular because challenges to the racial order could destabilize the system of power they had created. In a time of dramatic economic change, racial discrimination in employment operated to cushion the strain of transi-tion for working-class whites and thus reinforced elite claims to power in the emerging new order.[27]

Business leaders' actions revealed the assumptions and operations of a managerial masculinity characterized by an unshakeable sense of entitle-ment to public power and an overt contempt for others who sought a voice in the community's affairs. As Deborah Kerfoot has noted, "those for whom masculinity resonates most loudly appear to be so preoccupied with 'fixing' the world around them and others in it as to detract from the pos-sibilities of other forms of engagement." The civic elite's use of secrecy,

manipulation, and deception to achieve its goals reflected a deep-seated anxiety that more democratic processes would erode its economic and political power and introduce profoundly unsettling values and modes of interaction. Local civic and business leaders' claims to represent reason, moderation, and the public good masked the fear and egoism that often compelled their actions. However dispassionate their public language may have appeared, theirs was a politics of panic and timidity, bespeaking a radical discomfort with anything but uncontested dominance.[28]

The crisis over school desegregation undermined the desire of civic leaders for unchallenged power as working-class whites mobilized openly against integration, defied federal authority, and voted for segregationist politicians, particularly in elections to the school board. Significantly, working-class segregationists employed racial rhetoric to express class-based grievances and used symbols of the Confederacy to signal their fealty to a region whose heritage of slavery, localism, and rebellion they embraced. Their rhetoric, in the words of historian Pete Daniel, invoked "a flawed history that conflated segregation, the Lost Cause, religion, and sex." The idea that African Americans might claim greater rights and opportunities created a "confrontation between Little Rock's working-class blacks and whites, who were competing for jobs, education, and respectability in a decade of great social change." It also pitted working-class resisters to integration against the local establishment.[29]

The members of that establishment viewed quality public education as a critical element in their industrial recruitment plan. Without good public schools, they believed, northern companies would not relocate managers and their families to Little Rock. Segregationists' threats to the existence and quality of the public schools frightened local developers as much as the public disorders orchestrated by segregationists to sustain massive resistance. As with other elements of the local elite's growth agenda, education required support from all levels of government, including the federal. This need for government support was intensified when the children of the baby boom era and of the rural migration to Little Rock markedly increased public school enrollments in the postwar era.

Local business and civic leaders wished to profit from interdependence in a national economy while maintaining the South's political isolation from a national polity and its racial arrangements. They held to a general belief in states' rights, although they were more than willing to accept fed-

eral funding for education and other public services when it was available on their terms. In fact, their hopes for social stasis in the midst of economic changes were utterly chimerical. As Virginia Scharff has cogently noted, "Markets and nations are creatures of motion. They require the circulation of people and money, goods and ideas." The proliferation of televisions in America's living rooms reduced local elites' ability to maintain their autonomy by giving racial conflicts national and international visibility.[30]

This study seeks to focus on various actors in the Little Rock story in order to understand its meanings in a new way. In particular, a broader comprehension of the crisis in Little Rock means taking the activism of white women much more seriously when analyzing the terms of public debates over race and education and when interpreting the outcomes of the crisis over school desegregation. The segregationist Mothers' League of Central High School orchestrated not only the harassment of African American students at Central High by white racist students; its members also worked to mobilize segregationist resentment and resistance within the white community. Once state and local segregationists orchestrated the closing of Little Rock's public high schools in September 1958, a group of indignant middle-class white women entered the political fray organized as the Women's Emergency Committee to Open Our Schools (WEC). The organization soon became a formidable political presence throughout the state. The WEC worked with local civic leaders to support open schools and gradualism in desegregation, although its more liberal leadership ultimately developed an agenda that differed in important respects from that pursued by the male moderate establishment. The WEC's deference to male civic leaders propped up the men's power and doomed the progressive vision of some WEC leaders. Moreover, the WEC's middle-class political appeals and priorities ultimately limited not only its progressive political vision but also its social base, as did the leaders' commitment to trying to end segregation while excluding African Americans from their own organization.

Examining businessmen's actions more systematically in relation to local social relations than has previously been done illuminates the institutional and ideological bases for their success in maintaining their dominance over local politics despite the growing opposition to their policies. Focusing on the relationship of male business elites to working-class whites, middle-class

white women, and African Americans also highlights the importance of local considerations in motivating activism for or against desegregation and in shaping political rhetoric, goals, and outcomes. As the Little Rock case suggests, local conflicts developed not only over what should be done with respect to desegregating the schools but also over the interrelated questions of who was to exercise power in the community and what kind of community should be created in postwar Little Rock.[31]

More elusively, this study also reveals the operation of gender in the politics and social relations enacted by men throughout the crisis over school desegregation. Historians and the general public have become accustomed to the idea that gender as a power relation and cultural script shapes women's consciousness and motivates their actions, albeit in complex and sometimes contradictory ways. Men, however, have remained the "invisible gendered subject," in the words of Stephen Whitehead. That invisibility has obscured the fact that "American men's ceaseless quest for manhood" formed American organizations, traditions, associations, public policies and political systems, as numerous scholars have documented.[32]

That quest for manhood has also shaped men's social and political disputes. The different social backgrounds, political affiliations, and attitudes to race of the white men involved in the Little Rock crisis created profound conflicts. These conflicts centered in part on whether men would claim political authority as proponents of an ideology of progress centered on the economic and educational development of middle-class whites, or as defenders of racial purity and white working-class respectability. At the same time, men at all levels in the political hierarchy sought ways to assert their wills and protect themselves from the humiliation, material losses, and disempowerment they all associated with public defeats. Joane Nagel has noted the entrenched nature "of such masculine preoccupations as honor, cowardice, strength, face-saving, and manliness" in domains of competition among men. In Little Rock, these preoccupations became central obsessions, especially for the segregationists, as men fought for dominance for themselves and their interests.[33]

Lurking under the surface of southern white men's encounters with federal authority was the memory of Civil War defeat. Although their honor had been propped up by almost a century of memorialization, the hundreds of statues of Confederate military leaders had not effaced the anxieties about confrontations with powerful outsiders just below the surface

of their political consciousness. Male moderates used a rhetoric of victimization to express strong desires for a respite from the authority of others, for a system of impermeable boundaries that would protect them from "outsiders" to their world. Male segregationists' use of masculinist and martial rhetoric bespoke the politics of manhood enacted in their conflicts with federal officials and with Little Rock's moderates. Moreover, the intense preoccupation of southern white men with issues of dominance, submission, and honor fueled a political culture of anger and retribution that shaped their actions and public statements at critical moments.[34]

This study pays particular attention to gendered political rhetoric and iconography so as to examine more closely the values, strategies, and emotional cultures of various groups and organizations. Clearly, some white activists against integration and their allied politicians chose their language and symbols opportunistically and even cynically in order to appeal to or intensify popular fears and prejudices. Many of the ideas advanced by segregationists, however, revealed the gendered anxieties, values, and goals of both political leaders and constituents with particular clarity. This anxiety was not new in the postwar period. From the specter of black male rapists invoked to justify segregation, disfranchisement, and lynching in the Jim Crow era to the demonization of "welfare mothers" pioneered by Orval Faubus, gender has provided a vocabulary for the racial fears and prejudices of whites in the South and the nation.[35]

While segregationists relied on fundamentalist Protestantism to provide religious justification and emotional intensity for their racist views, moderates sought to marginalize the voices of liberal ministers and others who supported an egalitarian racial morality. For moderates, the introduction of new political actors and of different values (of "morality" itself) into the political economy was at odds with modern masculine identities whose ideals derived from marketplace goals and practices. Moreover, because masculine success was to be achieved primarily within dominant economic and political institutions, the performance of middle-class masculinity was inextricably linked with advancing the values and interests of those institutions.[36]

This book examines political disputes over race and schools in relation to interconnected social inequalities, the contested boundaries of political authority in a federal system, shifts in American law, and the rhetoric used by activists to interpret and shape the contours of their social worlds. It does so by understanding that social and economic class is important in

shaping the perspectives and actions of both middle-class and working-class people, that men as well as women construct and reflect gender identities and relations, and that the construction of racial formations in the South involved whites and African Americans. Even as it offers a different view of the meanings and consequences of African American and NAACP activism in Little Rock and the United States, this book focuses mainly and deliberately on the ideologies, actions, and emotional investments of whites in Little Rock, the state of Arkansas, and elsewhere who failed to rise to the moral and political challenge posed by the efforts of African Americans to eradicate racial hierarchy.

This work differs significantly from studies by other scholars who have investigated many of the groups and issues involved in the crisis over desegregation in Little Rock, but who have not offered the kind of systematic and interconnected social and cultural analysis developed in this book. The Women's Emergency Committee and the Mothers' League of Central High School, for example, have been investigated separately by scholars but have not occupied a central place in their examinations of the political dynamics of the crisis over desegregation. Political historians have also treated segregationist activists, most of whom were working class, as the group responsible for mobilizing class identities and ideologies politically. C. Fred Williams and David Chappell have concluded that class was the primary issue for Little Rock's arch segregationists, but do not analyze closely the ways in which southern whites' class-based politics were linked to racial hierarchies in the postwar culture and politics of Little Rock, choosing instead to ask which social relationships were most important during the crisis. The politics and ideologies of business elites, by contrast, have been so taken for granted that they have not been investigated seriously as an expression of gendered class identities. In all cases, the emotional cultures of political movements have received little scrutiny as significant sources of insight into politics.[37]

The book begins by describing the murky origins of Little Rock's school desegregation plan and the exclusionary politics and social visions those origins reveal. The segregationist mobilization activated by the integration crisis in Hoxie, Arkansas in 1955–1956 and the resistance laws endorsed by Orval Faubus in 1956 and early 1957 provided the basis for the sustained campaign of massive resistance to desegregation in Little Rock that began in the summer of 1957. Chapter 2 focuses particularly on the segre-

gationist campaign and on the politics of confrontation with federal offi-
cials it provoked. Concerns about gender and sexuality were central to the
emotional culture, the rhetoric, and the actions of segregationists and thus
receive particular attention.

When segregationists shifted their resistance from the streets to the hall-
ways of Central High School, they caused critical dilemmas for the moder-
ate establishment. Chapter 3 analyzes the politics of school discipline as it
reveals the assumptions, goals, and tactics that characterized the efforts of
white moderate, segregationist, and African American activists to advance
their respective political goals. This chapter, in particular, demonstrates the
centrality of the Mothers' League of Central High School to the emotional
culture and politics of the massive resistance movement to desegregation in
Little Rock. The closing of the public high schools in the fall of 1958 raised
the stakes of the opposition to integration in the schools and led to the
mobilization of middle-class white women in Little Rock to reopen the
schools. Chapters 4 and 5 consider the political shifts that were revealed
and produced as segregationists directed their attacks against public school
administrators and teachers. The political shifts reveal the quest for social
legitimacy, moral authority over children, and political power that moti-
vated segregationist activists and prompted some of their most significant
political blunders. Chapter 6 examines the contested politics of tokenism
and gradualism in integration that developed after schools reopened in
1959, focusing particularly on the dynamic nature of the politicization
that occurred as white women and African Americans sought greater power
in Little Rock politics.

The history of Little Rock's school crisis reveals the dense interconnec-
tions between various social inequalities and disputes over cultural values
and public policies. When segregationists defended white supremacy as nec-
essary to sexual and moral order and white male moderates defended their
racial and gender privilege as the prerequisite for economic and social pro-
gress, they acknowledged the complex and contested social relations that
shaped their disputes. When African Americans and white middle-class
women sought to change the terms of public discussion and broaden the so-
cial basis of political power in Little Rock and Arkansas, they faced opposition
not only from arch segregationists but also from many male moderates.

The activism of African Americans, Women's Emergency Committee
leaders, and white liberals was suspect precisely because it threatened to

deploy a concept of political morality and the public good at odds with the values supported by the city's traditional male elite. The civil rights movement, its rhetoric based in democratic and Christian promises of human equality, offered one of the most powerful threats not only to racial hierarchy but also to the exclusion of alternative values and marginalized social groups from the public sphere. An analysis of the Little Rock crisis over school desegregation reveals how various actors and organizations interpreted and contested the meanings of legal equality in a context of political and social inequalities. It also reminds us that the past contained multiple possibilities and perspectives and examines why some perspectives received little opportunity for a hearing.

The moderates' great success in maintaining their power has masked their equally stunning failures of vision and courage. Racist assumptions and narrow economic perspectives informed all aspects of local governance in postwar Little Rock from the educational policies pursued by school superintendent Virgil Blossom and Little Rock's civic leaders to the development agendas embraced by business elites to the legal arguments pursued by local school authorities. Investigating the dynamics and outcomes of Little Rock's social conflicts discloses their formative role in the construction of America's late twentieth-century neo-liberal political order.