

Historians of the Central High Crisis and Little Rock's Working-Class Whites: A Review Essay

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Little Rock: Race and Resistance at Central High School. By Karen Anderson. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010. Pp. x, 330. Acknowledgments, introduction, abbreviations, illustrations, notes, index. \$37.50.)

ON MAY 22, 1959, Arkansas governor Orval Faubus secured time on Little Rock television to boost the segregationist cause in the city's upcoming school board election. All six board members were facing a recall vote that historians generally view as the beginning of the end of the Central High crisis. Angered by the firing of forty-four educators seen as sympathetic to integration and wanting to reopen the high schools that the governor and voters had closed to avoid desegregation, the city's white racial moderates had formed Stop This Outrageous Purge (STOP) and secured sufficient signatures to place the three segregationist board members on the recall ballot. Segregationist forces—organized as the Committee to Retain Our Segregated Schools (CROSS)—responded by doing the same to the school board's three moderate members, transforming the election into a referendum on school integration. In his endorsement of CROSS's efforts, Faubus told his television audience that the contest was part of a class struggle among the city's whites. He derided the STOP forces as the "Cadillac brigade," insisting that they comprised the city's "prominent and wealthy," and accused them of trying to force integration upon "the honest white people of the middle and lower classes."¹

¹Bill Lewis, "Governor Comes Out for McKinley Slate, Labels Move against Purge 'Smokescreen,'" *Arkansas Gazette* (Little Rock), May 23, 1959, p. 1.

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Historians, including, most recently, Karen Anderson, have generally regarded Faubus's statement as an accurate assessment of the class dynamics at play among the city's whites during the Central High crisis.² Yet *Arkansas Gazette* reporter Roy Reed observed in the wake of the moderates' extremely narrow victory that "Governor Faubus did not come anywhere near success in stirring up a 'class war' to benefit the [segregationist] element." Reed explained that "a study of the vote by precincts . . . shows that the [white] working people seem to be shifting to a stronger stand for public education [i.e. reopening the public high schools on an integrated basis]." He cited returns from several neighborhoods, including the Fourth Ward, populated mostly by white "skilled laborers and industrial workers," where the moderates "picked up about 40 per cent of the ballots." This increased support from working-class whites provided STOP's margin of victory. Reed noted that backing for the moderates from the "silk stocking" neighborhoods of the far west side and black neighborhoods on the east side was the same as it had been during the previous two elections, one of which was won by the segregationists and the other of which produced a board split evenly between moderates and segregationists. Only the white working-class neighborhoods had shown an increasing percentage of ballots going to the moderates, and Reed credited the city's industrial unions for much of this change.³

Reed's insistence that white working-class votes were the key to STOP's victory is corroborated by the more detailed statistics offered up the following year by University of Arkansas political scientist Henry Alexander, who classified the precinct level returns in terms of both race and income. The returns indicate that 40.4 percent of voters in white "Middle-Income" precincts cast ballots to retain moderate school board member Ted Lamb and 45.4 percent of those same voters cast ballots to remove segregationist Robert Laster. Although "Upper-Income" whites were about 1.7 times more likely to vote for the STOP ticket than their

²Karen Anderson, *Little Rock: Race and Resistance at Central High* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 187. Others citing Faubus's "Cadillac brigade" remark include Numan Bartley, *The New South, 1945-1980* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1995), 248; Elizabeth Jacoway, *Turn Away Thy Son: Little Rock, the Crisis that Shocked the Nation* (New York: Free Press, 2007), 324; David Goldfield, *Still Fighting the Civil War: The American South and Southern History* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2004), 170.

³Roy Reed, "Ward-by-ward Voting Check Shows Recall Election Not 'Class Struggle,'" *Arkansas Gazette*, May 27, 1959, p 2A. *Arkansas Gazette* executive editor Harry S. Ashmore also dismissed Faubus's "Cadillac brigade" remark, noting the "massive illogic" of the governor calling STOP supporters elites one day and "Communist-tainted left-wingers" the next; Ashmore, "Faubus Will Never Sit Easy on the Tiger He Rides," *Life*, June 8, 1959, p. 26.

“Middle-Income” counterparts, the majority of STOP votes from white precincts came from areas Alexander designated as “Middle-Income” and “Low-Income.” The precincts populated by those Faubus called “the honest white people of the middle and lower classes” cast 64.5 percent of votes from white areas to retain Lamb, while the precincts of the so-called “Cadillac brigade” supplied just 35.5 percent. Of the votes to remove Laster, a majority (50.6 percent) came from “Middle-Income” and “Low-Income” white precincts. Only 27.8 percent of the votes to recall Laster came from “Upper-Income” white precincts, and the remainder (21.5 percent) came from African-American precincts. No matter how you parse the returns, STOP was more of a working-class movement than an elite one.⁴

Karen Anderson in her recent *Little Rock: Race and Resistance at Central High* has followed earlier historians of the Central High crisis, however, in characterizing the movement to reopen the city’s high schools on an integrated basis as an elite effort opposed by working-class whites. These historians essentialize working-class whites as unconditionally hostile to the prospects of school integration and civil rights for African Americans and unwilling or unable to change. Yet Anderson and other historians of the Central High crisis never engage in any sustained analysis of Little Rock’s white working class or the institutions, like labor unions, controlled by its members, relying instead on detailed study of a few individual segregationists, statements of self-proclaimed leaders of the masses, self-serving accounts by members of the city’s better classes, or impressionistic assessments of the angry folk who rallied on the streets surrounding Central High. Anderson distinguishes her work from earlier accounts by emphasizing the ways in which issues of race, gender, and class intersected during the Central High crisis, insisting that understandings of all three social constructs are bound up and interrelated with each other. But Anderson’s uncritical acceptance of the flawed interpretations of class put forward by other historians necessarily renders her conclusions regarding gender and race suspect.

As Reed’s newspaper analysis and Alexander’s election returns make clear, the distinctions that historians have made between the city’s

⁴Henry M. Alexander, *The Little Rock Recall Election*, Eagleton Institute Cases in Practical Politics number 17 (New York: McGraw Hill Book Company, 1960), 32. The exact correlation between “Middle-Income” and working-class is unknown, but the wards that Roy Reed classified as working-class are called “Middle-Income” by Alexander. While Alexander’s methodology is not ideal—precinct-level descriptions of race and income level are overly broad—his data are the only non-anecdotal measures of voter behavior during the STOP-CROSS campaign available. It should also be noted that Alexander was unable to place about 1700 of the nearly 25,000 voters in specific precincts.

elite and working-class whites are wildly overdrawn. This tendency traces back to the earliest historians of the Central High crisis. Numan Bartley, for instance, noted how Little Rock's desegregation plan put the onus of integration on the white "lower and middle classes," whom he assumed were "most likely to hold strong racial prejudice." Irving Spitzberg, Jr., acknowledged that most whites in Little Rock held segregationist sentiments but insisted that only those on "the fringes of politics as well as the fringes of the economy and power" translated their segregationist ideas into action. Neil McMillen portrayed the Capital Citizens' Council, the main vehicle for mobilizing Little Rock's segregationists, as a working-class organization that did not "enjoy the support of the city's 'substantial' middle class."⁵

In a short essay in an issue of the *Arkansas Historical Quarterly* commemorating the fortieth anniversary of the Central High crisis in 1997, C. Fred Williams sought to explain the association between working-class whites and the radical segregationist movement. Williams, who provocatively titled his piece "Class: The Central Issue in the 1957 Little Rock School Crisis," maintains that the "rise of massive resistance in the capital city was fundamentally an expression of class conflict" among whites and that it was based on a critical misunderstanding. He argues that the Little Rock school board's integration plan—named after Superintendent Virgil Blossom—shielded members of the city's business and social elite from any possibility that their children would be forced to attend schools with African Americans while requiring working-class kids to go to integrated schools. Williams does not attribute the plan's disparate effects on the white student population to any conscious effort on the part of the school board but instead as the result of geography, population growth, and school construction projects formulated before the *Brown* decision. These facts, though, were lost on white "working-class Little Rockians," who concluded,

⁵N. V. Bartley, "Looking Back at Little Rock," *Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 25 (Summer 1966): 101-116 (quotation p. 103); Irving J. Spitzberg, Jr., *Racial Politics in Little Rock, 1954-1964* (New York: Garland, 1987), 40-41; Neil R. McMillen, "White Citizens' Council and Resistance to School Desegregation in Arkansas," *Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 30 (Summer 1971): 95-122 (quotation p. 101). Also see, Elizabeth Jacoway, "Taken by Surprise: Little Rock Business Leaders and Desegregation," in *Southern Businessmen and Desegregation*, ed. Elizabeth Jacoway and David R. Colburn (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982), 15-41; Tony A. Freyer, "Politics and Law in the Little Rock Crisis, 1954-1957," *Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 40 (Autumn 1981): 195-219; Bartley, *New South*, 247-248; David L. Chappell, "Diversity within a Racial Group: White People in Little Rock," *Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 54 (Winter 1995): 444-456; Lorraine Gates, "Power from the Pedestal: The Women's Emergency Committee and the Little Rock Crisis," *Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 55 (Spring 1996): 26-57.

Elite whites and east-side blacks had been taken care of with attractive, modern new schools in their respective neighborhoods. But citizens in the city's central section [i.e. the working-class wards] were stuck in a thirty-year-old building, and to add insult to injury, that building had been singled out to be the site of the city's experiment with racial integration. . . . [T]he Blossom plan was unfair, a favor to the privileged class.

Thus, even though "most white Little Rockians did not support race mixing," the elites reluctantly accepted that the schools would be integrated while the working class mobilized on the streets surrounding Central High to stop it. These working-class whites later expressed their rage by "going to the ballot box" to support Faubus and other segregationist candidates.⁶

Although coming in at less than five pages and offering no footnotes, Williams' essay has achieved a somewhat celebrated status because it succinctly expressed what was the emerging paradigm for understanding white behavior during the Central High crisis (and the broader civil rights movement): the juxtaposition of unconditional working-class hostility toward racial integration with the increasing willingness of elites to moderate their racist beliefs and find accommodation with some African-American demands.⁷ Like all paradigms, this one allows scholars to make sense of certain pieces of evidence and answer certain questions, but it also leads talented historians astray. The task of the historian becomes to explain the elements of the paradigm—that is, why elites mod-

⁶C. Fred Williams, "Class: The Central Issue in the 1957 Little Rock School Crisis," *Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 56 (Autumn 1997): 341-344.

⁷Even some of the most highly regarded histories of the Civil Rights-era South are caught in this paradigm. Matthew Lassiter advances an argument about the political realignment of the South that is largely based on working-class whites' hostility to racial integration and civil rights. In his telling, African Americans and some white urban elites emerge in the 1960s as the region's liberals, white-collar whites fleeing to the suburbs become swing voters, and working-class whites (both those stuck in the city and those in the rural areas) line up behind reactionary politicians like George Wallace and Lester Maddox. The problem is that Lassiter never subjects working-class whites to the type of rigorous analysis that he reserves for other actors; he simply assumes the white working class to be monolithic and unconditionally hostile to integration. Kevin Kruse's *White Flight* is similarly predicated on the white working class's unconditional hostility to the integration of schools, parks, neighborhoods, and the like. But the only evidence that Kruse brings to the table is anecdotal. There is no effort to determine how representative the working-class protesters he cites are of the entire class. Matthew Lassiter, *The Silent Majority: Suburban Politics in the Sunbelt South* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006); Kevin Kruse, *White Flight: Atlanta and the Making of Modern Conservatism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).

erated their racist views and why working-class whites clung to them. There is little need to provide evidence in support of arguments that conform to the paradigm, and evidence that contradicts it is either ignored or dismissed as irrelevant. Thus historians of the Central High crisis divine the gradations of elite thought toward school integration with great care and insight, highlighting the ways in which broad support for the racial segregation of schools was often overcome by countervailing economic, political, and cultural forces. But when attention is turned to working-class whites, it is only to plumb their pathologies—mostly their hatreds, yearnings for status, and fears of interracial sex.

In *Lost Revolutions: The South in the 1950s* (2000), Pete Daniel suggests that he is challenging historians' "conventional telling" of the Central High crisis—"elite women and businessmen prevail over lower-class segregationists"—but he really only fine-tunes it. He takes working-class whites' unconditional hostility to integration as a given but locates its origins in broader class and racial anxieties rather than just anger at the inequities of the Blossom plan. Instead of raging against the city's elites, Little Rock's working-class whites first directed their anger toward African Americans. "The crisis during the 1957-58 school year," according to Daniel, "could more accurately be called 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." This confrontation, which played out in the halls of Central High and resulted in the closing of the city's high schools, prompted both the moderation and the mobilization of the city's elite: "it took over a year after the crisis began in the summer of 1957 for elite women to find their voices and six more months and a teachers purge to stir businessmen." Only at that time does the class conflict among the city's whites move to the fore.⁸

Daniel, though, cannot break free of the "conventional telling" that he says he is contesting. He finds no reason to examine rigorously the attitudes of working-class whites. He does no city-wide analysis of working-class attitudes during the crisis nor does he look at any of the institutions of the city's working-class whites. Instead, he cites the declarations and actions of a few segregationists (including Sammie Dean Parker and her family) as well as the appearance of those who congregated around Central High to protest the entrance of the nine black students—"Most of the men and women were dressed casually but neatly; it was, at its core, a respectable-looking working-class crowd." Daniel

⁸Pete Daniel, *Lost Revolutions: The South in the 1950s* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 251-283 (quotations on p. 251).

then assumes that the thoughts and actions of the small portion of the city's white working class who protested outside the school were representative of the entire class. As he puts it, "As much as any incident in the 1950s, the Central High School crisis disclosed white working-class attitudes toward African-Americans." Daniel never considers that those working-class whites who did not bellow racist cant at reporters or threaten to lynch Elizabeth Eckford might differ substantively from those who did.⁹

In *Turn Away Thy Son: Little Rock, the Crisis that Shocked the Nation* (2007), Elizabeth Jacoway gives the paradigmatic understanding of white behavior during the Central High crisis its fullest telling. She insists that "the vast majority of the [white] population espoused the segregationist arguments" but characterizes the activism of Little Rock's working-class whites as distinct and more radical. She titles one chapter "Blue-collar Opposition." But in that chapter she spends little time examining the attitudes of the city's working-class whites in any systematic fashion. Instead, she focuses on Amis Guthridge, a white attorney from suburban Little Rock who had long been accepted by the city's elite as one of their own. Jacoway justifies the focus on Guthridge by emphasizing "his ability to articulate the inchoate fears and concerns of the middle and lower classes of the city's white citizens." The assumption that Little Rock's working-class whites were inarticulate absolves Jacoway of the task of uncovering their thoughts and actions and allows her to substitute the pronouncements of one man for those of an entire class. This methodology renders working-class whites monolithic and suggests a level of class cohesion that would impress Karl Marx.¹⁰

Jacoway portrays the radical segregationist activism of the city's white working class—personified in Guthridge—as a product of the Blossom plan, which exempted the offspring of the elite from an integrated education while forcing white working-class children to attend school alongside African Americans. As Guthridge noted, the "only race mixing that is going to be done is in the districts where the so-called rednecks live." Perhaps most important in fueling working-class anger was fear of the miscegenation—what Guthridge called "the black plague of race-mixing"—that would come from black and white children sitting next to each other in the classroom. Jacoway explains that preventing integration and the interracial sex that would naturally fol-

⁹Ibid., 251 (second quotation), 265 (first quotation).

¹⁰Jacoway, *Turn Away Thy Son*, 66 (second quotation), 203 (first quotation).

low would allow Little Rock's working-class whites to maintain "their tenuous hold on self-respect through racial superiority."¹¹

This left movement toward racial accommodation and the reopening of the city's schools in the hands of those whose claims to respect and privilege were more secure. Jacoway explains, "a consensus began to emerge among Little Rock's social and business leadership. . . . that some yielding to federal demands was unavoidable." Not only did school closings threaten to blight the futures of the city's children but also negative headlines had sullied the city's reputation to the detriment of economic development. Forging what Jacoway calls a "new elite consensus," professionals and Chamber of Commerce-types with the help of their female counterparts—organized through the Women's Emergency Committee to Open Our Schools (WEC)—successfully took control of the school board from "their less sophisticated neighbors." Jacoway's elite triumphalism is only somewhat mitigated by her criticisms of the moderate school board members who pushed through a plan to reopen the city's high schools in the fall of 1959 that offered only token integration.¹²

In *Little Rock: Race and Resistance at Central High*, Karen Anderson never veers from the established paradigm. She does not question the conventional understanding of working-class whites as unconditional segregationists or the idea that the effort to recall segregationist board members and reopen the city's high schools was an elite movement. Anderson does not spend much energy trying to understand the behavior of working-class whites. Instead she cites approvingly the work of Williams and Daniel. The only white working-class voices that she credits are radical segregationists, mostly members of the Mothers' League of Central High. Like Daniel, she confuses a subset of the white working class for the whole, simply assuming that the most radical were typical.

Anderson's one attempt to move beyond the analyses of Williams and Daniel in accounting for the behavior of working-class whites is particularly problematic. She insists that before racial unrest roiled Arkansas there existed a "class compact" between the state's elite and its

¹¹Ibid., 67 (second and third quotations), 69 (first quotation). For another work on the Central High crisis that locates the era's hysteria over miscegenation in the racial and status anxieties of working-class whites, see Phoebe Godfrey, "Bayonets, Brainwashing, and Bathrooms: The Discourse of Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Desegregation of Little Rock's Central High," *Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 62 (Spring 2003): 42-67.

¹²Ibid., 328 (first and second quotations), 348 (third quotation). "New Elite Consensus" is the title of chapter 17, pp. 328-348.

white working-class. Working-class whites would defer to the elite on political and economic matters in exchange for the elite's commitment to maintaining segregation and white racial privilege. In Anderson's telling, African-American demands for equality and opportunity and the federal judiciary's increasing support for those claims put the elite who governed the city in a difficult position. To address the complaints of African Americans would enrage working-class whites and disrupt the class compact but to rebuff the claims for greater civil rights would anger the African-American population, threaten economic relationships with those outside of the region, and possibly invite federal intervention. Elites, who found the prospects of integration as distasteful as working-class whites did, tried to steer a dangerous course—protecting their own children and foisting token integration upon the offspring of working-class whites at Central—that ended disastrously. Angered at what they considered to be betrayal of the compact, working-class whites “mobilized openly against integration, defied federal authority, and voted for segregationist politicians.”¹³

But no such compact existed in Arkansas.¹⁴ As Jordan Patty has made clear, Little Rock witnessed unprecedented class conflict and labor violence in the years before the integration crisis, most of it revolving around 1955 strikes at the Capitol Transit Company and Terry Dairy. Convinced that Mayor Pratt Rimmel, an antiunion member of the city's old guard, needed to be replaced, labor leaders recruited Woodrow Wilson Mann to run for mayor that year.¹⁵ During the campaign, Little Rock's labor movement—representing some 16,000 union members in

¹³Anderson, *Race and Resistance*, 7 (first quotation), 12 (second quotation).

¹⁴The literature about such a class compact in the postwar South is extensive, offering different explanations as to why around 1948 organized labor, particularly the CIO, gave up efforts to build a white-black working-class political coalition to challenge the region's old guard. But none of these works describe the political situation in Arkansas. See, for example, Patricia Sullivan, *Days of Hope: Race and Democracy in the New Deal Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996); Michael Goldfield, *The Decline of Labor in the United States* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987); Robert Rodgers Korstad, *Civil Rights Unionism: Tobacco Workers and the Struggle for Democracy in the Mid-Twentieth-Century South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003); Michelle Brattain, *The Politics of Whiteness: Race, Workers, and Culture in the Modern South* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

¹⁵Jordan Patty, “‘Victory Based on Violence Is Undesirable’: The Little Rock Bus Strike of 1955-1956,” *Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 61 (Autumn 2002): 233-254. Also see, Sam G. Harris, “Uneventful Years in the Labor History of Little Rock Shattered by Violence of Transit and Dairy Strikes,” *Arkansas Gazette*, January 1, 1956, p. 10B; *Officers' Report of the Arkansas State Federated Labor Council, March 19, 1956* (North Little Rock: Times Publishing, 1956), 7; Billy Burton Hawthorn, “Pratt Cates Rimmel: The Thrust toward Republicanism, 1951-1955,” *Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 43 (Winter 1984): 321.

Pulaski County—employed the canvassing methods that unions had developed in the urban North for the first time. The name of every voter was placed on a file card; the cards were sorted by ward, precinct, and block and distributed to block captains in shoe boxes; the block captain contacted each voter to ascertain if he/she supported Mann or Rempel; and on election day block captains saw to it that every likely Mann voter got to the polls.¹⁶ In a letter thanking the Congress of Industrial Organizations' national political director for sending organizers to Little Rock to train trade unionists and their wives in these methods, Arkansas State Federation of Labor co-general counsel Henry Woods boasted that the canvassing effort had allowed the labor movement to transform a "rank amateur in politics" into the mayor of Little Rock.¹⁷

In fact, organized labor and African Americans had formed a political coalition in 1950s Arkansas, supporting a constellation of liberal candidates revolving around former governor Sidney McMath, who along with Woods served as general counsel to the Arkansas State Federation of Labor and its successor, the Arkansas AFL-CIO, from 1953 through the mid 1960s. Among these liberals was Orval Faubus, who, in the words of Daisy Bates, owed his gubernatorial election in 1954 to "labor, Negroes, and liberals in the cities" who "assumed he had liberal inclinations because of his association with the McMath machine."¹⁸

¹⁶The Arkansas Industrial Union Council, the state's affiliate of the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO), first used these methods with success in Fort Smith during the 1954 Democratic primaries; George Ellison to Jack Kroll, no date, box 1, folder 9, Congress of Industrial Organizations Political Action Committee [hereinafter CIO PAC] Papers, Reuther Library, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.

¹⁷Henry Woods to Jack Kroll, November 10, 1955, box 1, folder 9, CIO PAC Papers; "Democrats Recapture Mayor's Post; Meter, Water Issues Okayed; Vote Seen As Labor Victory," *Arkansas Democrat* (Little Rock), November 9, 1955, p. 1. The election of Mann prompted Little Rock's business community to advocate municipal reforms that would place political power more securely in elite hands. The enactment of these reforms in 1956 stripped Mann, a racial moderate, of most of his authority by the summer of 1957, creating a municipal power vacuum during the Central High crisis that gave Faubus more room to maneuver. Although historians have noted Mann's lame-duck status during the Central High crisis, they have not connected the reform movement to the larger conflict between an increasingly aggressive labor movement and the city's old guard.

¹⁸Daisy Bates, *The Long Shadow of Little Rock: A Memoir* (1962; reprint, Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1986), 81. For more on the labor-black coalition, see Michael Pierce, "John McClellan, the Teamsters, and Biracial Labor Politics in Arkansas, 1947-1959" in *Life and Labor in the New South: Essays in Southern Labor History since 1950*, ed. Robert H. Zieger (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, forthcoming). For more on Arkansas labor's break with Faubus, see Michael Pierce, "Orval Faubus and the Rise of Antiunion Populism in Northwest Arkansas," in *The Right and Labor in America: Politics, Ideology, Imagination*, ed. Nelson Lichtenstein and Elizabeth Shermer (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, forthcoming).

The labor movement saw poor and working-class African Americans as allies in efforts to expand the reforms of the New Deal, create a more progressive tax structure, increase spending on education, repeal the state's right-to-work law, abolish the poll tax, and undermine the planters and utility magnates who traditionally controlled Arkansas politics. To this end, labor provided African-American organizations funds throughout the 1950s to pay poll taxes for thousands of black Arkansans each election cycle.¹⁹

While agreeing with Jacoway's portrait of working-class whites as unconditionally hostile to racial integration, Anderson is rightfully more critical of the actions of Little Rock's male elites during the efforts to reopen the city's high schools. In Anderson's telling, there was no "elite consensus." Discussing segregationist board member Ed I. McKinley, an attorney who was a member of the country club set, Anderson notes, "Little Rock's 'kingmakers' believed that a particular class status served as a proxy for pragmatism in racial matters. In McKinley's case they would find out they were dead wrong."²⁰

Nonetheless, Anderson never challenges the idea that STOP or the larger open schools efforts were elite movements, bankrolled by businessmen and organized by the WEC. She explains that the "time, money, and political expertise" so essential to the STOP campaign could only be the product of "the class and race privileges of the whites who supported the moderate cause." She contrasts this to the CROSS campaign which attempted to fuel working-class anger but failed to mobilize its supporters because it was "poorly funded and politically inept." Anderson explains that the WEC turned out voters in the elite neighborhoods of the west side and African-American leaders—"who organized their own campaign"—got black voters to the polls. It was, however, the "low voter turnout in working-class white neighborhoods [that] sealed the victory." Like other historians, Anderson employs a particular class status as a proxy for support of segregation and school closure.²¹

¹⁹Sid McMath to Jack Kroll, May 19, 1953, box 1, folder 9, CIO PAC Papers; Phil Weightman to Kroll, May 13, 1953, *ibid*; Don Ellinger to Kroll, March 30, 1955, *ibid*.; Kroll to Orval Faubus, March 30, 1955, *ibid*; Jackie Shropshire to Phil Weightman, May 26, 1953, box 1 folder 4, Philip Weightman Papers, Tamiment Library, New York University; Wiley Branton to Weightman, May 27, 1953, *ibid*.; Shropshire to Weightman, May 28, 1953, *ibid*.; I. S. McClinton to Weightman, September 20, 1953, *ibid*.; Branton to Weightman, June 30, 1957, *ibid*.; George Ellison to James L. McDevitt, October 15, 1959, box 2, folder 29, Daniel Augustus Powell Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

²⁰Anderson, *Race and Resistance*, 175.

²¹*Ibid.*, 188 (all quotations).

In fact, the political expertise that Anderson sees as so essential to the STOP victory was not supplied by the elite but by a working-class organization—organized labor. The state's labor movement had been at the forefront of the effort to reopen Little Rock's four high schools since Faubus and voters closed them in the late summer of 1958 to avoid integration. Dan Wakefield, a journalist examining those brave white citizens of Little Rock who dared to oppose Faubus, suggested that the city's labor leaders were perhaps the bravest:

the leaders who risked the most in making a public statement in favor of the integration plan were the local unions, for time and time again throughout the state the unions have lost shop elections when management used the racial issue to dissuade the workers from organizing. But before the special school vote, state AFL-CIO chairman Odell Smith made a formal statement urging union men to vote for integration, and all but one of the local union leaders in Little Rock spoke up in their meetings to support this policy.

Wakefield also noted, "The powerful local groups of businessmen, such as the Chamber of Commerce, have remained silent."²² Similarly, in late 1958 a Southern Regional Council report on the open school movements in Virginia and Arkansas mentioned only one Arkansan by name—Odell Smith.²³

Although Anderson mentions that "some labor unions" supported the STOP campaign, she attaches no significance to labor's contribution to the open school movement.²⁴ But labor leaders launched a massive campaign to convince trade unionists and other members of the working class to support the STOP slate. The campaign was so effective that WEC member Sara Murphy credited Odell Smith and Victor Ray of the *Union Labor Bulletin* with "pulling a sizable amount of the

²²Dan Wakefield, "The Brave Ones," *The Nation*, October 11, 1958, pp. 204-206. Wakefield's piece was reprinted in his *Revolt in the South* (New York: Grove Press, 1960) and *Between the Lines: A Reporter's Personal Journey through Public Events* (New York: New American Library, 1966). Smith's statement appeared as "Let's Keep Free Public Education," *Union Labor Bulletin* (Little Rock), September 26, 1958, p. 1.

²³"Resistance Growing to School Closings," *New South* (November 1958): 6.

²⁴Anderson, *Race and Resistance*, 186. Anderson is correct that not all union locals supported the STOP slate. Four building trades locals even endorsed the CROSS ticket. But those union leaders who controlled labor's potent political apparatus all lined up with the moderates.

labor vote out of the segregationist column.”²⁵ These labor leaders also worked closely with the WEC in the two weeks leading up to the election to mobilize voters of every economic stratum. Years later, WEC leader Irene Samuel laughed when she recalled that many of the businessmen who provided financial backing for the STOP campaign were never aware of the “big part labor played.”²⁶

Perhaps most importantly, labor leaders shared the voter mobilization methods that they had employed in the 1955 mayoral race with WEC members. WEC leaders offer two explanations as to how the organization acquired its celebrated canvassing methods, but both accounts trace back to organized labor. In Irene Samuel’s telling, Henry Woods met her at Smith’s Drug Store, where “he told me about ‘saints’ and ‘sinners’ and the whole shoe box thing.” WEC activist Sara Murphy recounts in her memoir/history:

Woods explained that the names, addresses, precinct numbers, and telephone numbers of the thirty thousand voters should be put on cards. They would be coded “saints,” those who could be expected to vote for STOP; “sinners” those who were known CROSS supporters; or “savables,” those whose leanings in the election were unknown. The cards would be distributed in shoe boxes to the appropriate ward captains, precinct leaders, and ultimately block workers. It would be the job of the block workers to see that all of the “saints” got out on election day, did nothing to arouse the “sinners” to go to the polls, and worked in the meantime on the “savables,” hoping to win them over.²⁷

²⁵Sara Alderman Murphy, *Breaking the Silence: Little Rock’s Women’s Emergency Committee to Open Our Schools, 1958-1963* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1998), 189. On labor’s efforts, see, for example, “Labor Head Raps Method Used in Teacher Firing,” *Arkansas Democrat*, May 21, 1959, p. 2B; “Labor Leader Deplores Purge of 44 Teachers,” *Arkansas Gazette*, May 21, 1959, p. 2A; “STOP’s Labor Faction Makes TV Appeal to Job Holders,” *ibid.*, May 23, 1959, p. 6A; George Ellison to James L. McDevitt, June 4, 1959, box 2, folder 29, Powell Papers.

²⁶Irene Samuel and Pat House interview with Sara Murphy, June 4, 1992, box 3, file 13, Sara Alderman Murphy Papers, Special Collections, University of Arkansas Libraries, Fayetteville; Pat House interview with Murphy, July 7, 1992, box 6, tape 25, *ibid.*; Henry Woods interview with Murphy, August 30, 1992, box 6, tape 60, *ibid.*; Pat Youngdahl interview with Murphy, November 17, 1994, box 5, folder 17, *ibid.*; Mamie Ruth Williams interview with Murphy, July 3, 1992, box 5 folder 7, *ibid.*; Bill Shelton interview with Murphy, December 1, 1993, box 3, folder 16; Pat House interview with John Luter, August 22, 1971, Eisenhower Administration Project, Columbia University, New York.

²⁷Samuel and House interview with Murphy; Murphy, *Breaking the Silence*, 175.

In Pat House's version, labor-WEC cooperation began when several union officials—including Odell Smith, Henry Woods, Bill Becker, Earl Yeagan, and Jim Youngdahl—brought in national political operatives to teach WEC volunteers the canvassing methods that labor had perfected in larger urban areas. The workshop, held in the ballroom of the Marion Hotel, "taught us to organize block-by-block-by-block." House considered the methods to be revolutionary, insisting "it's a very simple concept but it was absolutely eye-opening to all of us."²⁸

Trade unionists—most of whom were white—were also instrumental in getting African-American voters to the polls for STOP. Not only had organized labor provided the state's National Association for the Advancement of Colored People branch money in 1958 to pay the poll taxes for blacks to vote in 1959, but white union members and black college students worked in tandem to turn out the black vote on election day. Pat House, who coordinated STOP's election day operation in black neighborhoods where many residents had neither cars nor telephones, recalls:

we had door knockers, drivers, and runners, and the drivers were white and members of the labor organization or volunteers, the door knockers and the runners were black [college students], and what we did was, the door knockers had certain territories to go out and knock on doors, tell them the rides were going to be coming and report back to us.²⁹

The STOP campaign witnessed more interracial cooperation than Anderson and other historians have realized. This is because they were looking for cooperation between blacks and white elites rather than between blacks and working-class whites.

A post-election meeting of STOP participants organized by the WEC at the mansion of Adolphine Fletcher Terry attests to labor's instrumental role in the campaign. Of the ten men in attendance, half—two Teamsters, a labor editor, the Arkansas AFL-CIO's general counsel, and the head of

²⁸Pat House interview with George King, December 10, 1991, box 10, folder 13, "Will the Circle Be Unbroken?" Program Files, Southern Regional Council Collection, Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Books Library, Emory University, Atlanta, GA. Also see, House interview with Murphy; Pat House interview with Charlotte Gadberry, March 30, 1979, box B9, file 23, Oral History Collection, University of Arkansas at Little Rock.

²⁹Daisy Bates to Gloucester Current, December 31, 1958, box 4, folder 8, Daisy Gatson Bates Papers, State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Madison; House interview with Gadberry. For a fuller discussion of the roles of drivers, knockers, and runners in getting black voters to the polls in Pulaski County, see Roy Reed, "'I'll Build You a City': An Interview with Casey Laman," *Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 66 (Autumn 2007): 353-355.

the teachers union—were associated with the labor movement. The meeting was going nowhere until Teamsters Local 878 president Odell Smith took charge, and preparations for the reopening of Little Rock's high schools on an integrated basis began. WEC member Sara Murphy considered the meeting "the beginning of the coalition that later included blacks and was to become a force in future elections."³⁰

Anderson closes her book on a more optimistic note than Jacoway does, maintaining that the open school movement led to an alliance of African Americans and elite women associated with WEC that forged a new type of liberalism in Little Rock. In the decades after the Central High crisis, this alliance, according to Anderson, "sustained various forms of activism and may have help move politics in Arkansas in a more progressive direction than occurred in other southern states in this period." To support her claim, Anderson quotes African-American leader Ozell Sutton as saying, "It was that coming together [in the early 1960s] of liberals, blacks, and unions that really brought the change that was made in the city and the state."³¹

Anderson, though, ignores Sutton's inclusion of "unions" in this liberal coalition, maintaining throughout her analysis that only elites and blacks were involved. Jacoway does something similar when she men-

³⁰Vivion Lenon Brewer, *The Embattled Ladies of Little Rock, 1958-1963: The Struggle to Save Public Education at Central High* (Fort Bragg, CA: Lost Coast Press, 1999), 182; Murphy, *Breaking the Silence*, 190. The national AFL-CIO's expulsion of the International Brotherhood of Teamsters in 1958 forced Odell Smith to step down from the presidency of the Arkansas AFL-CIO. The contest for his replacement became a referendum on the state federation's support for integration and its vocal opposition to Faubus's reelection in 1958, with the governor backing the candidacy of Harold Veazey of the state's building trades council and Smith endorsing Wayne Glenn of the paperworkers. In what the *Arkansas Gazette* called a "snub" of the governor, delegates to the federation's convention chose Glenn by a three-to-two margin. "Wayne E. Glenn Beats Veazey In Race for AFLCIO Helm," *Arkansas Gazette*, November 20, 1958, p. 1; Donald Slaiman, "Summary Report on Arkansas, November 25, 1958," box 322, folder 63, Jewish Labor Committee Papers, Tamiment Library. For more on Glenn's opposition to segregationists during the Central High crisis, see Alan Draper, *Conflicts of Interests: Organized Labor and the Civil Rights Movement in the South, 1954-1968* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell Studies in Industrial and Labor Relations, 1994), 52; Jacoway, *Turn Away Thy Son*, 111-112. As president of the United Paperworkers International Union, though, Glenn worked to preserve the highest paying positions in mills for whites; Timothy J. Minchin, *The Color of Work: The Struggle for Civil Rights in the Southern Paper Industry, 1945-1960* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 28, 78-80. Glenn's career suggests that efforts to maintain white racial privilege on the shop floor and opposition to the broader civil rights movement did not necessarily go hand-in-hand.

³¹Anderson, *Race and Resistance*, 222 (second quotation), 227 (first quotation). Sutton's quotation is from Ozell Sutton interview with Sara Murphy, September 20, 1993, box 3, folder 19, Murphy Papers. In the same interview, Murphy observed, "We [WEC] formed a coalition with labor."

tions that on the day of the STOP-CROSS election unionized truck drivers—almost certainly white members of Teamsters Local 878—went into black neighborhoods to give African-American voters rides to polling stations. The lesson Jacoway takes from the episode is “it was the black vote that won the election. Four thousand blacks voted almost entirely for the STOP ticket.”³² Just as Anderson refuses to ask how the most powerful political organizations of Little Rock’s working class ended up in a coalition with elite women and African Americans, Jacoway never considers how the Teamsters’ actions contradict her earlier characterization of white working-class behavior or how working-class whites were instrumental in the moderate victory.

The actions of labor leaders might not be any more representative of white working-class attitudes than the statements of Sammie Dean Parker’s family, Amis Guthridge, or the Mothers’ League, but the efforts of union men in the STOP campaign and the votes from white working-class precincts surely indicates these attitudes were hardly as monolithic as historians have asserted or assumed. Most white trade unionists and members of the working-class—like most whites more generally—certainly opposed the racial integration of Little Rock schools. But for significant numbers this opposition was not unconditional. The same political, social, and cultural forces that convinced elites to moderate their views on integration operated among working-class whites.

Intransigent racism, desire for respectability, and fear of miscegenation were problems that plagued too many southern whites of all classes during the civil rights era, but the historians of the Central High crisis have transformed them into peculiarly working-class pathologies. Working-class whites emerge in these histories as almost feral—inarticulate, socially insecure, uncivil, governed by the basest passions, herd-like, easily manipulated, politically inept, and fundamentally irrational. Faced with evidence that complicates this caricature—be it white Teamsters driving black voters to the polls or the mostly white trade union movement making common cause with those leading the efforts to advance African-American civil rights or data suggesting that “the honest white people of the middle and lower classes” cast nearly two-thirds of the white votes for the STOP slate—these historians look the other way. Only when historians consider Little Rock’s working-class whites to be fully human—with virtues as well as flaws—can the history of the Central High crisis be told.

³²Jacoway, *Turn Away Thy Son*, 325.