Equal in All Places: The Civil Rights Struggle in Baton Rouge, 1953-1963

And when we allow freedom to ring, when we let it ring from every village and hamlet, from every state and city, we will be able to speed up that day when all of God's children—black men and white men, Jews and Gentiles, Catholics and Protestants—will be able to join hands and to sing in the words of the old Negro spiritual, 'Free at last, free at last; thank God Almighty, we are free at last.'

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

By DEAN SINCLAIR

The struggle for civil rights by African Americans has been long and painful. During the 1950s and 1960s, the most active period of protest activity, much of the struggle for equality was staged in Southern cities. Activities such as bus boycotts, lunch counter sit-ins, protest marches, and storefront picketing had a decidedly urban focus, and, although oppression of blacks was particularly onerous in the smaller towns and rural areas of the South, it was in cities such as Atlanta and Birmingham, where leadership coalesced to create a movement that would change the course of American history.

Between 1953 and 1963, Baton Rouge played a significant role in the battle for civil rights. Louisiana's capital was the site of the first successful bus boycott in the 1950s, establishing a model that would be followed by later, more widely known boycotts in Montgomery, Alabama, and Tallahassee, Florida. After the local bus boycott, however, Baton Rouge's African

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American leadership generally followed rather than led the movement, even though the city was swept by the tides of unrest which convulsed the South.

The civil rights struggle is inherently a social, political, and legal struggle. Yet there are spatial aspects as well. Where events occurred can provide a framework for addressing how and why they occurred. This article presents a geographic framework for the events relating to the civil rights movement in Baton Rouge between 1953 and 1963, and it attempts to place these events in an urban context.

The years between the bus boycott of 1953 and the desegregation of Baton Rouge's public places in 1963 were marked initially by a shift in the locus of civil rights activity from the well established black neighborhoods of the central city to a peripheral area dominated by Southern University. The final chapters of this drama were staged in the inner city, where African Americans made a final push to end color barriers in public establishments. Though it was a time of intense conflict in the American South, relatively peaceful—albeit slow—social change was the rule in Baton Rouge. A pattern of social change nevertheless can be seen in which the black and white communities engaged in a decade-long struggle marked by alternating periods of conflict and accommodation as the black community sought equality.

Baton Rouge is a city of broad avenues and tree-lined streets, stately mansions, and shotgun houses typical of most cities in the Deep South. Situated along the Mississippi River, Baton Rouge's development has been profoundly shaped by the city's role as a major inland port. Because of its location, Baton Rouge attracted numerous energy and petrochemical firms, most notably Standard Oil, to process Louisiana's rich oil and gas resources at glittering steel facilities stretching north of the city. Because of its close ties to the American oil industry, Baton Rouge has seen its economic fortunes swing between periods of boom and bust. The impact of economic downturns has been moderated by the government sector—symbolized by the towering state capital building—which has acted as a stabilizing influence on the local economy.

The local black population did not share in the city's general prosperity. Half of all blacks in Baton Rouge lived at or below the poverty level in the 1950s; most African Americans held
low-wage manual labor jobs.\textsuperscript{1} The large size of the capital city's black population magnified the problem.

In 1950, Baton Rouge had a population of around 125,000; blacks constituted around 28 percent of the population (Table 1). The city's population increased to around 153,000 between 1950 and 1960. The city's black population expanded by 30 percent during the decade despite the fact that the state's black population was shrinking. Between 1960 and 1970, however, the growth of Baton Rouge slowed dramatically, with the population increasing only around 8 percent during the period. The slow growth was due in part to a scant increase (just over 1 percent) in the city's African American population.\textsuperscript{2}

During the 1950s and 1960s, Baton Rouge's black population was concentrated in a zone just outside of the Central Business District (CBD), centered in the Third Street shopping area, and the Capital Complex. (See Figure 1.) These predominantly black areas ring the CBD, forming a buffer between the downtown district and the predominantly white suburban areas. Much of the black population resides in the Southern Heights area between the central city and the Louisiana State University campus. Southern Heights residents played an important role in the events surrounding the Baton Rouge bus boycott, and the neighborhood was also the scene of violent street protests in the late 1960s. The downtown area of Baton Rouge is further bracketed to the north by the predominantly black community adjacent to the campus of Southern University (not shown). Scotlandville, as this area is known, was the scene of a cross burning and other protest activities in the early 1960s.

The Bus Boycott of 1953

Baton Rouge's bus boycott of 1953 was a watershed event in the city, and it proved to be a beginning of an activist national civil rights movement that had up to that point concentrated on


Table 1
Population Change in Baton Rouge, Louisiana
1950-1970

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Population</th>
<th>1950 in ,000s</th>
<th>1960 in ,000s</th>
<th>1970 in ,000s</th>
<th>Percent Increase 1950-60</th>
<th>Percent Increase 1960-70</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>153</td>
<td>165</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>119</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

legal attacks on segregation rather than direct conflict.\(^3\) Throughout the 1940s and early 1950s, Louisiana’s capital was largely quiescent, with both the white and black communities accepting the status quo of legal segregation.

In Baton Rouge, as in all the cities of the South, there were separate facilities for whites and blacks. As Sean Dennis Cashman notes,

\[\text{The regular intimacy of contact under slavery was being superseded by a caste system with next to no sustained contact, which resulted in an inexorable gulf between African-Americans and whites. Although African-Americans were the largest of America’s ethnic minorities, they were segregated in schooling, housing, and places of public accommodation, such as parks, theaters, hospitals, schools, libraries, courts, and even cemeteries. The variety and fluidity of access of the late nineteenth century were abandoned as state after state adopted rigid segregation in a series of so-called Jim Crow laws.}\(^4\)

There were few places where whites and blacks came into close, direct contact under the system of segregation. One of these places was the city bus. Used disproportionately by blacks, public transportation became the focus of much African American anger regarding segregation laws. In 1953, blacks, who made up only 28 percent of Baton Rouge’s population, constituted approximately 80 percent of the bus ridership. Blacks nevertheless were forced to stand, even when seats were available. Aldon D. Morris describes the segregated bus system as follows:

\[\text{Under the Jim Crow system, every public bus had a "colored section" in the back and a "white section" in the front. If the white section filled up, blacks had to move farther toward the back, carrying with them the sign designating "colored." When blacks filled up the colored section, however, they had to stand even though seats in the white section were vacant. Most of the bus routes passed through the black community, which meant that the colored section was often full and the entire white}\]


section empty. In the heart of their own community, blacks had to stand over vacant seats designated for white passengers.5

Rev. T. J. Jemison, a newcomer to the community and the pastor of one of the largest black churches in the city, Mount Zion Baptist Church, stood outside his new sanctuary just off of Government Street as it was being constructed and "watched women who had cooked and cleaned in the houses of white folks off of Goodwood all day having to stand up on the long bus ride home."6

In an effort to change this situation, Reverend Jemison, along with other community leaders, approached the Baton Rouge City Council and requested that the council pass an ordinance allowing blacks to fill up the bus from the back to the front and for whites to fill up the bus from the front to the back, with all seats on a first-come first-served basis.7 Though the separation of races would be maintained, black bus riders would at least be able to sit down. Mayor Jesse Webb and the council, with the support and guidance of City Attorney Gordon King, unanimously approved Ordinance 222 on March 11, 1953.8 It is interesting that approval of the resolution was not noted in the Baton Rouge Morning Advocate, the city's leading newspaper. It was not until the bus company's white drivers refused to comply, launching a strike on June 15 in protest of the ordinance that the statute attracted the public's attention.9 The bus-drivers' strike lasted four days, ending on June 19 after Louisiana Attorney General Fred LeBlanc ruled that the


6Interview with Rev. T. J. Jemison, November 18, 1994; Theodore J. Jemison, The T. J. Jemison Story (Nashville, 1994), 37-41. Born in Selma, Alabama, Reverend Jemison arrived in Baton Rouge in June of 1949 as the pastor of Mount Zion Baptist Church. Though Reverend Jemison would involve himself over the next ten years in the civil rights movement, much of his energy would be directed towards his role with the National Baptist Convention, the largest black Christian organization in the country. He served as secretary of this organization from 1953 until 1982; in 1982, he was elected president, an office which he held from 1982 until 1994.

7Jemison interview; Morris, The Origins of the Civil Rights Movement, 18.

8Jemison interview.

9Baton Rouge Morning Advocate, June 16, 1953.
ordinance was unconstitutional because it did not specifically
reserve seats for whites and blacks.\textsuperscript{10}

The municipal bus drivers returned to work in the wake of the
attorney general's favorable decision. However, during the
evening of June 19, Reverend Jemison appeared on a local
radio program and called for a boycott of the bus system. He
also urged the black community to attend a meeting at Mount
Zion Church the following Saturday night to discuss the issue.\textsuperscript{11}
At the appointed time, around 1,000 people gathered in Mount
Zion's sanctuary, and the meeting's organizers proposed a "free-
ride" system for workers and others using municipal buses.
The plan was greeted with great enthusiasm, and a boycott
was established. As Reverend Jemison recalls, the mood was
summed up by the response of a black maid to her white
employer who phoned to tell her that "the buses are rolling;"
according to Reverend Jemison, the maid replied, "The buses
are rolling but we're not riding."\textsuperscript{12}

The public transporation system established by Reverend
Jemison and other leaders had to be free to the riders, or it
could be shut down by the local government as an unlicensed
taxi service. The free-ride system operated from 5:00 a.m. until
midnight. Bars in black neighborhoods were closed to minimize
the possibility of trouble with the authorities, and bar patrons
were enlisted to expedite the movement of passengers. To
assist in the effort, several thousand dollars were collected
within the community by appealing to local churches and by
passing the hat at the various meetings held in support of the
boycott. As enthusiasm built, evening meetings began
attracting thousands of people, forcing the organizers to change
the venue to McKinley High School to accommodate the large
crowds. According to Reverend Jemison, at its peak 65 to 70
cars and trucks were used in the free-ride operation, and that
"everyone got to where they needed to go."\textsuperscript{13}

On June 24, the city passed Ordinance 251 which reserved
the first two seats on the bus for whites and the last seat on the

\textsuperscript{10}Morris, \textit{The Origins of the Civil Rights Movement}, 18; \textit{Morning Advocate},
June 20, 1953.

\textsuperscript{11}\textit{Morning Advocate}, June 20, 1953.

\textsuperscript{12}Jemison interview.

\textsuperscript{13}Jemison interview; Morris, \textit{The Origins of the Civil Rights Movement}, 17-
25; \textit{Morning Advocate}, June 23, 1953.
bus for blacks; in between these seats people of any color could sit anywhere they chose.\textsuperscript{14} The bus company, which relied on black passengers for two-thirds of its revenues and which was reportedly losing $1,600 per day,\textsuperscript{15} eagerly accepted the deal. For the black community, there was some resentment that \textit{any} of the seats were reserved, and Reverend Jemison and other leaders of the movement, at a meeting attended by 7,000 people on June 25, promised to challenge the new ordinance in court. Despite protests, the decision was made to halt the free-ride system, effectively ending the boycott. The ordinance was subsequently challenged in court, but it would take nine years before segregation was eliminated on Baton Rouge's buses.\textsuperscript{16}

In spatial terms, the bus boycott of 1953 can be seen as a downtown Baton Rouge phenomenon (Figure 2). Protest meetings were held in a downtown church and a nearby school (not shown on map), and the key locations for passenger transfers were on Third Street—Baton Rouge's main shopping thoroughfare—and on the capital grounds. The community effort was clearly directed at the downtown shopping district. According to Reverend Jemison, most of the participants in the boycott were from the black neighborhoods surrounding Baton Rouge's central business district.\textsuperscript{17} This was the first indication that the downtown area would bear the brunt of the unrest associated with the civil rights movement in Baton Rouge.

Reverend Jemison insists that local authorities and the bus company were generally supportive of the bus boycott. According to Jemison, both the mayor and the city attorney were keenly interested in maintaining racial harmony in the city, while the bus company was interested in maximizing its profits. The unanimous vote on the initial ordinance and the use of a public school for the large meetings would seem to confirm a supportive stance.

\textsuperscript{14}\textit{Morning Advocate}, June 25, 1953.
\textsuperscript{15}Morris, \textit{The Origins of the Civil Rights Movement}, 17; \textit{Morning Advocate}, June 24, 1953.
\textsuperscript{17}Jemison interview.
Reverend Jemison also recounts a story about the arrest of one of his parishioners during the boycott. Because of concern
regarding his personal safety, Reverend Jemison had five bodyguards. During a mass meeting at McKinley High School, one of the bodyguards, who guarded the parsonage by marching military style with a shotgun on his shoulder, was arrested for carrying a weapon in public. Upon learning of the arrest after the meeting, Reverend Jemison immediately contacted Chief of Police Wingate White, who personally instructed the desk sergeant to release the bodyguard, thereby avoiding a possible incident.\(^{18}\)

**White Resistance and Black Advances: 1954-1959**

The year 1954 saw a dramatic turn of events on the national stage that was to set the tone for a period of white resistance. In 1896, in the *Plessy v. Ferguson* decision, the United States Supreme Court held that separate but equal facilities were constitutional, thus providing the legal underpinning for segregation. This ruling was not overturned until May 17, 1954, in the historic *Brown v. Board of Education* decision. The ruling stated that "in the field of public education the doctrine of 'separate but equal' has no place. Separate educational facilities are inherently unequal."\(^{19}\)

In Baton Rouge, the *Brown* decision was greeted with joy in the black community and anger in the white community. On September 3, with the start of the school year, local attorneys Alex Pitcher and Johnnie Jones attempted to register twenty-three black children at the all-white Gilmer Wright School. The children were turned away.\(^{20}\) In Baton Rouge and across the South, the response of the white community to the *Brown* decision and the growing assertiveness of the black community was the rise of virulently racist organizations like Citizens Councils, which began holding rallies and other events in support of "massive resistance" to integration. The Louisiana legislature responded to *Brown* by passing laws utilizing the state's police powers to mandate school segregation. This legislation gave new authority to local school districts to assign children to schools in the hope of staving off integration.

\(^{18}\)Jemison interview.


\(^{20}\)Jemison Interview; *Morning Advocate*, November 6, 1954; Fairclough, *Race and Democracy*, 188.
Packaged as Amendment 16 to the state constitution, voters approved the measure by a 5 to 1 margin.\(^2\)

In 1956, however, with the state losing its battle against the federal government for maintenance of segregated schools, other avenues were sought to protect the beleaguered institution. On January 17, 1956, the Baton Rouge Park Commission approved a resolution mandating the policy of segregation at all recreational activities by virtue of the police powers the state delegated to the city. This resolution was interpreted to mean that blacks and whites were barred from competing on the same field. This decision had an immediate impact upon the minor league baseball teams of the Evangeline League, which had included black players. In the wake of the decision, one commissioner noted: "I think that without the major league tie-ins the Evangeline League would fold up, but I'm forced to observe that either we're for segregation or we're not."\(^2\)

The major league teams which supported the Evangeline League had integrated with the shattering of the color barrier by Jackie Robinson in 1947. The seats and other facilities at Goldsby Field, the city-owned ballpark, were segregated, but for the previous three seasons the Baton Rouge Rebels, who had no black players, had played Evangeline League teams with black players. The new resolution, however, made that impossible. On April 28, the game against the Lake Charles Giants was forfeited because the Giants refused to play the game without its black players, including future major league star Felipe Alou, as was demanded by Baton Rouge recreation officials.\(^2\)

The disruption of league play was overshadowed by the actions of the state legislature which, in the face of a federal court's rejection of Amendment 16, passed a series of measures to restore segregation's legal foundation. The resulting laws included measures to ban integration lawsuits, utilized the state's police powers to segregate public parks and recreation facilities, guarantee segregated waiting rooms, effectively ban the activities of civil rights organizations, and eliminate

\(^2\)Morning Advocate, November 5, 1954; Fairclough, Race and Democracy, 169-170.

\(^2\)Morning Advocate, April 5, 1956.

\(^2\)Ibid., April 29, 1956.
compulsory school attendance if the federal government sought to force integration.\textsuperscript{24} One of the many local responses to these measures was the decision by Louisiana State University to discontinue sports contests against schools with integrated teams. The immediate effect was the decision by the University of Wisconsin football team to cancel a 1957-1958 home and home arrangement with L.S.U. in protest of the new measures.\textsuperscript{25}

In 1957, the state legislature remained the focus of the anti-integration struggle by holding hearings on the role of communism in the civil rights movement. Newspaper headlines from the period, such as "Reds Seek to Steer NAACP, Witness Says"\textsuperscript{26} and "Negro Ex-Red Hits Rev. King as 'Mis-leader,' Says Policies Could Lead to Communism,"\textsuperscript{27} suggest the tone of the debate that was underway.

The anti-civil rights offensive was short-lived. By November 1958, the legal basis of segregation was again under attack, as the result of a decision by the federal judiciary that laws requiring segregated sports events were unconstitutional.\textsuperscript{28}

During this period in Baton Rouge, according to Reverend Jemison, African Americans made limited efforts to desegregate lunch counters around the city, including the Kress lunch counter on Third Street and the Piccadilly Cafeteria, which quietly integrated its seating in the late 1950s. Jemison reports that during this period, students from Southern University who trained at his church would arrive at a lunch counter individually or in small groups in the afternoon after the lunch time rush and sit in the "whites only" area and try to get served. The manager of the store and the chief of police would be contacted by Reverend Jemison to inform them that the students were on their way and then, under the watchful eye of a nearby police officer positioned to watch for trouble, would enter the eating establishment. Reverend Jemison recounts that after one of the managers was alerted about the

\textsuperscript{24}Morning Advocate, July 15, 1956; Fairclough, Race and Democracy, 205.

\textsuperscript{25}Morning Advocate, October 16, 1956.

\textsuperscript{26}Ibid., March 8, 1957.

\textsuperscript{27}Ibid., March 9, 1957.

\textsuperscript{28}Ibid., November 30, 1958; Fairclough, Race and Democracy, 219. All of L.S.U.'s other scheduled opponents had segregated athletic programs.
approaching students she stepped away from the counter for a brief period; when the students arrived she was nowhere to be found. The black waitress who was on duty did not know what was occurring and refused to serve the students. They left the restaurant and returned to the church. A call quickly came from Chief of Police Wingate White, who had been watching that particular lunch counter, to tell Reverend Jemison to send the students back because they would be served. However, this slow pace of change created deep frustrations in the black community, setting the stage for increasing conflict in the 1960s.

Marching Towards Equality: 1960-1963

In the late 1950s, new organizations like the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) formed while older organizations like the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) were beginning to have an impact within the black community. In Baton Rouge, however, these organizations were slow to take root, partly because of intimidation by the white community as well as a leadership vacuum within the black community. With the beginning of the student sit-in movement of 1960 which swept the cities of the South, CORE became increasingly important in Baton Rouge, after finding a home on the campus of nearby Southern University.

With around 5,000 students in 1960, Southern University considered itself to be the nation’s largest black public university. In terms of the civil rights struggle, the campus had been relatively quiet during the 1950s, with no public protests. Southern students had no organized involvement in the bus boycott of 1953 or in the 1958 and 1959 efforts to integrate lunch counters; any participation was strictly on an individual basis, usually as a result of ties to Jemison’s

29Jemison interview.

30For a discussion of these groups and the student sit-in movement, see Martin Oppenheimer, The Sit-In Movement of 1960 (Brooklyn, N. Y., 1989), 59-84; Jack L. Walker “Sit-ins in Atlanta: A Study in the Negro Revolt,” in David J. Garrow, ed. Atlanta Georgia, 1960-1961: Sit-Ins and Student Activism (Brooklyn, N. Y., 1989), 59-94; Morris, The Origins of the Civil Rights Movement, 128-38; for a discussion of the role of these organizations at Southern University, see Fairclough, Race Democracy, 267.
church. However, when the wave of sit-ins began on February 1, 1960, with the demonstration at the F. W. Woolworth store in Greensboro, North Carolina, by four students of North Carolina A & T, the students at Southern took notice.

Sit-ins by Southern University students began at Kress Department Store on Third Street in downtown Baton Rouge on Monday, March 28. Seven well dressed students—five males and two females—sat in the "whites only" section of the lunch counter and were arrested for disturbing the peace and escorted from the building to jail. The following day seven more students were arrested at the Greyhound bus station on Florida Avenue. In addition, two students were arrested at Sitman's Drug Store in downtown Baton Rouge. These nine students were also arrested for disturbing the peace.

Reverend Jemison, who reported that he knew nothing of the demonstrations in advance but was thrilled when they began, asked his congregation to boycott Third Street merchants in response to the arrests. Felton Clark, president of Southern University, however, expressed outrage and dismay that students at the school would engage in such behavior. That night, as tensions in the community mounted, a cross was burned in the Scotlandville area near the Southern University campus.

On Wednesday, a boycott of classes at Southern University led to a five-mile march of 1,000 students from the campus to the state capitol. This was the first time that a large, well-organized assembly of blacks had marched on the capitol. Eighteen students—the sixteen arrested in the sit-ins and two students who addressed the rally at the capitol—were suspended or expelled by President Clark. Clark also banned protest activities from the campus, prompting rallies just off the school grounds over the next several days. Two students,

31 Jemison interview.
32 Oppenheimer, The Sit-In Movement of 1960, 38-44.
33 Morning Advocate, March 29, 1960.
34 Ibid., March 30, 1960.
35 Jemison interview.
37 Ibid., March 31, 1953.
Major Johns and Marvin Johnson, emerged as leaders of the movement, and they called on students to withdraw from the university. The largest rally took place on Friday, April 1, in which 3,000 students met off campus. With an effective boycott of classes in place, hundreds of students heeded the call and submitted withdrawal forms. The following week, however, as the implications of their actions sank in, most of these requests were nullified at the students’ request.

The boycott ended quietly the following week, though a final rally drew 1,000 students on Monday, April 4. Nine of the fourteen students arrested during the sit-ins were still in jail on April 4, but they were bailed out by local citizens shortly thereafter. The boycott of Third Street merchants called for by Reverend Jemison never materialized.

With the sit-ins of 1960 and the march on the capitol by Southern students, the center of the civil rights struggle in Baton Rouge had shifted away from Baton Rouge proper to the Southern University campus (Figure 3). The focus of protest remained the central city of Baton Rouge, but the movement’s leadership and energy had shifted to Scotlandville. This pattern continued into the following year, when tear gas was used for the first time in Baton Rouge in response to African American efforts to achieve equality.

As Christmas approached in 1961, more than a year after the unrest of the spring of 1960, student protesters returned to the "whites only" sections of the lunch counters of Baton Rouge. The first reported events were two "eat and run’s" at the Kress and McCrory stores on Third Street on December 9. Organized by field representatives of the Congress of Racial Equality, these protests involved enlisting sympathetic whites to buy food at lunch counters for consumption by blacks who arrived after the food was ordered. Ronald Moore, CORE’s local spokesperson, gave the business community an ultimatum: integrate or face a rising tide of protest.

Two days later, a federal court threw out the convictions of students arrested during the 1960 sit-ins on the grounds that

38Morning Advocate, April 2, 1960.
39Ibid., April 6, 1960.
40Ibid., April 5, 1960.
41Ibid., December 10, 1961.
there was no evidence that the students disturbed the peace.\footnote{Morning Advocate, December 12, 1961.}
Sensing trouble, Baton Rouge officials warned against any further disruptive activity.\footnote{Ibid., December 14, 1961.} On December 14, however, twenty-three protesters from Southern University were jailed for picketing at twelve stores on Third Street and elsewhere in

\footnote{Morning Advocate, December 12, 1961.}
\footnote{Ibid., December 14, 1961.}
the city. Slogans on signs the students carried—including "Don't buy here, this store discriminates" and "Have money, will buy elsewhere"—suggests a growing awareness of the African American community's economic power. In another indication of a broadening agenda, the jailed students complained that merchants refused to discuss better job opportunities for blacks.44

On December 15, a crowd of 1,500 people, most of them students from Southern University, again marched from campus to downtown Baton Rouge, with their destination the municipal courthouse. When the demonstration began to grow unruly, it was broken up with tear gas, and fifty marchers were arrested on charges of conspiracy to commit criminal mischief. United States District Judge E. Gordon West issued a court order against further picketing by CORE, and around forty state troopers were put at the disposal of city officials. Southern University, once again rocked by unrest and with seventy-three of its students languishing in jail, closed for the Christmas break three days early.45 Many of the students remained in jail through Christmas, despite pleas from the community to accept bail. By February of 1962, with all the students out of jail, a permanent injunction was issued by Judge West barring further demonstrations by CORE, an injunction that would not be thrown out by the federal court until 1963. This injunction, along with intimidation by President Clark, quelled further disturbances at the university, and large-scale civil rights activity would not again disturb the campus until 1972.46

After the student-led sit-ins of 1960 and 1961, the center of desegregation efforts in Baton Rouge returned to the downtown area. There were, however, only a few isolated civil rights incidents in 1962. In one widely publicized incident Reverend Arthur Jelks, the head of the local NAACP, sought to register black students at three white schools and was met by a crowd of 125 jeering whites.47 Later that day, sit-ins were staged at McCrory's on Third Street and Montgomery Ward's lunch

46Fairclough, Race and Democracy, 290-291, 459-460.
counter at Bon Marché Mall. In November of that year, at the municipal court trial of CORE activist Reverend B. Elton Cox, accused of inciting the unrest which occurred on December 15, 1962, two blacks sat in the "whites only" section until they were physically removed, and, on the same day, two blacks sought to eat at the cafeteria in the state capital building, only to be told it was closed.48

In 1963, the tone and pace of the civil rights movement changed nationally, and these changes impacted Baton Rouge. In April, a boycott of discriminatory white-owned businesses in Birmingham, Alabama, as a means of securing economic opportunity for blacks and an end to segregated lunch counters, posed a major challenge to segregation. The white community responded violently, and on May 3 the images of peaceful marchers being met by Sheriff "Bull" Connor's dogs and water hoses were beamed into the nation's living rooms.49

In all likelihood the sight of the unrest in Birmingham was a spur to the white leadership of Baton Rouge to seek accommodation with the black community. A few weeks after the May 3 altercation in Birmingham a bi-racial committee was formed with the support of influential newspaper owner Douglas Manship and Reverend Jemison, who was selected co-chair.50 As the committee deliberated, thirty blacks staged a "swim-in" on July 25; five were arrested at the whites-only City Park Pool.51 Another protest was held at the pool on August 5. Despite warnings from the segregationist Citizens Council, as the threat of sit-ins and a boycott of white-owned businesses escalated the merchants and leaders of the white community capitulated on August 8, integrating the twelve lunch counters on Third Street, at Bon Marché Mall, and at Delmont Plaza.52 It is notable that the twelve stores that were integrated on August 8 were not identified by the news media, and the removal of the racial barriers was not reported in the Morning Advocate.

48Morning Advocate, November 30, 1962.
49Morris, The Origins of the Civil Rights Movement, 250-274.
50Fairclough, Race and Democracy, 332-333; Baton Rouge News Leader, June 1, 1963.
52Baton Rouge News Leader, August 10, 1963.
With the dropping of the barriers, further unrest was postponed for a time. Like other Southern cities, however, Baton Rouge could not escape the white backlash or the escalating violence of the civil rights struggle. In 1964 there were continuing efforts to integrate public accommodations in the wake of the passage of the Civil Rights Act. After 1964 there were frequent bombings of businesses, a major riot on Third Street in 1969, and the bombing of the state capitol in 1970. The violent confrontations culminated in a wild shootout on a downtown street in 1972 in which two police officers and two black activists were killed and thirty-one people were wounded. Nearly twenty years after the peaceful bus boycott and ten years after quietly dropping the color barriers at Baton Rouge lunch counters, it was clear that a seat on the bus and a place at the table were not enough to bring true racial equality.

Conclusion

The civil rights movement in Baton Rouge mirrored the racial struggle in many Southern cities. There were periods in which the black community made significant advances, but gains were often followed by setbacks and intimidation. In terms of a spatial framework, the civil rights struggle centered on high profile public locations, where whites and blacks came into contact. Between 1953 and 1963, the principal targets of protests were the city transportation system and shopping areas, particularly the stores on Third Street. Schools and recreation facilities like Golsby Field and City Park Pool later became focal points of civil rights activities. Protesters also targeted symbols of white institutions, including the state capitol and the municipal court, though this strategy seems to have been formulated primarily by the students at Southern University. Southern’s student population, drawn from throughout the country, may have been more attuned to the symbols of control employed by the white community than the typical Baton Rouge resident. Moreover, the social insularity of a college campus, the physical distance between the campus and the white institutions—Southern, for example, is five miles from the capitol—and a sense of youthful invincibility may have provided the students a greater sense of security.

Before 1953, Baton Rouge was like most Southern cities. It was highly segregated, and the status quo was maintained by public institutions. The bus boycott of 1953 galvanized the
black community and drew African Americans together. The boycott's success forced local authorities to accommodate black demands. Though seats were still reserved on the bus for whites—thus maintaining the veneer of segregation—it was an important victory. The student sit-ins of 1960 and 1961, which helped spur the eventual end of color barriers at lunch counters, also represented a victory for the black community.

Yet the victories were followed by periods of white reaction and resistance. Conflict was necessary to draw the attention of the white community, and once a certain threshold of tensions had been reached, whites made accommodations. After each black success, there was a white backlash, forcing the black community into retrenchment until conflict again erupted.