INTRODUCTION

Looking back from the perspective of the 1990s, the black North Carolinian Charles Jones recalled delivering clothes and toys to sharecroppers at Christmastime during the height of the Jim Crow era. The gifts had been sent by northern churches to be distributed by Jones's father, a minister, to their less fortunate southern brethren. In order to get access to the sharecroppers, Jones remembered, his father had to secure the permission of the white landlord to enter his plantation. He would shuffle and defer to the white landlord, Jones noted, but "I remember when we left, him looking at me and kind of winking [as if to say] 'that's the only way we can get back here.'"

The son later chose a different tack, joining civil rights demonstrators and becoming a leader in the worldwide youth movement. But he also understood the world his father inhabited and how much his father had achieved "by being wise enough to know what to say, how to say it, how to position your body in a submissive position so as not to [alienate the owner]." Reflecting on this experience later, Jones developed a new appreciation for what his father had accomplished. "I began to understand my father's restraint, my father's wisdom—because it was more important to accomplish a common object with dignity than to challenge at every stage everything . . . that white males were confronting us with. So we assumed the higher ground, took all the rhetoric that the Christian white church and the Constitution had taught us, and beat the devil out of them with it."

This vignette, taken from one of the 1,265 interviews compiled by the Behind the Veil Project at the Center for Documentary Studies at Duke University, speaks in myriad ways to the rich, complicated, heroic, and ulti-

franchisement that flourished starting in the 1890s with the imposition of Jim Crow segregation statutes that were ultimately sanctioned by the U.S. Supreme Court in the *Plessy v. Ferguson* case in 1896.

The so-called Jim Crow era was, in fact, a combination of the de facto second-class citizenship and racial separation that emerged in 1877 at the end of Reconstruction, and the de jure arsenal of laws and official regulations that came to fruition in the 1890s. Although to all intents and purposes, blacks in the South during the late 1870s and 1880s had little but white good will to protect them, there remained during these years a tacit recognition that blacks might still benefit from federal (Republican) patronage and exercise certain rights, including the franchise, as long as in local and state politics they accepted the domination of white Democrats and the white upper class.

By the end of the 1880s, however, economic and political insurgency began to rear its head in the South. The Southern Farmers' Alliance inaugurated a vigorous campaign designed to end the economic exploitation of sharecroppers and tenant farmers by the elite of white plantation owners. The Farmers' Alliance, soon to become allied on a national level with the Populist Party, promoted the development of farmers' cooperatives to put an end to the crop lien system where small farmers mortgaged their crops in return for supplies and household goods from merchants (usually the plantation owners) who charged exorbitant sums; the Farmers' Alliance also urged creation of federally funded agricultural warehouses where farmers could store their crops awaiting an ideal market while receiving government loans, using their crops as collateral; and the same insurgents pushed for a new political system, directly challenging the monopoly of railroads and banks.

More threatening than anything else, however, was the prospect that white farmers and black farmers might ally on the basis of their common class interests and overthrow the political and economic hegemony of the rich white farmers. Tentatively, and then with growing vigor, a movement toward a biracial Populist coalition developed.

It was at this point that the ruling Democrats raised the "bloody flag" of Southern victimization during the Civil War and insisted that all whites band together in the name of racial solidarity to turn back the "mongrelizing" threat of a biracial political movement from the left. In the name of political "reform," blacks must be denied the vote. To prevent any further danger of race-mixing, segregation must be enforced. Using the race issue as a means of permanently dividing and conquering any possibility of biracial

organizing, the Democrats succeeded in putting into place the system of official Jim Crow statutes that defined southern politics from the end of the nineteenth century all the way through into the 1950s and 1960s. Economically and politically, dominance by a narrow band of well-off white Democrats was guaranteed. Indeed, since almost as many poor whites as poor blacks lost the vote with the new disenfranchisement statutes, there was almost no threat of a challenge to rich white rule.

Despite the excellent work of historians in documenting the emergence of this citadel of oppression, little has been written about the actual experience of black Americans during the age of segregation. One learned about the crusade of W.E.B. Du Bois to fight Jim Crow, about the great migration of the World War I period and the terrorizing race riots that followed the armistice in 1918, about the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s and the achievements of black writers and artists. But there was no larger sense of what occurred in the everyday lives of blacks from the 1890s through the onset of World War II. Instead of being understood as a time of complexity and struggle, the Jim Crow era appeared as a barren wasteland of oppression. It was almost as though the Stanley Elkins model of a "closed system," with no outlets, that had once been applied to slavery, now had become the prism through which we understood the era of Jim Crow. Oversimplified, static, and without nuance, the historiography of Jim Crow became a tale of total oppression, on the one hand, and passive submission, on the other.

This portrayal was all the more anomalous given the degree to which slavery and Reconstruction historiography had undergone a sea change in the 1970s and 1980s, with a new focus on black agency and institutional development. From John Blassingame's *The Slave Community* (1971) to Eugene Genovese's *Roll Jordan Roll* (1974) and Herbert Gutman's *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom* (1976), a generation of historians had dismantled simple stereotypes and described far more complex patterns of slave life on plantations and as freedmen and -women after emancipation. Variety, not uniformity, emerged as the watchword, as historians wrote about the multiple ways African Americans created family lives; practiced religion; made their living; and found the means to preserve pride and maintain some forms of self-determination, even in the face of pervasive structures of oppression. The new historiography of slavery and emancipation brought to light the traditions African Americans had preserved from their cultures of origin. New studies explored African American creativity in adapting the restrictions and regulations that black people were forced to live under. Despite severe obstacles, blacks managed to develop their own instruments

of resistance and self-affirmation. What had once been a stark portrait in black and white became, as a result of this scholarship, a tapestry woven of multiple colors, with diverse themes and subthemes, all highlighting the multiple dimensions of the African American experience.

A similar richness of scholarly endeavor emerged in the scholarly rendering of the civil rights era. Initially, historians focused on the heroic national struggle that culminated in the *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) repudiation of *Plessy*, and the charismatic leadership of individuals such as Martin Luther King Jr. But soon there developed a new appreciation of the insurgencies that shaped the civil rights movement on a local level, with a focus on the "organizing tradition" in Mississippi, the precedents for resistance that blossomed into activism in Greensboro, St. Augustine, Tuskegee, and Jackson, and the pivotal—and previously unsung—role of women in shaping movement events, from Ella Baker to Hazel Palmer to Septima Clark to Fannie Lou Hamer.

Above all, what came out of this scholarship was a new appreciation for the importance of understanding the roots of the civil rights era. As one group of graduate students at Duke discovered when they started to study the civil rights movement in North Carolina using the tools of oral history, the beginning date of the movement kept changing. One group came back from a series of interviews with local citizens saying it was 1954 and 1955, with *Brown* and Montgomery; but soon other groups came back talking about the Freedom Rides of 1947, the emergence of student protest at an all-black high school in the early 1950s, or the founding of the local NAACP branch at a Baptist church in the 1930s. Suddenly the age-old historiographical question of continuity versus change assumed a new and powerful relevance, only this time not regarding such perennial questions as whether the New Deal was a departure or a continuation of Progressivism; now, the question was whether the sit-in movement represented a revolutionary departure from black acquiescence and passivity, or simply a new way of expressing an ongoing tradition of resistance.

This set of inquiries provided a point of entry into re-interrogating the era of Jim Crow and challenging those untreated notions of black acquiescence and passivity. Why not "unpack" the ordinary lived experiences of African Americans in that period in the same way historians had rethought stereotypes of slave life and developed new sources and fresh ways to analyze the diversity of life on the plantation or the complicated origins of civil rights protests?

The Behind the Veil Project thus began with two frames of reference:

first, the belief that, as with the civil rights era, recovering the voices of average citizens provided the best means of exploring the commonalities and differences of the black experience during the Jim Crow period; and second, the conviction that behind the two-dimensional story of oppression and submission there existed a richer, deeper, and more compelling reality which an investigation of the institutions, family and community patterns, spiritual life, and daily living experiences of black Americans in diverse southern communities would reveal. Based on these departure points, the Behind the Veil Project succeeded in raising funds from foundations and from the National Endowment for the Humanities to conduct up to 1,300 interviews with African Americans who lived during the era of Jim Crow. Selecting communities based on different economic, social, and cultural lifestyles (urban/rural, industrial/agricultural, Piedmont/Delta, rice/cotton), the project chose to do in-depth research in 25 communities in 10 different states.

Each summer for three years, 10 graduate students from history programs throughout the country came to Durham for training, then journeyed to three or four different communities where they took up residence for two weeks. Using research lists compiled by project coordinators—lists cultivated through churches, senior citizen centers, and various black voluntary associations—the graduate students immersed themselves in the histories of their selected communities, using the initial lists of sources to generate more names, digging into personal papers, photographic files, and local archives to flesh out information about critical events and people in a community's history. By the end of each local visit, the researchers had gained some sense of the dynamics of a local community, had ranked the quality of the interviews for transcribing purposes, and had developed a set of insights and scholarly queries that would facilitate the larger, overall team coming to grips with the rich array of sources that had been developed.

Simultaneous with this process, a new generation of historians were producing scholarly studies of the Jim Crow era that paralleled those earlier done for the eras of slavery and civil rights. Books by Leon Litwack, Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, Glenda Gilmore, John Dittmer, Deborah Gray White, Neil McMillen, Earl Lewis, and Tera Hunter created a richer framework within which to understand the interview data that the Behind the Veil Project had accumulated. Indeed, the oral history materials developed by the Behind the Veil Project ideally complemented and deepened the findings of this new scholarship. What remains most exciting, however, is the way that the voices of these ordinary people illuminate, as if viewing something afresh and for the first time, the compelling story of accommodation

and resistance, love and fear, pride and humiliation that constituted the everyday working lives of black Americans who lived during this era.

What are the lessons that these stories teach us? They are as multiple as the colors of a rainbow perceived at different angles in the sunlight after a storm.

First is an understanding of the dailiness of the terror blacks experienced at the hands of capricious whites—the man who told of his brother being killed in the middle of the night because he had not sufficiently deferred in the presence of a white man, another story of an African American being dragged to his death behind a horse-drawn wagon, or a pregnant wife having her womb slit, with both mother and child killed, because her husband allegedly had offended a white woman. From lynching to being denied the right to be called "Mr." or "Mrs.," to having cars or school buses intentionally hit puddles of water to splash black people walking, there was neither escape from, nor redress for, the ubiquitous, arbitrary, and cruel reality of senseless white power.

What makes the stories in this book so revelatory, however, is not the constant reminder of white terror, but the extraordinary resilience of black citizens, who, individually and collectively, found ways to endure, fight back, and occasionally define their own destinies.

The second lesson, therefore, is the capacity of the black community to come to each other's aid and invent means of sustaining the collective will to survive and perhaps even inch forward. As Booker Federick told one of our interviewers, "we had much more a [a sense of community] then than we do now. [If] you had 15 acres and you wasn't quite through, we'd just take our hoe and go over there without any questions." Sometimes community self-help came through pooling resources to build a new office for a health worker or farm agent; at other times in enforcing standards of community behavior when a teacher or principal acted in ways that were harmful. But always, there was the sense that no matter how badly off people might be in their own right, they would come together to help others, as Reverend Jones did on behalf of his own congregation and their northern partners, in the vignette that opened this introduction.

The third lesson is the enduring capacity of families to nurture each other, and especially their children, in the face of a system so dangerous and capricious that there were no rules one could count on for protection. One of the Behind the Veil informants recalled how his father taught him to watch out for whites. "He told us what to expect, how to act, how to stay away from them . . . so we . . . kind of knew what we were supposed to do."

But even as parents sought to protect their children, they also conveyed a sense of right and wrong, strength and assurance. "When some things really got out of hand," another woman told us, "[my parents] would sit down and talk to you and tell you, 'Now this is wrong. But the situation is that your father can't do anything about this [right now].'" At the same time, parents instilled pride wherever possible. Notwithstanding Jim Crow rules, one woman recalled, her mother "always told us . . . that we were as good as anybody else," while another man's parents insisted on the importance of "stand[ing] up for what you believe. Don't try to take advantage of anybody, but don't let anybody take advantage of you." There was always a tightrope to be walked—cautions that would create hypersensitivity to situations of potential danger, but also a sense of being somebody. As one person's mother told him, "You are my children. You look like you do because of your father and me, and you can do anything you want to do. . . . Don't ever be ashamed of how you look because of your color."

The fourth lesson from these interviews is the way that same tightrope pervaded the world of work. On the one hand, a job could be a source of pride, whether it consisted of planting and harvesting a crop on shares, teaching in a Jim Crow school, laying bricks, being a domestic servant, a seamstress, or on rare occasions, working in a mine or a mill where there was a union. On the other hand, the same job often carried with it daily reminders of the humiliating power that whites held over their black employees. Sharecroppers annually confronted the stinginess of many white landlords. "Those people were watching . . . [to] make sure [we] didn't get no top price for that cotton," Booker Federick noted. Teachers held the highest status jobs in the black community, but that did not prevent them from experiencing the cruelty of whites, such as when a woman teacher tried to have a prescription filled, only to have the pharmacist slap her because she had not said "sir" when she thanked him. Women who worked in the homes of whites ran the constant threat of sexual harassment from men in the house, and even skilled bricklayers confronted the desire of some whites to belittle or undermine their achievements. Thus the workplace was a perennially contested ground, potentially a source of pride and accomplishment, but just as often, a site of threat, danger, and unpredictable cruelty.

In such a world, where did African Americans look for hope and a sense of possibility? Education—the fifth lesson from these interviews—offered one answer. If local planters insisted that schools remain open only four to five months so that youngsters could work in the fields, blacks in the community pooled resources and contributed meat, vegetables, and eggs so that

the work of a teacher could continue for an extra month. Teachers, in turn, encouraged students to have higher aspirations. "We were leading the children to be the best persons they could be," one North Carolina teacher declared, while a Mississippi instructor sought to inspire her students by saying that one of them might be president of the United States within 100 years. In a world where there seemed no safe and predictable outlet for progress, education held out a glimmer of hope that a better day might emerge.

Sustaining that hope were a series of black institutions that provided pivotal support and affirmation within the African American community. The powerful role of these black institutions or "sanctuaries" represents the sixth lesson from the Behind the Veil interviews. The church stood at the center of the community, the place where people shared their pain, their hope, the news of the community, and the life of the spirit. After Charles Jones's father distributed the clothes and toys he had brought to North Carolina sharecroppers, they gathered together in their church to sing, and, Jones noted, "after the songs, and the spirit and the holding of hands, and the hugging," people had such hope in their faces. Not only did the church provide a place of worship; it also served as a shelter where political discussions could freely occur, and where a local NAACP might even be organized.

Other institutions also nourished a sense of pride. In a city like Durham, companies like the North Carolina Mutual Insurance Company or the Mechanics and Farmers Bank suggested the achievements possible for black Americans once they were given a chance to succeed. Black schools and colleges did the same, even in the face of poor governmental financing. Women's and men's voluntary associations provided the networks for developing social welfare activities and sharing political information. The black Masonic hall in Birmingham, for example, served as the foundation for a unionization effort in that city in the 1930s, while a pinochle club in Tallahassee provided an organizing base for black political campaigns in that city. Creatively, and with ingenious methods of communication and mobilization, the multiple "sanctuaries" of Jim Crow America served as the home bases from which efforts were launched to undermine and eventually topple the structures of segregation.

Which, in turn, leads to the final lesson of these interviews—the extraordinary and multiple ways in which resistance to Jim Crow occurred and was nourished even in the face of brutal, arbitrary, and systemic discrimination. Much of this resistance necessarily took the form of pushing back within the constraints of existing mores. African Americans daily faced the

challenge of adapting the rules and regulations of Jim Crow to their own purposes, sustaining a delicate balance between appearing to comply with prescribed norms, on the one hand, and finding ways to subvert those norms on the other. Clearly, this was a task fraught with difficulty. It would be a mistake to understate the degree to which, in the circumstances, many African Americans complied with the roles prescribed for them, and if for no other reason than preserving their own and their family's personal safety, failed to resist or challenge the system of Jim Crow. Yet the remarkable reality was the degree to which some black citizens managed to walk the tightrope and engage in subversion even as they appeared to be accepting the racial system of white dominance.

Nothing better illustrates that dynamic than the story told by Henry Hooten of Tuskegee, Alabama, about an annual fishing trip that he and his neighbors took to the Gulf near Mobile. The group had purchased an old bus for the yearly foray, which of course posed the dilemma of where to stop for food and fuel. One year Hooten went to a place where he hoped to get both needs met. "We were always taught never to talk back to the white man, but to tell him what he would like to hear," Hooten remarked, so as he was in the midst of filling the huge gas tank on the bus, Hooten politely asked the station owner if all the hungry children he had with him could get fed at the station restaurant. "The white man thought you knew less about psychology [than him]. He didn't think you had enough sense to [get your way]." But Hooten also understood economic realities. And so when the station owner said that feeding the children was not allowed, Hooten politely demurred, responding that, in the circumstances, he would have to stop filling his tank and move on. "Suddenly," Hooten said, "he's ready to feed the kids. And put the white customers to work feeding the kids"—an arrangement that continued every year thereafter.

As suggested in Hooten's story, there often existed an economic dimension to the ability of blacks to push back. When a young female student was treated rudely by a postmaster when she went to pick up the mail for Boggs Academy in Keysville, Georgia, the headmaster indicated that he would take his business elsewhere until the postal official mended his ways. An apology was soon forthcoming. Similarly, when a white insurance man came into the house of Ralph Thompson's mother to collect a monthly payment and called her "Auntie," she exploded, declaring, "I'm not your 'Auntie,'" and telling him if he wanted her business, he could call her "Mrs. Thompson."

There were no clashes more volatile or emotion-packed than those involving sexual harassment. One person interviewed by the Behind the Veil

Project proudly recounted how his mother, ironing clothes in the house of her employer, pressed her burning iron into the back of a white salesman when he grabbed her in a sexual advance. Another person remembered an episode when her mother's employer approached her sexually. In response, her mother declared, "If a black man done that to a white woman, you'd be the first to . . . find a limb to hang him to. So if you would hang the black man about doing it, you think I'm going to let you do it to me?"—a retort that evidently deterred similar advances from that point forward.

Occasionally, the protest also took a physical form, or was expressed in terms of forceful retaliation. When one sharecropper was threatened with a whipping by his white employer while working in the fields, he replied, "No sir, somebody'll die . . . and it's got to be more than me." On another job site, a black bricklayer struck a white coworker when the white man knocked off a brick he had just put in place and simultaneously insulted the black man's wife. In Tuskegee, a local minister, who also worked in a barbershop serving whites, used his position to gather and convey intelligence about the local Klan to his neighbors. When the Klan found out, they descended on the man's home garbed in their white sheets and called him out. The minister responded by taking out his long gun, shooting out the porch light, and sending the Klan members scurrying to their cars.

Oftentimes, of course, such responses created dire peril for the individuals involved, evoking the community solidarity that provided the ongoing foundation for black resistance and protest. The sharecropper who said "more than one's going to die" was sheltered by friends until he could escape by dead of night. In Georgia, a black man who struck back when a white assaulted him for allegedly insulting the man's wife was harbored at the all-black Boggs Academy and taken out of the county under armed guard later on. Such episodes became legendary. "We had a few black men [here]," Booker Federick noted about his experience in rural Alabama, "known as the men that didn't take anything [from whites]. The white folks would put on like they wasn't afraid of them, but they were."

Naturally, with these interviews as with those collected from former slaves during the 1930s WPA project, exaggeration and selective memory may occur. Veterans of the Jim Crow experience understandably point to instances where they or their friends engaged in heroic resistance. Tales of deception and of hoodwinking whites logically shape the narrative of how African Americans dealt with their oppressors. And humor abounds, as in the episode, proudly described by a mother, of how her young children would play "drink and run" when they were in a department store, using the

"white" fountain rather than the "black." Such stories punctuate the lore of Jim Crow, like variations on a theme, highlighting and dramatizing, with vivid detail, the larger saga being transmitted.

Still, these stories convey a compelling body of evidence that fleshes out, in colorful specificity, the ultimate product of the Behind the Veil venture: the incredible variety, richness, and ingenuity of black Americans' responses to one of the cruelest, least yielding social and economic systems ever created. With these 1,265 interviews available to future scholars—more than one-quarter of them transcribed—no longer will it be possible for historians to see the Jim Crow era as only a "nadir" of African American history. The "flatness" of a previous historical landscape has given way to hills and valleys full of countless scenes, some of them a tragic confirmation of how little power and space black Americans had during the age of segregation, but others a riveting reminder that blacks still sought control of their destiny, retained agency in their own lives, and helped build—inch by inch—the foundation for a final assault on the fortress of Jim Crow.

Charles Jones learned from his father the importance of keeping one's "eyes on the prize" and doing what was necessary to carry on to another day. Charles Jones and his father embody the continuity of the struggle that links the era of Jim Crow with the era of the Freedom Movement. That is why Charles Jones and his father—together—were the first blacks to integrate the Rexall Drugstore in downtown Charlotte in 1960, and why these stories, in this book, will help future American students to understand how one generation makes possible the hopes of the next generation.

ONE

BITTER TRUTHS

Jim Crow was not merely about the physical separation of blacks and whites. Nor was segregation strictly about laws, despite historians' tendency to fix upon such legal landmarks as *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896), *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), and the Civil Rights Act of 1964. In order to maintain dominance, whites needed more than the statutes and signs that specified "whites" and "blacks" only; they had to assert and reiterate black inferiority with every word and gesture, in every aspect of both public and private life. Noted theologian Howard Thurman dissected the "anatomy" of segregation with chilling precision in his classic 1965 book, *The Luminous Darkness*. A white supremacist society must not only "array all the forces of legislation and law enforcement," he wrote; "it must falsify the facts of history, tamper with the insights of religion and religious doctrine, editorialize and slant news and the printed word. On top of that it must keep separate schools, separate churches, separate graveyards, and separate public accommodations—all this in order to freeze the place of the Negro in society and guarantee his basic immobility." Yet this was "but a partial indication of the high estimate" that the white South placed upon African Americans. "Once again, to state it categorically," Thurman concludes, "the measure of a man's estimate of your strength is the kind of weapons he feels that he must use in order to hold you fast in a prescribed place."

As the interviews in this chapter—and indeed most of the interviews in this volume—suggest, the arsenal of weapons white southerners felt it necessary to use against black southerners was truly prodigious. In firsthand recollections stretching back to the early twentieth century, Behind the Veil informants tell stories of rapes and beatings, of houses burned to the ground

and land stolen, of harrowing escapes in the middle of the night to evade lynch mobs or to avoid the slower, grinding death of perpetual poverty and indebtedness on southern tenant farms. Even informant Arthur Searles's offhand comment about needing a pass to travel in Baker County, Georgia, is revealing. Passes had been common in the slave South and were used extensively in South Africa during apartheid, but the idea that an American citizen might need one to travel in his own home state in the post–World War II era seems outrageous, and in fact passes were not typical after slavery ended. Yet, Searles had been given one. He had seen the mutilated body of a Baker County lynching victim, and he knew how desperately white southerners wanted not only to keep blacks in a fixed position socially, but also to control their movements. Above all, he, like others of his generation, knew at some level that white control over black bodies and therefore black labor was key to southern agriculture and to the region's slowly industrializing economy. Thus, whites rarely hesitated to use force against African Americans who threatened to destabilize labor arrangements or who tried to "steal away," escaping from debt and abuse on tenant farms in much the same way that slaves had escaped from bondage a generation or two earlier. The legacy of whites' drive for social stability and control includes both the broken bodies of lynching victims and the grim wariness of men and women like Arthur Searles.

While a number of the stories in this chapter are about lynching and other forms of racial violence, informants also tell of moments that were less dramatic but nonetheless humiliating. "You could shop," Theresa Lyons of Durham, North Carolina, suggests, "but if you walked up and a white person walked up later, they waited on the white person first. I mean, it was just a known that you weren't going to get waited on. Even when I knew that [something] was *it*, no matter how bad I wanted it, I wouldn't buy it. I would leave."

For African Americans such as Lyons and Searles, life in the Jim Crow South was a process of navigating treacherous waters. Just as any stretch of ocean might offer smooth sailing on any given day, individual white southerners might be friendly and even helpful at times. However, they might also be unaccountably hostile and prejudiced. Thus, blacks had to remain ever vigilant in case storms of white fury should suddenly begin to blow.

Because they had to fight racist *people* as well as institutions the struggle of blacks against racial oppression was never so impersonal as a seaman's struggle against the elements. Instead, living Jim Crow meant confronting bitter truths about human nature, including the arbitrary unpredictability of

alleged white "friends" suddenly becoming mortal enemies. Among the most poignant of these realities emerged when African American children came to understand that blacks and whites were different in the eyes of their society. Often, the circumstances that led up to this realization were mundane, but the realization itself could be devastating. Walking to school, going to the store, playing on rural farms and city sidewalks, black children confronted racial differences in the taunts of white children, in the degrading treatment of black adults, and in their own observations of who was better off than whom. Under such circumstances, "you just automatically grow up inferior," as Charles Gratton of Birmingham, Alabama, laments, "and you had the feeling that white people were better than you." Yet, parents and other black adults worked hard to counteract such lessons. Employing a variety of child-rearing strategies, they encouraged black youths to maintain their self-respect regardless of white attitudes.

Children's experiences also varied. Those who lived in or near cities often remember the physical signs of segregation—placards above water fountains, separate platforms at the train station, the often-shifting terrain of racial separation on the street car or bus. In the rural South, children's memories of learning about racial difference are sometimes more subtle (rural children played together) and sometimes brutally stark (in the countryside, white violence tended to be even less restrained). The stories of boys and girls also differ. Ferdie Walker's memories of white policemen exposing themselves to her at a Fort Worth bus stop are but one case in point.

Even after age and experience had taught them the roles Jim Crow required them to perform, adult blacks regularly encountered new limitations on their freedom. Every visit to the doctor, every effort to get a job or buy land, much less register to vote, could result in a further restriction, an additional humiliation arbitrarily imposed. African Americans' efforts to meet even basic needs such as health care could take them into minefields of white recalcitrance, as the testimonies of Milton Quigless and G. K. Butterfield suggest. Henry Hooten found that white southerners' prejudices went with them even across the Atlantic during World War II. And, in 1958, Walter Cavers uncovered the bitter truth that a seemingly straightforward car accident, for which he was not at fault, could result in terrible consequences.

For many Behind the Veil informants, a deep personal knowledge of American race relations at their worst has resulted in a sense of obligation to pass on an understanding of Jim Crow's bitter truths to subsequent generations.

FOUR

LESSONS WELL LEARNED

Immediately following the Civil War the masses of ex-slaves sought to secure education long denied them by their former masters. Missionary schools such as Hampton Institute in Virginia, founded mainly by northern Christian organizations, first answered the newly freed slaves' call for learning. But northern and southern whites were determined to direct and control black schooling, even as they built segregated schools for freedmen and women. They came with various educational philosophies for their black students; most meant to prepare them for a life of subservience to whites. As a result, deep divisions quickly emerged among whites and blacks regarding the intent and purpose of formal education. Within the black community this conflict has long been identified with two prominent black educators and intellectuals, Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. Du Bois. Their opposing views came to represent the polarities of the argument.

Washington, a Hampton graduate and president of Alabama's Tuskegee Institute, advocated agricultural and industrial training for blacks, who were sorely in need of economic uplift. He proposed that African Americans train themselves to perform jobs that white Americans would allow them to hold, thereby making them not only an invaluable labor force, but independent property holders. In contrast, Du Bois advocated a curriculum that focused on the study of literature, the arts, philosophy, and the social sciences. His interest lay in developing a well-educated cadre of leaders for the black community. Those he called the "Talented Tenth," who could then devote themselves to the uplift of the race. White southerners and philanthropists mainly envisioned Washington's model, encouraging his brand of instruction to create a black underclass of laborers.

Fargo Institute in Arkansas represented one school that closely followed the Hampton-Tuskegee model. Here black students who sought a higher liberal arts education had to choose from narrow options. Besides manual crafts, they followed a preparatory course for teachers. Similarly, in Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), postsecondary academic institutions founded before 1964, the curriculum often forced students to navigate between industrial and liberal arts. These were not easy decisions for students.

As we will see, the type of institution one attended significantly shaped a student's experiences and opportunities. Many students attended publicly funded schools, which were frequently poorly financed by state or local governments. In contrast, in privately funded schools such as those built by the Rosenwald Fund throughout the South, black principals and teachers frequently had more leverage on curriculum and discipline (although ultimate oversight of such schools was sometimes in the hands of the local white elite).

The lessons that Jim Crow taught to black children were numerous and easy to comprehend. Children learned that they were not allowed to attend the same schools as whites. After a short while they saw that only white children received a bus to ride to and from school, along with new books and desks. They learned too that only white students had decent libraries or science labs. Census statistics by 1910 in Beaufort County, South Carolina, bear this point out. While state expenditures per white pupil averaged $40.68, the average black pupil received $5.95. The average value of a white school was $30,056, and $3,953 for a black school. Similarly, Macon County, Alabama, spent $57,385 on 1,435 white students and only $27,813 on 7,145 black students—the majority of the school population.

Even as they learned these lessons, African Americans struggled to transcend impediments set before them to attain decent educational opportunities. They improvised and found ways to supplement the meager resources they were allotted. They devised innovative means to improve the poor educational opportunities that southern states afforded them. Many simply learned methods to cope with the harsh realities of southern apartheid; they were determined to survive and live lives of value to themselves and their communities.

In an effort to fill the void left by public school boards that neglected their care, black schools became institutions carefully nurtured by black parents and communities. Braving unequal opportunities and facilities, they supported black schools from their own meager resources. When there was

no wood to heat the schools, parents would send children to school with timber to fuel the heater. If schools offered industrial education, the community's laborers not only donated the tools and materials to furnish the classrooms, but also volunteered as instructors. In Canton, Mississippi, the town's black brick masons and carpenters taught boys those trades.

Although the segregated school symbolized inequality, it also came to represent a degree of space and autonomy for black communities. Subjects like black history, which were ignored by the white teachers and administrators who defined the official state school curriculum, were covered in black schools. When the curriculum did not call for African American students to learn trigonometry, their teachers taught it anyway, endeavoring to level the disparities between white and black students. Often teachers found in this independent space the freedom to teach in unconventional ways. Arlestus Attmore, a teacher in New Bern, North Carolina, inserted black history into his lessons. He remembers "that in our history books we were only introduced to a smattering of people of the black race such as George Washington Carver and other blacks that stood out. We did not know about Mary McCleod Bethune or those people that were not mentioned in the book. I would do research in the libraries and collect all of the materials that I could to let the children know of the accomplishments of the people of their race." Black teachers like Mr. Attmore, moreover, taught well beyond regular school hours and the regular curriculum, staying after school and offering subjects not covered adequately by the state curriculum.

Despite these efforts to provide the best education possible, the segregated school still worked to engender feelings of inferiority among African Americans. Indeed, beginning in the 1930s psychologists and social scientists such as Howard University professor Charles H. Thompson began arguing that segregation stigmatized black students. Their research armed the NAACP's counsels—from Charles H. Houston to Thurgood Marshall—to argue that segregated schooling both harmed black children psychologically and denied them the "equal protection" mandated by the Fourteenth Amendment. In its 1953 appellants' brief, the NAACP reargued these two claims and the Supreme Court agreed. Its 1954 *Brown* decision pointed out that public school segregation had "a detrimental effect upon the colored children," who were being "deprived of the equal protection of the laws guaranteed by the Fourteenth Amendment." Still, for many African Americans, even a Jim Crow education helped to transcend humble beginnings. It gave hope to many; it represented a place to affirm black children culturally and prepare them educationally. Segregated schools were integral

to white oppression while simultaneously promoting black liberation. Schools endeavored to teach African Americans how to negotiate their harsh and oppressive reality, even as they caught a glimpse of how to overcome second-class citizenship.

ANN POINTER

During the era of legal segregation, African American children rarely had access to public transportation to and from school. To make matters worse, black children frequently had to walk past white schools on the way to the more distant, segregated institution.

As they trudged long distances to school, African American children often experienced harassment at the hands of white children, as Ann Pointer, a native of Macon County, Alabama, relates.

I tell you, I had to walk to school every day and back no matter if it was storming. We could not ride the buses although we were paying taxes. But we couldn't ride those buses. Nothing rode the bus but the whites. And they would ride and throw trash, throw rocks and everything at us on the road and hoop and holler, "nigger, nigger, nigger," all up and down the road. We weren't allowed to say one word to them or throw back or nothing, because if you threw back at them you was going to jail. Now that's one of the things, that's the only bitter spot in my heart, and I shouldn't have it, but you know, you can't keep from thinking. We were paying tax, but yet we could not ride those buses; our school was the only [school for blacks]. We didn't have nothing at our school. They give the teachers some chalk and a couple of erasers for the board, but no kind of supplies. Not even heat. If your father didn't bring two loads of wood to that school, then they made you go to the woods and gather wood and you, you were not going to sit by the other children's fire. We were told, "All who ain't brought your wood, go to the woods." We had to go out there and walk up in water trying to find wood to help heat the school.

THOMAS FRANKLIN VAUGHN

Thomas Vaughn of Pine Bluff, Arkansas, shares a remembrance that adds a nuance to our understanding of how plantation owners controlled