THE POLITICS OF DECENCY: BILLY GRAHAM, EVANGELICALISM, AND THE END OF THE SOLID SOUTH, 1950-1980

By

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To my wife, Clarissa P. Gaff, friend, activist, and

endless source of love, support, and joy

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION:
BILLY GRAHAM, SOUTHERNER

An influential religious personality such as Dr. Billy Graham is interesting to study because he serves as a kind of trading-post agent of this two-way traffic between religious faith and the world of changing codes, technology, politics, medical evolution, and social mobility. Through him flows much of the interchange between religion, on one hand, and the complex of society and culture, on the other.

Joe E. Barnhart[1]

But I think we have seen rather overwhelmingly that what the South does become will not be in fulfillment of all those grand expectations that it would develop models for national emulation of new political alignments or new kinds of cities or new economic prodigies or new never-equaled racial harmony.

Pat Watters[2]

In June 2005, an elderly Billy Graham returned to New York City, a half-century after a mountain-top moment in his evangelistic career, a crusade that had stretched on for four months in that most un-Protestant and secular of American locales. Stricken with prostate cancer and Parkinson's disease, among other health problems, and reliant on a special lectern that allowed him to sit while preaching, the white-haired Graham held only three services during what was billed as his final domestic crusade. Most of the 230,000-plus total attendees likely knew what to expect from this lion in winter. Many elements of his services had remained largely unchanged since the 1950s: the bass-baritone of soloist George Beverley Shea, the volunteer choir and ushers drawn from area

[1] Joe E. Barnhart, *The Billy Graham Religion* (Philadelphia: Pilgrim Press, 1972), 62.

[2] Pat Watters, "The South and the Nation," *New South*, Fall 1969, 28.

churches, the climactic and solemn moment of invitation, and—of course—the presence of celebrities and politicians on the crusade platform. The highest-profile guests in Flushing Meadows were Hillary and Bill Clinton, who feted the evangelist. (Graham, in turn, surprised many of his constituents by implying that Hillary Clinton was presidential material.) Standing with Graham at the pulpit, Bill Clinton noted how his admiration for the evangelist derived from an integrated Graham service he had attended as a child in Little Rock, Arkansas. Clinton viewed the evangelist as a fellow southerner. In an interview with the *New Yorker*, Clinton expanded on the 1959 service:

> When he gave the call—amid all the civil-rights trouble, to see blacks and whites coming down the aisle together at the football stadium, which is the scene, of course, of our great football rivalries and all that meant to people in Arkansas—it was an amazing, amazing thing. If you weren't there, and if you're not a southerner, and if you didn't live through it, it's hard to explain. It made an enormous impression on me. I was at that age where kids question everything, you know? And all of a sudden I said, 'This guy has got to be real, because he did this when he didn't have to.'[3]

As journalists filed datelines that read like obituaries, the glow from Graham's status as the grandfather of modern American evangelicalism made him seem removed from the ebbs and flows of history. The New York crusade coverage was a commentary on both the grace of time and the thoroughly mainstream status of Graham's brand of Christianity at the start of the twenty-first century. During the decades following the Civil Rights Movement, Vietnam, and Watergate, Graham had softened his eschatological, jeremiadic themes and had impressed former critics by embracing nuclear disarmament and criticizing the Christian Right. He had also benefited from an irenic demeanor that grew more convincing with age. His refusal to cast stones in the culture

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[3] Peter J. Boyer, "The Big Tent: Billy Graham, Franklin Graham, and the Transformation of American Evangelicalism," *The New Yorker*, 22 August 2005, 42-55 (Clinton quoted in 42, 44). See also *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, 24 June 2005; and *New York Times*, 27 June 2005.

wars, as numerous commentators observed, stood in refreshing relief from the rhetorical gauntlets thrown down by Pat Robertson, James Dobson, and even his own son and heir-apparent, Franklin Graham. Billy Graham, one writer noted, had "figured out how to triangulate American Protestant Christianity," how to cultivate mainstream appeal without burning conservative bridges.[4] He had come to represent the better half of an evangelicalism that, by 2005, again stood as the ascendant religious force in American society. His more controversial days—1971, for example, when two Southern Baptist dissidents branded him a "court prophet" in the Nixon White House (and when few journalists described him as anything other than a Republican), or 1958, when a Deep South governor echoed the sentiments of many segregationists in castigating him as a southerner whose "endorsement of racial mixing has done much harm"—felt farther away than his first crusade in New York.[5]

Yet had Graham truly transcended the politics of his past—or even that of his present? A mere three years before the 2005 New York crusade, Graham had sloughed off a final round of residue from the Nixon years: the release of a White House conversation in which the evangelist appeared to readily affirm the president's anti-Semitic ranting. Graham had responded to the disclosure with swift, if somewhat puzzled, contrition, apologizing to Jewish leaders for words he could not remember uttering.[6] He had long stressed that his flirtation with politics had ended. Still, only two

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[4] Boyer, "Big Tent," 44. For other response to the New York crusade, see *New York Times*, 26 June 2005 and 12 June 2005.

[5] Will D. Campbell and James Y. Holloway, "An Open Letter to Dr. Billy Graham," *Katallagete*, Winter 1971, inside cover-3. *Columbia* (SC) *State*, 12 October 1958.

years earlier, on the cusp of the 2000 presidential election, he had offered effusive support for candidate George W. Bush, who credited Graham with sparking his journey toward born-again Christianity.[7] A decade before this second Bush assumed office, Graham had spent a night in the White House with George H. W. and Barbara Bush watching television coverage of the start of the Persian Gulf War—a fact the elder Bush soon recounted at the National Prayer Breakfast.[8] During an era when religion and politics consorted brashly and unapologetically (and when Graham no longer commanded sustained media coverage), these incidents drew only passing attention.

Clearly, the snapshot of Graham in New York City captured only the twilight of a remarkable career that dated back to the end of World War II. Since the early 1950s, Graham has never relinquished his status as one of the most recognizable and respected of Americans, someone who has mingled comfortably with the powerful, while retaining the common touch. As scholar Joe Barnhart recognized in the early 1970s, the evangelist functioned during his peak years of influence as a kind of conduit through which flowed much of the *zeitgeist* of the latter half of the twentieth century. However, Graham was not, as Barnhart went on to contend, merely "an innocent tool of complex dynamics which he may little understand or appreciate."[9] Rather, the evangelist has functioned as a public actor in his own right. In engaging political leaders and the pressing issues of his

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[6] White House conversation 662-4, 1 February 1972, National Archives and Records Administration, Nixon Presidential Materials. See also *New York Times*, 4 April 2002, 17 March 2002, and 12 June 2005.

[7] *Atlanta Constitution* and *Florida Times-Union*, 6 November 2000.

[8] Billy Graham, *Just As I Am: The Autobiography of Billy Graham* (New York: HarperCollins, 1997), 584-587. Jim McGrath, ed., *Heartbeat: George Bush in His Own Words* (New York: Scribner, 2001), 134.

[9] Barnhart, *Graham Religion*, 62-63.

times, he made important decisions that, while always weighed against his higher priorities as an evangelist, reflected his own values, his own notion of the social and spiritual good. His power, that is, was simultaneously readily visible and more than what met the eye.

Nowhere was Graham's public and private sway more evident than in his native region of the American South. His national and international prominence has understandably obscured his southern origins and identity, as well as the keen ways in which he paralleled and, this work argues, *influenced* the course of the post-WWII and post-civil rights era South.[10] Bill Clinton understood this influence, yet voiced only one facet of it on the crusade platform in New York. During the three decades between 1950 and 1980, the South experienced two significant, related shifts away from its status as a "Solid South": the end of legalized Jim Crow and the end of Democratic Party dominance.[11] That Graham had a hand in both trends says much about his influence and complexity. This project seeks to reintroduce a familiar figure to the narrative of recent

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[10] The term "post-civil rights era" comes from political scientist Alexander P. Lamis, *The Two-Party South* (New York: Oxford University Press [Oxford], 1984), vii. As used in this project, the southern post-civil rights era refers to the period starting when federal civil rights legislation entered into nominal force and the politics of "massive resistance" had largely run its course (i.e., the late 1960s and early 1970s). This period has seen three striking trends: the growth of African-American involvement in Democratic Party politics, the rise of Republican Party influence in state congressional delegations and legislatures, and the electoral salience of gender-based issues not explicitly linked with race.

[11] "Solid South" is employed both in its traditional sense (i.e., in reference to the historic power of the Democratic Party in the region) and in reference to the region's network of Jim Crow laws and enforced racial mores. The latter usage draws inspiration from the title of a classic volume of southern religious historiography: Samuel S. Hill, et al., *Religion and the Solid South* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1972). On the former usage, see, for example, Dewey Grantham, *The Life and Death of the Solid South: A Political History* (Lexington, KY: University of Kentucky Press, 1988).

As used here, the persistently contested term, "the South," builds on the above understanding of the Solid South. In broad terms, the South includes those states where both exhaustive Jim Crow laws and, in most cases, the segregationist wing of the Democratic Party were dominant until the post-civil rights era. This definition includes large portions of the "border" or "rim" states, such as Texas and Kentucky. The "Upper South" includes Virginia, North Carolina, Tennessee, Arkansas, and parts of the border/rim states. The "Deep South" generally refers to South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana.

southern history and, in the process, elucidate the social and political transitions constitutive of the modern South. Alternately a desegregating crusader in Alabama, regional booster in Atlanta, southern apologist in the national press, and southern strategist in the Nixon administration, Graham functioned as a type of regional leader—a product of his times and a player in them, a symbol and an actor. His evangelical Christianity mediated the emergence of a post-civil rights era South simultaneously more open to desegregation and more amenable to Republican Party politics.

Graham, the South, and Evangelicalism

This project considers Graham's important role in creating the modern South, focusing on his behavior and rhetoric regarding race and politics (along with religion, the most salient subjects for analyzing change in his home region) from 1950 to 1980. During these years, the North Carolina native and resident maintained a visible and controversial presence in a region witnessing the Civil Rights Movement and the beginning of political realignment. His life can tell us much about the South during these decades—and about the evangelist. Graham, who possesses a distinct drawl (particularly in casual conversations) and whose grandfathers both fought for the Confederacy, has made Montreat, North Carolina, his primary residence since 1945, and he has always embraced his identity as a southerner. Like most southerners of his generation, the Charlotte-born evangelist grew up in a part of the country that was rife with segregation laws, overwhelmingly Democratic, and pervasively evangelical. The pinnacle of his career, the first term of the Nixon administration, coincided with the fitful emergence of

what commentators began calling the Sunbelt South, a development that featured the end of the first two (although not the third) of these characteristics.

Graham's complex role regarding racial and political changes in his home region raises important questions about the nature of the post-civil rights era South. From the mid-1950s through the mid-1960s, the evangelist came to support desegregation, discreetly cooperated with Martin Luther King, Jr., and advocated racial tolerance in such national publications as *Life* and *Ebony*. At the same time, Graham remained a member of a Southern Baptist congregation led by the outspoken segregationist W. A. Criswell—and, in the eyes of at least one right-wing Republican, he was a viable candidate for the 1964 GOP presidential nomination. Graham held his first intentionally desegregated southern crusade in 1953. As he began holding desegregated services throughout the Upper South, he received public criticism from ardent segregationists, such as South Carolina Governor George Bell Timmerman. The evangelist largely avoided the Deep South until the mid-1960s, when he visited Alabama, partly at the bidding of Lyndon Johnson, and held highly publicized rallies and crusades in the aftermath of racial violence in Birmingham and Selma.

Graham's relationship to electoral politics in the South was equally complicated. Beginning with Dwight Eisenhower and continuing through Lyndon Johnson and Richard Nixon, national politicians looked to Graham for regional leadership on civil rights matters, particularly among the evangelist's presumed constituency of white southerners. The evangelist consulted with Eisenhower about the Little Rock desegregation crisis and, during the years considered here, met with a host of regional politicians, including Alabama Governor George Wallace. Also, Graham supported the Office of Economic

Opportunity and recorded television spots promoting obedience to school integration and busing laws. Yet he was more than just a consultant or figurehead. Although nominally a registered Democrat throughout his adult life, Graham prominently paralleled—in certain respects, spoke for—those white southerners, many of them with moderate inclinations, who supported Eisenhower, backed Johnson, and then voted Republican again with Nixon.[12] Through his relationship with Nixon, in particular, Graham functioned as a political strategist and abetted the president's controversial, if not always successful, "southern strategy."

The simultaneous assistance of Graham to ending both the political and racial Solid South appears somewhat incongruous. These parallel narratives each intersect with one of the perennial debates within southern historiography: continuity versus change. While more racially moderate and economically vibrant than before, the modern South has also perpetuated traditions of political conservatism and evangelical piety. Applied to the newest New South, then, the seemingly ceaseless questions of continuity and change are not exhausted. How much of a political and cultural watershed was the end of Jim Crow? To what extent has race retained its electoral salience? Has the GOP permanently supplanted a formerly entrenched Democratic Party? These key questions have elicited a range of responses among scholars, extending from Cashian descriptions of the modern South as an antiunion bastion of low wages and political Whiggery to Woodwardian invocations of "forgotten alternatives" in the realms of race and politics.[13]

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[12] On this electoral demographic, see Matthew D. Lassiter, *The Silent Majority: Suburban Politics in the Sunbelt South* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006), 229-241.

[13] For the former, see W. J. Cash, *The Mind of the South* (New York, Vintage, 1991 [1941]); James C. Cobb, *The Selling of the South: The Southern Crusade for Industrial Development, 1936-2000*, 2nd edition (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 254-281; Cobb, "Does *Mind* No Longer Matter?

Political scientists have stressed the discontinuity of two-party competition in the region.[14] Following the implications of historian Dan T. Carter, meanwhile, several scholars of southern religion and/or politics have observed a form of continuity masked as change: a shift from race to gender as the dominant trope of reactionary politics, often voiced with faith-infused language.[15]

The example of Graham, as well as the type of evangelical faith he proffered and represented, can shed critical light on these issues. On its face, religiosity would seem to comprise an element of southern continuity. Yet its role in recent southern history is ambiguous enough to have sparked a lively scholarly debate about whether Christianity has served overall as a liberal, conservative, or moderate force among white southerners. Here, as well, questions abound. Did the faith of white southerners largely abet the conservative status quo, as Samuel S. Hill, one of the deans of southern religious historiography, suggested back in the 1960s? Or was it not such a roadblock to racial

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The South, the Nation, and *The Mind of the South*, 1941-1991," *Journal of Southern History* 57.4 (November 1991): 681-718; and Bruce J. Schulman, *From Cotton Belt to Sunbelt: Federal Policy, Economic Development, and the Transformation of the South, 1938-1980* (Oxford, 1991).

For the latter, see C. Vann Woodward, *The Strange Career of Jim Crow*, 3rd edition (Oxford, 1974), 31; Numan V. Bartley, *The New South, 1945-1980: The Story of the South's Modernization* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press [LSU], 1995); and Pete Daniel, *Lost Revolutions: The South in the 1950s* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press [UNC], 2000).

[14] Earl Black and Merle Black, *The Rise of Southern Republicans* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), 1-39.

[15] Dan T. Carter, *From George Wallace to Newt Gingrich: Race in the Conservative Counterrevolution, 1963-1994* (LSU, 1996); and *The Politics of Rage: George Wallace, the Origins of the New Conservatism, and the Transformation of American Politics*, 2nd edition (LSU, 2000). For variations on the race-to-gender thesis, see Paul Harvey, *Freedom's Coming: Religious Culture and the Shaping of the South from the Civil War though the Civil Rights Era* (UNC, 2005), 218-250; Marjorie Julian Spruill, "'Women for God, Country, and Family,': Religion, Politics, and Antifeminism in 1970s America" (unpublished paper in possession of author); and Glenn Feldman, "Introduction" and "The Status Quo Society, The Rope of Religion, and the New Racism," in *Politics and Religion in the White South*, ed. Feldman (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 2005), 1-10, 287-352. See also Andrew Michael Manis, *Southern Civil Religions in Conflict: Civil Rights and the Culture Wars*, 2nd edition (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2002).

change, as David Chappell has recently argued? Lastly, how much did conservative southern Christianity change as it grew more politicized during the 1970s and 1980s?[16]

This project views evangelical Christianity as ultimately synergistic with modern change in the South, in part because trends such as the rise of a highly organized Christian Right and the growth of televangelism (along with the familiar story of economic growth) are themselves products of that very modernity. In other words, as most sociologists of religion now believe, modernization does not reflexively equate with secularization.[17] Facets of this modernity (e.g., evangelical faith and New South boosterism) actually represent an evolving pattern of continuity in southern history. Other aspects (e.g., the absence of Jim Crow laws and the growth of the Republican Party) clearly indicate change. Billy Graham's style of evangelical faith helped to determine the course of these partial watersheds. As many mainstream white southern Christians, including Graham, began distancing themselves during the immediate postwar

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[16] For an overview of debates about the political cultural influence of white southern Christianity, see Feldman, "Introduction," 1-10. Hill, *Southern Churches in Crisis Revisited* (Tuscaloosa, AL: The University of Alabama Press [Alabama], 1999). David L. Chappell, *A Stone of Hope: Prophetic Religion and the Death of Jim Crow* (UNC, 2004). For two studies noting the discontinuity of political activism within conservative southern Christianity, see Barry Hankins, *Uneasy in Babylon: Southern Baptist Conservatives and American Culture* (Alabama, 2002); and Daniel Kenneth Williams, "From the Pews to the Polls: The Formation of a Southern Christian Right" (Ph.D. Dissertation, Brown University, 2005).

[17] On the decline of secularization theory, see R. Stephen Warner, "Work in Progress Toward a New Paradigm for the Sociological Study of Religion in the United States," *American Journal of Sociology* 98.5 (March 1993): 1044-1093; and William H. Swatos, Jr., and Kevin J. Christiano, "Secularization Theory: The Course of a Concept," *Sociology of Religion* 60.3 (Fall 1999): 209-228. Modernization and modernity are used here very generally in a developmentalist sense (i.e., as the process or result of moving away from "traditional" social and/or economic structures and toward something identified as modern). In the political and industrial history of the twentieth-century South, modernization entailed a language of progress and advancement—a certain comfort with change or, somewhat more complexly, a desire to mediate or control that change. Regarding religion in the South, the point here is that evangelical Christianity was not a casualty of modernization. On the political language of modernization, see Paul Luebke, *Tar Heel Politics 2000* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1998). On evangelicalism and modernity, see Martin E. Marty, "The Revival of Evangelicalism and Southern Religion," in *Varieties of Southern Evangelicalism*, ed. David Edwin Harrell (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1981), 7-21.

years from Jim Crow apologetics, evangelical piety dulled as a weapon in the segregationist arsenal. (In the case of many African Americans and civil rights activists, of course, it was already a weapon *against* Jim Crow.) Departures from tacit or overt defenses of Jim Crow, however, scarcely indicated larger shifts toward theological or political liberalism—a reality the 1968 and 1972 Nixon campaigns only reinforced. A key to delineating the socio-political space these white evangelicals occupied lies in understanding the nature of Graham's social ethic, here termed *evangelical universalism*. This social ethic featured three coexistent (and not always complementary) tenets: that the individual soul is the primary theological and political unit in society; that relational solutions greatly surpass legislative ones in resolving social problems; and that Christians should, in most cases, acquiesce to ordained governmental authority.

Any attempt to interpret how Graham affected both the religious and political space of the South also requires a step back to consider the influence of American evangelicalism on public life. Evangelicalism has itself become a contested term, leading a prominent historian of American Christianity to wish it good riddance as a unit of analysis.[18] Modern evangelicalism is, in part, an elastic construction generated and perpetuated by its proponents, detractors, and scholarly interrogators alike. Yet it was also an avowed, internalized label for many figures considered here—including, of

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[18] D. G. Hart, *Deconstructing Evangelicalism: Conservative Protestantism in the Age of Billy Graham* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2004). To be sure, Hart primarily wrote to an audience of born-again Christians, and the title of his book suggests that at least Graham qualifies as evangelical. At the same time, Hart dedicated substantial space to debunking various scholarly uses of evangelicalism. For criticism of the uses of evangelical in a southern context, see the contribution of Beth Barton Schweiger in "Forum: Southern Religion," *Religion and American Culture* 8.2 (Summer 1998): 161-166; and Donald G. Mathews, "'Christianizing the South'—Sketching a Synthesis," in *New Directions in American Religious History*, ed. Hart and Harry S. Stout (Oxford, 1997), 102-107. Their understandable complaint is that an exclusive focus on an unspecific, static evangelicalism lends such evangelicalism a hegemonic power that, in turn, belies themes of conflict, fluidity, and general diversity in the southern religious past.

course, for Graham. Like "liberal" and "conservative," "evangelical" has become such a pervasive modifier that, while often frustratingly vague, it has inextricably joined the pantheon of living American identities. During the years considered here, evangelicalism stood apart from Protestant liberalism and most other forms of mainline denominationalism, as well as from Roman Catholicism and Orthodoxy. Moreover, evangelicalism remains a useful category for interpreting the type of cross-denominational faith Graham and many others upheld—a piety too specific for the labels "Protestant" or "conservative," yet obviously much too broad for "Baptist" or "Pentecostal."[19] The intention here is not to casually disregard important distinctions among the Reformed, Wesleyan, and free-church traditions—or, for that matter, between southern and northern ones. The very nature of Graham's ministry, however, has lent itself to a certain elision of such categories. Evangelicalism (along with one of its modes of expression, revivalism) has worked most influentially on a large and small scale, as a sweeping social force and as a discrete movement within individual souls.[20]

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[19] The understanding of evangelicalism employed here draws inspiration from historian George Marsden's description of evangelicalism as a highly informal "denomination" that can be defined in three alternating and overlapping manners: as "a conceptual unity" marked by a commitment to certain Christian principles; as a broad "movement" linked by common histories and directions; and as a "consciously organized community or movement." Marsden, "Introduction: The Evangelical Denomination," in *Evangelicalism and Modern America*, ed. Marsden (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1984), vii-xix. For a historical overview of American evangelicalism, see Hart, *That Old-Time Religion in Modern America: Evangelical Protestantism in the Twentieth Century* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2002).

[20] Michael J. McClymond's definition of revivalism is applied here: "'Revivalism' is a spiritual movement within Christianity that calls individuals to make a self-conscious decision to repent of sin and believe the gospel, and thereby seeks to bring them an assurance of being in the right or proper relationship with God, and integrate them into a community with other like-minded individuals." See McClymond, "Issues and Explanations in the Study of North American Revivalism," in *Embodying the Spirit: New Perspectives on North American Revivalism*, ed. McClymond (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004 [Johns Hopkins]), 10. In the case of Graham's brand of evangelism, revivalism refers specifically to the organized expression (largely via services) of these goals.

This study employs an expansive understanding of evangelicalism as operating simultaneously on theological, sociological, and attitudinal levels. Evangelicalism holds to doctrinal orthodoxy and Biblicism, while emphasizing the born-again moment, a personal relationship with God, and the importance of sharing the good news of salvation. It also features self-conscious, para-denominational networks of likeminded believers. Finally, evangelicalism can be seen as an attitudinal posture with two tendencies. It tends toward individuation and a pietistic emphasis on the normative correspondence between personal conversion and the subsequent transformation of character. Also, during the years considered here, it evinced a habitual wariness toward non-religious social institutions, along with a more forthright skepticism about religious and political liberalism—stances rooted in ambivalence about the status of evangelicalism in American society.

The above elements have applied to evangelicalism in both the South and the nation at large, even though the southern variety has tended to maintain distinctive institutions and communities of discourse. In the South into the present century, evangelicalism has often functioned much more as a general faith.[21] It has served as a kind of informal establishment or point of reference in keeping with the broader American tradition of church-state separation and denominational pluralism. Significantly, Graham bridged both the national and the more particularly southern varieties of evangelicalism.

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[21] In the context of southern Christianity, where Southern Baptists in particular have tended to maintain a discrete, decidedly non-ecumenical identity, such scholars as Samuel S. Hill have identified a general southern evangelicalism focused on conversion and the "regeneration of human hearts." Hill, *Crisis Revisited*, 114.

Graham's type of evangelicalism served as a conduit for socio-political change in the American South. Historian Martin E. Marty has described evangelicalism as "the characteristic Protestant (and, eventually and by indirection, Christian) way of relating to modernity" in the United States. One might also speak of its capacity to create modern change. What historian Beth Barton Schweiger writes about the antebellum South applies equally to the times of Billy Graham: "The history of Protestant revivals in the South indicts any understanding that pits religion against modernity."[22]

To a somewhat surprising degree, the observations of Marty and Schweiger contradict tendencies within the historiography of southern religion. More specifically, they cut against the work of Samuel Hill and his pathbreaking peers, who offered what might be termed the *crisis motif* of southern religious historiography, stressing the extent to which the white church in the South had not addressed the needs of southern society.[23] The crisis motif drew inspiration from the calls of theologians Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Reinhold Niebuhr (and, on a different level, H. Richard Niebuhr) for prophetic responsibility and relevance, but also reflected a long and commendable tradition, stretching back to C. Vann Woodward and even W. J. Cash, of southern historians using their scholarship to speak truth to their region.[24] The purpose here is not to challenge the

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[22] Marty, "The Revival of Evangelicalism and Southern Religion," 9. Schweiger, "Max Weber in Mt. Airy, Or, Revivals and Social Theory in the Early South," in *Religion in the American South: Protestants and Others in History and Culture*, ed. Schweiger and Donald G. Mathews (UNC, 2004), 31-66 (quoted in 34).

[23] For examples of the crisis motif, see Hill, *Crisis*, esp. 193-211; Hill, et al, *Solid South*; Rufus B. Spain, *At Ease in Zion: A Social History of Southern Baptists, 1865-1900* (Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University Press, 1967); and Manis, *Southern Civil Religions in Conflict*.

[24] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, ed. Eberhard Bethge (New York: Touchstone, 1971); Richard Fox, *Reinhold Niebuhr: A Biography* (New York: Pantheon, 1985); and H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (New York: Harper, 1956).

substance of such prophetic engagement, and this is by no means the first work to perceive the limits of the crisis motif.[25]

Still, the normative legacy of the crisis motif does threaten to distract scholars from the larger influences of evangelicalism on socio-political change in the modern South. As historian Jane Dailey has suggested, Christianity that does not satisfy the moral standards of its scholars is, nevertheless, still Christianity.[26] That is, a segregationist can be a Christian, if not a good one. As originally put forth by Hill, the crisis motif rested on one inaccurate prediction: that the silence of the southern white church on social issues would eventually lead to its irrelevance in a changing region. In truth, of course, evangelicalism has continued to prosper in the region, in part because its relevance for many southerners remains much more personal than consciously political, but also because many white evangelicals eventually found a middle ground—unsatisfactory to civil rights activists and segregationists alike—on racial matters. Graham helped to create and broadcast this middle ground, which became the public face of much of the modern South.

The conception of evangelicalism embraced here has a number of methodological implications that, in turn, reflect the various facets of Graham's career. This project treats Graham, first and foremost, as an evangelist, but also, at times, as a politician, a spokesperson, and a regional leader. Similarly, evangelicalism is seen, first and foremost, as a faith perspective and identity, but also as, at times, a posture with profound

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[25] Schweiger has identified something akin to the crisis motif. See Schweiger, "Max Weber," 37-38 and passim.

[26] Jane Dailey, "Sex, Segregation, and the Sacred after *Brown*," *Journal of American History* 91.1 (June 2004): 120-122.

socio-political implications—or, put more simply, as the expression of born-again Protestantism in the American public sphere. This project explores the intersection of religion and political culture, seeking to avoid making either an epiphenomena of the other.[27] Likewise, the intention here is not to reinforce what is sometimes an unfortunate division between histories of religion *qua* religion and histories of religion and politics.[28] If the latter have too often caricatured evangelicalism as reflexively other-worldly or as merely a cultural component of economic conservatism, many works on evangelicalism have employed a language of insularity, focusing on the minutiae of terminology and social networks. This project aspires instead to model a dynamic middle ground between treating religious language with the sophistication it deserves and situating evangelicalism in relation to larger political cultural changes. It offers a *blending model*—a kind of history in which the worlds of faith and politics at times intersect seamlessly, in which religious and secular actors and motivations overlap and blend, sometimes without clear distinctions between them.[29] Hence, evangelical universalism

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[27] A helpful definition of political culture comes from political scientist Richard W. Wilson: "a set of values that stabilize institutional forms and hierarchical social relationships in terms of ethical constructs; over time these values reflect developmental changes in individual psychology and in social norms of legitimation; they evolve as a consequence of the interaction between them." Wilson, *Compliance Ideologies: Rethinking Political Culture* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 6.

[28] One might also speak of the differences between the "histories of religion" approach and the genre of "religion and culture."

[29] Influences for the blending model include Henry Goldschmidt, "Introduction: Race, Nation, and Religion," in *Race, Nation, and Religion in the Americas*, ed. Goldschmidst and Elizabeth McAlister (Oxford, 2004), 3-31. The anthropologists Goldschmidst and McAlister seek to "blur the boundaries between religion and society without reducing either to a pale reflection of the other—to demonstrate the concrete, empirical foundations of religious discourse and experience, as well as the otherworldly, metaphysical foundations of social order and identity" (21). Two works that fruitfully explore the intersection of faith and political culture are Susan Friend Harding, *The Book of Jerry Falwell: Fundamentalist Language and Politics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press [Princeton], 2000); and Lisa McGirr, *Suburban Warriors: The Origins of the New American Right* (Princeton, 2001), 217-261.

possessed a secular corollary, the *politics of decency*, which invoked "law and order" toward moderate ends.

In the life of Graham, as for the South as a whole, such blending was often an everyday phenomenon. This was true even though many southern evangelicals have historically tended to cast the *seam*lessness of the religious and political spheres as *seem*lessness, drawing from variations on the venerable Southern Presbyterian doctrine of the "spirituality of the church" (which emphasized the duty of the church to reinforce, rather than impede or challenge, the social order overseen by the state) or the Southern Baptist notion of "soul competency" (which stressed the primacy of the individual soul and conscience before God). Both perspectives—or, later, their mid-twentieth century residue—were selectively employed to truncate the social responsibilities of the church.[30] Born into a strict Calvinist denomination (Associate Reformed Presbyterian), re-baptized as a Southern Baptist young adult, and later married into a prominent Southern Presbyterian family, Graham knew these traditions intimately. Thus, while this work seeks to counter the tendency of political histories not to take religion seriously, it also adopts a respectful hermeneutic of suspicion toward the many figures in these pages who characterized their work as conversion-centered and, hence, wholly non-political. In the blending model offered here, religion often resides at the forefront of socio-political change, all the more so because of its power as an enduring facet of the human experience that ultimately transcends conventional temporality.

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[30] On the "spirituality of the church," see Harvey, *Freedom's Coming*, 24. Scholar Charles Marsh described the extreme conservative interpretation of soul competency as the "piety of the pure soul." See Marsh, *God's Long Summer: Stories of Faith and Civil Rights* (Princeton, 1997), 106-112.

A World—and a Regional—Historical Figure

Considering Graham in relation to all of the above trends entails treating him as a serious historical actor and, at times, as a powerful symbol. As suggested earlier, his familiarity and seeming consistency can sometimes dull appreciation for his complexity—not as an intellectual or original thinker, but, like many politicians, as a public figure with a telling knack for locating the pulse of socio-political change. Certainly, someone who contributed more than any single person to the renaissance of evangelical Christianity in post-WWII America, who once addressed an audience of one-million during a crusade service in South Korea, and who routinely met with the leaders of such nations as India, Ethiopia, and Israel scarcely requires justification as a subject of historical analysis.[31] Yet even these high-profile achievements did not fully capture his roles as a political actor and, importantly for this work, as a regional leader. Gaining insight into this side of Graham necessitates analyzing both his private and public dimensions, weighing the Graham of crusade services and press conferences against the Graham of private correspondence and backroom consultations. These spheres, which sometimes (but by no means always) conflicted with each other, comprised parts of a whole. In his public role, Graham was a great communicator, more consistent than charismatic, with an ability to think on his feet and a talent for staying on task. In his private role, Graham was an energetic networker greatly attracted to politics (runner-up to evangelism as a career choice) and eager to seek out political leaders, whom he selectively attempted to influence, for whom he sometimes did bidding, and by whom he occasionally let himself be used. This project emphasizes Graham as an independent

[31] South Korea in William Martin, *A Prophet With Honor: The Billy Graham Story* (New York: William Morrow, 1991), 414-419.

actor whose actions were also open to myriad interpretations and applications. To reinforce the primacy of his position as an evangelist amid his other identities, Graham is frequently referred to as "the evangelist."

Even while this project seeks to illuminate important aspects of Graham's life, it does not aspire to the status of formal biography. Rather, it falls into a time-honored tradition, common to the historiography of both religion and politics, of documenting and interpreting aspects of a life for the purpose of gaining insights into a historical period. Such studies, as historian Timothy Tyson has contended, illuminate "the way in which human lives point to the larger story around them."[32] In the case of Graham, this project also considers the way in which he influenced the world around him, specifically his home region.

The historiography on Graham is extensive, yet it has overlooked his role in the South to a surprising degree. The earliest scholarly treatment of Graham, historian William McLoughlin's 1960 biography, casts him as the somewhat atavistic flagship evangelist of a new Great Awakening.[33] During the Nixon era, a generation of scholars offered informed polemics about an evangelist they viewed as an agent of civil religion and a spokesperson for Middle America. Journalist Marshall Frady's lyrical, provocative biography of the evangelist falls into this genre.[34] Graham soon drew more attention

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[32] Timothy B. Tyson, "Robert F. Williams and the Promise of Southern Biography," *Southern Cultures*, Fall 2002, 52.

[33] William G. McLoughlin, *Billy Graham: Revivalist in a Secular Age* (New York: The Ronald Press, 1960).

[34] See, for example, Barnhart, *Graham Religion*; Lowell D. Streiker and Gerald S. Strober, *Religion and the New Majority: Billy Graham, Middle America, and the Politics of the 70s* (New York: Association Press, 1972); James Morris, *The Preachers* (New York: St. Martin's, 1973), 367-387; Charles

from academic historians, who ably treated him in relation to a number of broad trends, such as Cold War religiosity and the emergence of the mainstream "neo-evangelical" movement.[35] William Martin's excellent 1991 biography of Graham stands as the definitive work on the full career of the evangelist.[36] A model of balanced, rich scholarship, it is a starting point for this project.

Absent from the historiography is a comprehensive treatment of Graham's influence on his native South, even though a committee of historians, journalists, and public intellectuals ranked him as the fourth most influential southerner of the twentieth century, behind Martin Luther King, Jr., William Faulkner, and Elvis Presley.[37] While Martin's biography documents many of the evangelist's activities in the South, it focuses more on his progressive movement toward evangelical ecumenism. In filling a critical void in the scholarship on Graham, this project also seeks to elucidate the relationship between evangelicalism and political culture in the post-WWII and post-civil rights era South, thus contributing to scholarship on southern political culture, American evangelicalism, and popular conservatism. Historians of the South have understood Graham primarily in relation to two aspects of regional change: the postwar rise of

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P. Henderson, *The Nixon Theology* (New York: Harper & Row, 1972); and Marshall Frady, *Billy Graham: A Parable of American Righteousness* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 1979).

[35] Stephen J. Whitfield, *The Culture of the Cold War*, 2nd edition (Johns Hopkins, 1996), 77-82. Joel A. Carpenter, *Revive Us Again: The Reawakening of American Fundamentalism* (Oxford, 1997), 211-232.

[36] Martin, *Prophet*. Elsewhere, Martin linked Graham with the origins of the modern Christian Right. See Martin, *With God on Our Side: The Rise of the Religious Right in America* (New York: Broadway, 1996). Two dissertations provide valuable insights into Graham's social ethic. See Jerry Berl Hopkins, "Billy Graham and the Race Problem, 1949-1969" (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Kentucky, 1986); and Eric J. Paddon, "Modern Mordecai: Billy Graham in the Political Arena, 1948-1990" (Ph.D. Dissertation, Ohio University, 1999).

[37] John Shelton Reed, "The Twenty Most Influential Southerners of the Twentieth Century," *Southern Cultures*, Spring 2001, 96-100.

metropolitan, entrepreneurial evangelicalism, as well as the general exportation of southern culture to the nation.[38] Both of these arguments have great merit, yet they address Graham as a symbol or anecdote, more than as an actor. The aforementioned crisis motif of southern religious historiography has informed passing, yet influential, references to Graham and has likely contributed to the dearth of work on him as a southerner. A good example is a quotation, originally cited by Frady, from a 1965 comment by Graham on the role of the church in social issues, to the effect that "the church should not answer questions the people aren't asking." An author using this remark to cast Graham as emblematic of a general white southern "flight from reality" remained unaware of one complicating factor. The words came from the text of a sermon given in Dothan, Alabama, where Graham was holding a desegregated revival, much to the displeasure of the local White Citizens' Council.[39] Historian David Chappell's important recent book, *A Stone of Hope*, suggests a pivotal opening for more work on Graham's role in the South. In a brief, provocative consideration of the evangelist, Chappell casts Graham as representative of white southern evangelicalism's overall lack of willingness to actively defend the declining Jim Crow system.[40] His work is a start

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[38] Bartley, *New South*, 270-277. John Egerton, *The Americanization of Dixie: The Southernization of America* (New York: Harper's Magazine Press, 1974), 194-196.

[39] David R. Goldfield, *Black, White, and Southern: Race Relations and Southern Culture, 1940 to Present* (LSU, 1990), 85-86. Marshall Frady, "God and Man in the South," *Atlantic Monthly*, January 1967, 40. Original version of quotation in *Charlotte Observer* (AP) and *Tulsa World* (UPI), 25 April 1965; both in Billy Graham Center Archives, CN 360, R30. An early interpretation of Graham by an influential historian of southern religion foreshadows the crisis motif in casting him as a kind of anachronism, if a popular one: "The vibrant exhortations of that most renowned of all Southern Baptists—Billy Graham—belonged as much to the nineteenth as to the twentieth century." Kenneth K. Bailey, *Southern White Protestantism in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Harper & Row, 1964), 154.

[40] Chappell, *Stone of Hope*, 131-152. Another recent, but also brief, consideration of Graham labels him "[a]n enormously complex man" who befriended both Richard Nixon and Martin Luther King,

toward delineating the role of Graham and southern evangelicalism in creating the post-civil rights era South. This project continues that task.

Overview

The central story of this project concerns the birth of the post-civil rights era South—and Graham's contribution thereto. The six subsequent chapters trace this narrative in thematic and roughly chronological progression from 1950 to 1980, with an eighth chapter, "The New South of Billy Graham," providing a conclusion. Ultimately, Graham represents an illuminating window through which to consider the relationship between evangelical Christianity and socio-political change in the region. As such, he suggests American evangelicalism's particular relationship to evolving social and political currents—how revivalism and evangelical public theology, while embracing traditional forms of belief, can also sanction new expressions of those same values. These dynamics have resulted in a mercurial mixture of continuity and discontinuity that has made the post-civil rights era South an intriguing and challenging region to interpret. In his simultaneously influential and circumscribed roles as evangelist, peer of political leaders, and regional spokesperson, Graham was both a nexus for, and driver of, many developments central to the creation of the post-civil rights era South. He supplied an acceptable path upon which white southern moderates could back away from Jim Crow, and his post-segregation rhetoric portended the emergence of "color blindness" within popular conservatism. Through both his involvement in the Eisenhower and Nixon administrations and his deep social ties in the South, the evangelist also created space for

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Jr. See Kenneth J. Heineman, *God is a Conservative: Religion, Politics, and Morality in Contemporary America* (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 46.

the decades-long process of political realignment. In the end, Graham suggests the peculiarly evangelical nature of the South's rapprochement with modernity.

"'No segregation at the altar'" outlines Graham's emergence during the early to mid-1950s as a desegregationist, considering his first desegregated crusades and their regional-religious context. Motivations for Graham's evolution on racial matters included his exposure to theological spheres outside of southern fundamentalism, his Cold War internationalism, and his desire to evangelize within the black community. Graham cultivated public positions he continued to evince during the years considered: defensiveness of the South, denouncement of "extremists on both sides" of the civil rights debate, and prophesy of racial disharmony in the North.

"Evangelical Universalism and the Politics of Decency" explores Graham's emergence as a player in the South during the latter half of the 1950s. As an evangelist, he could stand removed from both the politics of rage and the politics of protest. Through multiple venues—including the pages of *Life* magazine, rallies in Little Rock, and correspondence with President Dwight Eisenhower and journalist Ralph McGill—Graham proffered a social ethic of evangelical universalism. His politics of decency complemented Eisenhower's approach to civil rights.

"'Another kind of march'" focuses on Graham's most celebrated southern services—his 1964-1965 visits to Alabama, where he appealed to the rule of law, as well as the rule of grace. The visits occurred after his much-mythologized (if still significant) relationship with Martin Luther King, Jr., had entered into an irreversible decline. These years represented the high point of Graham's regional influence. With the

encouragement of President Lyndon Johnson, he facilitated the growth of a faith-informed, post-segregation public language.

"Billy Graham's Southern Strategy" considers the complex (and, initially at least, mutually rewarding) friendship between Graham and Richard Nixon, analyzes the evangelist's important role in the southern policies of the Nixon administration, and pays particular attention to the many moments when evangelistic activities intersected with political loyalties. Willingly politicized during the Nixon years, Graham participated in the Republican southern strategy and implicated himself in a larger debate about the direction of the newest New South.

"Crusading for the Sunbelt South" looks at two crusades in the early-1970s South, Birmingham and Atlanta, where Graham acted as a regional booster. His crusades reflected and impelled the particular combination of faith and self-promotion that came to characterize the 1970s Sunbelt South, an imagined region of piety, modernity, and increasingly Republican politics. Graham's crusade boosters attempted, not always successfully, to demonstrate the region's racial progress.

"'Before the Water Gate'" explores Graham's evangelical explanations of Watergate and considers his relationship to the "new" social issues of the 1970s and the subsequent emergence of the Christian Right. Following Watergate, Graham downgraded his involvement in politics, yet he never completely departed from that world. He also paralleled a larger regional shift away from racial matters and toward a range of gender-based social issues. While his relationship to the Christian Right was ambiguous, Graham suggested the paramount position of evangelicalism in the political culture of the post-civil rights era South.

CHAPTER II

"NO SEGREGATION AT THE ALTAR"

The audience may be segregated, but there is no segregation at the altar.

Billy Graham[1]

Billy Graham entered the 1950s as a nationally known evangelist who was also an identifiable southerner and a Christian fundamentalist. The following decade would see a struggle—sometimes public, often unstated—between his singular position as an evangelist and the other, seemingly more expendable, labels. Graham clearly chose to retain his regional identity, and this decision eventually helped compel him to address the specifically southern problem he and his fellow moderates parsimoniously called the "race question" or the "race problem" (hesitant as they were to use the more prescriptive term, "civil rights"). Graham's southern identity was evident in many things—his theological sensibilities, his political and social relationships, and his zealous Cold War apocalypticism—but expressed itself most strikingly when civil rights re-emerged as a national issue in the early 1950s. As an evangelist, Graham also situated his response to race within the larger context of his ministerial priorities, which in many respects transcended matters of region. At some level, that is, he had to square racial customs with theology, his southern background with the implications of his brand of mass evangelism. During the post-World War II years preceding the rise of "massive resistance" to desegregation—a time when even white Mississippi was not yet a

[1] *Jackson* (MS) *Daily News* (UPI), 9 July 1952.

completely "closed society" on matters of race—Graham formulated views and rhetorical postures that would last him for decades.[2] In his shifts toward desegregated crusades and in his selective, but increasingly public comments on the race problem, Graham helped to introduce new assumptions into his home region—a common-sense critique of strict segregationism that, while elusive in its political applications, further weakened the theological fortress of Jim Crow. He did so, however, by using a familiar evangelical language buttressed by both his celebrity status and his recognizability as a southerner. Although Graham's actions were more reactive than radical, and although he cultivated and retained close ties with southern politicians of all stripes, the evangelist contributed to the removal of an influential strand of conservative Protestantism from active resistance to the demise of Jim Crow.

During the years before southern white support for Jim Crow hardened in the face of the *Brown* decision and civil rights activism, Graham transitioned from a tacit segregationist to a tepid critic of Jim Crow policies and, finally, to a practitioner of desegregation. The evangelist came to support desegregation during the 1950s—first, of his crusades and then, later in the decade, of the South and the nation as a whole. The sources and motivations for his evolving stances on racial segregation ranged from the theological to the intellectual and political. They included his exposure to theological spheres outside of southern fundamentalism, his desire to evangelize within the black community, and his burgeoning Cold War internationalism. At the same time, Graham's rhetoric on race retained a distinctly southern tone, which would inform his later service

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[2] Charles W. Eagles, "The Closing of Mississippi Society: Will Campbell, *The $64,000 Question*, and Religious Emphasis Week at the University of Mississippi," *The Journal of Southern History* 67.2 (May 2001): 331. See also James W. Silver, *Mississippi: The Closed Society*, 2nd edition (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1966).

as a regional leader and mediator. He cultivated public positions reflective of his regional affiliation: defensiveness of the South, denouncement of "extremists on both sides" of the civil rights debate, and prophecy of racial disharmony in the North. Coexistent with these positions, however, was his keen acknowledgement and acceptance of the fact that the Jim Crow system was ultimately on borrowed time—theologically and, quite possibly, politically. While not playing as visible a role in the South as he would in subsequent years, Graham during the early and mid-1950s contributed greatly to the weakening of theological segregationism, which entered the years of the post-*Brown* backlash embattled and on the defensive. Graham represented the moderate evangelical—and southern—wing of the offensive against Jim Crow.

The Making of a Racial Moderate[3]

By Graham's own telling, the climax of his years-long struggle to reconcile a tacit acceptance of Jim Crow with a strident promotion of salvation for all came in March 1953, when he decided at the start of a Chattanooga, Tennessee, crusade service to personally remove the ropes separating the black from the white sections of the audience.[4] This was the first time Graham had not followed the dictates of the local crusade committee regarding segregated seating. Despite a reversion to segregated

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[3] The understanding of racial moderate employed here refers specifically to a southern context and draws influence from historian William Chafe's description of white moderates/progressives ("who welcomed an atmosphere of tolerance but did not initiate or endorse change in the racial status quo") and especially from Eagles' description of Raleigh, North Carolina, newspaper editor Jonathan Daniels (who "advocated [a] cautious, compromising, prudent approach to change" and who "[c]ounsel[ed] obedience to the law and gradual progress in racial matters"). See William H. Chafe, *Civilities and Civil Rights: Greensboro, North Carolina, and the Black Struggle for Freedom* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980 [Oxford]), 57; and Eagles, *Jonathan Daniels and Race Relations: The Evolution of a Southern Liberal* (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 1982), 235.

[4] Graham, *Just As I Am: The Autobiography of Billy Graham* (New York: HarperCollins, 1997), 426.

seating patterns in at least one subsequent crusade, the Chattanooga incident served as a key moment in Graham's "racial conversion narrative," to use literary scholar Fred Hobson's term for self-styled narratives in which "products of and willing participants in a harsh, segregated society . . . confess racial wrongdoings and are 'converted,' in varying degrees, from racism to something approaching racial enlightenment."[5] The primary catalysts of this narrative—Graham's involvement in the neo-evangelical movement, his desire to evangelize to African Americans, and his adamant Cold War politics—blended theological with political influences.

Graham's status as a religious celebrity who was also a southerner made his decision to address the race issue at some level less than surprising. Less predictable, though, was his public position, at a reasonably early date, as a moderate desegregationist. Like most white southerners of his generation, Graham had grown up as a *de facto* segregationist—in his own words, someone who "had adopted the attitudes of that region without much reflection." Later, he would reminisce with unintended condescension about his childhood admiration for Reese Brown, a black foreman on the Graham family dairy farm "with a tremendous capacity for working hard" and whose wife made "fabulous buttermilk biscuits."[6] These fond memories aside, little evidence exists to suggest that Graham's celebrated 1934 response as a scrawny, playful teenager to the brimstone-laden altar call of Kentucky evangelist Mordecai Ham—a fundamentalist who faced allegations of anti-Semitism—comprised the origins of his

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[5] Fred Hobson, *But Now I See: The White Southern Racial Conversion Narrative* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press [LSU], 1999), 2.

[6] Graham, *Just As I Am*, 425, 12.

"awakening to the wrongs of racism and segregation."[7] Graham's racial conversion was not coterminous with his walk down the sawdust trail. In fact, his gradual awakening did not commence for another decade and-a-half, after he had attended such segregated institutions as Bob Jones College in Cleveland, Tennessee, where he lasted but one semester, and Florida Bible Institute, another unaccredited fundamentalist school from which he graduated in 1940. While described in classically southern terms, his transformation may never have occurred without his exposure during the early 1940s to a moderate brand of northern fundamentalism then beginning the protracted, but conclusive process of refashioning itself as "evangelicalism."

Many southerners of Graham's generation experienced racial conversions in the context of exposure to more racially moderate environments.[8] While a city like New York or Austin might more naturally fit this bill, the world of Chicagoland fundamentalism provided such an impetus for Graham. His enrollment at Wheaton (Illinois) College—then, as now, a leading institution of higher education within conservative, non-mainline Protestant circles—represented one of the few times the budding evangelist had crossed the Mason-Dixon line. There, he remembered, "people looked at me curiously, as if my heavily accented drawl were a foreign language." His education at Wheaton, where he majored in anthropology, contributed to his eventual willingness to question his racial assumptions. While Graham later struggled to explain

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[7] Jerry Berl Hopkins, "Billy Graham and the Race Problem, 1949-1969" (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Kentucky, 1986), 13. "[E]ven after my conversion," Graham wrote in 1960, "I felt no guilt in thinking of my dark-skinned brothers in the usual patronizing and paternalistic way." Graham, "Why Don't Our Churches Practice the Brotherhood They Preach?" *Reader's Digest*, August 1960, 55. On Ham, see *Oregonian*, 20 August 1950, in Billy Graham Center Archives (BGCA), CN 360, R3.

[8] See, for example, Willie Morris, *North Toward Home* (New York: Vintage, 2000 [1967]). Two other writers who fit this category are Robert Penn Warren and William Styron. See Hobson, *But Now I See*, 80-83.

his decision to study a subject commonly associated with agnosticism, if not outright atheism, the content of his education suggested that at Wheaton he first gained awareness of the cultural relativity of race.[9] In 1950, years before the public knew Graham as a racial desegregationist, the evangelist noted that in college he had "practically memorized" a textbook titled *Up from the Ape* and authored by the evolutionary anthropologist Earnest Albert Hooton.[10] A Harvard professor, Hooton emphasized the highly relative nature of racial categories and was dismissive of quasi-eugenicists, calling them "ethnomaniacs." While not denying the significance of racial differences, physical and otherwise, Hooton argued that "a 'pure race' is little more than a philosophical abstraction and that the great cultural achievements of humanity have been produced, almost invariably, by racially mixed peoples." He specifically attacked the simplistic chauvinism of arguments concerning the inferiority of Negroes.[11] Graham filtered such ideas through the lens of his true focus at Wheaton, evangelism. While written from an explicitly secular perspective, Hooton's book reinforced a universalistic understanding of humanity's moral and spiritual potential, providing for Graham, in the words of a

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[9] Donald E. Hoke, "Knowledge on Fire," *Christian Life*, July 1949, 12, in BGCA, CN 360, R61. Graham, *Just As I Am*, 64. *Houston Press*, 10 May 1952, in BGCA, CN 360, R5. Later, Graham cited a popular visiting professor at Wheaton, as well as "the remote possibility that I might end up on the mission field," as reasons for his major. See Graham, *Just As I Am*, 65. Wheaton College, which had roots in antebellum evangelical abolitionism, admitted black students during the early 1940s, although they were neither permitted to reside in dormitories nor to date white students. See Hopkins, "Race Problem," 18.

[10] *Boston Post*, 7 January 1950, in BGCA, CN 360, R1. Graham referred to Hooton during his 1950 Boston crusade, when publicly criticizing the anthropologist's defense of euthanasia, calling him a "materialist and evolutionist" who did not believe in the Christian God. See *Boston Herald*, 9 January 1950. A 1964 article written by Graham leaves open the possibility that he read Hooton while taking anthropology classes part-time at a neighboring university, possibly the University of Chicago. See Graham, "Billy Graham's Own Story: 'God is My Witness,'" Part I, *McCall's*, April 1964, 205. See also Curtis Mitchell, *Billy Graham: The Making of a Crusader* (Philadelphia: Chilton Books, 1966), 184.

[11] Earnest Albert Hooton, *Up From the Ape* (New York: MacMillan, 1931), 397, 501, 591-593; and 394-605 passim.

biographer, "a reassuring affirmation that people in every culture are essentially alike and therefore equally open to a straightforward explanation" of Christian salvation.[12]

At Wheaton, Graham also met his future wife, Ruth Bell, a model of piety whose prayerful coyness attracted the aspiring husband. Their marriage ultimately reinforced his southern identity. Ruth's father was L. Nelson Bell, a surgeon and longtime missionary in Nationalist China, but also a native Virginian, proud southerner, and influential lay leader in the conservative wing of the Presbyterian Church in the United States (a.k.a., the Southern Presbyterian church). Bell, who served as "something like a second compensatory father to Graham," heavily mediated the way Graham applied his theological perspectives on race to the social context of the South.[13] During the latter half of the 1950s, in particular, Bell would function as a conservative brake on the evangelist's opinions concerning racial policy. At the same time, the well-connected Bell reinforced Graham's ties to a host of southern religious leaders, thus strengthening the evangelist's potential role as a regional actor. Lastly, the Bells' move to the Southern Presbyterian mountain retreat community of Montreat, North Carolina, led Billy and Ruth to follow them there in 1945. Although Graham built his reputation as a national evangelist in the Midwest, especially through his partnership with Torrey Johnson—head of the Chicago-based organization, Youth for Christ (YFC) International—he remained a southerner in the eyes of much of the public, as well as in his own.[14]

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[12] William Martin, *A Prophet With Honor: The Billy Graham Story* (New York: William Morrow, 1991), 84.

[13] On Bell, see David L. Chappell, *A Stone of Hope: Prophetic Religion and the Death of Jim Crow* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press [UNC], 2004), 117-121, 140-141. Quoted in Marshall Frady, *Billy Graham: A Parable of American Righteousness* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 1979), 355.

Graham's racial development also paralleled his theological and temperamental transition from fundamentalism to neo-evangelicalism. Despite the sudden fame that followed his landmark 1949 Los Angeles crusade (during which newspapers baron William Randolph Hearst famously instructed his outlets to continue to "puff" Graham), the evangelist still moved comfortably within separatist fundamentalist circles at the start of the 1950s.[15] He continued receiving numerous accolades from fundamentalist leaders, including an honorary doctorate in 1948 from his abortive alma mater, Bob Jones University (by then based in Greenville, South Carolina), where he spoke on several occasions.[16] From the influential fundamentalist Baptist minister William Bell Riley, a Kentucky native based in Minneapolis, Graham received a more burdensome mantle: the presidency of Riley's Northwestern Schools, which the evangelist reluctantly accepted in 1947.[17] Despite maintaining a home in North Carolina, Graham occupied the college presidency—in name, much more than in body or even spirit—until 1952, by which time he had begun to depart from his fundamentalist peers on, among other issues, race. In doing so, the evangelist would face criticism from the many southern, as well as northern, fundamentalists who either advocated a strict, two-kingdom separation between saving

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[14] On Graham's early career, see Martin, *Prophet*, 66-120.

[15] Martin, *Prophet*, 117-118.

[16] "Billy Graham Speaks at BJU in Greenville," *Little Moby's News*, March-April 1950, in BGCA, CN 360, R1. During the late 1940s, Graham repeatedly flattered Bob Jones in personal correspondence. See Farley P. Butler, "Billy Graham and the End of Evangelical Unity" (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Florida, 1976), 62-63.

[17] Joel A. Carpenter, *Revive Us Again: The Reawakening of American Fundamentalism* (Oxford, 1997), 219-220.

souls and reforming societies or, like Bob Jones, Sr., also avowedly supported the institution of segregation.[18]

The line between militant fundamentalists of Jones' stripe and more culturally engaged neo-evangelicals had not yet hardened in the early 1950s. During the previous decade, an influential group of moderate fundamentalists associated with the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE) and hailing mostly from Reformed backgrounds had begun embracing the label "evangelical," the source of its modern American usage. By the time their differences with fundamentalists had solidified, Graham had long since sided with the neo-evangelicals, who tended to prioritize evangelism over defenses of the pure faith. Graham more than any other figure came to embody the neo-evangelical posture: a greater willingness to witness to secular society and, by doing so, to offer a relevant conservative alternative to the overt or latent liberalism of mainline Protestantism. In addition to the Great Commission, neo-evangelicals responded to an overarching concern for, in the words of NAE founder Harold Ockenga, "the rescue of western civilization by a . . . revival of evangelical Christianity." The publication *Christianity Today*, founded in 1956 with vital assistance from Graham, reflected this mission.[19] Graham himself sermonized in the late 1940s against sectarian proponents of "so-called 'ultra-Fundamentalism' whose object is not to fight the world, the flesh and

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[18] On Bob Jones, Sr., Graham, and race, see Mark Taylor Dalhouse, *An Island in the Lake of Fire: Bob Jones University, Fundamentalism, and the Separatist Movement* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1996), 78-84, 155. Jones incorporated race into his theological critique of Graham. *Greenville* (SC) *Piedmont*, 10 September 1957, in BGCA, CN 360, R26.

[19] Ockenga quoted in Carpenter, *Revive Us Again*, 149. Carpenter suggested that a clear boundary between separatist fundamentalists and engagement-oriented neo-evangelicals did not harden until "at least" a decade after the 1943 founding of NAE. For example, Bob Jones, Sr., momentarily served as an NAE officer. See Carpenter, *Revive Us Again*, 141-232 passim. See also D. G. Hart, *That Old-Time Religion in Modern America: Evangelical Protestantism in the Twentieth Century* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2002), 115-145.

the devil, but to fight other Christians whose interpretation is not like theirs."[20] In a southern context, departing from the doctrinal dogmatism of fundamentalists potentially meant departing from their racial assumptions, as well.[21] Ecumenical inclusiveness thus held implications for racial inclusiveness.

Graham's education and inclusive style of conservative theology may have portended his subsequent racial views. Those views, however, did not exit the halls of his conscience without external promptings originating from two sources: his need to nurture his public image and his desire to evangelize within the black community. By the early 1950s, his constituency had widened beyond the realm of fundamentalism, extending further even than the burgeoning neo-evangelical community with which he identified. "To maintain credibility as a religious leader," one scholar has rightly argued, "[Graham] had to modify his culturally-conditioned views on race." As early as 1950, the evangelist received criticism in New England for tolerating segregation down South.[22] Criticism came from within Dixie, as well. A letter to the editor of the *Atlanta Constitution*, a liberal paper by regional standards, chided the evangelist for holding segregated meetings during his 1950 crusade in that city and wondered, "Is he implying that God Almighty has room for segregation and discrimination in His work?" A columnist for the same paper continued on this theme, asking, "Will you preach, Sir, on the sins of violent sectionalism and hatred, with brother pitted against brother? . . . And

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[20] Graham sermon, "America's Hope," in *The Early Billy Graham: Sermon and Revival Accounts*, ed. Carpenter (New York: Garland, 1988), 23.

[21] See Bill J. Leonard, "A Theology for Racism: Southern Fundamentalists and the Civil Rights Movement," in *Southern Landscapes*, ed. Tony Badger, et al (Tubingen, Germany: Stauffenburg Verlap, 1996), 165-181.

[22] Hopkins, "Race Problem," 31, 33.

will you, in all humility, state your position on the greatest thorn in the brow of Southern clergymen . . . the puzzles of race, white supremacy and segregation?"[23]

In Atlanta and elsewhere, Graham faced criticism from African-American leaders. Black attendance was extremely low at the Atlanta crusade, even though Graham recalled that black churches were among the congregations to officially invite him to the city. There, he came under fire from prominent African-American ministers, as well as the South's leading black newspaper, the *Daily World*, for offering to hold a special service exclusively for blacks.[24] Morehouse University President Benjamin Mays, a foremost theological critic of Jim Crow and an early mentor to Martin Luther King, Jr., chastised the evangelist publicly and in print during the crusade.[25] Similar tensions with black leaders were evident in other southern cities, including New Orleans, where in 1954 a prominent Congregational minister took out advertisements urging blacks to shun the Graham services. (He later learned that the crusade would, in fact, be desegregated.) Outside of the South, at least one black newspaper reported that Graham had held segregated services during his 1953 Dallas crusade. His immediate response to this negative publicity—sermonizing, from the relatively safer confines of Detroit, "that there is no [racial] difference in the sight of God"—revealed his caution, but also his sensitivity to criticism.[26] Despite tolerating segregated seating patterns, Graham clearly viewed African Americans as a part of his broader constituency, although not the core of it.

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[23] *Atlanta Constitution*, 27 November 1950 and 29 November 1950.

[24] Martin, *Prophet*, 168-169. Graham, *Just As I Am*, 184.

[25] *Pittsburgh Courier*, 18 April 1964, in BGCA, CN 506, 2-10.

[26] *New Orleans Weekly*, 9 October 1954, in BGCA, CN 360, R25. Rev. Charles A. Hill to Willis Haymaker, 11 June 1953, BGCA, CN 1, 1-18. Quoted in Hopkins, "Race Problem," 49.

The Cold War represented a final influence on Graham's development on racial matters. One historian has cast him as the quintessential Cold War revivalist who, from the very beginning of postwar tensions with the Soviet Union, linked the destiny of the United States and its leaders to the mission of his evangelism.[27] When Graham advocated "Christ For This Crisis" (the motto of his 1947 revival in Charlotte), the crisis he spoke of entailed the specter of communism, in addition to moral degeneration. His sermon titles (e.g., "The End of the World" and "Will God Spare America?") reflected an apocalyptic interpretation of the times.[28] Graham's Cold War bellicosity resided well to the right of the emerging liberal anticommunist consensus. In 1950, for example, he castigated the reds who "stole China" and predicted that communists would bomb the United States within two or three years—"and not five years."[29] Considering his identities both as an evangelist and a southerner, these views held complex implications for his stance on domestic matters, especially racial ones. Legal historian Mary Dudziak has explained how the first two decades of conflict between the United States and the Soviet Union simultaneously expanded and limited the national discourse on civil rights, making "civil rights reform . . . *in part* a product of the Cold War." While Dudziak stressed the State Department's desire to advance America's image as the leader of the free world, historian Jeff Woods has described the growth of a specifically "southern red scare" in which segregationist politicians and activists readily merged rabid domestic anticommunism with their pre-existing opposition to altering the racial status quo. In

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[27] Stephen J. Whitfield, *The Culture of the Cold War*, 2nd edition (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 77-82.

[28] Promotional poster, November 1947, in BGCA, CN 360, R1. Sermons titles in *Atlanta Constitution*, 7 December 1950 and *Chattanooga Times*, 13 April 1953.

[29] *Columbia* (SC) *Record*, 4 March 1950, in BGCA, CN 360, R1.

keeping with Dudziak's narrative, Graham viewed the Cold War through an international lens, even while he communicated with many southerners who, as Woods documents, clearly (or conveniently) viewed civil rights activism as a tool of communist subversives.[30] In the late 1940s, Graham's travels to Europe only reinforced his hawkish Cold War sentiments.[31] Subsequent international travels, however, made the evangelist increasingly conscious of how racism damaged the image of America. Like many foreign missionaries within his Southern Baptist denomination, his international evangelistic work led him to reconsider the domestic racial status quo.[32] By the latter half of the decade, Graham routinely linked anticommunism with a critique of segregation. The nation, he declared in 1957, resided "in a fish bowl with the whole world looking in," and "our racial tensions are causing some of the people of the world to turn away from us."[33]

In Public and Private Spheres

In October 1953, Graham wrote a telling letter to *Atlanta Constitution* editor Ralph McGill, who had asked the evangelist to clarify his views on racial segregation after reading an interview Graham had given to the *Michigan Chronicle*. The renowned,

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[30] Mary L. Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights: Race and the Image of American Democracy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), 3-17 (quoted in 12). Jeff Woods, *Black Struggle, Red Scare: Segregation and Anti-Communism in the South, 1948-1968* (LSU, 2003), 1-11 (quoted in 2).

[31] Unidentified clippings (likely from Augusta, Georgia, newspaper), 10 October 1950, in BGCA, CN 360, R1.

[32] On Southern Baptist missionaries and race, see Mark Newman, *Getting Right With God: Southern Baptists and Desegregation, 1945-1995* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press [Alabama], 2001), 129-149; and Alan Scott Willis, *All According to God's Plan: Southern Baptist Missions and Race, 1945-1970* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2005).

[33] Graham, "No Color Line in Heaven," *Ebony*, September 1957, 102.

future Pulitzer Prize-winning editor was in the midst of his own conversion, reflective of the broader swath of southern liberals, from tolerance of separate-but-equal segregation to acceptance of, and eventually support for, its legal demise. As a critic of the role of southern Christianity in abetting racial injustices, McGill likely wrote to Graham with some skepticism. (Within a year, the editor would praise Graham in print as an effective evangelist and an asset to anticommunist efforts overseas.) In a reply written from Detroit, the evangelist critiqued racism through a theological lens and then proceeded to qualify the application of his conclusions in light of the peculiar social chemistry of the South. "In my study of the Bible," Graham wrote, "I can find no verses or chapters to support segregation." He affirmed that "Jesus Christ belongs neither to the colored nor the white races" and repeated a sentiment he had already voiced in Detroit: "[I]n race relations the church has been lagging far behind in certain areas and allowing the sports world and political world to get ahead of it." Graham's chariot of justice slowed at the Mason-Dixon line, however. The South, he wrote to his fellow southerner McGill,

> presents a problem particularly all its own that many times our Northern friends do not understand. It is going to take a long process of education rather than legislation to ultimately bring about better relations between the races. We have extremists in both races who cause 90% of the trouble. In many parts of the South it is my observation that the race situation is better than in many parts of the North. For example, the sharp divisions between races, and racial tensions, are very strong here in Detroit. Non-segregation thus cannot be forced or legislated. There must be a process of education and faith in Christ.[34]

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[34] Graham to Ralph McGill, 31 October 1953, Emory University Special Collections, Ralph McGill Papers, 5-9. *Atlanta Constitution*, 24, 25, and 31 May 1954; all in BGCA, CN 360, R24. On McGill, see Harold H. Martin, *Ralph McGill, Reporter* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1973), 132-133, 152, 302-303. On how support for desegregation "redefined" post-World War II southern liberalism, see Julia Anne McDonough, "Men and Women of Goodwill: A History of the Commission on Interracial Cooperation and the Southern Regional Council, 1919-1954" (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Virginia, 1994).

Most of these sentiments—a color-blind Christology, defense of his home region, embrace of the South's relational culture, and denouncement of "extremists"—would remain with the evangelist for at least the next quarter of a century. The remaining view—a moralistic, but chronologically noncommittal gradualism regarding the ultimate abolition of Jim Crow—would wane, without vanishing altogether, during the late 1950s and early 1960s as Graham grew more appreciative of the need for civil rights legislation.

The tone of Graham's private letter would have surprised many of his white supporters in the South. Indeed, his behavior in public regarding the race question was much more ambiguous than his correspondence with McGill suggested. At the time Graham wrote to McGill, the evangelist was several months removed from his first desegregated crusade in the region. While he occasionally addressed racial matters when speaking in the South during the early years of his ministry, his comments tended to be limited in nature. During the 1950 Columbia crusade, for example, he flatly declared that "[r]evival will also solve the race question by causing both races to be fair toward each other."[35] Graham team member Grady Wilson explicitly embraced the residual nature of this formula. "What's the point of attacking a cause when you're after sinners?" Wilson rhetorically asked an interviewer that same year. "If a man's a sinner and he's a member of the Ku Klux Klan, we're not going to lose the chance of saving him by attacking the organization he belongs to."[36] Such statements hardly fulfilled Graham's professed desire for the church to catch up with the secular world in the area of race relations.

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[35] *Columbia* (SC) *State*, 26 February 1950, in BGCA, CN 360, R1.

[36] Arthur W. Hepner, "Sin and Salvation on the Sawdust Trail," *Everybody's Digest*, July 1950, 26, in BGCA, CN 360, R61.

The tension between public and private spheres was particularly evident in Graham's many southern crusades. Despite the northern headquarters of the YFC and his own Billy Graham Evangelistic Association (BGEA, incorporated in 1950 in Minneapolis, a location attributable to his position with Northwestern Schools), the growing, urban South provided a strong base for many early rallies and crusades, beginning with Charlotte (1947) and including Shreveport (1951) and Houston (1952). During the 1950s, in fact, a significant majority of Graham's domestic crusades, as well as a substantial portion of his guest sermons and one-day rallies, took place in southern cities.[37] His influence was most palpable in the South, where the press "promoted him on an epic scale."[38] Atlanta and Chattanooga were among the few cities to construct special tabernacles in which to hold crusade services.[39] Graham's 1950 address to a joint session of the Georgia legislature inspired the state Senate to pass a prohibition law (which the other chamber quickly let die).[40] Clearly, Graham held cachet within his home region.

Still, during the evangelist's first six years of holding solo revivals, 1947 through 1952, he allowed segregated seating arrangements in his southern crusades. At the 1951 Greensboro crusade, recalled BGEA staffer Willis Haymaker, blacks sat in "special sections of seats reserved for them as was customary in all Billy Graham crusades [in the

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[37] Online chronology of BGCA events, http://www.wheaton.edu/bgc/archives/bgeachro/bgeachron02.htm (accessed 20 February 2006).

[38] Chappell, *Stone of Hope*, 141.

[39] William McLoughlin, *Billy Graham: Revivalist in a Secular Age* (New York: The Ronald Press, 1960), 163; John Pollock, *Billy Graham: The Authorized Biography* (London: Hodder & Stroughton, 1966), 98; and *America's Hour of Decision* (Wheaton, IL: Van Kampen Press, 1951), 57.

[40] "The Whiskey Rebellion," *Time*, 20 February 1950, 18.

South] at that time."[41] The racial separation, presumably, did not extend to the area around the crusade platform where respondents gathered during the altar call. In Atlanta one year earlier, city police chief Herbert Jenkins recalled segregated meetings, with exemptions for a few black ministers whom Graham knew. In a file of high-resolution BGEA photographs from the Atlanta crusades (generally, a more trustworthy source for crowd shots than southern newspapers, which tended to conceal the presence of blacks), the only African Americans shown are two maintenance workers at the crusade stadium. An even more substantial BGEA file of shots from the Columbia crusade, held earlier in 1950, reveals similar results, despite the official Graham biographer's claim that the audience for the final service contained "solid blocks . . . of Negroes."[42]

Jim Crow was thus an expected part of Graham's 1952 crusade in Jackson, Mississippi, capital of the most southern state on earth. The generally glowing coverage from Jackson's two daily newspapers—one of which ran a "Billy Graham Boxscore" listing the decision tally from the previous service—captured the routine thrust of his social commentary during that presidential election year. For example, the evangelist lamented the recent firing of "our star quarterback" General Douglas MacArthur (a favorite within the anti-Communist right) and, in a comment easily interpretable as an endorsement of Dwight Eisenhower for the presidency, urged citizens to vote in the upcoming elections for candidates who possessed moral integrity. "Christians Must Be

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[41] Haymaker to Pollock, 20 May 1965, BGCA, CN 1, 1-5.

[42] Herbert Jenkins interview, 8 March 1977, BGCA, CN 141, 4-41. BGCA, CN 74, photograph folders, "BGEA: ATLANTA CRUSADE, 1950: BILLY GRAHAM—ATLANTA, GA; OCT. 29-DEC 3, 1950"; and "BGEA: COLUMBIA CRUSADE, 1950; BILLY GRAHAM—COLUMBIA, SOUTH CAROLINA; FEB-MAR, 1950." Pollock, *Billy Graham*, 104.

Devoted To Their Cause To Combat Communists," alliterated a headline recounting a Graham sermon.[43]

Then, in the final days of the crusade, a less typical headline appeared in the *Jackson Daily News*: "Billy Graham Hits State Liquor System, Scores Segregation in Church." In an interview with United Press International (UPI) given in Jackson, Graham stated a number of the themes he would also emphasize to Ralph McGill. "There is no scriptural basis for segregation," the evangelist declared, even while he admitted following local racial customs in his services. "The audience may be segregated," he added, "but there is no segregation at the altar." Likewise, there should be none "in the church." Those who come forward during his services, he stressed, "stand as individuals. And it touches my heart when I see white stand shoulder in shoulder with black at the cross."[44]

Graham's comments on segregation, which represented his first definitive public statement about Jim Crow given in a southern setting, were sandwiched between treatments of his less surprising condemnations of obscene book sales and Mississippi's tax on illegal liquor sales. The following day, likely after Graham had received a concerned phone call from Mississippi Governor Hugh White, an article in the *Jackson Clarion-Ledger* emphasized the evangelist's opposition to legalized liquor and then added the following clarification from him concerning "another subject":

> I feel that I have been misinterpreted on racial segregation. We follow the existing social customs in whatever part of the country in which we

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[43] *Jackson* (MS) *Clarion-Ledger*, 10 July 1952 and other issues. *Jackson* (MS) *Daily News*, 28 June 1952 and 17 June 1952.

[44] *Jackson* (MS) *Daily News* (UPI), 9 July 1952.

> minister. As far as I have been able to find in my study of the Bible, it has nothing to say about segregation or non-segregation.

Graham emphasized that he "came to Jackson to preach only the Bible, and not to enter into local issues," a statement that rested uncomfortably within an article detailing his prohibitionist pronouncements. Nevertheless, Graham passed along an account of his initial critique of segregation to the head of the Detroit Council of Churches—two days after he had retracted those same remarks. Neither of the ultra-segregationist Jackson papers further explored the matter of the UPI interview. Following the crusade, the *Daily News* returned to a more comfortable Cold War theme, arguing that Graham's efforts "might not only prove to be our best, but our only real defense against communism."[45] The Jackson crusade, then, did not indicate a change in policy for Graham, but rather featured a wobbly expression of anti-segregationist sentiments that had yet to congeal.[46]

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[45] Gerald S. Strober, *Graham: A Day in Billy's Life* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, 1976), 55. *Jackson* (MS) *Clarion-Ledger,* 10 July 1952. Graham to Dr. G. Merrill Lenox, 12 July 1952, BGCA, CN 1, 1-18. *Jackson* (MS) *Daily News*, 13 July 1952. *Christian Century* reported that Graham "declared segregation unchristian" during his final crusade service in Jackson (i.e., after the retraction of his interview comments). The magazine likely referred to comments he actually made to UPI.

[46] A number of authors have suggested that the Jackson crusade was in fact desegregated. On their face, these claims are easily refuted. During and in the years immediately following the crusade, Graham stated or strongly implied that services there were segregated. For example, see above and Graham, "Billy Graham Makes Plea for an End to Intolerance," *Life*, 1 October 1956, 144. The confusion derives from three sources: 1) lack of distinction between desegregated seating patterns and services open to attendance by both blacks and whites, both of which violated the racial mores of 1952 Mississippi; 2) failure to differentiate desegregated seating from interracial altar calls, the latter of which were always in effect at Graham crusades; and 3) occasional attribution of the ropes story (see above and below) to Jackson, rather than Chattanooga. These accounts, along with a vague allusion Graham once made to the lack of a formal barrier between the segregated black and white audiences in Jackson, allow for the possibility that the evangelist removed the ropes in Jackson at some point during the crusade (although he may also have done so before the crusade in Chattanooga). It is also possible that, in Jackson, Graham decided he could no longer stomach permitting segregation. Still, the audience in Jackson clearly remained segregated. See Strober, *A Day in Billy's Life*, 55; John Pollock, *To All the Nations: The Billy Graham Story* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1985), 105; and Russ Busby, *Billy Graham: God's Ambassador* (Alexandria, VA; Minneapolis; and Del Mar, CA: Time-Life, BGEA, and Tehabi Books), 212. Jackson, Mississippi, press conference transcript, 7 May 1975, BGCA, CN 24, 3-34.

By the following year, Graham had concluded that, at least as far as his crusades were concerned, the Bible's lack of specific statements about the South's other peculiar institution did not represent a tacit endorsement of the Jim Crow status quo. In his 1953 crusade in Chattanooga, Graham took a more forthright stand against segregation in religious settings.[47] Before the start of the crusade, he personally removed the ropes separating the black and white sections of the audience. "Either these ropes stay down," Graham recalled telling two ushers, "or you can go on and have the revival without me."[48] The desegregated nature of the crusade went unreported in Chattanooga's major dailies, which gave more attention to his proficiency on the golf course, although the evangelist later claimed that his action "caused the head usher to resign in anger right on the spot (and raised some other hackles)."[49] A photograph attributed to the Chattanooga crusade and later used in a BGEA promotional booklet shows white and black audience members sitting together. In taking such a dramatic step, however, Graham made sure to hedge its ramifications. He predicted to the ushers that blacks in the audience would

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[47] The Chattanooga account, as treated above and below, is accepted as described by Graham (if likely embellished for narrative effect) because it appears both in a relatively early biography based on interviews with Graham and in the evangelist's own autobiography. John Pollock's first authorized biography of Graham, also the first published treatment of the Chattanooga crusade, does not include the ropes story, but notes that "Graham told the crusade committee that Negroes must be allowed to sit anywhere." William Martin, who based his description of the Chattanooga crusade in part on conversations with Graham, included the story. Importantly, though, the Chattanooga crusade did not represent a wholesale change in policy for the BGEA. That would not occur until 1954, following the *Brown* decision. Also, according to Martin, Graham announced before the start of his 1952 crusade in Washington, DC—a city under federal civil rights jurisdiction and then transitioning away from formalized Jim Crow practices—that seating would not be conducted on a discriminatory basis. It is unclear what came of Graham's declaration. Either way, Graham never cited the Washington, DC, story when recounting his shift toward desegregated seating policies. Lastly, it is possible that a few of Graham's pre-Chattanooga southern services were non-segregated for the simple reason that the hosting committee did not see fit to establish a separate seating section. See Pollock, *Billy Graham*, 98; and *Crusades: 20 Years with Billy Graham* (Minneapolis: World Wide Press, 1966), 107-108. Martin, *Prophet*, 169-171, 648.

[48] Frady, *Parable*, 408.

[49] *Chattanooga Times* and *Chattanooga News-Free Press*, March-April 1953. Graham, *Just As I Am*, 426.

probably continue to sit among themselves. According to a Graham biographer, the evangelist was correct; moreover, the black attendance was disappointingly low.[50]

In holding his first intentionally desegregated crusade in 1953, Graham was slightly ahead of his time in comparison with his fellow white evangelists in the South. By the end of the decade, independent mass revivalists in the region had begun conducting integrated services; earlier in the decade, their services had largely been biracial, yet segregated.[51] Biracial worship, while uncommon in the post-Civil War South, was not an unprecedented experience even during the height of Jim Crow. Graham himself recalled attending a black church service in Florida during his Bible school days in the late 1930s.[52] As historical phenomena, racially-separated churches preceded the formalization of Jim Crow and hence differed from legalized segregation per se.[53] Church attendance at all-white congregations, however, had become intertwined with the rules, rituals, and power structures of formalized Jim Crow decades before the Chattanooga crusade. Still, unlike Holiness revivalism or Pentecostal glossolalia, two facilitators of the southern religious "racial interchange" historian Paul Harvey has documented, Graham crusades did not occur in anything approaching a countercultural or liminal environment.[54] They were public events—and preternaturally mainstream ones,

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[50] *Billy Graham and the Black Community* (Minneapolis: World Wide Publications, 1973), 10. Frady, *Parable*, 408-409. Pollock, *Billy Graham*, 98.

[51] David Edwin Harrell, Jr., "The South: Seedbed of Sectarianism," in *Varieties of Southern Evangelicalism*, ed. Harrell (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1981), 53. Harrell wrote primarily in reference to revivalists of a sectarian, Pentecostal-Holiness variety. See also, Harrell, *White Sects and Black Men in the Recent South* (Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University Press, 1971), 100-106.

[52] Graham, *Just As I Am*, 51.

[53] Chappell, *Stone of Hope*, 145

at that. At the same time, they did not conform exclusively to the conservational function Emile Durkheim influentially assigned to religion.[55] While Graham crusades usually reflected community norms, they sometimes helped to change them, as well.

Although the Chattanooga crusade became the symbolic starting point for Graham's departure from Jim Crow, Haymaker more accurately described 1954 as the year when the BGEA began to officially declare a no-segregation policy.[56] During the first Graham crusade in the South following Chattanooga, also held in 1953, the BGEA reluctantly acquiesced to the Dallas crusade committee's request for segregated seating.[57] The evangelist had come to oppose segregation in his services, yet did not move to formalize that position until after the 1954 *Brown* decision. As sentiments hardened in the years following *Brown*, Graham intentionally avoided the segregationist bastions of the Deep South, turning down most invitations to come there during the mid- and late-1950s, while conducting desegregated crusades in such Upper South cities as Nashville (1954), Richmond (1956), and Louisville (1956), as well as one Deep South city, New Orleans (1954).[58] With a few exceptions, only one of which was high-profile, he would

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[54] Paul Harvey, "God and Negroes and Jesus and Sin and Salvation: Racism, Racial Interchange, and Interracialism in Southern Religious History," in *Religion in the American South: Protestants and Others in History and Culture*, ed. Donald G. Mathews and Beth Barton Schweiger (UNC, 2005), 291-307.

[55] Durkheim famously characterized religion as "an eminently social thing"—a source of social unification and order, providing protection against society's loss of moral consensus. Durkheim wrote, "A religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices . . . which unite into one single moral community called a Church, all those who adhere to them." Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (New York: Free Press, 1995 [1912]), 9, 44; and Meredith B. McGuire, *Religion: The Social Context*, 4th edition (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1997), 36, 188-189.

[56] Haymaker to Harold G. Sanders, 11 November 1960, BGCA, CN 1, 4-18.

[57] An instruction sheet for Dallas ushers specifically informed them of a section to be set aside for black attendees until the start of the service; seating would be open for all late comers. See "THE GREATER DALLAS EVANGELISTIC CRUSADE with BILLY GRAHAM: Instructions for Ushers," undated [1953], BGCA, CN 1, 1-16. See also Pollock, *Billy Graham*, 98. Graham's Asheville crusade, held later in 1953, may have been segregated, as well. See Hopkins, "Race Problem," 51-52.

not return to holding services in the Deep South until the particularly tense civil rights years of 1964 and 1965.

One such Upper South visit, the 1954 Nashville crusade, revealed that the BGEA's policy on desegregation remained in a formative stage. In July 1954, two months after the *Brown* decision against public school segregation, Graham wrote to Southern Baptist pastor James M. Gregg of Nashville recommending that "Negroes be allowed to sit anywhere they like . . . and that nothing be said one way or the other about it." Graham also recommended having a black pastor lead prayer at the crusade once a week. He did not link these requests with Christian morality, but rather stressed the increasingly "world-wide" nature of his ministry:

> The Nashville crusade will be written up quite extensively in the British press, and of course our work in England would suffer tremendously if they thought we were having a segregated meeting. They have no conception of the problem and would blame me for anything that would happen. . . . I have been in prayer on this point almost more than any other point concerning our Nashville and New Orleans meetings. So much is at stake. I personally think the less said the better.[59]

Graham's reasoning likely held particular salience because Tennessee Governor Frank Clement, an intimate of the evangelist, had solicited funds among state elites on behalf of the BGEA's efforts in Britain.[60] The evangelist went on to predict that few blacks would attend the crusade, anyway. Gregg recalled that African-American attendees at the

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[58] In 1954, Graham informed a Presbyterian seminary professor in Richmond that "[d]ue to the racial situation I do not think it would be wise to accept any crusades in the deep South." Graham to James Appleby, 26 August 1955, BGCA, CN 1, 1-32. Graham received an invitation from a group of Montgomery ministers in 1954. Alfred L. Bixler to Graham, 25 November 1954, BGCA, CN 1, 6-8. In 1957, he reportedly turned down an invitation to lead several services in Birmingham. See *Selma* (AL) *Times-Journal* editorial, published in *Piedmont* (AL) *Journal*, 28 June 1957, in BGCA, CN 360, R26.

[59] Graham to James M. Gregg, 24 July 1954, BGCA, CN 1, 1-24. Grady Wilson wrote a similar note regarding desegregation to a member of the New Orleans crusade executive committee. Grady Wilson to J. D. Gray, 27 May 1954, BGCA, CN 1, 1-25.

[60] Frank Clement to Maxey Jarmon, 16 September 1953, Frank Goad Clement Papers (FCP), Tennessee State Library and Archives (TSLA), 17-6 (R4).

crusade tended to sit among themselves, while another crusade leader remembered more mixed seating.[61] During one sermon in Nashville, Graham did offer an uncharacteristically direct denouncement of white racialism, although not segregationism per se: "We have become proud as a race—we have been proud and thought we were better than any other race, any other people. Ladies and gentlemen, we are going to stumble into hell because of our pride." These words represented a theological restatement of Hooton's warning in *Up from the Ape* against racial presumptiveness. Despite this forceful, if politically ambiguous, declaration, the crusade received glowing coverage in the segregationist pages of the *Nashville Banner*, which published every sermon delivered during the four weeks of services.[62]

With the Nashville crusade, as well as the New Orleans crusade held later in 1954, desegregation of services became a requirement for crusade hosts. In the subsequent years of the mid-1950s, Graham grew slightly more direct in his description of this policy. "Naturally," he wrote to Richmond minister James Appleby in 1955, "I am assuming that the meeting in Richmond would be non-segregated." In Richmond, the Graham team also began addressing criticisms that it included black ministers in the crusade planning process only as an "after thought" (as one New Orleans minister saw it), if at all. Haymaker later sought assurances from Appleby that tensions did not exist among the ministers of Richmond, whose integrated Ministers' Association was headed by John M. Ellison, president of the historically black Virginia Union College.[63] During

[61] Graham to James M. Gregg, 24 July 1954, BGCA, CN 1, 1-24. Gregg interview, 27 February 1979, BGCA, CN 141, 11-15. Albert Rose interview, 27 February 1979, BGCA, CN 141, 14-5.

[62] Quoted in David Lockard, *The Unheard Billy Graham* (Waco, Texas: Word Books, 1971), 121. *Nashville Banner*, August-September 1954.

the crusade, Graham delivered a well-attended convocation address at Virginia Union, where he said the race problem lay at "the heart of man." In his Richmond services, critics noted, he failed to address racial matters. Such gestures, or lack thereof, did not strike the segregationist *Richmond Times-Dispatch* as particularly radical. While not specifically addressing Graham's racial views, a *Times-Dispatch* columnist favorably contrasted public figures of his stripe with those "ultra-liberals" who promoted such agendas as "compulsory integration." The even more staunchly segregationist *Richmond News Leader* offered similarly favorable coverage, noting Graham's intention to visit the Museum of the Confederacy while in town.[64]

In light of the political sensibilities of the two Richmond newspapers, their editors conceivably may not have chosen to highlight other cases during the crusades where the race issue did surface. Some readers of the papers may not even have known about the desegregation policy. Such self-censorship was much less likely, however, during the 1956 crusade in Louisville, where the *Louisville Courier-Journal*, edited and published by Mark Ethridge, stood as one of the leading white liberal voices in the greater South. The Louisville crusade also took place just as Graham published an article in *Life* magazine, titled "Billy Graham Makes Plea for an End to Intolerance," in which he dismissed biblical arguments supporting racial segregation and hierarchy, and called for the church to speak out in favor of racial tolerance.[65]

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[63] Graham to Appleby, 26 August 1955; and Haymaker to Appleby, 2 September 1955; both in BGCA, CN 1, 1-32. *New Orleans Weekly*, 9 October 1954, in BGCA, CN 360, R25. *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, 30 November 1954, in BGCA, CN 1, 1-32.

[64] *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, 19 May 1956 and 25 April 1956. Criticism in *Kansas City* (MO) *Call*, 25 March 1955, in BGCA, CN 360, R25. *Richmond News Leader*, 27 April 1956.

[65] Graham, "Plea," 138-151. For more on the article, see Chapter III.

The Louisville crusade thus offered a good indication of how certain residents of a Jim Crow city perceived an evangelist who was beginning to be identified with the cause of desegregation. As early as March 1955, Graham had begun to attract criticism from the more hardline elements of the segregationist right, one member of which accused the evangelist of selectively quoting scripture on racial equality.[66] The Louisville crusade revealed that his comments about race relations did not resonate as clearly as his altar calls; neither were they delivered as resolutely. After the *Courier-Journal* reported on the *Life* article and announced that Graham crusades were now desegregated, a member of the local Citizens' Council called the Graham team to request a meeting with the evangelist. "We think we can convince him to change his views on this integration," the caller said. That avowed segregationists still thought of Graham as a possible ally was attributable both to the halting, episodic nature of his public statements on race and to the desire of Jim Crow partisans not to "lose" a renowned figure they may have assumed was either in their camp or at least not an enemy. Graham did not accept the offer, and neither did his subsequent comments on Jim Crow parallel the confident tone of his *Life* article. When a caller on a local television show asked the evangelist a question about segregation, he replied by re-affirming the primacy of the conversion moment. "I believe the heart of the problem of race is in loving our neighbor," he declared. "But man must love God before he can love his neighbor." As for the crusade itself, the *Courier-Journal*'s religion editor expressed surprise that the "completely desegregated" services had attracted so few black attendees. Graham had earlier observed a decline in black attendance contemporaneous with the desegregation

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[66] *Birmingham World*, 18 March 1955, in BGCA, CN 360, R25.

policy. In Louisville, this occurred in spite of a thoroughly integrated crusade steering committee.[67] In actuality, though, low black attendance had been a reality at many Graham crusades even before the change in seating policy.

By the latter half of the 1950s, desegregation was a declared and increasingly understood policy for all Graham crusades and rallies. According to the evangelist, this desegregation extended to the hotel restaurants where he met with local ministers.[68] His comments and behavior during his desegregated southern crusades, however, suggested an unwillingness to moralize the race issue beyond the level of individual decency, the level of Christian neighborliness. The question of legalized Jim Crow stood outside of the sphere over which Graham consciously exerted influence—the quasi-congregational environment of the crusade service—and, hence, still remained classifiable as a separate "political" question. In the post-*Brown* years, he appears to have viewed his desegregated crusades as violations only of local customs, not of local laws.[69] For Graham, desegregation had expanded from the altar call into the seats; the proper Christian understanding of its status outside the stadium or sanctuary was less certain. Even within the BGEA's own purview, the Graham team clearly felt uncomfortable using language that might imply any agenda other than evangelism. "If the question [of mixed

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[67] *Louisville Courier-Journal*, 28 September 1956, 30 September 1956, 4 October 1956, and 22 October 1956. Crusade committee photograph in "BGEA: LOUISVILLE CRUSADE; SEP 30-OCT 28, 1956," BGCA, CN 1.

[68] "Billy Graham Text," 4 July 1956, FCP, TSLA, 17-6 (R4). In this draft of the *Life* article, Graham specifically cited an incident in Oklahoma City.

[69] Determining the exact legal status of Graham's desegregated crusades during the 1950s is difficult. A comprehensive 1956 study conducted by The Fund for the Republic listed Louisville and Oklahoma City—early locations for desegregated crusades—as among the few Jim Crow cities that featured at least token desegregation polices at events ranging from hotel conventions to the state fair. David Loth and Harold Fleming, *Integration North and South* (New York: The Fund for the Republic, 1956), 100-101, 106.

seating] should arise," Haymaker wrote to the concerned chair of a one-day Tallahassee rally, "we suggest you use the term '[n]on-segregated'; we like it much better than using the word 'integrated.' You can simply say that all people are invited to come and will be welcome in the meeting."[70] When Graham traveled to such civil rights flash points as Little Rock and Montgomery, this dually passive and politic attention to language, combined with a constant re-assertion of his evangelistic priorities, would retain an audience that an established civil rights crusader would have long since lost.

Graham's desegregated services of the mid-1950s represent notable accomplishments within the closed (and still closing) societies of the South, yet they hardly qualify as landmark events in the civil rights struggle. A black newspaper in New Orleans described the opening crusade service there as "the first time in recent times that Negroes have been permitted to attend a huge public Protestant gathering, or otherwise . . . without restrictions."[71] Still, few locations for early desegregated crusades—with New Orleans as a possible exception, even though that demographically distinctive southern city did possess a certain biracial Catholic tradition—had a reputation for intractable segregationism akin to that of Birmingham or Jackson. "Our concern since God laid the matter [of racial prejudice] on our hearts some years ago," Graham said in 1957, "has not been so much to talk as to act, to set an example which might open new paths and stir the consciences of many."[72] In the comparatively moderate settings of Nashville and Louisville during the immediate post-*Brown* years, though, actions did not necessarily

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[70] Haymaker to Harold G. Sanders, 11 November 1960, BGCA, CN 1, 4-18. Haymaker apparently had the job of explaining the BGEA's desegregation policy to crusade and rally committees. See also Haymaker to Graham, 26 May 1959, BGCA, CN 1, 6-7.

[71] *New Orleans Weekly*, 9 October 1954, in BGCA, CN 360, R25.

[72] Graham, "No Color Line in Heaven," 100.

speak louder than words. There, the line separating leadership through unannounced policies from a kind of moral quietism was thin, indeed. In those cities, Graham would have exerted greater influence had he declared his policy more openly.

The evangelist had already used somewhat stronger language, similar to his letter to McGill, during his many appearances at ecclesiastical and denominational gatherings throughout the South and the nation. In 1952, Graham told members of the NAE that the "Church is on the tail end—to our shame!—of progress along racial li[n]es in America today. The Church should be leading instead of following."[73] In an address delivered at the annual meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) that same year, he advocated opening denominational colleges to academically qualified blacks.[74] If the Louisville Citizens' Council did not trust the staying power of Graham's racial positions, others clearly did. For example, the liberal Protestant magazine *Christian Century* published an editorial, titled "Sewanee Says No, Billy Graham Yes," favorably contrasting his criticism of segregation at the 1952 Jackson crusade (for which "many think he will pay dearly") with resistance at the University of the South to the desegregation of its Episcopal seminary.[75] The years preceding the *Brown* decision did see the nominal desegregation of three SBC seminaries, as well as several other leading

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[73] Quoted in Bill Adler, ed., *The Wit and Wisdom of Billy Graham* (New York: Random House, 1967), 141.

[74] *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, 18 May 1952.

[75] "Sewanee Says No, Billy Graham Says Yes," *Christian Century*, 13 August 1952, 934. On the tumultuous desegregation of the University of the South's School of Theology, see Donald Smith Armentrout, *The Quest for the Informed Priest: A History of the School of Theology* (Sewanee, TN: The School of Theology, The University of the South, 1979), 279-312.

seminaries in the region. Following the *Brown* decision, the SBC passed a resolution endorsing the ruling.[76]

In the aftermath of the *Brown* decision and the formalization of Graham's own policy of holding desegregated services, the evangelist gradually grew more vocal on the subject of race. In a March 1955 interview on the television show *Meet the Press*, Graham questioned whether segregation measured up to the standards of either Christianity or the American nation.[77] The timing of the comments, given a few days before he left for a crusade in Scotland, allowed the evangelist to avoid direct criticism at home, while enhancing his image abroad. Within the South, he remained less strident in tone. At a 1956 SBC gathering in Kansas City, Graham praised the pro-*Brown* resolution as a "courageous stand" and argued that the SBC should lead in the area of race relations, just as the denomination had always led in matters of evangelism. The Oklahoma City *Black Dispatch* ran a brief article touting these remarks in anticipation of the Graham crusade there. However, the evangelist chose not to use the more prophetic language of a draft in which he warned that, should his denomination fail on the race issue, "we may eventually find our spiritual power waning and our thrilling statistics only hollow echoes." He also supported a decision at the convention, which took place just two months after the signing of the Southern Manifesto by segregationist congressmen, to table further discussion of racial matters. Still, his comments and actions inspired one historian to argue that the evangelist "influenced Baptists by example."[78]

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[76] Newman, *Getting Right With God*, 23-24. On similar trends regarding Presbyterian seminaries in the South, see Joel L. Alvis, Jr., *Religion and Race: Southern Presbyterians, 1946-1983* (Alabama, 1994), 90.

[77] *Presbyterian Outlook*, 11 April 1955, in BGCA, CN 360, R25.

An Early Affinity for Politics

By the mid-1950s, then, Graham had staked out a moderate desegregationist position centered on evangelistic priorities and a belief that defenders of Jim Crow could not look to the Bible for recourse. In doing so, he had commenced the process of assuming authority not just as a renowned evangelist, but also as a southerner with particular knowledge about the region's populace, black and white. His public comments received notice, even if they remained quite malleable in the minds of interpreters. However, he was not yet the regional leader he would become later in the 1950s and into the following decade. His most significant southern relationships remained largely private in nature and often did not reflect his emerging views on race. They did, moreover, indicate a disconnect between Graham as racial commentator and Graham as political intimate.

Even while Graham moved away from theological fundamentalism and latent segregationism, he maintained close ties with many southern conservatives—politicians, such as South Carolinians James Byrnes and Strom Thurmond, but also religious leaders, such as W. A. Criswell, pastor of the mammoth First Baptist Church in Dallas, Texas. While Criswell later became known as a leading ministerial proponent of Jim Crow, before the *Brown* decision he was simply viewed as a rising star within the SBC. His downtown church had mushroomed into the largest Southern Baptist congregation in the world. Graham and Criswell's relationship dated at least as far back as 1948, when Graham held meetings at First Baptist, and the two dined together two years later during

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[78] Graham address, Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives (SBHLA), Christian Life Commission—Minutes, 1956, 1-13. Oklahoma City *Black Dispatch*, 1 June 1956, in BGCA, CN 360, R8. Deletion in *The Christian Index*, 7 June 1956, 7, in SBHLA. Newman, *Getting Right With God*, 69-70.

a Graham revival in Charlotte. In 1953, in the midst of his Dallas crusade, Graham publicly requested membership at First Baptist. The evangelist explained his decision by noting that Criswell's church would not place the same demands on his time as would a congregation closer to home. (In reality, Graham could have said the same of his former church, Curtis Baptist in Augusta, Georgia.) Taking membership at First Baptist represented a savvy move for Graham, who confessed admiration for swaggering Texans and who often wore a cowboy hat during the early 1950s.[79] The membership of First Baptist later included oil baron H.L. Hunt, an eccentric multimillionaire and rabid right-wing activist who became a fan of the BGEA, especially team member Grady Wilson. Graham's connections in the state stretched beyond First Baptist and extended deep into the pockets of, to name a few major supporters, defense and energy magnate Russell Maguire (a right-winger of Texas-sized proportions), industrialist and evangelical philanthropist R. G. LeTourneau, and most significantly, Dallas-area oilman Sid Richardson, who introduced the evangelist to two rising politicians, John Connally and Lyndon Johnson. The titles of the BGEA's first two feature films, *Mr. Texas* and *Oiltown, U.S.A.*, drew from the well of this Lone Star prospecting.[80]

Many times throughout his career Graham would admit a deep interest in, and attraction to, the world of politics. Were it not for his calling to the ministry, Graham

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[79] *Northwestern Pilot*, January 1948, in BGCA, CN 360, R61. W. A. Criswell, *Standing on the Promises: The Autobiography of W. A. Criswell* (Waco, TX: World, 1990), 186-188. "Graham Fills Cotton Bowl," undated, unidentified newspaper clipping in Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library, Eisenhower, Dwight D.: Records as President. President's Personal Files. 966-"PPF 1052 Graham, Billy." *Boston Globe*, 27 March 1950, in BGCA, CN 360, R1.

[80] Carol Flake, *Redemptorama: Culture, Politics, and the New Evangelicalism* (Garden City, NY: Anchor, 1984), 52, 126. Martin, *Prophet*, 300, 135, 139-140. *Dallas Daily Times Herald*, 8 June 1953, in BGCA, CN 360, R5.

declared in 1950, he might have chosen a career in public service.[81] In practice, the evangelist never kept these vocations as far apart as his membership in a denomination long friendly toward the Establishment Clause might have suggested. As Graham grew in national stature, he befriended a wide range of political movers and shakers from both parties. His early connections, though, ran deepest among southern Democrats, including Tennessee Governor Frank Clement, Mississippi Senator John Stennis, South Carolina Representative Mendel Rivers, Virginia Senator A. Willis Robertson, and Alabama Representative Frank Boykin. Speaker of the House Sam Rayburn, a Texan, permitted Graham to hold the final service of his 1952 Washington, DC, crusade on the steps of the Capitol Building.[82] "I had more friends in the Democratic Party than I did in the Republican Party," Graham recalled; "being a southerner, I knew most of them."[83] He regularly consulted with these and other political figures who ran the ideological gamut from pious moderates to staunch segregationists. Stennis, with whom Graham traveled to the 1952 Democratic Party convention, clearly fell into the latter camp, as did two other friends of the evangelist, Strom Thurmond and James Byrnes.[84] Supporting the evangelist even as his racial positions became better known, one historian has argued, "was a chance that segregationist politicians took, for it was more dangerous to oppose such a popular figure than it was to fudge the hard line of resistance [to desegregation]."[85] Supporting Graham was hardly a political risk, however, during the years before the

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[81] *Columbia* (SC) *State*, 26 March 1950, in BGCA, CN 360, R1.

[82] Martin, *Prophet*, 143.

[83] Graham, *Just As I Am*, 448.

[84] Jackson, MS, press conference transcript, 7 May 1975.

[85] Chappell, *Stone of Hope*, 141.

evangelist was publicly identified with desegregationism. His self-described electoral philosophy actually paralleled that of the many ambivalent southern Democrats who had grown increasingly comfortable with the thought of supporting Republican presidential candidates: "Though a registered Democrat (a sort of birthright in the part of the South where I came from), I always voted for the man and not the party."[86]

During the early 1950s, Graham's links with politicians who would soon stoke the political flames of massive resistance were tighter than his relationships with southern political moderates. These connections were prominently on display during his 1950 crusade in Columbia, South Carolina, where the Graham team first employed the term "crusade" (rather than "campaign").[87] In addition to staying in Governor Strom Thurmond's mansion, Graham inspired an outbreak of civil religion in the state capital. Thurmond, less than two years removed from his presidential run as a Dixiecrat and more than a decade away from his trend-setting switch to the Republican Party, officially declared the last day of the crusade "South Carolina Revival Day" and signed a proclamation calling the crusade the "greatest religious gathering ever held in South Carolina—if not the South." Thurmond and his bitter political rival, U.S. Senator Olin Johnson, posed around a Bible with Graham. In Columbia, the evangelist addressed the state general assembly and also met and befriended conservative *Time* magazine publisher Henry Luce, an encounter historian Numan Bartley has termed "an important event in the marriage of southern fundamentalism and northern anticommunism." While in the state, Graham found time to spend a weekend at the Spartanburg home of James

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[86] Graham, *Just As I Am*, 188.

[87] Martin, *Prophet*, 129.

Byrnes, a former Secretary of State under Franklin Roosevelt who went on to carry the segregationist banner as governor of South Carolina during the early 1950s.[88] At the time, when Graham rarely spoke about race in public, he gave few initial indications of a willingness to step on the toes of the southern political establishment.

During the same year as the Columbia crusade, in fact, Graham received overtures about potentially joining that establishment. Several Democratic Party officials from North Carolina approached Graham about running to oust the state's sitting senator, a campaign that would have pitted him against former University of North Carolina President Frank Porter Graham, a childhood neighbor and friend of the evangelist's father. Byrnes likely had a hand in the offer.[89] Although Graham did not seriously consider running, the possible 1950 campaign offers insight into his perceived political usefulness. An evangelical writer described the opposition among Tar Heel conservatives to Frank Porter Graham, a leading and well-respected southern liberal who held "radical ideas on race, religion, and politics" out of step with the region's traditions. Consequentially, certain North Carolinians had discussed running Billy Graham against the sitting senator.[90] (Senator Graham would go on to lose a primary run-off that featured

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[88] *Columbia* (SC) *Record*, 4 and 10 March 1950. *Atlanta Journal*, 28 February 1950. Numan V. Bartley, *The New South, 1945-1980: The Story of the South's Modernization* (LSU, 1995), 274. *Greenville* (SC) *Piedmont*, 20 March 1950, in BGCA, CN 360, R1.

[89] AP article, unidentified South Carolina paper, 20 March 1950, in BGCA, CN 360, R1; and *Portland Oregonian*, 7 August 1950, in BGCA, CN 360, R3. The AP article observed that Graham "has not disclosed his political affiliations—if any—but his sermons have contained criticism of deficit spending," a common GOP complaint during the time. According to Martin, the invitation to run for the Senate (and possibly for the presidency in 1956) came from "a former member of Roosevelt's cabinet" (a category Byrnes fell into). At this point in the early 1950s, Graham would not rule out a future run for office. Martin, *Prophet*, 146. According the Billy Graham's father, he and Frank Porter Graham were not related, but grew up within a few miles of each other. See clipping, *Chattanooga News-Free Press*, 30 August 1952, in BGEA Photo Album IV, BGCA, CN 17.

overt race-baiting.) One year later, in 1951, Louisville lawyer James T. Robertson (who represented evangelist Mordecai Ham) wrote to David Lawrence, the conservative editor of *US News & World Report*, proposing the evangelist's service on behalf of an ideologically parallel cause, an effort to nominate conservative Minnesota Congressman Walter Judd, a Republican, for the presidency, with Byrnes as his running mate.[91] Graham did not join the unsuccessful effort, although either he or one of his team members was undoubtedly aware of the offer to do so. Later, the right-wing, anti-Semitic *American Mercury*, controlled by Russell Maguire, suggested Graham as an ideal presidential nominee; the magazine's other recommendations included Strom Thurmond and Mississippi Senator James O. Eastland.[92] In 1957, an Eisenhower-supporting Democrat from Oklahoma organized a quixotic and short-lived "Graham-for-President club" movement.[93] As the aforementioned editorial in the *Richmond Times-Dispatch* indicated, Graham's moderate comments on race often lacked discernable coordinates on the political spectrum. Throughout the mid-1950s, observers clearly assumed his politics leaned well to the right. His strong support for President Eisenhower suggested a somewhat more complex dynamic, however.

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[90] Donald E. Hoke, "Knowledge on Fire," *Christian Life*, July 1949, 9, in BGCA, CN 360, R61. In 1958, Graham told *Holiday* magazine that he had received overtures from political conservatives about running in the Democratic Party primary against the incumbent Senator of North Carolina, Kerr Scott. See Noel Houston, "Billy Graham—Part II," *Holiday*, March 1958, 114.

[91] James T. Robertson to David Lawrence, 10 November 1951, BGCA, CN 544, 1-1. A former missionary to China (like Graham's in-laws), Judd possessed strong ties to the China Lobby and other conservative anticommunist projects. See Sara Diamond, *Roads to Dominion: Right-Wing Movements and Political Power in the United States* (New York: Guilford Press, 1995), 104.

[92] *American Mercury* clipping, undated (likely mid- or -late 1950s), in BGCA, CN 360, R54. Graham contributed to, and received additional praise from, the publication. See, for example, Graham, "Our World in Chaos: the Cause and Cure," *American Mercury*, July 1956, 21-27; and front cover, *American Mercury*, June 1957.

[93] *Oklahoma City Times*, 13 June 1957; and *Jamaica* (NY) *L. I. Press*, 23 June 1957; both in BGCA, CN 360, R26.

A Theological Defeat for Jim Crow

The lack of synergy between Graham's relationships with southern politicians and his statements and actions in the area of race relations raises questions about his overall influence within the region during the pre- and early *Brown* years. During this time, his emerging racial positions ruffled few feathers and did not threaten his existing friendships with strongly segregationist politicians. In this brief period of relative flexibility in southern relations, Graham's embrace of desegregated seating was rarely received as a slap in the face of regional mores. It can be counted as among the many, largely unpublicized forms of desegregation that occurred in the years immediately preceding and following *Brown*. At the same time, Graham's evolution on race eliminated his candidacy as a potential ally of segregationists. While by no means an activist and while rarely incautious, Graham began criticizing segregation in religious settings and attacking the use of Christianity in support of Jim Crow a decade and a half before many of his southern peers publicly arrived at such positions. Criswell, for example, did not formally endorse desegregated church services until 1968.[94] Like Criswell, Graham commanded appeal among grassroots white southerners well-removed from the more racially liberal spheres of denominational publishing houses and policy committees. This appeal gave the evangelist tangible influence in the region or, at the very least, contributed to deference to his desegregationist policies. Graham was not simply a role model, then; he could effect the desegregation of major public gatherings in the late Jim Crow South.

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[94] James E. Towns, ed., *The Social Conscience of W. A. Criswell* (Dallas, TX: Crescendo Publications, 1977), 162-171. Graham embraced church desegregation nearly two decades ahead of another notable segregationist divine, Jerry Falwell. See Martin, *With God on Our Side: The Rise of the Religious Right in America* (New York: Broadway, 1996), 55-58, 68-72.

Graham's early shift toward racial moderation challenges how historians have viewed the religious status of segregationism during the civil rights era. Writing in the aftermath of scholar Samuel Hill's criticism of white southern Christianity—what one historian has called the "cultural captivity thesis"—interpreters of southern religion have considered to what extent white southern Christianity offered the implicit sanctification of Jim Crow that Hill had perceived. Hill himself did not stress the overt doctrinalization of segregation within southern evangelicalism, but rather the removal of faith from the realm of social questions.[95] Historians Paul Harvey and Bill Leonard have each identified a more specific theologized racism, thus adding greater nuance to the Hill thesis. Leonard, who focused largely on fundamentalist independent Baptists, found a "theology for racism" that viewed civil rights activism "as a violation of fundamentalist dogma and biblical norms." Harvey, whose work addresses southern lay figures (but also a few SBC ministers), argues that his actors evinced a "segregationist folk theology." As both Leonard and Harvey have recognized, their subjects did not argue for segregation as a theological positive good so much as they constructed a religious worldview that permitted and encouraged the existence of a racial hierarchy. In that sense, their findings are in keeping with Hill's larger understanding of white southern Christianity.[96]

Historian David Chappell has attempted to turn the culture-faith thesis on its head. "The historically significant thing about white religion in the 1950-60s is not its failure to join the civil rights movement," Chappell argues. "The significant thing . . . is that it

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[95] Samuel S. Hill, *Southern Churches in Crisis Revisited* (Alabama, 1999). Harvey, "God and Negroes," 285.

[96] Harvey, *Freedom's Coming: Religious Culture and the Shaping of the South from the Civil War through the Civil Rights Era* (UNC, 2005), 229-245; and "God and Negroes," 287, 285-291 passim. Bill Leonard, "A Theology for Racism," 168.

failed in any meaningful way to join the anti-civil rights movement." Because the "white religious leaders of the South did not care deeply enough about segregation to make its defense the most important thing in their lives," Chappell continues, segregationists turned their ammunition on the mixing of faith and politics, arguing that pastors overstepped their bounds when they discussed racial matters.[97]

More recently, historian Jane Dailey has contested Chappell's description of an atrophied southern religious segregationism. She rightly suggests that historians often have employed an overly normative standard when evaluating the faith dynamics of late Jim Crow, defining out of religion those views contradicting the seemingly more authentic (read: prophetic) faith of Martin Luther King, Jr., and others. Adopting a broader, somewhat more operational conception of religion than does Chappell, Dailey stresses the religious nature of Jim Crow's elephant in the room: sexuality. "It was through sex," she writes, "that racial segregation in the South moved from being a local social practice to a part of the divine plan for the world." For Dailey, segregation addressed manifold matters of ultimate concern.[98]

In light of Dailey's arguments, Graham's desegregated crusades could attain a certain cosmological significance in the area of race relations. To the extent it existed, though, this significance was undoubtedly more incidental than intentional. The spatial arrangement of a desegregated crusade did not enflame white anxieties about interracial

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[97] Chappell, *Stone of Hope*, 107, 150, 122. Harvey notes a similar phenomenon, yet places its emergence in the 1960s. Harvey, "God and Negroes," 284. A contemporary observer, Vanderbilt Divinity School professor James Sellers, identified segregationism as fundamentally a "religious issue," yet stressed its "dying spirit" and declining "authentic folk quality." See Sellers, *The South and Christian Ethics* (New York: Association Press, 1962), 118-128.

[98] Jane Dailey, "Sex, Segregation, and the Sacred after *Brown*," *Journal of American History* 91.1 (June 2004): 120, 122; 119-144 passim.

intimacy in the same manner as, say, the integration of a public high school. Graham attempted to recuse himself from the explicitly political questions of Jim Crow in a manner paralleling the Hill thesis. However, only a proponent of Graham's own social theology would describe his crusades as wholly lacking political import. His role in the South appears more notable when considered in terms of Chappell's topic of interest, the theological authority possessed by either avowed segregationists or, in the case of Graham and his team, moderate desegregationists. Here, the most striking trend concerned the overall theological poverty of religious defenders of Jim Crow as they slouched away from the New Testament's Bethlehem, birthplace of a Christ who mingled with the outcasts of his society, and back toward such exegetical compensations as the Old Testament's Hamitic curse, a favorite proof text of nineteenth-century defenders of the discredited institution of slavery.[99] Graham's evasive contention during his Jackson crusade that the Bible says nothing about segregation represented a classic example of his instinctive tendency to compromise in the face of public pressure; but the evangelist only momentarily arrested his movement toward desegregationism. Graham did not contend that the Bible *endorsed* segregation. His subsequent behavior and actions confirmed the fact that segregationism faced theological defeat well before it faced political demise.

Graham, a religiously conservative southern evangelical, suggests the fairly early timing of this loss. "When southern ministers of Rev. Graham's influence begin to speak out against the evils of segregation," predicted a black North Carolina newspaper in

[99] The Hamitic curse refers to the biblical Noah's curse on Canaan, offspring of Noah's son, Ham: "Cursed be Canaan; a slave of slaves shall he be to his brothers" (Genesis 9:25, Revised Standard Version). According to apologists for slavery and, later, for racial segregation, black Africans descended from Canaan and, hence, comprised a biblically-sanctioned servant class. See Stephen R. Haynes, *Noah's Curse: The Biblical Justification of American Slavery* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).

1955, “it[’]s a sure sign that the day of its departure is near at hand.”[100] Such a forecast represented wishful thinking about both the end of Jim Crow and the role of white southern ministers in bringing about its closure. Still, Graham’s words had clearly attracted notice. By no means did the evangelist create or drive the argument that segregation lacked a theological defense; generations of black theologians had already tilled that ground.[101] However, his accessible critique of segregation in Christian practice lent the theological defeat of Jim Crow a quality of common sense, even as the exact relationship of his arguments to political and grassroots efforts for racial change remained ambiguous. “The church should voluntarily be doing what the courts are doing by compulsion,” Graham told a national magazine six months after the *Brown* decision.[102]

Race had not trumped evangelism on Graham’s priority list. Yet race was an issue he could scarcely—and, increasingly, chose not to—avoid. His moderate style and his friendship with numerous southern leaders gave him unusual access to a range of regional actors. This status made him attractive as a potential consultant, advisor, or mediator for someone such as President Dwight Eisenhower. By the latter half of the 1950s, Graham grew more willing to accept a summons to regional leadership.

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[100] *Durham Times*, 19 March 1955, in BGCA, CN 360, R25.

[101] See, for example, Howard Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1976 [1949]).

[102] Lewis W. Gillenson, “Billy Graham: Can he save the world from sin?” *McCall’s*, November 1954, 98, in BGCA, CN 360, R64.

CHAPTER III

EVANGELICAL UNIVERSALISM AND THE POLITICS OF DECENCY

Christ was not so much a reformer as he was a transformer.

Billy Graham[1]

We must respect the law, but keep in mind that it is powerless to change the human heart.

Billy Graham[2]

The brand of regional leadership Graham adopted required that he convincingly differentiate himself from leading figures on the southern right. One such person was W. A. Criswell, pastor of First Baptist Church in Dallas, where Graham kept membership. In February 1956, the firebrand Criswell delivered a well-publicized and subsequently infamous address to a joint session of the South Carolina legislature in which he endorsed segregation in both society and the church. Elsewhere in Columbia, Criswell castigated integrationists as "a bunch of infidels, dying from the neck up." Pressed for a response to this rhetorical gauntlet, Graham averred that Criswell and he had "never seen eye to eye on the race question. My views have been expressed many times and are well known."[3]

In truth, Graham's views were only beginning to enter public consciousness during a time when the Montgomery bus boycott and the school integration crisis

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[1] *Hour of Decision* sermon, "Solving Our Race Problems through Love," 25 August 1963, Billy Graham Center Archives (BGCA), CN 191, T711c.

[2] *Knoxville News-Sentinel*, 15 December 1958.

[3] *Bible Baptist Tribune*, 5 July 1968 [reprint of Religious News Service, 24 February 1956].

grabbed the headlines. These developments cast a spotlight on his identity as a southerner. National politicians, such as President Dwight Eisenhower, and national publications, such as *Christian Century*, looked to the evangelist to exert regional leadership concerning desegregation and race relations, as did a number of persons inside the South. As the decade continued, Graham stopped merely responding to the events happening around him and started carving out his own space and agenda. By the close of 1957, he had positioned himself in the discursive middle ground between the segregationist right and the integrationist left—that is, between his pastor, Criswell, and another Baptist and southerner, Martin Luther King, Jr. In national venues, but less commonly from the crusade pulpit, Graham criticized legalized Jim Crow, condemned racial violence, and continued to attack biblical justifications for segregation. These positions cost him support in the white South. Following his comments about Criswell, the evangelist reportedly received several calls from First Baptist congregants demanding that he relinquish his membership.[4] At the same time, Graham remained publicly skeptical of legislative or judicial solutions to the civil rights crisis, preferring instead to stress the evangelical themes of "neighbor-love" and the transformation of society through individual conversions. Even though his stature in both the South and the nation gave him great leeway to express his views, he typically strove to avoid offending all but the most intransigent defenders of Jim Crow.

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[4] "Nation Eyes Dixie Christians," *Christian Life*, June 1956, 13, in BGCA, CN 360, R65. The 1956 flap was not the first time Graham had faced inquiries about First Baptist church and, by extension, about Criswell. One year earlier, in response to a relatively innocent question from an interviewer likely unfamiliar with Criswell, Graham had doubted whether First Baptist would turn away non-whites from services. See *Presbyterian Outlook*, 11 April 1955, in BGCA, CN 360, R25.

During the latter half of the 1950s, Graham emerged as a regional leader. This shift was reflected in his many public and private actions regarding the South: publishing articles about race relations in national publications; consulting with southern church leaders and national politicians on racial matters; and, finally, holding rallies in two violence-torn cities. In engaging his region, Graham functioned not only in his self-described role as an evangelist, but also as a type of politician, subject to the tendencies of elected political leaders: vacillation between grandstanding and caution amid attempts to balance seemingly contradictory constituencies. On a more literal level, Graham's activities in the South were intimately—at times, inextricably—connected with his service as an advisor to, and supporter of, Dwight Eisenhower. Their relationship sheds critical light on the origins of the evangelist's seemingly obvious, yet persistently elusive, leanings toward the Republican Party. His projected persona appeared to transcend partisanship even as his comments routinely buttressed the policy agenda and southern ambitions of Eisenhower. As an evangelist, Graham could stand removed from the fray of both the politics of rage and the politics of protest. Instead, he endorsed and advocated a moderate politics of decency rooted in an evangelical social perspective that straddled and selectively engaged the polarized racial discourse of the period. Here, as in so many areas of his career, the spheres of religion and politics blended almost beyond distinction.

Evangelical Universalism

Beginning in 1955 and continuing into the early 1960s, Graham used national media outlets to communicate his views concerning race relations and civil rights. Although Graham had discussed segregation in 1955 appearances on *Meet the Press* and

before the National Press Club, his first widely disseminated foray into racial issues came with an October 1956 article printed in *Life* magazine, a publication operated by Graham supporter Henry Luce.[5] Originally drafted by a *Life* writer and based on interviews with the evangelist, the essay partially fulfilled Graham's promise to Eisenhower that he would provide leadership in promoting racial tolerance and moderation.[6] The evangelist published the article with some reluctance.[7] The "vast majority of the ministers in the South," he wrote of both black and white clerics, were "not extremists on either side" of the race issue. They supported desegregation of such services as public transportation, hotels, and restaurants, while remaining skeptical of the current feasibility of school integration in the Deep South. Observing a decline in race relations since the *Brown* decision, most ministers who had talked with the evangelist "confessed that the church is doing far too little about it." In the article, Graham announced his policy of holding "nonsegregated" services and systematically dismantled two common biblical proof texts for segregation: the Hamitic curse and the Old Testament commandment that Israelites separate themselves from other peoples. Noah, not God, had cursed a son of Ham (and he had done so after awakening from a drunken slumber). Ham's descendents, the evangelist confidently contended, were white Canaanites, not black Africans. The social separatism of the Israelites was based on religious, not racial, principles. Moreover, he added, Jesus specifically countered the racialism of his own people by praising gentiles

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[5] *Presbyterian Outlook*, 11 April 1955; and *Baltimore Sun*, 5 August 1955; both in BGCA, CN 360, R25. Billy Graham, "Billy Graham Makes Plea for an End to Intolerance," *Life*, 1 October 1956, 138-151.

[6] For more on Graham and Eisenhower, see below.

[7] The *Life* author wrote that Graham is "doubtful about the wisdom of his writing on this subject now." See "Billy Graham Text," 4 July 1956, Frank Goad Clement Papers (FCP), Tennessee State Library and Archives (TSLA), Box 17, Folder 6 (R4).

and moving among the outcast Samaritans. For the present times, Graham's prescription for improved race relations required "more than justice: the principle of the Golden Rule, the spirit of neighbor-love, and the experience of redemptive love and forgiveness."[8]

This prioritization of relational love and personal redemption over mere legal remedies suggests the article's slippery prescriptions, as well as its underlying conservative assumptions. Draft references to Graham crusades as "fully 'integrated'" (rather than "nonsegregated") and to segregation as "both UnAmerican and UnChristian" (labels he had used regarding segregation on at least two previous occasions) did not appear in the printed version, while politically ambiguous anecdotes survived the final edit.[9] After attacking biblical defenses of Jim Crow, for example, Graham noted that black attendance at his desegregated services had not approached that of his segregated 1952 crusade in Jackson. Negroes, he declared, balked at legalized segregation, but often preferred to mingle among themselves. In another telling anecdote, Graham told of an idealistic, integrationist minister who became a racial moderate after moving to the South. While seeming to endorse basic legal remedies to Jim Crow, Graham voiced a modest version of the strongly held position of his father-in-law, Nelson Bell, that some voluntary forms of segregation were permissible. The evangelist also defended his native South. "Prejudice is not just a sectional problem," he wrote, labeling criticism of the South "[o]ne of the most popular indoor sports of some northerners these days." He ended with a story suggesting a distinctly regional model for improved race relations:

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[8] Graham, "Plea," 138, 140, 143.

[9] "Billy Graham Text," FCP, TSLA, R4. *Presbyterian Outlook*, 11 April 1955; and *Baltimore Sun*, 5 August 1955; both in BGCA, CN 360, R25.

> [S]hortly after the close of the Civil War, a Negro entered a fashionable church in Richmond, Va., on Sunday morning while communion was being served. He walked down the aisle and knelt at the altar. A rustle of shock and anger swept through the congregation. Sensing the situation, a distinguished layman immediately stood up, stepped forward to the altar and knelt beside his colored brother. Captured by his spirit, the congregation followed this magnanimous example.
> The layman who set the example was Robert E. Lee.[10]

Despite the mixed message inherent in invoking a Confederate hero on behalf of racial tolerance, Graham did call for the church to take a greater role in fostering improved race relations. He did so, however, in explicitly evangelical terms, linking social progress with personal salvation. "The church, if it aims to be the true church," he wrote, "dares not segregate the message of good racial relations from the message of regeneration, for . . . man as sinner is prone to desert God and neighbor alike." The most lasting advances in race relations would thus derive from individual conversions to Christ's message of salvation and love. "Any man who has a genuine conversion experience will find his racial attitudes greatly changed," the evangelist concluded.[11]

Graham published three subsequent articles—in *Ebony*, *U.S. News & World Report*, and *Reader's Digest*, respectively—which alternately reflected and amplified his contribution to *Life*. The *Ebony* piece—published in September 1957 with the kicker, "Southern-born evangelist declares war on bigotry"—contained a more strident tone than the *Life* article. The difference was attributable both to the magazine's primary readership, upwardly-mobile blacks, and to the timing of the article, the aftermath of the New York City crusade, where the Graham team had made special efforts to appeal to

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[10] Graham, "Plea," 144, 140, 143, 138, 146, 151. Historian Alan T. Nolan described the accuracy of this popular story about Lee as "highly unlikely." See Nolan, *Lee Considered: General Robert E. Lee and Civil War History* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press [UNC], 1991), 207.

[11] Graham, "Plea," 144, 146.

African Americans. In the article, which reflected comments the evangelist had made in New York, he promised a revival "to wipe away racial discrimination" and supremacist sentiments. More importantly, for the first time to a national audience, Graham overtly came out in favor of anti-segregation legislation. He did not clarify exactly what such laws would entail, however, and quickly added that, absent Christian love, they would result in "nothing but cold war."[12]

Graham also emphasized the literal Cold War in his *Ebony* piece—a theme he revisited in articles published in the much more racially conservative venues of *U.S. News & World Report* and *Reader's Digest*. "Race prejudice," Graham apocalyptically wrote in *Ebony*, "is a cancer eating at the heart and core of American life and, therefore, threatening to eclipse the dawn of peace and justice for all humanity."[13] As a fervent cold warrior who lent his visage and voice to at least one United States Information Agency propaganda reel in the late 1950s, Graham ardently supported efforts to enhance the reputation of America overseas.[14] His 1960 tour of Africa—during which he held desegregated meetings in Northern and Southern Rhodesia, while refusing to visit apartheid South Africa until he could do the same—inspired the contributions to *U.S. News & World Report* and *Reader's Digest*.[15] The Africa tour only reinforced his

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[12] Graham, "No Color Line in Heaven," *Ebony*, September 1957, 99, 100, 102. According to one scholar, Graham first endorsed anti-segregation legislation in an address given during the New York City crusade at a Baptist church in Brooklyn. See Jerry Berl Hopkins, "Billy Graham and the Race Problem, 1949-1969" (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Kentucky, 1986), 79. "I am convinced that we need legislation in the country," Graham was quoted as saying. See *Amsterdam News*, 20 July 1957, in BGCA, CN 360, R26.

[13] Graham, "No Color Line," 102.

[14] "INTERVIEW WITH BILLY GRAHAM," undated [1957 or 1958] film, Records of the United States Information Agency records (USIA), National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), video copy of USIA film 306.2143.

description of America's racial hypocrisy as "one of its greatest black eyes" in a largely non-white world.[16] Likewise, Graham wrote in those articles, the "embarrassment" of racism threatened to "weaken us to the point where communism will gain the ultimate victory." He called for Christians to "banish Jim Crow from their midst" and again endorsed basic legal remedies, yet he also warned of excessive "belligerence" among both black and white integrationists. While "convinced that 'Jim Crow' must go," he declared that society "cannot make two races love each other and accept each other at the point of bayonets."[17] Although the evangelist embraced the end of Jim Crow on both moral and political grounds, he only endorsed remedies that he believed would not result in the kind of tensions present in Little Rock and elsewhere. Such friction-free solutions were, of course, difficult to identify.

Graham's public commentaries on racial matters lacked intellectual depth and exposed the evangelist to charges of inconsistency. A glaring dearth of symmetry existed between his passionate calls for ending personal prejudice among Christians and his significantly less enthusiastic support for dismantling the actual legal structures of Jim Crow. Like a candidate running for office, Graham avoided committing himself to all but the most general of prescriptions for combating racist practices. Unlike most politicians,

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[15] AP article, undated [1960]; and "3,000 see crusade launched," undated [February 1960]; both in BGCA, CN 360, R14. "So. Africa Bias Is Hit By Graham," undated [1960], in BGCA, CN 360, R54. Graham finally held desegregated meetings in South Africa in 1973.

[16] Graham, "No Color Line," 100.

[17] Quoted in Graham, "Why Don't Our Churches Practice the Brotherhood They Preach?" *Reader's Digest*, August 1960, 52, 53, 54; and "No Solution to Race Problem 'At the Point of Bayonets,'" *U.S. News and World Report*, 25 April 1960 [originally written for UPI], 94. Although seemingly written for a white audience, the *Reader's Digest* article was reprinted in the leading journal of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, alongside a photograph of Graham receiving an honor from the president of Liberia. See *The AME Church Review* 78.205 (July-September 1960): 52-56. Black activist Robert Williams, meanwhile, mocked the Africa visit as an effort to "peddle the American racist way of life." Untitled piece, *The Crusader*, 5 March 1960.

however, Graham claimed spiritual and moral authority as a minister of God; he implicitly asked to be held to a higher standard than other public figures. Despite his tepidness and inconsistency, though, he proffered to his audiences something more than, as one scholar has charged, a simple belief that "religion, like politics, had a duty to uphold the status quo."[18]

In explaining his positions on racial and other socio-political matters, Graham evinced an evangelical social ethic centered on the individual soul and will, and predicated on the universal commonality of divinely created humans. This social ethic, here called evangelical universalism, viewed the individual soul as the primary theological and political unit in society, prioritized relational over legislative solutions to social problems, and tended to acquiesce to the ultimately inscrutable realm of ordained authority. According to this ethic (which should not be confused with the inclusive soteriology, or doctrine of salvation, also called "universalism"), the most effective forms of social change emanated from the conversion of individual souls. The theological content and socio-political biases of evangelical universalism distinguished it from the "liberal universalism" which pervaded the political culture of post-World War II reform movements.[19] The differences between evangelical and liberal universalism, while quite evident at the start of the civil rights era, grew even sharper at the close of the period, when southern boosters attempted to cast the region as having surmounted its racial

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[18] Lewis V. Baldwin, *The Legacy of Martin Luther King, Jr.: The Boundaries of Law, Politics, and Religion* (South Bend, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2002), 87, 92, 93, 85 (quoted in 85). Baldwin quoted the theologian Harvey Cox.

[19] Historian Bruce Schulman defined "liberal universalism" as the "belief in the fundamental unity and sameness of all mankind," meaning that "every person possessed the same intrinsic worth, deserved the same opportunities, [and] shared the same basic aspirations." See Schulman, *Lyndon Johnson and American Liberalism* (Boston: Bedford St. Martin's, 1995), 83.

problems. In the context of the American South during the latter half of the 1950s and the first half of the 1960s, Graham invoked the values of evangelical universalism to offer a theologically grounded, common sense critique of both racism and racialism. He also drew from the ethic to defend his region and to question the value of legislative or other operational routes to social change.

The universalism of Graham and many of his evangelical peers derived not from an optimistic reading of human nature, but rather from a theological recognition of the common condition of individual souls: created, sinful, and requiring salvation. In a 1966 address to an international gathering of evangelicals in Berlin, Graham chided himself and his peers for not always emphasizing the "[b]iblical unity of the human race. All men are one in the humanity created by God himself. All men are one in the common need of divine redemption, and all are offered salvation in Jesus Christ." By themselves, these were hardly radical words; Christians of most persuasions nominally professed some version of these principles. As is readily apparent to students of Christianity in the white South, moreover, the "inclusionary impulses of evangelical Christianity" (to use the words of historian Derek Chang) have often coexisted comfortably with racial hierarchies. In other words, spiritual and social equality could be, and often were, as separated as public schools or church sanctuaries were segregated. Spurred by motivations both religious and secular, though, Graham by the mid-1950s had begun drawing connections between the two types of equality. Later referring to humanity as "one race," the evangelist spoke for his Berlin audience in rejecting "the notion that men are unequal because of distinction of race or color. In the name of Scripture and Jesus

Christ we condemn racialism wherever it appears."[20] The frontiers of evangelism for Graham had always extended beyond both the physical and spiritual walls of the church; increasingly, the implications of his evangelical universalism did so, as well.

Those implications, however, gained expression largely in individuated terms—more specifically, in the language of individual souls. Graham wrote in the pages of the conservative magazine *American Mercury*: "Society is made up of individuals. So long as you have a man in society who hates and lies and steals and is deceitful, you have the possibility of racial intolerance; you have the possibility of war; you have the possibility of economic injustice."[21] He viewed larger social problems as manifestations of core individual ones. "Our international problems and racial tensions," he stated in 1963, "are only reflections of individual problems and tensions."[22] A year later he told a group of media executives that, before altering social structures, "we must change man first. Our great problem today is not social. . . . Our problem is man himself. We've got to change man."[23] The solution had to begin with individual souls. "Society cannot repent corporately," Graham argued in another *American Mercury* article.[24] For the evangelist, then, only the individual will—effectively, the intellectual corollary of the soul—could

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[20] Berlin address quoted in David Lockard, *The Unheard Billy Graham* (Waco, Texas: Word Books, 1971), 123; and Graham, "Stains on the Altar," 4 November 1966 sermon, BGCA, CN 14, T13. The theme of the Berlin Congress was "One Race, One Gospel, One Task." See Carl F. H. Henry, *Evangelicalism at the Brink of Crisis* (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1967), 3. Derek Chang, "'Marked in Body, Mind, and Spirit': Home Missionaries and the Remaking of Race and Nation," in *Race, Nation, and Religion in the Americas*, ed. Henry Goldschmidt and Elizabeth McAlister (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 135.

[21] Quoted in Lockard, *Unheard*, 95.

[22] "Solving Our Race Problems," BGCA 191, T711e.

[23] "LIFE Meeting" address, 19 May 1964, BGCA, CN 1, Box 6, Folder 9 (6-9).

[24] Graham, "A Christian America," *American Mercury*, March 1955, 72, in BGCA, CN 360, R64.

stimulate change in one's life and, by secondary extension, in society as a whole. In Graham's theology, as a student of the evangelist has written, "[t]he human will represents an autonomous ego."[25] Acceptance of Christ, of course, represented the ultimate willful decision for Graham, a choice from which all lasting social change derived. His avowed model for revival-driven social change was eighteenth-century Wesleyanism, which he claimed had contributed generations of reformers to Great Britain.[26] "Our hope," the evangelist declared in his Berlin address, "is . . . that social reform in areas where it's needed can be done by men who have been converted and who believe the Gospel." Such work comprised the realm of "social concern," a term Graham and his evangelical peers employed in reference to those Christian activities in the public, or "social," sphere outside of evangelism. The pervasiveness of the term demonstrates how white American evangelicals tended to place social activism in a mental category separate from, and secondary to, traditional missionary efforts.[27]

The born-again moment, described by theologian Carl F. H. Henry and other evangelicals as "regeneration," thus comprised the most legitimate (or perhaps the only wholly legitimate) starting point for transforming a fallen society. That transformation would occur on a soul-by-soul and then a relational basis. The emphasis on individual salvation as a trigger for social change is an oft-cited characteristic of evangelical social engagement. Henry contrasted the "transformation of society" with educational and legislative efforts aimed at "preserving what is worth preserving in the present social

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[25] Timo Pokki, *America's Preacher and His Message: Billy Graham's View of Conversion and Sanctification* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1999), 92, 135-143 (quoted in 141).

[26] Hopkins, "Race Problem," 23-24.

[27] Graham, "Stains," BGCA, CN 14, T13.

order." Henry and his generation of evangelicals tended to associate the state—and, by extension, the law—with coercive power. Transformation through regeneration, by contrast, "rests upon spiritual power," as "[e]vangelism and revival remain the original wellsprings of evangelical humanitarianism and social awakening."[28] Regeneration first entailed the divine forgiveness of the individual sins. Its social component likewise would commence voluntarily at the level of everyday human relations, what Graham and others called "neighbor-love"—a concept they kept distinct from magisterial justice.

At its extreme, this stress on individual regeneration could effect a type of socio-political passivism. It could lead to a pietistic version of Martin Luther's two-kingdom theology, permitting evangelicals to tacitly bless the political status quo while cultivating their own evangelistic gardens. Similarly, many of Graham's ideas resembled the non-statist nineteenth-century reform strategy of "moral suasion," as well as the social theology of antebellum American evangelist Charles Finney, who cautiously weighed his opposition to slavery against his emphasis on conversion.[29] Graham and his generation of post-World War II neo-evangelicals, though, sought to restore evangelical Christianity to its earlier status as moral guardian of the United States and to broaden that status to western civilization as a whole. They viewed themselves as departing from the separatist dogmatism and social irrelevance of post-Scopes fundamentalism. In practice, then, most postwar evangelicals hoped their values would permeate the realm of state leadership,

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[28] Henry, *Aspects of Christian Social Ethics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1964), 16, 25-26. Henry, the leading theologian of the neo-evangelical movement, edited *Christianity Today* during the 1950s and 1960s.

[29] For a treatment of moral suasion and its discontents in antebellum America, see Ronald G. Walters, *American Reformers, 1815-1860*, revised edition (New York: Hill and Wang, 1997), 199 and passim. On Finney, see Michael J. McClymond, "Issues and Explanations in the Study of North American Revivalism," in *Embodying the Spirit: New Perspectives on North American Revivalism*, ed. McClymond (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), 27.

irrespective of their beliefs concerning the limits of that sphere for transforming society. Their influence on temporal authority would commence, appropriately, at the level of individual conversions. As historian D. G. Hart has argued, a paramount conviction of evangelical political activism has been the belief that "being born again results in holy instincts about the way societies should be ordered and governments run."[30] When this principle is applied to Christian statesmen, the personal becomes political in a peculiarly evangelical way; godly character yields godly governance.

Another, equally important factor preventing postwar evangelicals from embracing either quietism or separatism was their profound respect not only for pious governmental leadership, but also for ordained authority and the rule of law. This final element of evangelical universalism often resided uncomfortably with the regenerational theory of social change. Despite Graham's inability to avoid partisanship, he routinely argued that believing Christians should support their elected leaders as agents of God's will, irrespective of party or platform. "The devout man," Henry likewise wrote, "must respect law, and he is spiritually inclined to obey the positive law of the State" and not "to condition [his] support of the State upon its promotion of Christian religious principles." While the state's mission remained ultimately negative (i.e., preservational) vis-à-vis the regenerative, transformational effects of individual conversions, government did possess a legitimate role to play in upholding and implementing justice. This acknowledgment sometimes necessitated theological hair-splitting among socially-concerned evangelicals attempting to distinguish between spiritual and temporal

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[30] D. G. Hart, *That Old-Time Religion in Modern America: Evangelical Protestantism in the Twentieth Century* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2002), 146. The discussion of evangelical social ethics in this chapter and elsewhere is greatly indebted to Dennis P. Hollinger, *Individualism and Social Ethics: An Evangelical Syncretism* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1982), 40, 111-112 and passim.

responsibilities, between individual souls bound for eternity and individual bodies presently occupying a fallen world.[31] In practice, it was difficult to voice one's eschatology without also blessing the political status quo. "From a Christian point of view," Graham declared in late 1967, "I'm very optimistic about the situation in the world. From [the] point of view of a member of the human race, I'm very pessimistic."[32] Many evangelicals clearly desired to strengthen their influence over national policy even while their theological inclinations led them to acquiesce to the legitimate powers that be and to assume a period of social decline would precede the triumphant Second Coming. When political leaders professed a Christianity of the appropriate variety, of course, the dilemma seemed less complicated. Indeed, Graham went so far as to state that qualified Christians had a responsibility to run for office.[33]

Applied to civil rights and to the broader postwar South, Graham's evangelical universalism held conflicting implications. The evangelist upheld the earthly, as well as the spiritual, equality of all human beings, irrespective of color. In doing so, though, he prioritized evangelism to individual sinners over explicit crusades for social justice, implying that the former would render the latter unnecessary. For Graham and other evangelicals, a tension existed between justice and regeneration, between their belief in a universal moral law (as well as the need for the state to preserve and, in certain cases,

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[31] Henry, *Aspects*, 79. In another example of hair-splitting, Henry stressed that the "Christian view of society does not require forcing the fruits of regeneration upon unregenerate men. Rather, the Christian view seeks public recognition, in theory and life, of those principles of justice necessary to national stability. With this distinction in mind, Christian believers will know that their primary task is to win individuals to Jesus Christ as Redeemer and Lord, a task not to be confused with misguided attempts to Christianize the world order." See Henry, *Aspects*, 120.

[32] Atlanta press conference, 29 December 1967, BGCA, CN 24, T12.

[33] "God and the Nations," *Hour of Decision* sermon pamphlet (Minneapolis: BGEA, 1964).

effect moral order) and their stress on voluntarism (e.g., individual acts of neighborly love) suggested by their foregrounding of individual wills. In the political culture of postwar America as a whole, this latter impulse often assumed a certain libertarian quality that complemented the anti-New Deal rhetoric of property rights and individual choice pervasive among political conservatives. In specific context of the postwar American South, however, the universal values of Graham's evangelicalism led him to challenge the Jim Crow status quo. Moreover, as will be seen, his respect for the rule of law informed how he responded to racial violence in Little Rock and elsewhere. Graham believed in a universal moral template and he believed that a democratic America held a special place in protecting and expanding that morality around the world. The tension between these values and his emphasis on individual choice remained as dynamic as it was unacknowledged. Conversely, in the overwhelmingly Christian South from which Graham hailed, the line between the spiritual and the social realms remained as invisible as it was articulated.

The Politics of Decency

The ambiguous political implications of evangelical universalism were evident in Graham's role as a mediator on behalf of his home region. If the evangelist was not always a consistent theological actor, neither was he consistently a theological actor. Almost congenitally geared to speak to his times, his motivations for engaging socio-political matters were never exclusively religious in nature. As much as he sought to narrowly confine his role to the contest for souls, his actions and statements, both in private and in public, routinely addressed society as well as spirituality. Graham was a

southerner and a cold warrior, in addition to being an evangelist. His racial views resembled those whom one scholar has termed the South's "middle-of-the-road liberals," regional leaders like Ralph McGill and *Greenville* (MS) *Delta Times-Democrat* editor Hodding Carter who "advocated an orderly, locally controlled process of racial change keyed to community conditions and economic growth." As resistance to the *Brown* decision gained increasing visibility during 1956 and 1957, their gradualist sentiments grew in credibility, leading to a momentary "vogue of moderation."[34] Another helpful point of comparison comes from historian William Chafe, who in his classic study of Greensboro, North Carolina, identified a postwar southern "progressive mystique" consisting of latent paternalism, aversion to conflict, and an overarching "commitment to civility."[35] Graham's concerns about extremists on both sides, expressed in *Life* and elsewhere, reflected a "dilemma of extremes" among southern moderates.[36] Like the moderates and the image-obsessed progressives of Greensboro, the evangelist asymmetrically equated militant segregationists and strident civil rights activists, while worrying that integrationist legislation or aggressive enforcement of Supreme Court decisions would adversely alter the precarious balance of southern race relations. Like them, as well, he spoke much more forthrightly and specifically when criticizing acts of racist violence than when offering constructive proposals for racial progress. These positions and characteristics also paralleled those of Dwight Eisenhower, with whom Graham stayed in regular contact throughout the president's two terms. Their

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[34] Anthony Lake Newberry, "Without Urgency or Ardor: The South's Middle-of-the-Road Liberals and Civil Rights, 1945-1960" (Ph.D. Dissertation, Ohio University, 1982), 16, 431 and passim.

[35] William H. Chafe, *Civilities and Civil Rights: Greensboro, North Carolina, and the Black Struggle for Freedom* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 6-8.

[36] Newberry, "Without Urgency or Ardor," 186.

relationship said much about Graham's application of evangelical universalism. It also revealed him to be a Republican at heart, if not in name.

The relationship between the evangelist and the war hero took root during the run-up to Eisenhower's successful bid for the 1952 Republican presidential nomination. Biographer William Martin has suggested that Graham played an important (and assigned) role in encouraging Eisenhower to enter the race. This role was primarily the work of Sid Richardson, a Texas oil baron close to both the general and the evangelist. In the fall of 1951, Richardson passed along to Eisenhower a letter, authored by Graham, in which the evangelist hoped that Richardson would convince Eisenhower to seek the presidency. In a quick response to Graham, Eisenhower (who was then commander of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization forces in Europe) politely balked at assuming a partisan political identity while still in his post. At the behest of Richardson, Graham responded to Eisenhower with a flurry of theologically-tinged hyperbole, a characteristic of his subsequent correspondence with political leaders. "Upon this decision could well rest the destiny of the Western World," the evangelist wrote of Eisenhower's possible run. Graham asked for a meeting with the general in order "to share with you some of the information I have picked up" from "your many friends" in the United States. With assistance from Richardson, they rendezvoused in France during March 1952.[37]

After Eisenhower took destiny by the reins and entered the race, Graham's public statements routinely echoed the GOP theme of cleaning up a corrupt Washington, DC. As he would attempt to do in subsequent presidential campaigns, he carefully avoided

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[37] Martin, *Prophet*, 147-148. Graham, *Just As I Am: The Autobiography of Billy Graham* (New York: HarperCollins, 1997), 189-192. Eisenhower to Graham, 8 November 1951; Graham to Eisenhower, 3 December 1951; and Graham to Eisenhower, 14 February 1952; all in BGCA, CN 74, 1-12 [original in NARA, Eisenhower Presidential Library (EPL), Eisenhower Presidential Materials (EPM)].

officially endorsing his preferred candidate. However, his public appeals on behalf of Eisenhower were scarcely more subtle than his altar calls. By frequently alluding in press conferences to the importance of personal character when choosing elected officials, Graham played to a perceived strength of Eisenhower, who ran on stature more than platform. Even before the Richardson letter, Graham had declared during his 1952 Greensboro crusade that the "Christian people of America are going to vote as a bloc for the man with the strongest moral and spiritual platform, regardless of his views on other matters."[38] Eisenhower, for his part, was keenly aware of the usefulness of the evangelist, whom the candidate personally sought out for advice on injecting a religious tone into campaign speeches.[39] Privately, Eisenhower proposed that Graham and other sympathetic pastors be informally organized to support the campaign.[40] The president made a similar recommendation during his reelection campaign in 1956, by which time he had already received a promise from Graham to "do all in my power during the coming campaign to gain friends and supporters for your cause."[41]

The 1952 campaign represented Graham's inaugural contribution to the postwar emergence of the Republican Party in southern presidential politics. His support for Eisenhower, while by no means uncommon among national evangelists, paralleled larger

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[38] Clipping, 17 October 1951, BGCA, CN 74, 1-12 [original in EPM]. See also *Greensboro Daily News*, 17 October 1951, in BGCA, CN 360, R4.

[39] Graham, *Just As I Am*, 191-192.

[40] Eisenhower to Arthur B. Langlie, 11 August 1952, NARA, EPL, EPM, President's Personal Files (PPF), 966-"PPF 1052 Graham, Billy."

[41] Leonard W. Hall to Eisenhower, 3 September 1956; and Graham to Eisenhower, 24 August 1956; both in NARA, EPL, EPM, NS, 16-"Graham, Billy."

developments in the South.[42] Political scientists Earl Black and Merle Black have described Eisenhower as "the human triggering mechanism for the first Republican breakthrough in the South" during 1952, a year when the candidate departed from GOP tradition and actively sought votes from the region's many conservative Democrats. In 1952, Eisenhower won the peripheral southern states of Tennessee, Virginia, Texas, and Florida, and according to Black and Black, captured half of all southern white votes. (Graham team member Grady Wilson claimed to have done his part to aid the general's cause in North Carolina, but lamented "those thick-headed Tarheels [who] would vote Democratic straight down the line even if the Devil himself were running.") The "partial realignment" of southern whites toward Republican presidential candidates had commenced. In both 1952 and the reelection vote of 1956, Eisenhower received particularly strong support from affluent white residents of large and small southern metropolitan areas, the very types of growing southern cities—the Greensboros and the Charlottes—that Graham frequented throughout the decade.[43]

Even while Graham all but endorsed Eisenhower, he remained a registered Democrat. Unlike during the subsequent Nixon presidency, however, he did not publicly declare this nominal status. As a friend and occasional confidant of numerous southern

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[42] Just before the 1956 election, Nelson Bell wrote to Eisenhower with the results of a *Christianity Today* poll showing overwhelming support for the president among Protestant ministers. Bell to Eisenhower, 25 October 1956, BGCA, CN 8, 1-28.

[43] Earl and Merle Black, *The Rise of Southern Republicans* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), 61, 207-209. Grady Wilson to Mendel Rivers, 21 November 1952, BGCA, CN 544, 1-2. In documenting the rise of urban Republicanism, historians Hugh D. Graham and Numan Bartley argued that the 1952 presidential election "clearly established the G.O.P. as the respectable party of the urban and suburban affluent whites in the South's large and small cities." Graham and Bartley, *Southern Politics and the Second Reconstruction* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1975), 81-110 passim (quoted in 86). It should be emphasized that Eisenhower's outreach to the South differed from Nixon's more famous "southern strategy" of 1968-1972. For example, Eisenhower was able to attract votes from southern African Americans in both 1952 and 1956.

politicians who were supportive of Eisenhower, Graham served as a friendly, informal conduit between these Democrats and a Republican Party now seeking votes in Dixie. Eisenhower remained aware of Graham's influence in the South (and, likely, his friendship with Sid Richardson), while Graham was conscious of the president's status in the white South. Indeed, the correspondence between Graham and Eisenhower revealed the evangelist as someone who, at least in the area of political strategy, thought like a national Republican during the 1950s. In 1954, Graham heard his friend, Republican Congressman Walter Judd of Minnesota, speak at a Lincoln Day Dinner in Asheville, an area of North Carolina with a traditional GOP presence. In a letter to Eisenhower, Graham recalled telling Judd afterward that, if only his address could be delivered on national television, "*we* wouldn't have to worry about Congress remaining GOP controlled this fall" (emphasis mine).[44]

Eisenhower was particularly alert to Graham's potential service in the area of southern race relations. His view received support from Representative Frank Boykin, a Democrat from Alabama, who wrote the president in March 1956 proposing just such a role for the evangelist, who was then visiting the capital. Significantly, Boykin saw Graham as a mediator, rather than a prophet—an agent of gradualism, rather than of reform. The race question, Boykin wrote in his insatiably social manner, was important

> because, in my judgment, the Communists are taking advantage of it. I believe our own Billy Graham could do more on this than any other human in this nation; *I mean to quiet it down and to go easy and in a Godlike way*, instead of trying to cram it down the throats of our people all in one day, which some of our enemies are trying to do. I thought maybe

[44] Graham to Eisenhower, 8 February 1954, NARA, EPL, EPM, PPF, 966-"PPF 1052 Graham, Billy."

> if you and Billy talked, you could talk about this real, real good (emphasis mine).[45]

Clearly, the segregationist congressman from southern Alabama viewed Graham as a shaper of inevitable changes, not as a driver of them.

Eisenhower met with Graham on March 20, the day after Boykin sent his letter. Although the evangelist had just returned from a visit to India and East Asia, his fifty-minute conversation with the president centered on what role he might play in the American South. According to White House notes, Graham asserted that the strong reaction against the *Brown* decision "had set back the cause of integration, but he thinks it is bound to come eventually." The moral issues at stake were obvious, Graham told Eisenhower, but were complicated by the social traditions of the South. In his upcoming services in the region, the evangelist agreed to echo the president's recent call for "moderation" and "decency" regarding the transition toward integration.[46] In affirming and possibly even compounding the gradualist leanings of Eisenhower, Graham offered words of advice similar to those the president received from moderate-to-liberal southerners, such as Ralph McGill.[47]

The content of the Graham-Eisenhower correspondence revealed their basic agreement regarding matters of race relations. They were avowed gradualists wary of extremists and skeptical of efforts to legislate racial morality. While the Eisenhower administration officially accepted the *Brown* decision, the president tacitly criticized the

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[45] Frank Boykin to Eisenhower, 19 March 1956, NARA, EPL, EPM, PPF, 966-"PPF 1052 Graham, Billy."

[46] Billy Graham Evangelistic Team news release, 22 March 1956, BGCA, CN 1, 6-9. Diary, 20 March 1956; and diary notes, 21 March 1956; both in NARA, EPL, EPM, Ann Whitman Diary Series (AWDS), 8-"March '56 Diary."

[47] See Newberry, "Middle-of-the-Road," 323.

Supreme Court and refused to enforce implementation of the ruling.[48] As he told Graham in a subsequent letter, he did back the desegregation of southern graduate schools—a position that paralleled the evangelist's support for open admission in Southern Baptist colleges. Moreover, Eisenhower thought white ministers in the South should publicly support greater representation of blacks in local governments and school boards. Graham called these suggestions "excellent."[49] They were in keeping with the type of adult-centered desegregation that had occurred in the years leading up to *Brown*. As with the open-seating policy in Graham crusades, these alterations of Jim Crow had not necessarily required legislative or judicial actions. Both Graham and Eisenhower publicly endorsed this type of prescriptive gradualism, implicitly contrasting it with the "extremism" of enforcing *Brown* in the Deep South.

Graham's correspondence with Eisenhower following their March 20 meeting swayed almost unconsciously between moral concerns and political analysis. Affirming the belief of the president that "the Church must take a place of spiritual leadership in this crucial matter," Graham pledged to organize a meeting of southern denominational leaders to discuss Eisenhower's recommendations for enhancing race relations. The evangelist further committed to "do all in my power to urge Southern ministers to call upon the people for moderation, charity, compassion and progress toward compliance with the Supreme Court decision." Although the proposed gathering never occurred, he did meet privately with a range of denominational leaders, black and white, "encouraging

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[48] After hearing a sermon promoting civil rights legislation, Eisenhower told the chaplain of the Navy, "You can't legislate morality." On Eisenhower's response to *Brown*, see Taylor Branch, *Parting the Waters: America in the King Years, 1954-1963* (New York: Touchstone, 1988), 180, 191 (quoted in 213).

[49] Eisenhower to Graham, 22 March 1956; and Graham to Eisenhower, 27 March 1956; both in NARA, EPL, EPM, PPF, 966-"PPF 1052 Graham, Billy."

them to take a stronger stand in calling for desegregation and yet demonstrating charity and, above all, patience." Two moderate southern governors, Luther Hodges of North Carolina and Frank Clement of Tennessee, received similar advice from Graham.[50] Later in 1956, the evangelist and Vice President Richard Nixon attended Southern Presbyterian, Baptist, and Methodist denominational gatherings in North Carolina. These discussions and meetings increased Graham's optimism, while also affirming his gradualism. "I believe the Lord is helping us," he wrote to Eisenhower, "and if the Supreme Court will go slowly and the extremists on both sides will quiet down, we can have peaceful social readjustment over the next ten-year period."[51]

The presence of Nixon at the southern religious meetings suggested the political considerations hovering closely over Graham's regional leadership. In the same 1956 letter in which the evangelist promised to meet with southern Christian leaders, he urged the president to wait until after the re-election campaign to enact specific policies on desegregation. "I hope particularly before November you are able to stay out of this bitter racial situation that is developing," the evangelist wrote. Meanwhile, he advised, "it might be well to let the Democratic Party bear the brunt of the debate." Two months later, Graham expressed concern that the GOP's efforts to attract northern black voters might hinder its southern ambitions:

> I am somewhat disturbed by rumors that Republican strategy will be to go all out in winning the Negro vote in the North regardless of the South's feelings. Again[,] I would like to caution you about getting involved in this particular problem. At the moment, to an amazing degree, you have

[50] Graham to Eisenhower, 27 March 1956; and Graham to Eisenhower, 4 June 1956; both in NARA, EPL, EPM, PPF, 966-"PPF 1052 Graham, Billy."

[51] Graham to Nixon, 4 June 1956, NARA, Pacific Region, Laguna Niguel, Richard M. Nixon Pre-Presidential Papers, Series 320, 299-"Graham, Billy." Graham to Eisenhower, 4 June 1956, NARA, EPL, EPM, PPF, 966-"PPF 1052 Graham, Billy."

> the confidence of white and Negro leaders. I would hate to see it jeopardized by even those in the Republican Party with a political ax to grind.

Eisenhower took notice of the recommendation, although his campaign garnered many African-American votes, including that of Martin Luther King, Jr.[52]

One year after the 1956 election, in which Eisenhower increased his success in the South, the president sought advice from the evangelist during the most pressing racial crisis of his two terms, the desegregation of Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas. Eisenhower consulted Graham about the possible use of federal troops, and Nixon twice contacted the evangelist during the crisis. Graham agreed that Eisenhower had no choice but to employ the troops.[53] Amid the tensions, the evangelist communicated with Little Rock ministers and offered to hold services in the strife-torn city, but only upon request. As part of his *Hour of Decision* radio program, he distributed to stations throughout Arkansas a sermon encouraging love across the color line. Oveta Culp Hobby, a Texan and former member of the Eisenhower cabinet, had suggested the gesture. In other statements, Graham called for Christians in Little Rock to "obey the law" and averred that "all thinking southerners" were disturbed by the events there.[54]

With Little Rock, Graham began to involve himself with specific racial crises in the South. Basic Christian racial decency and obedience to the law emerged as the two

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[52] Graham to Eisenhower, 27 March 1956; and Graham to Eisenhower, 4 June 1956; both in NARA, EPL, EPM, PPF, 966-"PPF 1052 Graham, Billy." Eisenhower to Graham, 21 June 1956, NARA, EPL, EPM, Name Series (NS), 16-"Graham, Billy." On the 1956 election, see Branch, *Parting*, 192, 220.

[53] Graham, *Just As I Am*, 201. Martin, *Prophet*, 247. "South's Churchmen: Integration and Religion," *Newsweek*, 7 October 1957, 34, 37, in BGCA, CN 360, R67.

[54] "South's Churchmen," in BGCA, CN 360, R67. See also "Love and Little Rock," *Hour of Decision* sermon, 29 September 1957, BGCA, CN 191, T403g. *Huntington* (WV) *Advertiser* (AP), 26 September 1957; *Durham* (NC) *Sun* (UPI), 26 September 1957; and *Carthage* (MD) *Evening Press* (AP), 24 September 1957; all in BGCA, CN 360, R26.

dominant themes of these interventions. The same month of the violence in Little Rock, the evangelist sent a brief card of support to Dorothy Counts, an African-American student who had faced severe harassment upon enrolling at a previously segregated high school in Graham's hometown of Charlotte. The curiously impersonal note characteristically juxtaposed faith and Cold War nationalism, separating them only by sentences:

> Dear Miss Counts,
> Democracy demands that you hold fast and carry on. The world of tomorrow is looking for leaders and you have been chosen. Those cowardly whites against you will never prosper because they are un-American and unfit to lead. Be of good faith. God is not dead. He will see you through. This is your one great chance to prove to Russia that democracy still prevails. Billy Graham, D. D.[55]

In September 1958, a year after sending the note to Counts, Graham returned to Charlotte for a crusade.

The evangelist's involvement in the social ferment of the South was not completely voluntary, however. As southern segregationists absorbed his articles in *Life* and *Ebony*, and as his policy of holding desegregated crusades became better known, Graham met resistance from defenders of Jim Crow who now viewed him as an explicit opponent of their cause. Segregationist agitator John Kasper, for example, protested Graham's appearance in Charlotte and referred to the evangelist as a "[N]egro lover."[56] Meanwhile, the BGEA had scheduled a one-day rally to be held on the statehouse lawn in nearby Columbia, South Carolina. This was to be the evangelist's first desegregated service in a Deep South city since his seating policy had become public knowledge. In

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[55] Quoted in Frye Gaillard, *The Dream Long Deferred* (UNC, 1988), 9-10.

[56] Hopkins, "Race Problem," 88-89; and Martin, *Prophet*, 234.

Columbia, the leading newspaper linked the lack of segregation at the Charlotte meetings with the low black turnout, estimated at between 1 and 3 percent of the total audience. The statehouse rally quickly drew protest from South Carolina Governor George Bell Timmerman, a blustering segregationist who argued that permitting the service would represent an endorsement of the evangelist's integrationist position. Timmerman implicitly characterized Graham as a traitor to the region. "As a widely known evangelist and native southerner, his endorsement of racial mixing has done much harm, and his presence here on State House property will be misinterpreted as approval of that endorsement," declared the governor.[57] His statement reflected the fact that newspapers in the Deep South had started reporting on Graham's racial views, especially those voiced during the 1957 New York City crusade.[58] In Charlotte, the evangelist continued on this theme, branding the bombing of schools and religious buildings by segregationists as "symptomatic of the type of thing that brought Hitler to power."[59] Timmerman soon moved to block the rally. Legally, he hung his hat on the separation of church and state, an argument typical of segregationists seeking to counter ministerial critics of Jim Crow. Besides, he claimed, the evangelist had likely chosen the statehouse location for "propaganda purposes." The governor neglected to add that Graham had spoken at the statehouse eight years earlier—or that, at the governor's own invitation, W. A. Criswell had delivered his 1955 harangue against integration in the same building.[60]

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[57] *Columbia* (SC) *State*, 7 and 12 October 1958.

[58] See *Birmingham News*, 12 May 1957; *Jackson* (MS) *State Times*, 23 June 1957; and *Magee* (MS) *Courier*, 4 July 1957; all in BGCA, CN 360, R26.

[59] *Atlanta Constitution* (AP), 16 October 1958, in BGCA, CN 360, R26.

[60] *Columbia* (SC) *State*, 23 October 1958. Towns, *Social Conscience*, 226.

Rather than challenging Timmerman, the BGEA shifted the rally to Fort Jackson, a nearby military base outside of state jurisdiction. The desegregated Sunday gathering drew an estimated crowd of 60,000, and platform guests included former Governor James Byrnes, a friend of Graham and an avowed segregationist. The evangelist avoided personally attacking Timmerman, but alluded at a press conference to people who "have become so unbalanced by this whole issue of segregation and integration that it has become their only gospel." As if to compensate for even this backhanded form of criticism, Graham praised South Carolina's "warm friendship between the races" in his national radio broadcast that evening. "It is most unfortunate," he added, "that much of the world judges this part of the country by a small, minute, extremist minority and sometimes forget[s] that some of the finest Christian people in the entire nation live in this state."[61] That "extremist minority" had, of course, somehow elected Timmerman as governor. In Columbia, Graham clearly cast himself as a voice of evangelical decency rather than as a prophet of racial justice. This distinction became more apparent as the Civil Rights Movement gained momentum and as its supporters increasingly recognized that Graham sought to publicize the South's moderate Christian whites at least as much as he aspired to promote racial tolerance.

Graham's role in the South grew even more visible when, two months after the Fort Jackson rally, he held his first desegregated service in a southern city that had experienced racial violence. President Eisenhower was not the only public figure asking the evangelist to play a more active role in his home region. In 1956, for example, an Oregon editorial board urged Graham to return from his travels abroad and "try and

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[61] *Columbia* (SC) *State*, 27 and 28 October 1958. *Charlotte Observer*, 27 October 1958, in BGCA, CN 360, R12.

convert the Negro baiting Alabama legislators."[62] While Graham had never ceased crusading in parts of the South and soon made race a major theme of several addresses in the region, he exhibited little desire to push the matter of holding services in the Deep South, a tendency the Columbia rally likely reinforced.[63] While not occurring in the Deep South, his visits to Clinton, Tennessee, and Little Rock, Arkansas, for the first time directly linked his evangelistic services with the region's racial troubles. These post-crisis visits, which ultimately numbered four in total, sharpened the contrast between his evangelistic priorities and the concerns of civil rights activists.[64] Intervening in the South by way of rallies and crusades allowed Graham to define himself, above all and exclusive to all, as an evangelist. In other words, he could safely fold his racial message into his revival sermons and, when pressed, explicitly prioritize the conversion of souls over the transformation of racial sentiments.

The first such intervention took place in the small East Tennessee city of Clinton, where in October 1958 segregationists had bombed the local high school. The school had already experienced rioting during its integration two years earlier. Along with Little Rock and Mansfield, Texas, which had seen similar strife, Clinton had come to symbolize

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[62] *Salem* (OR) *Capitol Journal*, 3 March 1956, in BGCA, CN 360, R25.

[63] Graham discussed racial issues in November 1958 addresses at Stetson University, in Deland, FL, and at the Alabama State Baptist Convention in Birmingham, Alabama. The latter event very likely was segregated (and drew advance press as such), yet technically would not have violated Graham's stated policy against holding desegregated services. See *Oakland Tribune* (UPI), 10 June 1958; Mobile (AL) *Press* (UPI), 17 November 1958; and *Bowling Green* (KY) *News* (AP), 21 November 1958; all in BGCA, CN 360, R26. In 1954, Graham turned down an invitation to travel to Phenix City, Alabama, a city racked by corruption and violence linked with, among other things, an illicit drug market. One correspondent thought the evangelist could "give the people of our section some reassurance and encouragement at this critical time in our State's history." Oakley Melton, Jr. to Jerry Beaven, 5 August 1954, BGCA, CN 1, 6-8. See also *New York World-Telegram & Sun* (AP), 25 August 1954, in BGCA, CN 360, R24; and Hopkins, "Race Problem," 60-61. In the spring of 1958, Graham backed out of services planned for the South Carolina Piedmont, citing health concerns. See *Charlotte News*, 24 April 1958, in BGCA, CN 360, R26.

[64] On Graham's other visits to southern trouble spots, see Chapter IV.

the violent emergence of grassroots massive resistance to the *Brown* decision.[65] Two months after the bombing, Graham accepted a challenge from nationally-syndicated newspaper columnist Drew Pearson and moderate Tennessee Senator Estes Kefauver, and held a one-dally rally in a gymnasium near the bombed-out high school. The evangelist also worked with an organization created by Pearson to raise funds to rebuild the high school, although he declined the columnist's invitation to chair the group.[66] The Clinton gathering was simultaneously a community rally and a church service. Before Graham's sermon, Pearson and area leaders recounted the bombing story and outlined their fundraising efforts. Pearson praised the local school board for its "unflinching determination to go ahead and rebuild the school as a symbol of law and order."[67]

In his Clinton message, Graham voiced his social theology in all of its political ambiguity. A racially-mixed crowd of 5,000 turned out to hear a sermon drawn from the Good Samaritan story and Christ's commandment to love thy neighbor. Christians, Graham emphasized in a recapitulation of his warning to Timmerman, "must not allow integration or segregation to become our gospel." Either position, he added, "minus God equals chaos." Reflecting his evangelical focus on the spirit-filled will, Graham argued that "[l]ove and understanding cannot be forced by bayonets. . . . We must respect the law, but keep in mind that it is powerless to change the human heart." His stress on the conversion moment and his dismissal of purely political solutions hardly represented a

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[65] Bartley, *The New South, 1945-1980: The Story of the South's Modernization* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press [LSU], 1995), 196, 223-230.

[66] Graham, *Just As I Am*, 201-02. Drew Pearson, *Diaries: 1949-1959* (New York: Holt, 1974), 487-488. Graham put Pearson in touch with other prospective members of the committee, including Tennessee Governor Frank Clement.

[67] *Knoxville News-Sentinel*, 15 December 1958.

rousing call to extend neighborly love beyond the sphere of daily interaction. What truly distinguished the Clinton rally from the many other services Graham held that year, though, were the circumstances behind his appearance in this traumatized southern town. His decision to affirm Clinton in its response to segregationist violence carried a distinct socio-political message, encapsulated in a *Knoxville News-Sentinel* headline the following morning: "Evangelist Calls for *Love, Law and Order*" (emphasis mine). While Graham later recalled opposition from the local White Citizens' Council to his visit, he spoke at the time of his desire to demonstrate that most of Clinton's residents were Christians and good citizens.[68]

The following year, the evangelist visited Little Rock, well after his initial pledge to travel there if invited by area ministers. Although a small group of pastors had requested Graham's presence the year before, all of the segregationist and most of the integrationist ministers in Little Rock had objected to the idea.[69] Moreover, Little Rock congressman and Southern Baptist Convention President Brooks Hays, a racial moderate whose political future hung in the balance, cautioned the evangelist against visiting so soon after the violence at Central High School. (After Hays lost his 1958 reelection bid, Graham addressed a banquet given in his honor.)[70] Graham's trip to Little Rock finally occurred in September 1959, when he held two rallies in the city's downtown football stadium. Continued tensions over integration likely contributed to his decision to forgo

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[68] *Knoxville News-Sentinel*, 15 December 1958. Graham, *Just As I Am*, 202. *Nashville Tennessean*, 15 December 1958.

[69] Ernest Q. Campbell and Thomas F. Pettigrew, *Christians in Racial Crisis: A Study of Little Rock's Ministry* (Washington, DC: Public Affairs Press, 1959), 55-56, 182. See also Graham, *Just As I Am*, 201-202.

[70] *El Paso Herald-Post*, 27 September 1957, in BGCA, CN 360, R26. Brooks Hays, *Politics is My Parish* (LSU, 1981), 195.

earlier plans for a multi-week crusade in August. The chair of the rally committee was influential Southern Baptist minister and racial moderate W. O. Vaught, whom Graham had introduced and praised at the Charlotte crusade for his work during the Little Rock crisis. As in Clinton, Graham attempted to clarify his role as an evangelist and only that, but could not escape the political implications of his visit. The desegregated nature of the rallies had been well-publicized, and questions remained about how much security segregationist Governor Orval Faubus and the Little Rock police force would provide for the services. These concerns were pressing because the Little Rock Citizens Council had launched its own crusade against the evangelist. According to Citizens Council chaplain Wesley Pruden, something of a celebrity among the massive resistance set, the group distributed 40,000 fliers attacking the integrationist agenda of both Graham and the ministers who had invited him. In making the case for Graham (and, by implication, the case against Faubus), the liberal *Arkansas Gazette* emphasized the evangelist's southern identity: "Billy Graham has preached the gospel on every continent and in the isles across the sea, but his heart, as he has said, has remained in his native South." The editorial reflected what two sociologists called the "exaggerated southerner technique," a strategy moderate and liberal southern ministers employed to accentuate their regional credentials.[71] Graham himself utilized this strategy on numerous occasions.

Even though Graham downplayed the racial aspect of the Little Rock rallies, he did not avoid racially-related comments altogether. "I have said many times," Graham reiterated in a press conference, "that nobody can cite the Bible as a defense for

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[71] *Arkansas Gazette*, 23 December 1958, in BGCA, CN 360, R26. *Arkansas Gazette*, 6, 9, 10, 12, and 13 September 1959. *Columbia* (SC) *State*, 16 October 1958. Campbell and Pettigrew, *Christians in Racial Crisis*, 102.

segregation." The two services drew a combined crowd of around 50,000 and featured no racial incidents, although fear of violence likely depressed the overall attendance. A glowing report written for the BGEA emphasized that the rally united people "not as integrationists or segregationists, but as Christians." In one of his sermons, Graham urged the audience to "obey constitutional authority as long as it doesn't interfere with the worship of God." Addressing the generic sinner, Graham implied that regenerated hearts should lead to renewed social consciences, as well: "When a moral issue comes up you don't really stand up for what you know is right. You're spiritually dead."[72]

More striking than Graham's occasional comments on race were the ways in which his visit served the interests of city boosters seeking to revive the image of Little Rock. That image had been further tarnished only days before the rally, when segregationists dynamited the city's school board headquarters. The bombings occurred just as public schools were re-opening following a year of forced closure by Faubus.[73] In the case of one recognizable Little Rock citizen and Graham supporter, Jimmy Karam, the rallies helped to resuscitate his own status. To label Karam mercurial would be to give him too much credit. A Little Rock clothier, friend of Faubus, and former associate of the Urban League whom bystanders had identified as a supervisor of the 1957 violence at Central High School, Karam was rough-edged and opportunistic, yet desperate to revise his well-earned reputation as a thug. Only months before his antics at Central High School, a thoroughly non-religious Karam had attended Graham's 1957 New York crusade, which he claimed had exerted no effect on him. By early 1959, however, Karam

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[72] *Arkansas Gazette*, 13 and 14 September 1959. Undated Little Rock rally report [1959], BGCA, CN 19, 5-48. *Arkansas Democrat*, 12 and 14 September 1959.

[73] *Arkansas Democrat*, 9 September 1959.

had come under the influence of W. O. Vaught, pastor of the most prominent Baptist church in Little Rock, who guided him into the faith. Karam became a prominent sponsor of the Graham visit and continued to support the evangelist in subsequent decades. During the Little Rock rallies, the evangelist and the convert visited four of the bombing suspects in jail. Karam's story made the pages of *Time* magazine, as did the fact that, while he recanted his role as a segregationist rabble rouser, he declined to state whether he personally still supported Jim Crow.[74] The Little Rock rallies, alas, did not net even an ambiguous racial conversion from Faubus, who professed to admire Graham and who had also attended the New York crusade (likely with Karam). During the one Little Rock service Faubus attended, he arrived late and was momentarily forced to sit on the stadium's concrete stairs. A photograph in the strongly anti-Faubus *Arkansas Gazette* shows him searching for a seat while a young black male, sporting sunglasses, sits comfortably in front of the pacing governor. According to one report, Graham and Karam paid a discreet visit to the gubernatorial mansion that day.[75]

To Little Rock boosters, most of whom opposed Faubus, the socio-political meaning of the rallies centered on "law and order," a term the editorial page of the *Arkansas Gazette* had readily invoked when arguing for obedience to court desegregation orders. The paper's more conservative counterpart, the *Arkansas Democrat*, invoked the

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[74] On Karam, see Roy Reed, *Faubus: The Life and Times of an American Prodigal* (Fayetteville, AR: University of Arkansas Press, 1997), 190, 226-227. "Filmed Testimony of Jimmy Karam, ca. 1960," BGCA, CN 74, F8. The filmed testimony contradicts Graham's later claim that Karam converted at the New York City crusade. See Graham, *Just As I Am*, 321. *Arkansas Gazette*, 14 September 1959. "Little Rock's Convert," *Time*, 28 September 1959, 42. Much to the surprise of the Arkansas Council on Human Relations, Graham later suggested that *Ebony* magazine published an article on the "new Jimmy Karam." See unidentified to Graham, 27 June 1962, University of Arkansas Special Collections, Arkansas Council on Human Relations Records, 8-82.

[75] *Arkansas Democrat*, 10 September 1959. *Arkansas Gazette*, 14 September 1959. *Arkansas Gazette*, 20 September 1959, in BGCA, CN 360, R27.

same slogan in a political cartoon published the week of the rallies. The cartoon showed three banners flying over downtown Little Rock; one announced the Graham rallies, another announced a contemporaneous meeting of the Shriners, and the final flag declared the "Triumph of Law and Order."[76] As historians of the Little Rock crisis have shown, what ultimately swayed many business and civic leaders to support school desegregation was opposition to segregationist mob violence and its debilitating effects on the image of the city. Their solution was to embrace law and order.[77] No less malleable than any other civic virtue, the slogan there stood for moderation: obedience to constitutional authority, but not support for any specific reform or protest agenda. In the context of Little Rock and Clinton, law and order became a rallying cry for the very type of decency Graham affirmed when he called for good citizenship and racial tolerance, casting those values as fruits of the conversion moment. In doing so, he tapped into a national, as well as regional, discourse of moderation. Two years earlier, *Life* magazine had described *Arkansas Gazette* editor Harry Ashmore as part of a "fifth column of decency" and opened an editorial praising Eisenhower's decision to employ federal troops with the premature declaration, "Law and Order have returned to Little Rock."[78] The rallies themselves, since they occurred without incident in spite of vociferous opposition from segregationist activists, offered evidence that Little Rock had achieved a

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[76] On law and order, see, for example, *Arkansas Gazette*, 28 September 1958, in *Crisis in the South: The Little Rock Story: A Selection of Editorials from the* Arkansas Gazette (Little Rock: *Arkansas Gazette*, 1959), 54. *Arkansas Democrat*, 11 September 1959.

[77] Elizabeth Jacoway, "Taken By Surprise: Little Rock Business Leaders and Desegregation," 15-41, in *Southern Businessmen and Desegregation*, ed. Jacoway and David R. Colburn (LSU, 1982). David L. Chappell, *Inside Agitators: White Southerners in the Civil Rights Movement* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), 107-118. Chappell focused specifically on law and order, while Jacoway emphasized concerns over the city's image.

[78] "A Fifth Column of Decency," *Life*, 30 September 1957. "The Eagle and the Rock," *Life*, 7 October 1957, 48.

degree of law and order. Graham appeared more than aware that his visits buttressed the interests of those moderates who, as he declared elsewhere, would assuredly triumph if only other southerners would cease resorting to "flag waving, inflammatory statements and above all, violence." The politics of decency might also triumph if more people knew of its existence. "The newspapers of America and the world have carried stories of violence and trouble on the front pages about Little Rock," Graham declared during the altar call of the final service. "I would like to challenge them to carry this story."[79]

As both the Columbia and Little Rock rallies revealed, Graham's actions and statements in support of improved race relations and desegregation garnered growing criticism from hardline segregationists. Governor Timmerman, however, remained exceptional as an elected official willing to castigate him on record. Most of the public reaction against the evangelist came from grassroots organizations, including the Ku Klux Klan, from whom Graham claimed to receive "incredibly obscene letters." By 1957, Klan leaders had added Graham to their attention-grubbing list of targets, labeling him a "nigger lover" and (following a freak injury he suffered as the result of an aggressive farm animal) declaring, "God bless the ram that butted him down the hill."[80] A smaller amount of opposition came from nominally more respectable white southerners, mostly from the Deep South. Independent or non-mainline fundamentalist groups in the South, such as the Carolina Baptist Fellowship and supporters of Bob Jones University, represented one such source of criticism.[81] They chafed at Graham's

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[79] Graham made the "flag waving" remark in an address to the student body of Asheville High School. See *Alabama Baptist*, 24 September 1959. *Arkansas Gazette*, 14 September 1959.

[80] Klan in Noel Houston, "Billy Graham – Part II," *Holiday*, 114; *Rock Hill* (SC) *Herald*, 24 June 1957, in BGCA, CN 360, R26; and *Martinsville* (VA) *Bulletin*, 9 December 1957, in BGCA, CN 360, R26.

increasing willingness to cooperate in his crusades with non-evangelical groups, but also objected to his positions on race. Like Timmerman, these and other critics attacked Graham for "betray[ing]" his "homeland" by entering into "racial politics" at the expense of his spiritual duties. "A lot of the good people of the Deep South have been heading for Heaven for a long time, and they are going to get there whether or not [Graham] likes it," editorialized the *Selma* (AL) *Times-Journal*. "Billy Lost South When He Jumped To Politics," read the title of another hostile editorial.[82]

Yet clearly Graham had not lost the whole of the white South. Even outspoken segregationists remained split in their responses to the evangelist. While many fundamentalists, in addition to professional segregationists like John Kasper, felt few restraints in dismissing Graham or challenging him to debates, other Jim Crow partisans approached him with relative humility. The evangelist "is personally a fine young man," wrote a Charlotte resident to Nelson Bell, despite being "misled on the negro question." Another North Carolina critic wrote to Graham (in a letter copied to each southern governor) not "in a spirit of antagonism, but in the hope it will be taken as constructive criticism, not to be finding fault with the ministry, but to plead with [desegregationist ministers] before it is too late." If only Graham knew of Martin Luther King's ties to the allegedly communist Southern Conference Educational Fund, wrote one professed admirer of the evangelist, he would surely denounce the civil rights leader. Perhaps these correspondents did not view the evangelist as a race mixer at heart; at the very least, they were nonplussed that a southerner who shared so many of their theological leanings could

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[81] *Southern School News*, July 1957, 4. For more on Bob Jones, see Chapter II.

[82] *Albany* (GA) *Herald*, 21 July 1957; *Selma* (AL) *Times-Journal* editorial, published in *Piedmont* (AL) *Journal*, 28 June 1957; and *Miami Life*, 19 October 1957; all in BGCA, CN 360, R26.

differ with them on this issue. A South Carolina newspaper, for example, branded Graham "one of the strongest advocates for total integration," while acknowledging his otherwise "wonderful work" as an evangelist.[83] Most importantly, though, such hedged criticisms testified to the social and spiritual clout Graham possessed, even though he remained hesitant to employ this leverage in a forceful manner. Even critics of his racial views often felt compelled to pay respects to this overwhelmingly popular minister of God. Many other segregationists never felt compelled to criticize him at all.

Nelson Bell responded on behalf of his son-in-law to many of these segregationist critics. Some of the charges coming from foes of Graham bordered on the absurd (e.g., that the evangelist was "preaching black supremacy") and could easily be countered. Other correspondents simply requested clarification of his opinions on racial matters. In answering these letters, Bell sometimes exceeded his apparent task of defending Graham, to the point where he misrepresented or exaggerated his son-in-law's positions and injected his own. As a racial conservative and a public defender of "voluntary segregation," Bell possessed many ties with segregationist activists. His biases surfaced in his letters, as Bell wrote to one Tennessean that blacks "must earn social recognition" and declared himself "dead against" Martin Luther King, Jr., "and the cause for which he stands." In a 1958 letter, dated well after Graham's piece in *Ebony*, Bell declared that "Billy does not believe in integration any more than you and I do." When insisting on Graham's opposition to "forced integration," Bell never once acknowledged his son-in-

[83] A New Orleans segregationist, who had been excommunicated from the Catholic Church for her activism, publicly challenged Graham to debate the merits of integration. See *Miami Herald* (AP), 26 August 1962, in BGCA, CN 360, R29. William C. McIntire to L. Nelson Bell, 12 January 1959, BGCA, CN 318, 15-15. Howard Chatham to Graham, 27 September 1957, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Southern Historical Collection, Luther Hodges Papers, Series 5, Subseries 5.3. Margaret Pope to Bell, 24 June 1964 [enclosed in Pope to Ruth Graham, 25 June 1964], BGCA, CN 318, 42-15. *Camden* (SC) *Chronicle*, 15 April 1960, in BGCA, CN 360, R27.

law's public support for moderate anti-Jim Crow legislation and obedience to judicial rulings on civil rights.[84] While Graham could not be mistaken for a civil rights activist, he placed much ideological and theological, if not always spatial, distance between himself and his southern segregationist peers during the latter half of the 1950s.

The Parameters of Decency

Graham's overall lack of willingness to discuss racial matters in terms other than general principles certainly left him open to such misinterpretations. His emphasis on salvation as the starting point for all meaningful social change—a major theme of evangelical universalism—led him to focus primarily on the macro picture of Christianizing society and the micro picture of neighborly love, all the while eschewing the messier middle space of protests and legislation, the very stuff from which political change usually derives. His perspective also allowed him to cite his evangelistic priorities when refusing to directly identify his crusades with the "social issue" of racial justice. Pleas for Graham to speak more voluminously about racial issues or to intervene more actively in the South continued to come not only from white intellectuals, such as Reinhold Niebuhr and leading southern liberal James McBride Dabbs, but also from African-American clergymen and newspaper editorialists, many of whom responded favorably to Graham's initial criticisms of desegregation. The evangelist, wrote one black newspaper in 1955, "may lose a few of his friends in his own dear Southland

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[84] On Bell, see David L. Chappell, *A Stone of Hope: Prophetic Religion and the Death of Jim Crow* (UNC, 2004), 140-141, 117-121; and Michael D. Hammond, "Conscience in Conflict: Neo-Evangelicals and Race in the 1950s" (MA Thesis, Wheaton College, 2002), 48-83. Tyler W. Payton to Bell, 16 October 1956, BGCA, CN 318, 41-10. Bell to R. D. Littleton, 11 September 1965, BGCA, CN 318, 43-12. Bell to Edward Jones, 21 October 1958, BGCA, CN 318, 15-15. See also Bell to John F. Frierson, 22 July 1957, BGCA, CN 318, 24-25.

because of his stand on segregation but he won't lose his soul." Two years later, a group of black ministers from Raleigh-Durham asked Graham to come "back to our state to tear down . . . every vestige of segregation and discrimination born of our prejudices"—a request he did not take up.[85] In correspondence that same year, Martin Luther King, Jr., similarly urged the evangelist to "see your way clear to conduct an evangelistic crusade in one of the hard-core states in the deep south," where the "impact of such a crusade would be immeasurably great."[86] With the exception of two rallies held on federal property and a few appearances in northern Florida, however, Graham largely avoided that part of the South until his 1964 visit to Birmingham.

The letter from King arrived soon after the civil rights leader had delivered an invocation at Graham's heavily publicized 1957 New York City crusade. The early contact between Graham and King revealed both the potential and the limits of evangelical universalism. Around the time of the 1955-1956 Montgomery bus boycott, they commenced what evolved into a mostly cordial and, at times, consultative relationship. As they grew closer, King asked the evangelist to call him "Mike," a birth name used mostly by black intimates. As scholar Edward L. Moore has shown, their common southern background and status as Baptist ministers provided them with an important bond. Moreover, at least by 1957, they stood as the leading spokespersons for

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[85] On Niebuhr and Graham, see Reinhold Niebuhr, "Proposal to Billy Graham," *Christian Century*, 8 August 1956, 921-922, in BGCA, CN 360, R65; and below. James McBride Dabbs, "The Man Across the Table from Billy Graham," *Christian Century*, 16 January 1957, 75-76, in BGCA, CN 360, R65. *Durham Times*, 19 March 1955, in BGCA, CN 360, R25. *New York Post* (AP), 21 May 1957, in BGCA, CN 360, R9.

[86] Martin Luther King, Jr., to Graham, 31 August 1957, in Clayborne Carson, et al, ed., The Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr., Volume 4, *The Symbol of the Movement, January 1957-1958* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), http://www.stanford.edu/group/King/publications/papers/vol4/contents.htm (accessed 20 February 2006).

their respective presumed causes: evangelism and civil rights. During a time when King still sought recognition from moderate whites (including Nixon) and when Graham had promised the president he would consult with southern ministers about the race issue, their paths inevitably intersected.[87] Eisenhower may even have recommended that Graham contact King.[88] The evangelist spoke highly of King from an early date, declaring in an April 1957 interview in the *New York Times Magazine* that the civil rights leader was "setting an example of Christian love" in the area of race relations. King soon accepted an invitation to give an invocation during the New York crusade. In an eloquent prayer, he called for liberation from "the dungeons of hate" and "the paralysis of crippling fear" in order to create a "brotherhood that transcends race or color."[89]

Afterwards, King added Graham to the list of southern white moderates and liberals with whom he corresponded. With intentionally flattering prose, King praised the evangelist for applying the message of the gospel to race, since Graham "above any other preacher in America can open the eyes of many persons on this question." Graham's southern background, the civil rights leader suggested, gave his message "additional weight." The following summer, however, King wrote with concern about reported plans for Price Daniel, a segregationist and evangelical Christian running for

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[87] Branch, *Parting*, 227, 212-213, 218-220. Edward L. Moore, "Billy Graham and Martin Luther King, Jr.: An Inquiry Into White and Black Revivalistic Traditions" (Ph.D. Dissertation, Vanderbilt University, 1979), 4, 453-468 and passim.

[88] Tantalizingly vague Eisenhower White House notes allude to a recommended "note to Billy Graham about a Negro Bishop—Dr. Martin Luther King," who was then emerging as the spokesperson for a Montgomery bus boycott. See "Notes dictated by the President after long telephone conversation with Mrs. Oveta Culp Hobby," 21 March 1956, NARA, EPL, EPM, AWDS, 8-"March '56 Diary."

[89] "As Billy Graham See His Role," *New York Times Magazine*, 21 April 1957, 19. "Invocation Delivered at Billy Graham Association Crusade," 18 July 1957, http://www.stanford.edu/group/King/publications/papers/vol4/contents.htm. See also BGCA, CN 26, T495.

reelection as governor of Texas, to introduce Graham at an evangelistic rally in San Antonio. The event was to occur one day before the state Democratic primary. Either disassociate yourself from Daniel, King urged Graham, or at least "make crystal clear your position on this burning moral issue." Support for a segregationist would severely hamper Graham's influence among blacks, he added. In a hasty and sharp reply to King, BGEA associate Grady Wilson disavowed any political motivation on Graham's part. "Even though we do not see eye to eye with [Daniel] on every issue," Wilson snapped, "we still love him in Christ, and frankly, I think that should be your position not only as a Christian but as a minister of the gospel of our risen Lord." Wilson then added that Graham had gladly invited King to New York City despite the "scores" of critical letters he had consequentially received.[90] For Graham (who almost certainly would have responded to King more cordially) and for Wilson, evangelistic priorities trumped matters of social concern, and Daniel's segregationist politics did not by definition undermine his Christian loyalties. Daniel's status as an elected official only strengthened their opinion. The service proceeded as planned in San Antonio, where God told a non-segregated crowd of 30,000 that God judges individuals by their hearts, not their skin colors. Daniel went on to victory; he may even have benefited from the public complaints about the San Antonio service by U. S. Representative Adam Clayton Powell, who had also contacted the evangelist.[91] The relationship between King and Graham vacillated between mostly

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[90] On King's correspondence with southerners, see Baldwin, *Legacy*, 57-58. King to Graham, 31 August 1957; and 23 July 1958; both in http://www.stanford.edu/group/King/publications/papers/vol4/contents.htm. Grady Wilson to King, 28 July 1958, BGCA, CN 544, 37-3. Graham had already participated in Daniel's first inauguration ceremony. See *Houston Post*, 16 January 1957, in BGCA, CN 360, R26.

[91] UPI, undated [26 July 1958]; *San Antonio Express*, 26 July 1958; *Dallas Times-Herald* (AP), 18 July 1958; all in BGCA, CN 360, R26. For more on King and Graham, see Chapter IV.

private warmth and occasional public frostiness into the 1960s, when the ideological and theological differences between them widened even further.

Graham's encounters with liberal Protestants were likewise less tense than they would become a decade later. Here, the much-publicized criticism he received from renowned theologian Reinhold Niebuhr served as an exception proving the rule. On the cusp of the 1957 New York City crusade, Niebuhr, a professor at Union Theological Seminary and a leading liberal anticommunist, dismissed Graham's social ethic as "pietistic individualism" and "moralism," irresponsible atavisms in light of the complexities of the nuclear age. The "evangelical perfectionism" inherent in Graham's style of revivalism (i.e., his focus on the conversion moment as a source for personal regeneration) represented a simplistic and potentially escapist response to the challenges of the twentieth century, argued Niebuhr. Thinking exclusively in terms of saving souls ignored the gravity of "collective evil."[92] Graham reacted politely to this criticism, yet yielded no theological ground to Niebuhr.[93]

Niebuhr, however, grew significantly more charitable toward Graham when the topic turned to race, going no further than to urge the evangelist to address the matter more extensively in his sermons. At the time their views on desegregation were closer than either would have likely admitted. Despite their many theological differences (not to mention their political, cultural and stylistic ones), they responded with striking similarity to the *Brown* decision, favoring gradual implementation of desegregation rooted in respect for the rule of law. Niebuhr, who took pride in his realist gravitas, was

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[92] Niebuhr, "Literalism, Individualism, and Billy Graham," *Christian Century*, 23 May 1956, 641; and "Proposal," 921-922; both in BGCA, CN 360, R65.

[93] Martin, *Prophet*, 228-229.

only slightly less skeptical of legislative solutions than the evangelist. Their gradualist positions derived from differing emphases on the individual: for Graham, a stress on individual conversions and human relationships over policy prescriptions; for Niebuhr, a profound caution regarding the ability of individuals to avoid social evils larger than themselves. Niebuhr's significantly more incisive pessimism about group and individual behavior ironically led him to a place similar to Graham's often reflexive optimism about human regeneration. They both worried about the adverse effects of legally coerced justice, and their perspectives tended toward caution when confronted with the mobs surrounding Central High School.[94] They shared their concerns with many other white intellectuals and Protestant leaders.[95]

Graham's relationship with King, who saw Graham as a potential ally of sorts, and with Niebuhr, who thought the evangelist warranted a pointed critique more than a wholesale dismissal, suggested the particular theological, social, and ideological space the evangelist occupied during the latter half of the 1950s: an alternately interventionist and hamstrung position of moderation. Their interest in Graham also indicated the heightened expectations surrounding his emergence as a regional leader. A range of figures—including a segregationist congressman, in Boykin, and an emerging civil rights

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[94] Niebuhr, "A theologian says evangelist is oversimplifying the issues of life," *Life*, 1 July 1957, 92, in BGCA, CN 360, R66. For Niebuhr's views on civil rights, see, for example, Niebuhr, "The Race Problem in America," *Christianity and Crisis*, 26 December 1955, 169-170; "School, Church, and the Ordeals of Integration," *Christianity and Crisis*, 1 October 1956, 121-122; "A Theologian's Comments on the Negro in America," *The Reporter*, 29 November 1956, 24-25; and "The States' Rights Crisis," *The New Leader*, 29 September 1958, 6-7. Later, however, Niebuhr came to recognize the fundamental legitimacy of the Civil Rights Movement to an extent the evangelist never did. See Niebuhr, "Revolution in an Open Society," *The New Leader*, 27 May 1963, 7-8. Peter Kuryla generously shared these articles with the author.

[95] On the strikingly moderate and cautious response of many American intellectuals to the early Civil Rights Movement, see Carol Polsgrove, *Divided Minds: Intellectuals and the Civil Rights Movement* (New York: Norton, 2001).

leader, in King—clearly thought the evangelist could play an important role as a racial mediator in the region. Graham, in other words, had options; he could engage the race issue on his own terms. To the pleasure of Eisenhower and to the disappointment of others, the type of role he chose in the South reflected his evangelical social ethic, as well as his political leanings. While his gradualist views resembled the opinions of many white moderates, his social location gave him distinctive leverage. As an evangelist safely removed from the worlds of filibusters and picket lines, yet possessing clear access to their organizers, Graham could selectively intervene in his home region, taking into account his evangelistic priorities, his personal politics, and his wariness of risking public criticism. His chosen leadership role during the latter half of the 1950s shaped the remainder of his engagements with both the Civil Rights Movement and the larger political trajectory of the South.

Graham's rarefied position, however, did not lack some socio-political punch. Boykin, King, and others were wise to seek his services. His stature and basic message of racial decency made him capable of unique service to the region, especially to regional boosters. During Eisenhower's second term, as the vogue of racial moderation compounded with each Clinton and Little Rock, Graham was particularly well-positioned to lend legitimacy to the forces of civil, if ill-defined, caution. His desegregated meetings served as foils for, and alternatives to, the likes of Faubus and Timmerman, while simultaneously circumventing the thorny details of school desegregation that had spawned massive resistance in the first place. Graham's appeals to evangelical universalism and its secular corollary, the politics of decency, carved out critical space to the left of ardent segregationists and to the right of civil rights backers, and more

ambiguously, assisted efforts to rehabilitate the South's image. In Clinton and Little Rock, Graham appealed to neighbor-love, as well as law and order—messages sadly missing from so much of the public discourse of the white South. At the same time, he defended his region with striking consistency, suggesting that racist demagogues did not speak for the true South, which he intended to showcase in his rallies. For the time being, the moderate white South could assert itself merely by proving what it was not: the mob in Little Rock or the bombers in Clinton. Likewise, Graham could easily condemn extremists on the right while responding hardly at all to the supposed radicals on the other end of the political spectrum. He could describe himself as a foe of Jim Crow and as a friend of racial tolerance, an opponent of racial violence and a supporter of obeying the law—and leave it at that.

This moment of moderation began to fade during the first half of the 1960s, when civil rights activism, rather than resistance to school desegregation, grabbed the headlines. The divisive issue of civil disobedience moved to the forefront, requiring national and southern figures alike to take clearer positions on the relationship between the law, justice, and—for Graham—faith. With Graham's answers, the existing discordance between appeals to evangelical universalism and exhortations to the beloved community, between the lyrics of "Just as I Am" and those of "We Shall Overcome," grew more strained.

CHAPTER IV

"ANOTHER KIND OF MARCH"

During the past week there have been racial incidents in many areas of the United States. People are marching for what they believe to be their rights. However, here in Montgomery, Alabama, we have witnessed another kind of march. In my opinion this march in Montgomery is even more significant, more constructive, and more revolutionary than the other marches we have read about in other parts of the country.

Billy Graham[1]

I have been holding demonstrations for fifteen years, but in a stadium where it is legal.

Billy Graham[2]

Billy Graham's racial moderation had made him useful, in differing ways, to both President Eisenhower and Martin Luther King, Jr., during the latter half of the 1950s. When the Civil Rights Movement reached a climax during the mid-1960s, Lyndon Johnson similarly viewed the evangelist as an ideal racial mediator in the South. To King and other civil rights leaders, though, Graham's reputation by then had begun a decline from which the evangelist would never fully recover. In the summer of 1960, Graham and King flew together from San Juan, Puerto Rico, to Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, to attend the annual meeting of the Baptist World Alliance. At some point, the two ministers discussed their respective high-profile roles as evangelist and activist. In Graham's telling, they had already agreed to bless each other's unique sphere of influence—one

[1] AP statement, undated [June 1965], Billy Graham Center Archives (BGCA), CN 506, Box 8, Folder 7 (8-7).

[2] *Birmingham News*, 26 April 1965.

marching in the streets, the other preaching in the stadiums—and, at Rio, King told his fellow Baptists that the evangelist's endeavors in the South had made his own efforts easier. Their work, Graham has conveniently asserted ever since, was complementary.[3]

The evangelist's interpretation would have come across as somewhat less startling in the context of 1960, when school desegregation remained stalled and the Eisenhower administration lacked an executive agent officially in charge of civil rights matters. Even as the sit-in revolution began spreading throughout the South that year, Graham and King arguably held more in common than not on racial matters, especially in the context of their home region. The remaining election year brought their different stations into greater relief, however. King, about whom the evangelist had never uttered a public word of criticism, was already identified with boycotts and other non-violent forms of protest, but not yet with the significantly more controversial tactic of civil disobedience. Later that summer, he participated in his first sit-in, setting off a chain of judicial retribution that led to a stint in a rural Georgia prison and intervention by Robert Kennedy on his behalf.[4] Graham, trying desperately and only somewhat successfully to avoid a public endorsement of Richard Nixon, sequestered himself in Europe for the remainder of the summer. During the first three years of the 1960s, the evangelist kept a comparatively low domestic profile and largely avoided the South, expanding into South America the appeal he had already cultivated in Europe, Asia, and Africa. At home, he addressed the constitutional status of school prayer as much as any other matter.

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[3] Billy Graham, *Just As I Am: The Autobiography of Billy Graham* (New York: HarperCollins, 1997), 360, 426.

[4] On King in the late 1950s and early 1960s, see Taylor Branch, *Parting the Waters: America in the King Years, 1954-1963* (New York: Touchstone, 1988), 200-450 passim.

As civil rights activists began to adopt more direct strategies and subsequently encountered violence that made Clinton and Little Rock pale in comparison, though, Graham shifted his attention back to the race problem. His arguments paralleled those he had made during the school desegregation crisis of the late 1950s, only now he more specifically targeted civil rights activists for censure. He publicly questioned the prudence of their tactics, ominously alluded to subversive elements within the Civil Rights Movement, and routinely called for King and others to eschew protests in favor of dialogue and the legislative process (even though he elsewhere doubted the effectiveness of civil rights laws). Focusing his energy on the White House and away from the streets, Graham tacitly aligned himself with the civil rights agenda of President Lyndon Johnson, who in turn influenced the course of his regional leadership. When the evangelist returned to the Deep South following the passage of landmark civil rights legislation in 1964, he revised the meaning of his own desegregated services, describing them as lawful alternatives not only to racial violence, as was the case in Clinton and Little Rock, but also to civil rights demonstrations, as seen in Birmingham and Selma.

The mid-1960s represented the high point of Graham's regional influence, when he facilitated the growth of a faith-informed, post-segregation public language and paved ground for a racially moderate Sunbelt South. As the strategic relevance of the evangelist decreased in the estimation of King, it grew in the eyes of Johnson, who sought out the evangelist as a political ally and racial conciliator. Graham did not fulfill all of Johnson's expectations, yet he did pay three visits to racially tense Alabama in 1964 and 1965. During these visits, his most celebrated interventions in the South, he appealed to the rule of law, as well as the rule of grace. While Graham and his southern booster collaborators

worked to convince white southerners to accept the fated demise of legalized Jim Crow—and, through desegregated evangelistic services, modeled one way to do so—they also steered the course of social change away from the more substantive goals of civil rights activists. The moderate and, occasionally, progressive forces of law and order (so distinct and decent when contrasted with a George Wallace or a Bull Conner) grew petulant in the face of civil rights protests and two-sided when confronted with urban riots. Graham's brand of demonstrations highlighted the better part of the white South, but also foreshadowed the Nixonian politics of the "silent majority."

Different Dreams

Within popular evangelical historiography, a mythology of sorts has emerged seeking to equate the work of Graham and King on behalf of racial justice. "Billy Graham Had a Dream," reads the title of one treatment of the evangelist's efforts to combat racism.[5] Such a development threatens to obscure the significant distinction between those ministers who marched and those who did not. Part of a larger conservative effort to invoke the legacy of King, this misleading equivalency has drawn sustenance from the residue of understandable civil rights-era dreams about what a King-

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[5] Edward Gilbreath, "Billy Graham Had a Dream," *Christian History*, Issue 47 (1995): 44-46. Gilbreath attributed to Graham the aphorism, often cited by King, that eleven o'clock is "the most segregated hour" in the nation (44). The claim is doubtful. Graham, as the author noted, did use such language in his 1960 *Reader's Digest* article. However, the evangelist prefaced his words with a qualifying clause ("[I]t has become a byword that") suggesting derivation from other sources. See Graham, "Why Don't Our Churches Practice the Brotherhood They Preach?" *Reader's Digest*, August 1960, 53. See also Russ Busby, *Billy Graham: God's Ambassador* (Alexandria, VA; Minneapolis; and Del Mar, CA: Time-Life, Billy Graham Evangelistic Association [BGEA], and Tehabi Books, 1999), 212-217. Recently, the author explained to a peer (who happens to be a committed evangelical Christian) that this project covered the complicated relationship between Graham and King. The peer's reply was quick and definitive: "Some would say they were brothers."

Graham alliance might have accomplished.[6] The interpretation first received popular dissemination in 1979 with the publication by Graham's authorized biographer of a letter from Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan to the evangelist. "You and Rev. King," wrote the Democrat and advisor to President Richard Nixon, "more than any two men—and, surely, with God's help—brought your own South out of that long night of racial fear and hate." Graham's autobiographical recounting of his relationship with King has contributed to the mythology, as well.[7]

A closer look at King and Graham does reveal some keen commonalities between them, but ultimately exposes the fundamental differences between Graham's evangelical universalism and King's prophetic realism. By the late 1950s, the two had commenced a mostly cordial, consultative relationship. Following King's appearance at the 1957 New York City crusade, he and Graham held several meetings, leading to momentary visions among King associates about a joint crusade that might eventually penetrate even the Deep South. Graham's continued willingness to associate with Christian segregationists, such as Governor Price Daniel of Texas, soon put an end to such hopes, although King told a Canadian television audience in 1959 that Graham had taken a "very strong stand against segregation." As historian Taylor Branch has shown, moreover, King drew early inspiration for his own efforts from the example of the tightly coordinated, strategically targeted crusades of the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association (BGEA). Most likely

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[6] "King and Graham as Ghetto-Mates," *Christian Century*, 10 August 1966, 976-977. The Graham-King revision has sought to counter the interpretations of black public leaders, such as Jesse Jackson, who told *Christianity Today* that Graham "would have preached to the slaves in Egypt . . . then he'd have gone and played golf with Pharaoh." King, in contrast would have "taken them to Canaan." See "You Can Pray If You Want To," *Christianity Today*, 12 August 1977, 15.

[7] Quoted in John Pollock, *Billy Graham: Evangelist to the World: An Authorized Biography of the Decisive Years* (New York: Harper & Row, 1979), 127. Graham, *Just as I Am*, 426.

with the encouragement of the evangelist, the Graham team willingly shared their trade secrets and public relations expertise with representatives from King's Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC). Meanwhile, the King-Graham friendship (a word befitting the first half-decade of their association) remained mostly a private one.[8]

The 1960 Rio conference was both the high point of their relationship and the point of no return for their differences. At the international gathering of Baptist leaders, Graham organized a banquet in honor of King and invited Southern Baptist leaders to attend. Either in Rio or during a layover in Puerto Rico, the two found occasions for extended conversation. At the time, all Graham recounted from their talks was his effort to sell King on Richard Nixon. Graham soon advised Nixon to meet with King.[9] Subsequently, however, the evangelist's memories of Rio have produced a quote from King that now stands as Exhibit A in the case for their ultimate complementarity. Graham's autobiography quotes the following words of advice given by King:

> You stay in the stadiums, Billy, because you will have far more impact on the white establishment there than you would if you marched in the streets. Besides that, you have a constituency that will listen to you, especially among white people, who may not listen so much to me. But if a leader gets too far out in front of his people, they will lose sight of him and not follow him any longer.[10]

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[8] Branch, *Parting*, 227-228, 594-595. "There was a time that [Graham] would even preach before segregated audiences," King told the Canadian viewers. "But now he refuses to preach to any audience that is segregated, which, I think is a marvelous step." *Front Page Challenge* interview, 28 April 1959, in Clayborne Carson, et al, ed., The Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr., Volume 5, *Threshold of a New Decade, January 1959-December 1960* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2005), 193.

[9] Graham to Nixon, 23 August 1960, National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), Pacific Region, Laguna Niguel, Richard M. Nixon Pre-Presidential Papers, Series 320, 299-"Graham, Billy."

[10] Branch, *Parting*, 314. Graham, *Just As I Am*, 360, 426.

The first two published versions of this directive reverse the flow of those words, with Graham remembering a proposal to King to "let me do my work in the stadiums, Mike, and you do yours in the streets."[11] A subsequent source offers an earlier point of origin for similar words, the 1957 New York City crusade, but attributes the comments to King.[12] The civil rights leader may well have privately affirmed or uttered sentiments to this effect, and his purported advice undoubtedly contained elements of strategic truth. In a more reliable quote taken from the Rio banquet held in his honor and quoted by the BGEA as early as 1965, King praised "the stand Billy Graham has taken in the South against racial segregation," a position without which "my work would have been much more difficult."[13] In the end, Graham likely would not have chosen any other course than the one he recalled King endorsing; doing so would have entailed a major departure from Graham's social theology. King was almost certainly aware of these parameters.

Regardless of the origins of the remembered advice to or from Graham, it contained different implications in the context of 1957 or 1960 than during the latter part of the civil rights era. During the former period, King needed mainstream American leaders (with southerners being particularly ideal candidates) to make the basic case for desegregation and racial justice. Graham could contribute to this important, if broadly defined, task through his crusades, as well as through his private meetings with southern religious and political leaders. As the Civil Rights Movement gained momentum and

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[11] Marshall Frady, *Billy Graham: A Parable of American Righteousness* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 1979), 416. A similar line appears in Pollock, *Evangelist to the World*, 127.

[12] William Martin, *A Prophet With Honor: The Billy Graham Story* (New York: William Morrow, 1991), 235.

[13] "Billy Graham and Race," undated [1965], BGCA, CN, 345, 44-1. A similar comment appears in Pollock, *Evangelist to the World*, 127.

increased in ambitions, however, King sought support both for his tactics and for specific civil rights legislation. He found such backing neither from the eight white clergy to whom he addressed his famous "Letter from Birmingham City Jail" nor from Graham.

Occurring on the cusp of this transition, the Rio gathering ultimately signaled a point of departure for King and Graham more than a pact of alliance between them. Contrary to the suggestion of one scholar, whatever influence King exerted on Graham preceded the era of Birmingham and Selma.[14] Four months after the Rio gathering, as the sit-in movement spread to his hometown of Charlotte, Graham conceded the propriety of using "every legal means to protest" injustice, but added that Christians have a duty to obey the law. His comments followed a public affirmation by King of the right to disobey "unjust laws."[15] In the midst of the campaigns in Birmingham and Selma, the evangelist continued to call King one of his "personal friends" and to lend organizational and public relations counsel through back-door channels.[16] By apparent coincidence in 1962, they flew on the same plane from Miami to Chicago, where Graham was beginning a crusade. Their disembarkation together created an opportunity to pose for a well-circulated *Chicago Tribune* photograph, which has been misidentified as deriving from the 1957 New York City crusade.[17] At the same time, Graham publicly criticized King's

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[14] The scholar inexplicably argues that King's influence "accounted largely for Billy Graham's public statements against racism in the 1970s." See Lewis V. Baldwin, *The Legacy of Martin Luther King, Jr.: The Boundaries of Law, Politics, and Religion* (South Bend, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2002), 102.

[15] *Columbia* (TN) *Herald* (UPI), 30 November 1960, in BGCA, CN 360, R27. See Branch, *Parting*, 594-595, 602. Graham declined to take a position on the sit-ins in his hometown of Charlotte, but expressed support for a biracial committee formed to address the demonstrations. See *Charlotte Observer*, 2 April 1960, in BGCA, CN 360, R27.

[16] Graham, "Billy Graham's Own Story: 'God is My Witness,'" Part III, *McCall's*, June 1964, 146.

strategies and periodically called for a halt to demonstrations. These criticisms carried more weight in the headlines than did professions of friendship.

The primary explanation for Graham's departure from King was the evangelist's opposition to civil disobedience as a mechanism for achieving social change. The strategy of civil disobedience ultimately clashed with his obvious preference for transforming society by way of individual conversions and, even more strongly, with his Pauline respect for ordained authority. He assumed that regenerated hearts normatively led to obedience to the law, not challenges to it. "I believe in trying to change the law through the system," the evangelist said during the height of anti-Vietnam War protests, "but when we go out and break one law, that leads to another law . . . until you teach a whole generation that it is all right to break laws."[18] As such, Graham quickly advocated prosecution of the whites who had attacked the Freedom Riders, yet remained unsupportive of civil rights activists who strategically violated, rather than tested, existing laws.[19] Graham was decidedly unequipped and unwilling to address the psychology of racial terror. The BGEA could offer helpful tips to the SCLC about how to coordinate transportation networks and schedule speaking events in order to gain maximum media exposure, yet the Graham team knew nothing about how to respond to bomb threats and belligerent sheriffs. Graham's respect for the law had never seriously been tested. City authorities had welcomed him at each of his desegregated crusades

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[17] *Chicago Tribune*, 29 May 1962, in BGCA, CN 360, R28. Mis-attributions in Gilbreath, "Dream," 44; and David L. Chappell, *A Stone of Hope: Prophetic Religion and the Death of Jim Crow* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 142. See also photograph, "KING, MARTIN LUTHER, JR.," BGCA, CN 17. Following the Miami-to-Chicago flight, King directed two aides to consult with BGEA staffers about public relations matters. See Branch, *Parting*, 594-595.

[18] Knoxville press conference transcript, 21 May 1970, BGCA, CN 24, 1-23.

[19] *New York Times*, 18 May 1961, in BGCA, CN 360, R27.

(even at Columbia), something that was obviously not true for demonstrators in Albany or St. Augustine.

While Graham seemingly had few bones to pick with the general cause of civil rights and argued that ministerial participation in demonstrations was a matter of individual prerogative, his description of the Civil Rights Movement suggested more than a little sociological distance from it.[20] Graham may have personally known King and other SCLC leaders, yet he did not begin to grasp the movement they represented and the struggles they faced. When discussing civil rights activism, he often employed grandiosely neutral language, describing it (albeit, in such Deep South states South Carolina and Alabama) as a "great social revolution" that had served to "arouse the conscience" of the nation.[21] At times, these terms of abstraction evolved into discomfort or even outright opposition. With each new landmark campaign—be it Birmingham (1963), Mississippi Freedom Summer (1964), or Selma (1965)—Graham called for a cessation of protests. Under the influence of Federal Bureau of Investigation head J. Edgar Hoover, an obsessive opponent of civil rights who routinely passed along to public figures classified intelligence skewed to prove the presence of communists in King's inner circle, the evangelist voiced concerns about subversive left-wing influences within the Movement.[22]

Graham's criticism of the Civil Rights Movement inevitably spread to King himself. In April 1963, during the height of the Birmingham demonstrations and amid

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[20] *Atlanta Constitution*, 14 January 1964.

[21] Greenville, SC, address, March 1965, CN 26, BGCA, T89. *Montgomery Advertiser*, 27 April 1965.

[22] *Nashville Banner*, 26 June 1964. Religious News Service, 18 August 1965, in BGCA, CN 345, 44-1. Frady, *Parable*, 416.

controversies over the city's mayoral election, Graham urged his "good personal friend" King to "put the brakes on a little bit." The evangelist doubted whether most blacks in Birmingham actually supported the protest movement and worried that continued demonstrations would hinder the influence of white southern moderates, such as newspaper editors Ralph McGill and Harry Golden.[23] The "brakes" line drew official censure from SCLC and the Fellowship of Reconciliation.[24] Judging from the BGEA's comprehensive clippings files, the statement represented a turning point for how many black newspapers and the most conservative portion of the white southern press separately responded to Graham. In 1960, when some white southern papers criticized the evangelist for his suggestion that racism damaged the image of the nation, a columnist for the *Chicago Defender*, a famous black newspaper, praised him as "a powerful friend" who was "not a gradualist," while a *Norfolk Journal & Guide* writer urged him to "[c]ome home" and witness to the white South.[25] Three years later, the two groups exchanged positions. Even though the "brakes" line resembled editorial positions taken by such national publications as *Time* and the *Washington Post*, it ignited a long-simmering fuse of anti-Graham sentiments among civil rights activists who had grown weary of his reflexively moderate views, which looked much less impressive in Birmingham than they had in Little Rock four years earlier.[26] "We have had the brakes

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[23] *New York Times*, 18 April 1963.

[24] *Tupelo* (MS) *Journal* (UPI), 2 May 1963; and *Westerly* (RI) *Sun*, 6 May 1963; both in BGCA, CN 360, R29.

[25] *Chicago Defender*, 25 May 1960; and *Norfolk Journal & Guide*, 19 March 1960; both in BGCA, CN 360, R27.

[26] S. Jonathan Bass, *Blessed are the Peacemakers: Martin Luther King, Jr., Eight White Religious Leaders, and the "Letter from Birmingham Jail"* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University [LSU], 2001),

on too long," one such activist, Birmingham's own Reverend Fred Shuttlesworth, declared in response to Graham.[27] The evangelist appeared to fit King's stinging description in "Letter from Birmingham City Jail" (which preceded Graham's comments by one day) of "the white moderate who is more devoted to 'order' than to justice; . . . who paternalistically feels that he can set the timetable for another man's freedom."[28]

Graham only confirmed his new reputation as a roadblock to the Civil Rights Movement when he failed to attend the August 28, 1963, March on Washington, which occurred during the evangelist's second crusade in Los Angeles. Graham referred to the march, where King delivered his famous "I Have a Dream" address, in a manner vacillating between insensitivity and dismissal. On the day of the rally, Graham prophesied that "one day there will be a march on Washington which will dwarf the civil rights demonstration and it will be in the name of God."[29] In a subsequent address to the segregationist-dominated Georgia state legislature, the evangelist said he agreed with King's vision of interracial brotherhood, although legislation could not fulfill this dream.[30] Elsewhere, he was more skeptical. "Only when Christ comes again," he was quoted as saying, "will the lion lie down with the lamb and the little white children of Alabama walk hand in hand with the little black children."[31] While Graham still called

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104-105. See *Hattiesburg* (MS) *American*, 25 April 1963; and *Gardner* (MA) *News*, 25 April 1963; both in BGCA, CN 360, R29.

[27] Andrew Michael Manis, *A Fire You Can't Put Out: The Civil Rights Life of Birmingham's Reverend Fred Shuttlesworth* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press [Alabama], 1999), 362.

[28] Martin Luther King, Jr., "Letter from Birmingham City Jail," in *A Testament: The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, ed. James M. Washington (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1991), 295.

[29] *Los Angeles Herald-Examiner*, 29 August 1963, in BGCA, CN 360, R29.

[30] *Atlanta Constitution*, 15 January 1964.

King a friend and claimed to support his general goals, they clearly had grown uncomfortable with each other's interpretation of the relationship between human and higher laws, as well as the role and responsibilities of ministers in public life.[32] As King called out moderates, Graham returned the favor. A decade apart in age and more than that in temperament and, increasingly, theology, their differences only widened when the evangelist began attacking King's opposition to the Vietnam War.[33]

Back in the White House

As Graham's relationship with King declined, his relevance to President Lyndon Johnson grew in intensity and visibility. The evangelist and the politician had known each other since the early 1950s, when they met through a mutual benefactor, Texas oilman Sid Richardson. Although they kept in touch during the next ten years, when Johnson served as Senate majority leader before becoming vice president, their affinity for each other increased when Johnson assumed the presidency in November 1963.[34] (Graham and President John F. Kennedy had maintained a cordial, but cool relationship during the preceding three years.)[35] Johnson was the type of Texan whom Graham admired. Even though the evangelist's politics were decidedly Nixonian, he held great

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[31] Kenneth L. Woodward, "The Preaching and the Power," *Newsweek*, 20 July 1970, 52.

[32] *Honolulu Star Bulletin*, 2 February 1965, in BGCA, CN 360, R30.

[33] AP, 16 August 1965, in BGCA, CN 360, R30; and *Camden Courier-Post*, 25 April 1967, in BGCA, CN 360, R31. Following the assassination of King in April 1968, Graham released a public statement that included a line mixing praise with distance: "Many people who have not agreed with Dr. King can admire him for his non-violent policies and in the eyes of the world he has become one of the greatest Americans." Quoted in Jerry Berl Hopkins, "Billy Graham and the Race Problem, 1949-1969" (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Kentucky, 1986), 150.

[34] Graham *Just As I Am*, 403-418. Martin, *Prophet*, 299.

[35] Martin, *Prophet*, 297. See also Chapter V.

affection for the gregarious, social Johnson, whose style differed from the guarded, calculating Nixon. According to Johnson aide Bill Moyers, the North Carolinian and the South Texan had "an almost visceral attraction to each other," due in part to their shared upbringings in southern outposts and, as Johnson later admitted, their propensity for stoking each other's ego.[36] Graham saw Johnson as a churchgoer with a Southern Baptist background, while the president considered the evangelist a well-meaning, if sometimes inconsistent, ally.

With the election of Johnson in 1964, Graham momentarily halted his support for Republican presidential candidates, which had continued through the 1960 election.[37] As such, the evangelist paralleled the portion of the white-collar, metropolitan electorate in the South that had voted for Eisenhower and Nixon in previous elections, but returned to southern Democratic loyalties in 1964. That year, the Republican Party failed to attain a majority of southern metropolitan voters for the first time since 1948—a development attributable to an increase in black voter registration, but also to the distaste many white moderates held for the GOP candidate, Barry Goldwater.[38] During the election year, Johnson remained mindful of how Graham might assist his efforts to appeal to moderates throughout the nation. In May, Johnson pondered attending a North Carolina fundraiser for the Kennedy Presidential Library for which Graham was scheduled to deliver the keynote address. The president was responding to an inaccurate rumor of a possible

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[36] Quoted in Frady, *Parable*, 260-262.

[37] For more on the 1960 election, see Chapter V.

[38] On the southern metropolitan vote and the GOP, see Matthew D. Lassiter, *The Silent Majority: Suburban Politics in the Sunbelt South* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006), 229-231. See also Hugh D. Graham and Numan V. Bartley, *Southern Politics and the Second Reconstruction* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1975), 107.

appearance by Jacqueline Kennedy, then still in a period of mourning. Her presence, along with that of the evangelist, would give the event enough appeal for Johnson to consider making a brief statement on behalf of the fund-raising campaign. He hoped to "circularize the hell out of it, even run it as an ad on what I say." The president ultimately decided not to attend the event, where before a crowd of 10,000 people Graham praised John F. Kennedy for his efforts to foster "racial understanding."[39]

Much to the consternation of Johnson and his staff, however, more than a few Republicans desired to align Graham with their candidate in 1964. Some even longed to make him the GOP nominee. Starting at least a year before the election, right-wing activist and oil tycoon H. L. Hunt, a Republican and member of Graham's home church in Dallas, touted the evangelist as the cure for the party's woes. Having similarly promoted General Douglas MacArthur in 1952, the eccentric, philandering billionaire had a history of sinking money into far-flung right-wing causes in a manner reminiscent of the present-day philanthropist Richard Mellon Scaife.[40] Hunt was by no means the first person to become afflicted with Graham presidential fantasies. (To cite one example, a scheme to draft him as an independent had surfaced among a group of southern fundamentalists in 1960.)[41] Yet Hunt was the most determined of Graham's suitors. He was also the most connected to the evangelist, who visited him early in 1963. Hunt, who

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[39] Johnson and Steve Smith, 11 May 1964, Lyndon Johnson Presidential Library and Archives (LJPA), White House Conversation Recordings (WHCR), 3381. See also Michael R. Beschloss, ed., *Taking Charge: The Johnson White House Tapes, 1963-1964* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1997), 344. *Florence* (SC) *News* (AP), 18 May 1964, in BGCA, CN 360, R29.

[40] For background on Hunt, see Dan T. Carter, *The Politics of Rage: George Wallace, the Origins of the New Conservatism, and the Transformation of American Politics*, 2nd edition (LSU, 2000), 335-336.

[41] Graham quickly, if politely, ended the 1960 draft effort. See *Americus* (GA) *Times-Reader*, 11 June 1960; and *Miami Daily News*, 25 August 1960; both in BGCA, CN 360, R27.

was closer to BGEA evangelist Grady Wilson than to Graham himself, wrote to Wilson in May 1963 regarding a possible Graham run against Kennedy. "The Republican fortunes are looking up," wrote the fanatical anticommunist, "but they truly do not have a logical candidate for President." Graham "would show up favorably in the polls," Hunt suggested, if only the evangelist would insert more "calls for Freedom" (i.e., anti-communism and anti-statism) in his columns. Hunt appears to have viewed Graham as—in the words of an action plan he passed along to Wilson—a "Prospect," a potential candidate whom the GOP should secretly cultivate, without even the knowledge of the prospect himself. The action plan listed the South as a region particularly ripe for Republican gains. Other memos written by Hunt touted the political potential of an otherwise unnamed "Pastor Good." When Hunt's ambitions found their way into a Dallas newspaper, he downplayed his interest in a Graham candidacy. Soon, though, the story gravitated to *U.S. News & World Report*.[42]

The oilman's machinations resurfaced dramatically in January 1964 when a well-sourced writer for the *Houston Press* published an article, leaked by Hunt and later corroborated by Graham, declaring the willingness of the evangelist to consider a draft for the GOP nomination. His likely opponent, of course, would be Johnson. According to the article, which quickly traveled over the Scripps Howard newspaper circuit, interest came from at least three separate groups—one of which was undoubtedly Hunt himself, who had offered to bankroll the campaign—as well as several evangelicals close to Graham. Party officials, who noted his popularity in the South and Midwest, had made

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[42] H.L. Hunt to Grady Wilson, 11 May 1963, BGCA, CN 544, 12-16. "BETWEEEN ELECTION CAMPAIGNS," undated, no author, BGCA, CN 544, 12-16. *Houston Post*, 19 October 1963; and *Dallas Times-Herald*, 2 [or 3] May 1963; both in BGCA, CN 360, R29. "New Face in Politics? Graham Attracts Interest," *U.S. News & World Report*, 13 May 1963, 19.

inquiries to the evangelist at least as early as his Los Angeles crusade of August 1963, three months after Hunt wrote to Wilson. Graham, who was in Houston for a gathering of Protestant lay leaders when the story broke, did not immediately refute the article, which ran nationwide, and his delay allowed time for television anchor Walter Cronkite to mention the possible candidacy on the evening news.[43]

The following day, Graham moved to squelch the rumors. Citing intense pressure from intimates, though, he acknowledged having considered a run for office. In declaring his present unavailability, he reasserted his evangelistic priorities, as well as his political neutrality, noting that in previous years he had received similar inquiries from Democratic officials.[44] Those inquiries, he did not say, had likely involved invitations from political conservatives to run for U.S. Senate seats in the overwhelmingly Democratic state of North Carolina. In early 1964, Graham could plausibly invoke political neutrality because his political affiliation remained largely unknown, even though the betting money had him as a Republican lean. Also, his budding friendship with Johnson, whom the evangelist had visited several weeks after the assassination of Kennedy, had yet to garner substantial media scrutiny.[45] Graham would not advertise his status as a registered Democrat until the Nixon years, when he attempted to downplay the implications of his intimacy with the Republican president.

The short-lived and understaffed draft-Graham movement accentuated his perceived political utility (still, in Hunt's eyes at least, as a candidate for the

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[43] *Houston Press*, 31 January 1964, in BGCA, CN 360, R29. Martin, *Prophet*, 300.

[44] *Houston Press*, 1 February 1964; and *Lakeland* (FL) *Ledger* (AP), 2 February 1964; both in BGCA, CN 360, R29.

[45] Graham, *Just As I Am*, 404.

anticommunist right), as well as his continued attraction to politics, and surely caught the attention of Johnson. Word later surfaced during the GOP convention of a possible grassroots effort to promote Graham as Goldwater's running mate. According to political gossip columnist Walter Winchell, Hunt had promised to make that grass especially green for Goldwater if he could convince Graham to join his team.[46] Years after the election, stories still swirled about secret overtures to the evangelist from Goldwater aides.[47] Although these rumors likely all led back to Hunt, the president probably remained a bit anxious until election day. Hope sprung eternal among Goldwater supporters that, in his heart, Graham knew who was right. The evangelist claimed to have received "over one-million telegrams" on the cusp of the election (upwards of 60,000 on November 2 alone, according to the Associated Press), the vast majority of which urged him to endorse Goldwater. The telegrams bore all the signs of a well-coordinated effort.[48] Although unrealistic, a late endorsement from Graham might have helped legitimate a candidate battling charges of extremism, while also perpetuating Goldwater's efforts to reach out to conservative Democrats in the South and elsewhere. Earlier memos from concerned Johnson staffers imply some cognizance of similar schemes, although Graham put to rest any worries when he accepted a strategically timed invitation, facilitated by Bill Moyers, to visit the White House one weekend before the

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[46] *Houston Chronicle*, 23 February 1964; and *San Francisco News-Call Bulletin*, 11 July 1964; both in BGCA, CN 360, R29.

[47] Earle B. Mayfield to Johnson, 21 July 1966, LJPA, WHCF, NF, 227A-"Box 227a WHCF Name."

[48] *New York Times* (AP), 3 November 1964. AP article, 23 December 1964, in BGCA, CN 360, R30. Johnson and Graham, 5 November 1964, LJPA, WHCR, 6227.

election.[49] This was the second such visit intended, at least partly, to shore up his support for the president.[50] It also occurred amid lingering political concerns over the arrest of Johnson aide Walter Jenkins on a "morals charge."[51] Over breakfast, Johnson happily advised Graham on how to describe his neutral position on the presidential race.[52] A final cause for concern came only a few days afterwards (around the same time the deluge of telegrams commenced), when one of Graham's daughters attended a Goldwater rally in Greenville, South Carolina, not far from Montreat. The evangelist, whose father-in-law was an active Goldwater backer, quickly reasserted his "strict neutrality" in the race.[53] Goldwater "needed you as much as I did," Johnson later told Graham, who publicly registered his opinion that the barrage of telegrams had resulted from an organized campaign. The dreams of GOP loyalists aside, Johnson need not have fretted much about retaining the support of Graham, who informed the president after the election that he was "not only the choice of the American people—but of God."[54]

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[49] Moyers to Ross Coggins, 21 October 1964; and Moyers to Coggins, 29 October 1964; both in LJPA, WHCF, Name File (NF), 227a-"WHCF Name." Johnson and Graham, 20 October 1964, LJPA, WHCR, 5926; and Michael R. Beschloss, *Reaching for Glory: Lyndon Johnson's Secret White House Tapes, 1964-1965* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2001), 88.

[50] A Johnson supporter called Graham's August 1964 visit to the White House "a great day, far greater in so many ways than the Press reported." George Harris to Moyers, 9 September 1964, BGCA, CN 74, 3-6 [original in LJPA].

[51] Several weeks before the October visit, Jenkins was arrested for engaging in a homosexual act. Johnson was paranoid that the Goldwater campaign would use the incident for political advantage. In accepting Johnson's invitation, Graham (who likely knew the meaning of "morals charge") passed along his "love and sympathy" for "dear Walter." Johnson and Graham, 20 October 1964; and Michael R. Beschloss, *Reaching for Glory: Lyndon Johnson's Secret White House Tapes, 1964-1965* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2001), 88. See also Branch, *Pillar of Fire: America in the King Years, 1963-65* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1998), 513-514, 517-518.

[52] Johnson and Graham, 5 November 1964.

[53] *Raleigh News & Observer* (AP), 2 November 1964, in BGCA, CN 360, R30.

LBJ obviously found Graham a useful political ally—a link to both the angry South and the proverbial Middle America—in addition to being a valued friend and occasional confidante.[55] The role he perceived for Graham extended beyond that of electoral symbol or pastoral peer, however. Likewise, Graham's support for Johnson, while undoubtedly rooted in their friendship, also reflected the comparatively moderate nature of his own politics during the mid-1960s. The two remained for the most part aligned on a number of critical issues, including civil rights and the Vietnam War, and the president could count on Graham to support much of his agenda. This fidelity was particularly important regarding civil rights, by far the most controversial agenda item during the first two years of the Johnson administration. The president needed support from the few southern moderates who still had the ears of mainstream segregationists, but who had repudiated the politics of massive resistance. Graham fit this bill.

Without specifically endorsing either the Civil Rights Act of 1964 or the Voting Rights Act of 1965, Graham supported the basic thrust of the administration's civil rights agenda. His basic understanding of socio-political equality squared with arguments Johnson employed in support of civil rights legislation and the larger programs of the Great Society. "I believe when we speak of equality," Graham wrote to a skeptical inquirer in 1966, "we refer to equal opportunity, equal rights, and equal chance for development. Although we may never be equal, we all deserve the chance to advance and improve."[56] While the evangelist was on record as a backer of federal civil rights

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[54] Johnson and Graham, 5 November 1964. Graham to Johnson, 10 November 1964, LJPA, WHCF, NF, 227a-"WHCF Name."

[55] Moyers identified Graham's primary constituency as "respectable, churchgoing, decent middle-class people." Quoted in Frady, *Parable*, 264-265.

[56] *Greenville* (SC) *News*, 10 March 1966.

legislation, the passage of which he appears to have thought inevitable, he almost always paired his support with a pointed invocation of evangelical universalism.[57] "We need legislation, we need civil rights legislation," he said in a statement released by the BGEA, "but it's got to come from the heart."[58] Similar assertions that only personal conversions, not civil rights laws, would finally solve the race problem were easily misused by segregationist politicians, such as South Carolina Senator Strom Thurmond, who selectively cited the evangelist in one of his many fulminations against the Civil Rights Act of 1964.[59] Not long after that landmark bill had passed, Graham quoted liberal Senator Hubert Humphrey as saying to him, "Billy, legislation alone can't do it. It must ultimately come from the heart."[60] Graham soon urged Johnson to declare a national day of prayer regarding the race problem.[61] During the Selma crisis of early 1965, which ultimately gave momentum to the Voting Rights Act, the evangelist released a statement—composed from a hospital bed in Honolulu, where he was suffering from a bronchial infection—stressing the "right to vote" of every citizen and offering a quintessentially moderate, if highly unrealistic, proposal for the president to bring both King and George Wallace to the White House for "a face-to-face discussion."[62] Following Johnson's nationally televised address in which he invoked the movement motto, "We shall overcome," Graham effusively called it the "greatest speech on civil

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[57] *Durham Herald*, 31 March 1964, in BGCA, CN 360, R29.

[58] *Charter Oak* (IA) *Times*, 27 August 1964, in BGCA, CN 360, R30.

[59] Thurmond in *Charleston* (SC) *News & Courier*, 20 April 1964, in BGCA, CN 360, R29.

[60] Graham, *World Aflame* (New York: Doubleday, 1965), 7.

[61] *Houston Chronicle*, 1 August 1964, in BGCA, CN 360, R30.

[62] *Greensboro News*, 14 March 1965, in BGCA, CN 360, R30.

rights of any president since Lincoln" before characteristically calling for a cessation of demonstrations. With equal predictability, he emphasized that "a thousand civil rights bills will not ease the racial tension in America unless we have a spiritual renewal that will change our hearts and give us a new love for each other." At the same time, he spoke favorably of the pending Voting Rights Act.[63]

Endorsing specific legislation, however, was not Johnson's primary aspiration for the evangelist in the policy realm. Rather, the president hoped that Graham would assist with efforts to convince level-headed white southerners to peacefully accept desegregation laws. The search for prophetic moderates, in fact, comprised a vital component of Johnson's civil rights policy and received its most tangible expression in the Community Relations Service (CRS), a federal agency created to oversee the implementation of the Civil Rights Act in the South. Modeled on existing human relations councils, the CRS was intended to mediate between white leaders and black activists. Along those lines, a 1965 White House strategy memo, which pondered how to persuade white southerners to stop acquitting segregationists for crimes of racial violence, proposed

> an organized effort by Southern leaders whose integrity and love of the South cannot be questioned but who have the vision to see what can happen unless there are some changes. These include men like Buford Ellington, LeRoy Collins, Luther Hodges, and others who, even though they hold 'advanced views' on human relations, still enjoy the confidence of conservative Southerners. These men should plan a careful tour of the trouble spots of the South in which they will contact influential businessmen, professionals, and other community leaders who, when united, actually determine the fate of political leaders.

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[63] *Los Angeles Times* (AP), 16 March 1965, in BGCA, CN 360, R30. *New York Times*, 17 April 1965.

These figures, all of whom had close ties to Johnson, would inform the "Southern power structure" of the consequences of inaction, while also "persuading communities that murder is murder and must be handled as such."[64]

Graham clearly fell into the category of the southern moderate who could still garner the respect of segregationist officials. In his 1964 and 1965 visits to Alabama, he performed many of the duties later outlined in the memo. Yet Johnson had originally sought an even more high-profile role for the evangelist. Graham was apparently his top choice to chair the National Citizens Committee for Community Relations, a group of "influential citizens" created to assist the CRS "in obtaining compliance with the [Civil Rights] Act and in creating a better spirit of good relations in the country."[65] As a respected minister possessing regional cachet and lacking serious political baggage, Graham represented a logical choice for chair. Moreover, Johnson had recently made a special appeal to Southern Baptists to accept the 1964 Civil Right Act.[66] Graham likely discussed the position with the president before final passage of the legislation, around the same time Johnson was soliciting other members for the Citizens Committee. In what would become a pattern during the Johnson years, Graham ultimately turned him down (as he would turn down several other formal or casual offers from Johnson), thus passing up perhaps his greatest opportunity for regional leadership outside of a crusade context.

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[64] For an overview of the CRS, see Chappell, *Inside Agitators: White Southerners in the Civil Rights Movement* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), 208-210. George E. Reedy to Johnson, 2 October 1965, LJPA, WHCF, Central Files (CF), Confidential File (CoF), 56-"HU 2 Equality of Races [first folder]."

[65] LeRoy Collins to Marvin Watson, 2 June 1965, LJPA, WHCF, EX FG 155-18, 228-"Community Relations Service 11/23/63-8/23/63."

[66] On March 25, 1964, four days before Graham's desegregated rally in Birmingham, Johnson convened a group of 150 Southern Baptist ministers for a reception at the White House Garden. He urged them to set an example for their congregants in the area of civil rights. See Branch, *Pillar*, 266.

However, he did accept a position on the 400-person Citizens Committee and promised to increase his evangelistic presence in the South. "He simply said that he felt like he could do more good [through his evangelistic work]," Secretary of Commerce and North Carolinian Luther Hodges told Johnson, "and to tell you that he's gonna try to have a crusade in St. Augustine and two or three other places in the South, including Mississippi, before long, and he thought this other [position] might detract from it." "That may be," Johnson replied laconically. Graham soon wrote to Johnson justifying his decision and inviting the president to attend a crusade at any time. The evangelist cited his busy schedule, as well as his belief that he could "contribute far more in the role of a preacher. . . . Certainly, the Civil Rights legislation needs to be undergirded by a moral and spiritual awakening." Johnson replied with an understanding letter and encouraged the evangelist and his wife to spend a night in the White House that summer. While Graham rarely mentioned his role in the Citizens Committee, he soon claimed that, "by and large the new civil rights law has been accepted by the people of the South."[67]

Still, the evangelist found more than a few other ways to support the president. Johnson became the first sitting executive to attend a Graham crusade service (a 1965 gathering in Houston) and the first to host the evangelist as an overnight guest at the White House.[68] Moreover, Graham spoke in favor of the Organization of Economic Opportunity (OEO) and, more controversially, defended the administration's policy in

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[67] Johnson to prospective members of the Citizens Committee, 1 July 1964, LJPA, WHCF, EX FG 155-18, 228-"Community Relations Service 11/23/63-7/5/64"; telegram list, 1 July 1964, in LJPJ, WHCF, NF, 227a-"WHCF Name." Graham, *Just As I Am*, 413. Johnson and Luther Hodges, 2 July 1964, LJPA, WHCR, 4123. Arthur Dean, a New York lawyer and statesman, accepted the chairmanship. Graham to Johnson, 6 July 1964; and Johnson to Graham, 22 July 1964; both in LJPA, WHCF, EX FG 155-18, 228-"Community Relations Service 7/6/64-7/22/64." UPI article, 23 December 1964, in BGCA, CN 360, R30.

[68] Graham, *Just As I Am*, 405-406.

Vietnam. Although the evangelist turned down an invitation to serve on the OEO advisory committee—a kind of citizens group designed to evaluate the centerpiece program of Johnson's War on Poverty—he took the arguably more visible step of producing an antipoverty documentary with OEO director Sargent Shriver. The film, titled *Beyond These Hills*, captured their helicopter visit to Avery County, North Carolina, an impoverished part of Appalachia not far from Montreat. In the film and accompanying pamphlet, Graham offered a moderate conservative's justification for the federal antipoverty program, citing relevant biblical passages and arguing that the OEO was not "sort of a handout." The evangelist, who earlier had called Shriver's Peace Corps "godless," now declared himself a "convert" to the War on Poverty and went so far as to testify in favor of anti-poverty legislation at a Capitol Hill luncheon. The film was screened by a group of Democratic senators, including many southern conservatives, and received wide television and radio distribution throughout the South, its target audience and the region politically most resistant to the program. "I believe this is the first and only time that Dr. Graham has consented to so endorse a domestic program of the United States Government," Shriver crowed in a memo.[69] This assertion may have been accurate, but only because of the evangelist's tendency to avoid details and the equally technical distinction that his two Christmastime tours of Vietnam represented more of a blessing than an endorsement. Privately, presidential aide Marvin Watson (a Southern

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[69] Marvin Watson to Johnson, 1 March 1967; and John W. Macy, Jr., to Johnson, 21 December 1966; both in LJPA, Office Files of John Macy, 222-"GRAHAM, Billy." *Beyond These Hills*, film and brochure, 1967, BGCA, CN 74, F16 and 3-3. *Minneapolis Star*, 28 August 1963, in BGCA, CN 360, R29. *Tazewell* (VA) *News*, 10 August 1967, in BGCA, CN 360, R31. Shriver to Johnson, 12 July 1967; Robert E. Kintner to Shriver, 19 June 1967; and Shriver to George Christian, 9 May 1967; all in LJPA, WHCF, NF, 227a-"WHCF Name."

Baptist who would later serve on the BGEA board) paraphrased Graham as calling himself as an "all-out hawk" who wanted "to win quickly and get out."[70]

Ultimately, when push came to shove, Graham readily marshaled his pastoral authority to defend the person of Johnson. Vouching for the character of a given leader represented the ultimate trump card for the nominally nonpartisan and widely respected evangelist. In comparison with his behavior during the subsequent Nixon presidency, though, Graham's favorable public comments about Johnson were largely confined to matters of the president's credentials and good intentions. Despite supporting the civil rights and antipoverty programs of Johnson, the evangelist publicly criticized many aspects of mid-1960s liberalism, especially anything pertaining to criminal rights or prayer in school.[71] His politics remained more in line with Nixon, to whom Graham later lent significantly more high-profile, as well as under-the-table, assistance.

The Politics of Decency Comes to Alabama

Johnson did not protest Graham's decision to forgo chairing the National Citizens Committee on Human Relations in favor of crusading in the Deep South. Rather, he attempted to hold the evangelist to his word. Two of Graham's three mid-1960s interventions in Alabama came with the encouragement of Johnson, who viewed Graham as a conciliator in keeping with the CRS's goal of "bring[ing] people together in constructive peaceful efforts."[72] The Alabama visits—a 1964 Easter rally in

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[70] Martin, *Prophet*, 344-345, 347. Watson to Graham, 13 June 1967, LJPA, Diary Backup, 68-"June 14, 1967." Graham, *Just As I Am*, 410.

[71] See, for example, Luther Holcomb to Douglas Nobles, 14 December 1966, LJPA, WHCF, NF, 227a-"WHCF Name."; and Los Angeles press conference, 13 August 1963, BGCA, CN 24, T3.

Birmingham, an April 1965 tour of the state, and a crusade in Montgomery two months later—reprised many themes evident in Clinton and Little Rock. In Alabama, though, the stakes were higher and the risks greater. Graham's visits came in the aftermath of civil rights demonstrations in Birmingham and Selma, two watershed moments of the Civil Rights Movement. In place of activism, he substituted his brand of evangelical mediation of social change.

As the Civil Rights Movement grew in intensity and breadth, Graham himself grew more willing to exert influence on the nation's domestic affairs. In 1962, he ventured into the Deep South to hold a desegregated (and strikingly unpublicized) rally in Huntsville, Alabama, where a crowd of 35,000 heard him preach at the Redstone Arsenal.[73] The rally, to be sure, took place on federal property outside of the jurisdiction of state segregation laws, as had the 1958 Columbia service. By 1963, the BGEA had decided to dedicate the next two years to domestic crusades, citing "the moral, spiritual and racial problems" of the nation.[74] The following year, Graham uncharacteristically used the term "integrated" when describing requirements for a proposed crusade in Atlanta; in a serialized autobiography published later in 1964, he returned to the less politicized "nonsegregated."[75] A few months later, the BGEA opened an office in Atlanta (from which all crusades would be run, even though the BGEA headquarters and

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[72] LeRoy Collins to Johnson, 24 March 1965, LJPA, WHCF, FX FG 155-18, 228-"11/23/63-8/22/63."

[73] *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, 27 August 1962, in BGCA, CN 360, R29. The lack of publicity concerning the desegregated nature of the rally was likely intentional on the part of Alabama newspapers.

[74] BGEA mass mailing, Graham to "Friend," July 1963, CN 74, 1-6.

[75] A*tlanta Constitution*, 14 January 1964. Graham, "'God is My Witness,'" Part III, 146.

publishing operations remained in Minneapolis), in part because most team members resided in the South.[76]

Graham also traveled to Birmingham in 1964. Located two hours west of Atlanta, the city was disparagingly branded "Bombingham" and widely recognized as the most intransigently segregated large city in the nation. It stood as a logical, if menacing, target for civil rights activists and, thereafter, for Graham himself. As early as May 1963, amid the civil rights demonstrations that would prod Kennedy to introduce what became the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Graham declared his willingness to visit the city, provided he received the requisite invitation from the its evangelical ministers. Within a few weeks, a local radio director publicly requested the evangelist to visit.[77] An official biracial invitation from Birmingham ministers proved difficult to attain and only emerged when the public relations potential of a rally became more apparent. In September 1963, after Graham had described the city as a symbol of violence in a crusade sermon telecast from Los Angeles, a distraught Birmingham television executive wrote to the evangelist lamenting this "unkind cut," which would only encourage "misguided negroes" in their criminal demonstrations. "Having so labeled our city and held it up for world censor [sic]," he wrote, "do you not feel that you are somewhat beholden to come and assist us with our problem?"[78] Meanwhile, Catholic Bishop Joseph Durick, one of the eight clerics to whom King had drafted "Letter from Birmingham City Jail," asked President

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[76] Atlanta press conference transcript, 5 November 1964, BGCA, CN 24, 4-15.

[77] *Knoxville News-Sentinel* (UPI), 9 May 1963; and *Columbia* (SC) *State* (AP), 26 May 1963; both in BGCA, CN 360, R29.

[78] Raymond D. Hurlbert to Graham, 13 September 1963, BGCA, CN 1, 6-8.

Kennedy to encourage the evangelist to hold an interracial meeting in Birmingham.[79] Both of these efforts occurred two days before the September 15 bombing of Sixteenth Street Baptist Church by segregationists, an event that killed four girls and decimated Birmingham's remaining pretensions of moderation. Graham soon reiterated his willingness to visit the city and apparently joined efforts to raise funds to rebuild the church.[80] In Birmingham, white Episcopal minister John Turner helped to lead the local fundraising effort. A racial moderate who held ties with the Graham team stretching back more than a decade, Turner became the driving force behind the effort to secure a biracial ministerial invitation to the evangelist, which arrived and was accepted by mid-January 1964.[81]

The rally had to weather a rocky period of planning. In light of Birmingham's well-earned reputation for violence, the event represented a legitimate risk on the part of Graham. One concerned caller to the BGEA feared "a race riot" at the rally. Hurlbert, who had pitched the idea of a crusade to Graham, wrote to the evangelist and stated bluntly that an integrated crusade was impossible.[82] Arthur P. Cook, a Birmingham newspaper mogul who chaired the rally executive committee and who puffed the Graham

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[79] Bass, *Peacemakers*, 186, 287n 36.

[80] AP, 25 September 1963, in BGCA, CN 360, R29. Hopkins, "Race Problem," 116.

[81] For background on Turner, see J. Mills Thornton III, *Dividing Lines: Municipal Politics and the Struggle for Civil Rights in Montgomery, Birmingham, and Selma* (Alabama, 2002), 350. Haymaker to John C. Turner, 4 August 1950, BGCA, CN 1, 9-3. Turner to Graham, 29 September 1963; Haymaker to Turner, 1 November 1963; and Gilbert L. Guffin to Graham, 8 November 1963; all in BGCA, CN 1, 6-8. *Birmingham News*, 16 January 1963, in BGCA, CN 360, R29.

Around the time of the Birmingham rally, Graham considered holding a service in Warrenton, NC, located in the black belt of the state. However, the proposed rally did not garner adequate support from the town's ministers. See Haymaker to Smyth, 21 April 1964, BGCA, CN 1, 6-11.

[82] Notes on "CONTROVERSIAL CALLS," 19 February 1964, BGCA, CN 17, 4-45. Hurlbert to Haymaker, 22 November 1963, BGCA, CN 1, 6-8.

visit in his chain of local papers, was not inclined to disagree. Aware of Graham's seating policy, however, he chose to deny consciousness of the obvious. "At no time," he declared after the rally, "did I ever consider myself personally sponsoring an integrated meeting."[83] The rally executive committee contained at least two African Americans: insurance dealer and "Second Vice Chairman" of the rally John Drew, who had hosted King during the Birmingham campaign, and prominent Baptist minister J. L. Ware. Both of them were pillars of Birmingham's black establishment and possessed ties to moderate white leaders in the city. The committee also included barbecue restaurateur Ollie McClung, a segregationist who headed the rally prayer committee. Later that year, McClung challenged Title II of the Civil Rights Act, banning racial discrimination in public establishments, and lost a famous Supreme Court decision in December.[84] Many committee members appeared less than enthusiastic about desegregating the service. (They would likely also have been unenthusiastic about Lyndon Johnson attending the rally, something the president reportedly considered doing, much to the horror of his Secret Service agents.)[85] Graham's motivations were entirely religious, the crusade backers conceded, yet his seating requirement came with "a good many problems." One of those problems was a legal challenge to the rally by the Jefferson County White Citizens Council, which unsuccessfully asked the Birmingham City Council to block the service. In characteristic fashion, the Council preemptively absolved itself of

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[83] Minutes, Greater Birmingham Crusade Executive Committee, 3 April 1964, BGCA, CN 17, 4-39.

[84] Executive committee list, undated, BGCA, CN 17, 4-19. See also *Shades Valley* (AL) *Sun*, 26 March 1964, in BGCA, CN 17, 4-54; *Bulletin News*, 19 February 1964, BGCA, CN 17, 4-11; and news release, 14 February 1964, BGCA, CN 17, 4-14. For background on Drew, see Branch, *Parting*, 690. Katzenbach v. McClung, 379 U.S. 294 (1964).

[85] *Atlanta Constitution*, 27 March 1964, in BGCA, CN 360, R29.

responsibility for any violence to come. The rally committee ultimately rested its case for desegregated seating on legal grounds (the fact that the city had already authorized the integration of the rally site), as well as the equally compelling reality that Graham would not otherwise come to Birmingham.[86]

Protestations aside, the March 29 Birmingham rally was by far the most desegregated of any Graham services previously held in the South. An estimated 35,000 people, slightly half capacity and containing similar numbers of blacks and whites, attended the Easter Day rally at Legion Field, a football stadium situated at the foot of an established black neighborhood bearing the tragic and telling nickname "Dynamite Hill." A photo spread in the *Birmingham News*, along with photographs taken by the BGEA, revealed an integrated choir and thoroughly mixed seating patterns amid heavy security. Despite threats of violence, no incidents occurred during the heavily-secured service. The guests of honor included Mayor Albert Boutwell—a moderate in Birmingham, simply a segregationist in most other contexts—and University of Alabama football coach Paul "Bear" Bryant, then in the process of attaining legendary status. J. L. Ware delivered the benediction. Ware, who that morning had hosted the white editor of the BGEA's *Decision* magazine at his church, was a moderate civil rights activist. A rival of Fred Shuttlesworth, Ware had initially opposed King's coming to Birmingham. Graham's Sunday sermon eschewed emotive allusions to the city's racial tensions. Although a pre-released sermon text mentioned bombs "thrown in the South against innocent people," the spoken sermon contained more general references to "heart

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[86] *New York Times*, 30 March 1964. Minutes, meeting between city and rally leaders, 2 May 1964, Birmingham Public Library Archives (BPLA), Albert Burton Boutwell Papers (ABBP), 264.10.34. Greater Birmingham Crusade Executive Committee, 3 April 1964, BGCA, CN 17, 4-39.

trouble" and sin, which had "blinded our minds, hardened our conscience, and confused our judgment." In a radio address later that day, the evangelist discussed the "racial problem" more specifically, but classified it was a world issue "not limited to Birmingham . . . or to the southern part of the United States." According to the condescending lead of one local paper, the first respondent was an black woman whose "hat was an old black straw," but whose smile "was as new as the Easter Day." Other descriptions of the rally were less dramatic, but no less affirming. Ware identified the rally as a "turning point in changing the outlook and image of Birmingham into a city of peace, tranquility and prosperity for all people," while Boutwell contended that Graham had made the city "an improved and better place in which to live."[87]

Not everyone emerged from the rally in good spirits. The crowd total was actually a good thirty-thousand lower than what Cook had predicted. In a wrap-up meeting of the executive committee, Cook blamed the attendance figure on fears of violence and cited plans by a states' rights group to tear gas the stadium. In a bizarre rant entered into the minutes, Cook proceeded to castigate critics of the rally, including Fred Shuttlesworth, extreme rightists, and even Black Muslims. The *Birmingham World*, an African-American paper whose editor had taken offense when Cook did not personally invite him to a rally news conference, offered a notable reason to remain skeptical about the influence of the rally. An editorial proposed that "twenty-five Negro policemen on

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[87] *New York Times*, *Birmingham News*, *Birmingham Post-Herald*, and *Nashville Banner* (UPI), 30 March 1964. A subsequently published sermon text referred to "bombs . . . thrown at innocent people." See "The Great Reconciliation," *Decision*, June 1964, 2. Photographs, "BGEA: Birmingham Easter Rally; March 29, 1964," BGCA, CN 17. Sherwood Wirt, *Billy: A Personal Look at the World's Best-Loved Evangelist* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1997), 131-134. For background on Ware, see Branch, *Parting*, 703; Manis, *A Fire*, 184-187; Thornton, *Dividing Lines*, 172; and Bass, *Peacemakers*, 106.

duty [at the service] would have been a better indicator of constructive [racial progress] than the seating arrangements."[88]

Overall, though, the Easter rally was a momentary boon for Birmingham's image, a fact city and rally leaders did not hesitate to tout. Graham had predicted that the service would "create a new image for Birmingham," making it "a symbol of love and harmony at the foot of the cross of Jesus Christ and at the open tomb of Jesus Christ."[89] The *Birmingham News* reflected less spiritual aspirations. The city had "been commended, widely, in the nation's press," granting an opportunity to achieve a "harmonious condition of respect and mutual regard, one group of citizens for others." Newspapers around the nation described the rally as the largest interracial gathering in Alabama history, and headlines soon carried such messages as "Birmingham Bastion of Segregation Crumbling" and "Birmingham Giving Ground."[90] Morehouse University President Benjamin Mays, a renowned theologian who had criticized Graham during the segregated 1950 Atlanta crusade, called the rally "one of the most important things he has done in his whole career," giving Birmingham a chance "to redeem its bad name."[91] Respected Raleigh newspaper editor and white moderate Jonathan Daniels added another affirming editorial.[92] The afterglow from the rally was bright enough for the *Birmingham News* to declare it "the most significant day of 1964" for the city. "From the front pages

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[88] *Birmingham Post-Herald*, 25 March 1964. Greater Birmingham Crusade Executive Committee, 3 April 1964, BGCA, CN 17, 4-39. John Drew to Cook, 4 March 1964, BGCA, CN 17, 4-31. *Birmingham World*, 4 April 1964.

[89] *Birmingham Post-Herald*, 30 March 1964; and "The Risen Christ—Adequate for the World's Greatest Problem," *Hour of Decision* sermon, 29 March 1964, BGCA, CN 191, T742c.

[90] *Birmingham News*, 5 April 1964. AP articles, 31 [or 30] March 1964, in BGCA, CN 360, R29.

[91] *Pittsburgh Courier*, 18 April 1964.

[92] *Raleigh News & Observer*, 2 April 1964.

of newspapers such as New York Times and Washington Post . . . ," wrote a publicly chipper Cook, who had invited members of the national press to attend a pre-rally press conference, "we now have a beachhead established." To the city sheriff, he wrote, "This is certainly something that we have all tried to gain for our city for a long time." Riding this momentum, the recently integrated Ministerial Association of Greater Birmingham petitioned Graham to hold a full crusade.[93]

Although Graham would not return to Birmingham for another eight years, he did visit other parts of Alabama one year later, holding rallies in Dothan, Auburn, Tuskegee, and Tuscaloosa during April 24-27, and then returning in June for a Montgomery crusade.[94] He revisited the state at the request of Lyndon Johnson, who had supported (and may well also have approved) the Easter rally. The president wrote Graham beforehand praising him for "doing a brave and fine thing for your country in your courageous effort to contribute to the understanding and brotherhood of the Americans in the South." In addition to the encouragement of Johnson, the evangelist received an overture from Tuscaloosa ministers, who believed a revival there would help "necessary social changes . . . come about more peacefully."[95] During the Alabama visits, Graham and his associates denied or avoided the connection between the president and his visit,

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[93] *Birmingham News*, 31 December 1964, in BGCA, CN 360, R30. Cook to Boutwell, 4 April 1964, BPLA, ABBP, 264.10.34. Invitations, 24 March 1964, BGCA, CN 17, 5-1. Cook to Melvin Bailey, 4 April 1964, BGCA, CN 17, 4-17. Ministerial Association of Birmingham petition, 4 May 1964, BPLA, Protestant Pastors' Union Papers, 911.2.30.

[94] During the anniversary of the Easter rally, Graham team member Grady Wilson led a multi-day revival held at the church of Earl Stallings, a member of the Birmingham Eight. His church was desegregated. Stallings to John Dillon, 27 January 1965, BGCA, CN 13, 25-2.

[95] Johnson to Graham, 13 April 1965, LJPA, WHCF, NF, 227a-"WHCF Name." Allan R. Watson to Graham, 7 February 1965, BGCA, CN 17, 7-7.

stressing to Alabamians and BGEA supporters the invitations received from local religious and civic leaders, black and white.[96]

Before and during these latter two visits to Alabama, Graham began casting his desegregated services as alternatives to civil rights demonstrations, a theme he had foreshadowed during his 1959 Little Rock rallies. His comments about race became increasingly uniform as the civil rights crisis heightened. At a Los Angeles press conference held two weeks before the March on Washington, the evangelist distributed copies of his *Life*, *Reader's Digest*, and *U. S. News and World Report* articles on racial tolerance. He later ordered the production of a flier detailing his contributions in the area of race relations.[97] During the lead up to his Alabama visits, Graham characterized his habit of visiting southern cities in the aftermath of high-profile racial violence as a policy. "We try to get in there a little bit afterward to see if we can't ring the healing message of the Gospel," he told the *New York Times*. He overtly cast himself as a southerner performing a mediating role, someone who "may have a little more influence than a man with a New England accent." For the moment, he said, "I have a voice in the South and I will try to provide the leadership I can." Still, he stressed that he was not traveling to Alabama "as a civil rights worker," but rather "as a preacher of the gospel" for whom the simple act of holding desegregated services "conveys enough on the subject of race." The evangelist made a conscious effort to distinguish himself from the activists who had

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[96] AP article, 26 April 1965, in BGCA, CN 360, R30; transcript, *Billy Graham in Alabama*, 1965, BGCA, CN 214, 1-27; and Graham to "Friend," 15 April 1965, LJPJ, WHCF, NF, 227A-"WHCF Name." See also *Birmingham News*, 6 April 1965; and *Montgomery Advertiser* (UPI), 11 April 1965. Graham acknowledged Johnson's request in a 1967 address. See "The Quiet Revolution," 29 December 1967, BGCA, CN 345, 43-3.

[97] Los Angeles press conference, 13 August 1963, BGCA, CN 24, T3. Notes from conversation, Mooneyham and Bob Root, undated [1965], BGCA, CN 345, 44-1.

marched before him in Alabama. "I have been holding demonstrations for 15 years," Graham declared when announcing his Montgomery crusade, "but in a stadium where it is legal."[98] The interracial services in Alabama functioned as his alternative to King's marches and strategies of civil disobedience, which, the evangelist feared, blurred the evangelical hierarchy of appeals to individual salvation over work for social change.

The Alabama rallies further accentuated the differences between evangelical universalism and liberal or prophetic approaches to civil rights. In March 1965, during the height of the Selma crisis, Graham offered to hold an Easter service there.[99] BGEA staffers soon visited the city and apparently proposed a June 12 date for a service. Business leaders in Selma responded favorably, only to withdraw their support amid persistent racial tensions.[100] Meanwhile, word that Graham was coming to Alabama set off a flurry of requests from other parts of the state. Inquiring towns faced the challenge of simultaneously demonstrating their racial progress and their need for a spiritual revival. A letter from Phenix City (which had first proposed a revival back in 1954) lamented the city's large un-churched population, yet emphasized plans to desegregate its school system.[101]

Ultimately, Graham settled on holding rallies in comparatively calm parts of the state where he possessed social connections and could safely secure biracial invitations.

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[98] *New York Times*, 17 April 1965; "Billy Heads South," *Time*, 30 April 1965, 88; *Atlanta Constitution* (AP), 23 April 1965; *New York Times*, 26 April 1965; and *Birmingham News*, 26 April 1965.

[99] *Greensboro News*, 14 March 1965, in BGCA, CN 360, R30.

[100] Notes from conversation, Mooneyham and Root, undated [1965], BGCA, CN 345, 44-1; John [surname illegible] to Mooneyham, 3 April 1965; Paul M. Grist to Smyth and Mooneyham, 23 May 1965; and Smyth to Grist, 8 June 1965; all in BGCA, CN 17, 7-7. See also Curtis Mitchell, *Billy Graham: The Making of a Crusader* (Philadelphia: Chilton Books, 1966), 17-18.

[101] Ministerial Association Special Committee to Smyth, 8 April 1965, BGCA, CN 17, 7-7.

He canceled engagements in Great Britain to make room on his schedule.[102] In Dothan, a wiregrass town where team member T. W. Wilson had recently resided and where Graham's brother-in-law Clayton Bell pastored a Presbyterian congregation, the evangelist held two services before interracial audiences of several thousand each. After one service, he met with local black leaders.[103] The local paper asked Dothan residents to welcome the evangelist as a matter of basic hospitality, despite "something less than unanimity of opinion regarding the timing of his visit." The area Board of Revenue and Control endorsed the rallies, citing the necessity of efforts to "avoid the bitter strife recently created in our great state by outside agitators," of which Graham was not deemed one. As in Birmingham, the county Citizens' Council opposed the Dothan rally, although a prominent Council leader agreed to a brief meeting with Graham (something the evangelist had not done during the 1956 Louisville crusade).[104] Only in Tuskegee, which Graham visited as part of an integrated medical conference, did the evangelist specifically discuss racial matters during a sermon. Speaking to a largely African-American audience at Tuskegee Institute, where he faced opposition from a student group, he encouraged efforts "to solve the [race] problem through understanding, through dialogue, through legislation."[105] In keeping with precedent, though, Graham defended the state of Alabama in his weekly radio broadcast and bluntly prioritized spiritual over

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[102] *Atlanta Constitution*, 23 April 1965.

[103] *Dothan* (AL) *Eagle*, 27 July 1963, in BGCA, CN 360, R29. *New York Times*, 25 and 26 April 1965. *Birmingham News*, 9 May 1965.

[104] *Dothan* (AL) *Eagle*, 22 April 1965. Resolution, Houston County Board of Revenue and Control, undated [1965], BGCA, CN 17, 7-7. Robert S. Denny to Graham, 15 February 1965, BGCA, CN 345, 4-21.

[105] *Billy Graham in Alabama*, BGEA film, 1965, BGCA, CN 113, F35. Mitchell, *Making*, 42.

social issues. The major wire services featured a particularly startling declaration from that broadcast: "The church today spends too much time answering questions nobody is asking." The line—which apparently appeared in a pre-released text, but not in the delivered sermon—subsequently reappeared in two critical assessments of the evangelist. It captured the ambiguity and inconsistency of an evangelical advocate of desegregation who doubled as a critic of the Social Gospel.[106] His target in the Dothan radio address was the latter. By holding desegregated rallies in Deep South Alabama, Graham clearly was not advising the church to remain silent about race relations. As his critics recognized, however, neither was he grabbing a bullhorn. Hardly more than a month removed from the shocking violence in Selma, the thought had tellingly crossed his mind to attack and caricature attempts to prioritize social concerns over saving souls.

In Montgomery that June, Graham held his first integrated crusade in the Deep South; it was also his only full crusade held specifically in response to racial tensions. By the time of the crusade, most of the city's public institutions had commenced the process of desegregation—reluctant and often modest undertakings not to be mistaken for heartfelt acceptance of the Civil Right Act.[107] A BGEA memo alluded to the difficulty of organizing a truly interracial crusade in the original capital of the Confederacy, where less than three months earlier the already-famous civil rights march from nearby Selma had come to an end.[108] Graham failed to procure his customary invitation from the local

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[106] *Charlotte Observer* (AP) and *Tulsa World* (UPI), 25 April 1965; both in BGCA, CN 360, R30. "Taking Advantage of Time," *Hour of Decision* sermon, 25 April 1965, BGCA, CN 191, T798a. A variation on this line appears in Frady, "God and Man in the South," *Atlantic Monthly*, January 1967, 40; and David Goldfield, *Black, White, and Southern: Race Relations and Southern Culture, 1940 to Present* (LSU, 1990), 85.

[107] Montgomery desegregation in Thornton, *Dividing Lines*, 137.

minister's conference. The executive director of the Alabama State Baptist Convention did welcome Graham, despite believing that Johnson had orchestrated the crusade.[109] While some segregationist Alabamians did not count Graham among those "outside agitators" who had "tormented" them, others wrote letters to Governor George Wallace linking the crusade with King's earlier presence in the state. Still others defaced three billboards advertising the Montgomery crusade and somewhat ambiguously showing an image of Graham silhouetted in black. Even Frank Boykin, the former congressman who had recommended to Eisenhower Graham's services as a racial mediator, questioned why the evangelist had chosen Alabama for unique intervention. Boykin, who copied his correspondence with Graham to a grateful Wallace, sent the evangelist a police report casting aspersions on the background of Viola Liuzzo, a white civil rights marcher recently murdered near Selma.[110] Ever cautious in the face of criticism from his right flank, the evangelist forcefully, if not convincingly, denied that he had singled out Alabama, which he described as an economically growing state containing "more church-going people . . . than anywhere else in the world." He again disavowed any civil rights agenda, noting simply that his services remained "open to those of all races to sit where they please . . . and listen to the gospel of Christ."[111]

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[108] Forrest Layman to Willis Haymaker, 2 November 1965, BGCA, CN 12, 13-4.

[109] Wayne Flynt, *Alabama Baptists: Southern Baptists in the Heart of Dixie* (Alabama, 1998), 462.

[110] Mrs. W.A. Brockway to BGEA, 28 April 1965, CN 12, 8-41. Robert H. Person to Haymaker, 8 June 1965, BGCA, CN 1, 5-32. Photograph of mutilated sign, "BGEA Montgomery Crusade," undated [June 1965], BGCA, CN 1; see also Gilbreath, "Dream," 46. Edward Thornton to Graham, 30 April 1965 [copied to Wallace]; Ocllo and Frank Boykin to Graham [copied to Wallace], 17 May 1965; and Wallace to Boykin, 10 June 1965; all in Alabama Department of Archives and History (ADAH), George Wallace Administrative Records (GWAR), "Fiscal Year 1965" (SG022387), Folder 022.

[111] *Birmingham News*, 13 June 1965. *Alabama Journal*, 7 June 1965.

Tensions aside, the rain-drenched Montgomery meetings proceeded without documented incident, attracting crowds of modest size. BGEA photographs show a thoroughly integrated crowd, and newspaper shots reveal a similar dynamic for the crusade choir. The crusade featured an introductory statement by A.W. Wilson, pastor of a leading black Baptist church, and a performance by Ethel Waters, a famous black vocalist who had worked with the Graham team for nearly a decade. In his sermons, Graham only indirectly addressed race, commanding each audience member: "As one southerner to another, go out of your way to continue the spirit of unity and love that you have demonstrated this week." The Graham team apparently invested a great deal of energy in his visit to Montgomery, where he published a daily reflection piece in the two leading newspapers. One of those papers subsequently labeled the crusade a success, while alluding to "some opinions to the contrary."[112] During the crusade, Graham kept Johnson aide Bill Moyers apprised of the good results, having earlier informed the president of this latest visit to Alabama.[113]

The evangelist went so far as to cast the Montgomery crusade as a complete vindication of evangelical universalism, both its theory of social change and emphasis on civic order. "There are those who claim that this type of evangelistic effort is not relevant in our times," he said in his weekly radio broadcast. "The Montgomery crusade proves them wrong." In Montgomery, the evangelist had observed "how reverent the people were as I spelled out the universality of man's need for God's forgiveness" and

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[112] Total crowd size for the eight-day crusade stood at around 100,000. See *Birmingham News*, 21 June 1965; and *Alabama Journal*, 22 June 1965, in BGCA, CN 360, R30. Photographs, "BGEA Montgomery Crowds," BGCA, CN 1; and *Montgomery Advertiser*, 14 June 1965. *Montgomery Advertiser*, 14, 18, and 20 June 1965.

[113] Moyers to David Kucharsky, 28 June 1965, LJPA, WHCF, NF, 227a-"WHCF Name." Graham to Johnson, 4 May 1965, CN 74, 3-6 [original in LJPA].

"as they marched, people of both races, not with hatred but in unity in a spirit of love as Christ drew them together at the foot of the cross." Such "racial harmony," the evangelist's brother-in-law, Clayton Bell tellingly proclaimed, "is never the product of concerted effort, programs, or legislation, but is easily achieved as a by-product of our commitment to our Lord and our common loyalty to His service." In what would become a habit, Graham soon criticized the national media for not extensively covering the crusade, which he had termed "another kind of march." Having elsewhere equated his significance with that of civil rights workers, he went one step further and pulled rank as an evangelist. "In my opinion," he bluntly declared, "this march in Montgomery is far more significant, more constructive and more revolutionary than the other marches we've read about in our newspapers and watched on our television screens."[114] These remarks demonstrated more than a little pride on the part of the evangelist—not to mention tactless disregard for the interests of the African Americans who had attended the Montgomery services. One writer noted the irony of media criticism coming from a man who had "been given more publicity by the press, television and radio than any evangelist in history."[115] In truth, the Montgomery crusade attracted only slightly less newspaper coverage than had the earlier visit to Alabama, a fact attributable both to its redundancy and to the general failure of the evangelist to discuss race in his sermons.

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[114] "Marching for Christ in Montgomery," *Hour of Decision* sermon, 20 June 1965, BGCA, CN 191, T806j. In an AP statement based on his sermon, Graham disingenuously referred to "marches we have read about in other parts of the country." AP statement, undated [June 1965], BGCA, CN 506, 8-7. Clayton Bell to Stanley Mooneyham, 26 April 1965, BGCA, CN 345, 4-21. *Miami Herald*, 25 June 1965. *Honolulu Star Bulletin*, 4 February 1965, in BGCA, CN 360, R30.

[115] *Miami Herald*, 28 June 1965, in BGCA, CN 360, R30. Graham reiterated his complaints in a July 1965 conversation with Lady Bird Johnson. See Lady Bird Johnson, *A White House Diary* (New York, et al: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1979), 301.

Graham's portrait aside, other elements of the weeklong crusade suggested a less optimistic story. Three of the most visible black supporters of the crusade—the "colored section" editor for the local dailies, as well as the presidents of the state-controlled (and hence, more conservative) Selma University and Alabama State College—came from sectors of the black community largely removed from the Civil Rights Movement.[116] As in Dothan, Graham met with black and white leaders from the city and, as in Birmingham, the crusade executive committee featured co-chairs from both races.[117] The black co-chair was A. W. Wilson, who had played a leadership role during the Montgomery bus boycott of 1955-1956. The full chair was J. R. White, the racially moderate pastor of the white First Baptist church.[118] In the run-up to the crusade, his congregation had revisited its policy on segregation, with the members voting to bar all racial demonstrators (i.e., blacks and integrationist whites) from attending services. Their decision surprised the church's deacons and prompted an emotional, but futile, address from White, who urged his congregants to cleanse themselves of racial prejudice.[119]

The white co-chair, Robert Strong, harbored no such reservations about his church's similar policy. CRS director LeRoy Collins described him as a "strong segregationist."[120] Trinity Presbyterian, his church, stood as a target for "kneel-ins" by

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[116] *Montgomery Advertiser* and *Alabama Journal*, 16 June 1965; both in BGCA, CN 360, R30; "God's Radiance in Alabama," *Decision*, August 1965, 8. BGEA film, *Billy Graham in Alabama*, BGCA, CN 113, F35.

[117] Meetings in *Alabama Journal*, 22 June 1965, in BGCA, CN 360, R30.

[118] Executive committee list, 17 May 1965, BGCA, CN 17, 7-39. For background on Wilson, see Thornton, *Dividing Lines*, 602n 86.

[119] Flynt, *Alabama Baptists*, 479.

[120] Leroy Collins to Johnson, 24 March 1965, LJPA, WHCF, FX FG 155-18, 228-"11/23/63-8/22/63."

civil rights activists seeking to desegregate church services. A northerner by birth, Strong became something of a celebrity among genteel partisans of Jim Crow because of a published April 1965 sermon in which he castigated King, defended his church's policy of banning civil rights demonstrators from attending services, and likened activists to the money changers whom Jesus had driven from the temple. Using the tortured logic of polite racism, Strong explained that, in the climate of the times, even the most ingenuous blacks or sympathetic whites seeking seats in his church qualified as "in actual fact sociological demonstrators."[121] A segregationist opponent of the Graham crusade ironically (but understandably) cited Strong's sermon as evidence for his position.[122] On the final day of the crusade, a racially mixed group of five persons and (in a separate incident) a black serviceman recently called to Vietnam were turned away from Trinity Presbyterian as they attempted to attend a sermon delivered by Graham associate Leighton Ford, brother-in-law of the evangelist. Ford later professed ignorance of the back-door segregation policy (even though the church bulletin on the day of his visit advertised printed copies of the Strong sermon) and wrote letters to both Strong and the serviceman clarifying his opposition to church segregation.[123] Still, the event was an embarrassment for Graham, whose denunciation of church segregation had grown stronger with time, but who obviously still permitted segregationists to serve on his crusade committees. As for Strong, his interpretation of the Montgomery rally had little

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[121] Robert Strong sermon, "Holy Week and the Civil Rights Demonstrators at the Churches," delivered 11 April 1965, BGCA, CN 5, 8-15.

[122] J. Edward Thornton to W. H. Martindale [copied to Wallace], 17 May 1965, ADAH, GWAR, "Fiscal Year 1965" (SG022387), Folder 022.

[123] *Alabama Journal*, 26 June 1965; and *Presbyterian Outlook*, 25 October 1965, 5-6, in BGCA, CN 506, 8-7. Leighton Ford to *Presbyterian Outlook*, 23 July 1965, BGCA, CN 12, 8-41. Trinity Presbyterian bulletin, 20 June 1965, BGCA, CN 1, 5-32.

to do with racial reconciliation. In a published commentary, he praised Graham's "willingness . . . to identify himself with our area at such a critical juncture. A southerner himself, Billy Graham feels for us, for example, in the unfair treatment we have been given in the national news picture."[124]

Rather than creating civil rights activists, Graham's services quite differently served as a conduit for the politics of decency in Alabama. One of the Trinity Presbyterian members who had initially enforced the church's segregation policy was Winton Blount, a wealthy Montgomery contractor. The elective affinity between Graham's visits to Alabama and the politics of decency was nowhere more evident than in the person of Blount, who served on the Montgomery crusade executive committee and ran a prominent advertisement for his construction company in a newspaper section dedicated to the crusade.[125] In many ways, Blount represented the quintessential southern moderate whom Johnson called upon following the Civil Rights Act of 1964. As a member of the University of Alabama board of directors during the school's 1963 desegregation crisis, Blount had helped to barter the deal allowing George Wallace to make his symbolic stand in front of the schoolhouse door. He had played similar roles during the Freedom Rides and agreed to serve as an honorary member of the CRS citizens committee, for which he hosted a meeting between white city leaders and Johnson administration officials in the days leading up to the Selma-to-Montgomery march.[126] During the crusade week, he also hosted a meeting with the Graham team.[127]

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[124] *Alabama Journal*, 10 June 1965.

[125] "Holy Week and the Civil Rights Demonstrators," BGCA, CN 5, 8-15. Executive committee list, 17 May 1965, BGCA, CN 17, 7-39. *Montgomery Advertiser-Journal*, 13 June 1965.

A business progressive, Blount held political views resembling those of Graham, although he lacked the evangelist's common touch. He backed Eisenhower and Nixon, but was cool toward Goldwater and openly critical of Wallace. Blount soon switched to the Republican Party and later served in the Nixon administration.[128]

Blount was part of a larger group of former segregationists working in Alabama to create space for whites to accept the legitimacy of federal civil rights laws, which now stood as a *fait accompli*. His involvement in the crusade revealed the overlap between this project and Graham's evangelical universalism. Theologically informed individualism and respect for the rule of law, values clearly evident in Graham's defense of the Montgomery crusade, comprised the key ingredients of this synergy. One vessel for moderate Alabama business interests, the *Birmingham News*, made the connection explicitly. The paper welcomed Graham's return to Alabama in an editorial, titled "See the Human Being," which labeled the civil rights crisis

> a *human* as well as a "legal" and a "social" problem which is before us. To the extent all, white or Negro, can think in terms of individuals being involved, single human beings and their families, mothers, fathers, children, we shall get a little further down the road toward mutual understanding and tolerance as to others' views. . . . For—as we have said—we are *all* human beings, whatever our color.[129]

By upholding the individual as the primary analytical unit for interpreting the conundrum of civil rights, the editorial emphasized the commonality of human beings without at all

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[126] *Atlanta Journal*, 19 October 1988. Attachment to James S. Love, Jr., to Johnson, 8 July 1965, LJPA, EX FG 155-18, 228-"11/23/63-7/5/64." Collins to Johnson, 24 March 1965, LJPA, WHCF, FX FG 155-18, 228-"11/23/63-8/22/63."

[127] Graham schedule, undated [June 1965], BGCA, CN 17, 7-36.

[128] Winton Blount interview, 10 July 1974, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Southern Historical Collection, Southern Oral History Program, #4007, A-4 (Blount).

[129] *Birmingham News*, 7 April 1965, in BGCA, CN 360, R30.

addressing the specifics of legislation or court orders. It offered morality without passion for the law, emphasizing respect for one's neighbors. Leon Macon, the influential editor of the *Alabama Baptist*, offered a complementary converse, law without concern for morality, stressing the responsibilities of citizenship. A segregationist, Macon nonetheless argued for obedience to the Civil Rights Act in light of the biblical mandate for Christians to obey ordained authority.[130] After only modestly covering the 1964 Birmingham rally, Macon publicly supported Graham's 1965 services, keeping his personal reservations largely to himself.[131]

The 1965 visits occurred against the backdrop of a revolt by moderate Alabama business interests against reflexive, counter-productive resistance to the Civil Rights Act. On April 15, 1965, a group of business leaders—representing the leading Chambers of Commerce in Alabama, as well as the state's banking, industrial and textile associations—released a statement of principles to the local and national media. In a rare marshalling of candidness from the white southern center (or what counted for the center in Alabama), the statement reflected the extent to which white southerners could no longer set the terms of the debate over Jim Crow. The federal government had already passed sweeping legislation, and the white South needed to respond. The published declaration resembled comments Graham had made for over a decade in magazines, press conferences, and private correspondence:

> The vast majority of the people of Alabama, like other responsible citizens throughout our nation, believe in law and order, and in the fair and just

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[130] Mark Newman, *Getting Right With God: Southern Baptists and Desegregation, 1945-1995* (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 2001), 124.

[131] .*Alabama Baptist*, 12 March 1964; 6 May 1965; and 24 June 1965. Macon advised his twenty-year old son not to attend the Montgomery crusade. See Flynt, *Alabama Baptists*, 462.

> treatment of all their fellow citizens. They believe in obedience to the law regardless of their personal feelings about its specific merits. They believe in the basic human dignity of all people of all races.

After this opening pep talk, the statement offered specific proposals in a manner uncommon to Graham or other southern moderates. Alabamians should obey the Civil Right Act—with business leaders taking specific responsibility for Title VII, banning employment discrimination—and respect the right of "every eligible citizen" to vote. In keeping with the tradition of southern moderation, the statement denounced vigilantism and unlawful demonstrations with equal force, not unlike how the "Birmingham Eight" had appealed to "law and order and common sense" when denouncing the 1963 protests. Writing in the aftermath of these and other demonstrations, though, the business leaders belatedly heeded the advice of the Alabama Council on Human Relations for the state to "[s]olve its human relations problem and get down to the job of making Alabama prosper." The Alabama elites emphasized economic and educational progress for Alabama, urging "the establishment of positive new vehicles for communications between the races throughout all the State."[132]

For the *Birmingham News*, Graham's visits represented just such a vehicle for interracial dialogue. The paper urged politicians like Governor Wallace (who in his own effort to improve the image of the state soon hosted a nationwide group of newspaper editors) to follow the example of those business and civic leaders. Because they "wish to move ahead in general prosperity and reasonableness," they had "come to understand that life is change, and that they must be part of it." Graham grasped this same reality, a later

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[132] *Birmingham Post-Herald*, 15 April 1965. During the Freedom Rides crisis in Montgomery, Blount had led an effort to publish a similar statement in the *New York Times*. See *Atlanta Journal*, 19 October 1988. Pamphlet, "Letter from Birmingham Jail," dated May 1963, in BGCA, CN 300, 139-32. Brochure, Alabama Council on Human Relations, 1964, in BGCA, CN 17, 4-45.

editorial suggested, and in his April visit had "complimented the better efforts in Alabama." He had also complemented them. "We can afford nothing but the highest in public and private life," the paper argued. "This could be the meaning of Billy Graham's messages."[133] Alabama business moderates viewed Graham's arrival in Alabama not as a slap in the face, as had Frank Boykin and segregationist critics of the evangelist, but as an opportunity to showcase the feasibility of their posited post-Jim Crow South.

With the contrast between Graham and Wallace already established, the Montgomery crusade became the site of a modest encounter between the politics of decency and the politics of rage.[134] The evangelist was on record as a critic of the Alabama executive—saying at one point that he did not "often agree with Governor Wallace on very many things"—yet was characteristically quick to declare his desire to meet with Wallace while in Montgomery. If an invitation from the governor was not forthcoming, "I might ask for it," said the evangelist.[135] Wallace likely interpreted the crusade as in part an incursion on his state. He received a host of correspondence urging him to shun a meeting with Graham. Some correspondents questioned Graham's motivations for visiting the state, while one writer appealed to the governor "on grounds secular affairs not within province [sic] of ministers of gospel."[136] Wallace appeared conflicted about what effect associating with the evangelist might have on his

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[133] *Birmingham News*, 25 April 1965 and 2 May 1965. Editors' tour in *New York Times*, 13 June 1965. A Columbus, GA, columnist had earlier embraced Graham over Wallace as an ideal spokesperson for the South. See *Columbus* (GA) *Ledger*, 15 September 1963, in BGCA, CN 360, R29.

[134] Here and elsewhere, the phrase "politics of rage" is borrowed from Carter, *Politics of Rage*.

[135] Los Angeles press conference, 13 August 1963, BGCA, CN 24, T3. *Alabama Journal*, 26 April 1965.

[136] Roland and Florence Ingram to Wallace, 24 April 1965; see also Paul J. Mason to Wallace, 24 April 1965; both in ADAH, GWAR, "Fiscal Year 1965" (SG022387), Folder 022.

segregationist constituency. According to Arthur P. Cook, the governor had prepared a statement in favor of the 1964 Birmingham rally, yet had chosen to withhold it for fear of using the evangelist for political gain.[137] A more likely reason was the fear of linking himself with a desegregated event. Boykin, again on edge as the Montgomery crusade approached, wrote to the governor proposing a special dinner for Graham and supposing that the evangelist would reciprocate by giving them prominent seats on the crusade platform.[138] Wallace, though, followed many prominent Montgomery leaders in steering clear of the services.[139] As both he and the *Birmingham News* recognized in their different ways, Graham abetted the agenda of those Alabama business interests who followed in the footsteps of Little Rock moderates by embracing racial tolerance along the lines of law and order. As an evangelist, Graham could reach a part of Alabama society (in some respects, the very source of Wallace's strength) not accessible to economic elites. After several delays, the governor finally consented to a private "social visit" that lasted over an hour, during which they discussed "some sociological points," in Graham's words. A picture of them together appeared in newspapers around the state.[140]

Yet Graham's 1965 visits did more than simply assist the transition of a portion of Alabama whites toward greater tolerance of the civil right laws. As with other crusades in the South, they also projected a positive image that business moderates and Wallace supporters alike could appreciate. In fact, one conservative southern editor who had toured Alabama at the behest of the governor cited Graham's affirming evaluation of the

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[137] Greater Birmingham Crusade Executive Committee, 2 April 1964, BGCA, CN 17, 4-39.

[138] Boykin to Wallace, 1 June 1965, ADAH, GWAR, "Fiscal Year 1965" (SG022387), Folder 022.

[139] Flynt, *Alabama Baptists*, 462.

[140] *Birmingham Post-Herald* (UPI); and *Alabama Journal*, 16 June 1965.

state as a confirmation of his own views.[141] The booster impulse was ever-present throughout the Montgomery crusade, for which the local Chamber of Commerce produced store window posters welcoming crusade attendees and workers to the city.[142] The evangelist's public comments during and following the crusade more than justified the investment of the business community. "I am convinced that the moral and spiritual resources are now available in Alabama for a rapid growth in racial understanding," he said at a closing press conference. If the Ku Klux Klan would "quiet down," he added, and if civil rights activists would take a breather and politicians would resist the temptation to score points with white voters, Alabamians would have "time to digest the new civil rights laws" and, presumably, to obey them.[143] Earlier, he had cautioned against turning the state into a public "whipping boy."[144] A few "more Selmas" might occur, he conceded, yet the deep friendship between southern blacks and whites bode well for the region.[145] A BGEA-produced documentary about the Alabama visits presented an even rosier portrait. While the film overtly condemned racial discrimination, it dedicated more space to glowing comments about the new spirit of interracial cooperation in the state.[146]

Similar rhetoric continued during Graham's lone 1966 domestic crusade, his immensely well-attended visit to Greenville, South Carolina. Supporters there cast the

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[141] *Charleston* (SC) *News & Courier*, 24 June 1965, BGCA, CN 360, R30.

[142] Chamber of Commerce advertisement, undated [June 1965], BGCA, CN 1, 5-32.

[143] *Birmingham Post-Herald* (AP), 21 June 1965.

[144] *Birmingham News*, 6 April 1965.

[145] *New York Times*, 17 April 1965.

[146] *Billy Graham in Alabama*, 1965, BGCA, CN 113, F35.

crusade as a sign that the New South had arrived, but remained as religious as ever.[147] By the time of the Greenville crusade—for which the main source of tension was a ban fundamentalist university head Bob Jones, Jr., had placed on student involvement in the crusade—Graham's tone had shifted from healing the South's wounds to celebrating its virtues.[148] From Greenville, he wrote to Ralph McGill expressing optimism about the direction of their region during "its most difficult period since the Civil War." "While we are not out of the woods yet," the evangelist wrote, "I do feel that the sound of the wind in the mulberry bushes is evident everywhere."[149] That breeze had not reached the ghettos of the North, where Graham increasingly identified the nation's main racial problems as residing. Otherwise, though, the evangelist thought his nation was "making the greatest attempt that any nation has ever made" on behalf of racial equality.[150] He reasoned that he had done his part.

Law and Order Turns Rightward

During the peak years of the Civil Rights Movement, Graham adopted a practice of arriving at selected southern cities in the aftermath of racial violence. In Alabama, he held services billed as the largest integrated meetings in either the state or locality. These services, Graham argued, represented his form of activism. In 1964, when civil rights

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[147] Lewis F. Brabham, *A New Song in the South: The Story of the Billy Graham Greenville, S. C., Crusade* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1966), 145.

[148] Bob Jones, Jr., "The Position of Bob Jones University in Regard to the Proposed Billy Graham Crusade in Greenville," 8 February 1965, BGCA, CN 12, 13-13.

[149] Graham to Ralph McGill, 12 March 1966, Emory University Special Collections, Ralph McGill Papers, 15-7.

[150] *New York Times*, 23 April 1965.

activists launched a student-infused voter registration campaign in Mississippi, Graham downplayed their efforts and cited his desegregated meetings in Nashville, Clinton, Birmingham, and other southern cities as evidence of a spiritual solution to the race problem.[151] He made similar comments following the Selma demonstrations in 1965. While Graham and many civil rights leaders shared a common faith, their differences became more telling during the first half of the 1960s, when his services shifted from being plausible complements of King-style activism to being discernable alternatives to it. Civil rights activists emphasized grassroots democracy, civic freedom, and Christian community. They counted prophetic pastors and fearless organizers among their members, and they appealed to the consciences of political leaders. Graham appealed to law and order, racial decency, and the transforming effects of individual conversations. He counted business moderates, established pastors, and the president of the United States among his supporters. Graham inspired affirming portraits of Alabama's better side, and unlike King during his interventions in the state, the evangelist did not publicly challenge or directly criticize its segregationist establishment, not even Wallace.

Regardless of the demographic breakdown of Graham's services in Alabama, he spoke primarily to the needs of whites there. The evangelist helped to facilitate a momentary coalition of those white southerners who recognized the inevitability of (and, in some cases, the need for) change. They viewed his services as conduits and models for transitioning toward an altered social order—and also for controlling it. Graham's

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[151] *Nashville Banner*, 26 June 1964. Graham made these comments hours before liberal Republican Senator Jacob Javits presented him with the George Washington Carver Institute Award for his "indefatigable quest for moral justice." During the ceremony, Graham betrayed more than a little paternalism when he presented an aging Reese Brown, the black foreman on the Graham's childhood farm, with a watch. See *Amsterdam News*, 4 July 1964, in BGCA, CN 360, R29.

services offered a safe "way out" out of the racially Solid South, to use a memorable term first employed in reference to the electorally Solid South.[152] By appealing to law and order, but also to such seemingly non-partisan qualities as neighborly love and spiritual piety, they supplied a path upon which moderates could back away from segregationism in a manner acceptable to regional mores. In this context, Graham's evangelical universalism contained clear political meanings: acceptance of existing civil rights laws, condemnation of racial violence, and dismissal of the need for further protests or legislation. These values defined the politics of decency in the mid-1960s white South. Not every supporter of the evangelist completely agreed with him, of course; more than a few Graham backers remained segregationists, while a much smaller group held views to his left. These basic principles, though, comprised the sum impact of his civil rights era interventions in his home region, revealing his hand in the fitful, yet enduring creation of a racially moderate white South.

This momentary, if always awkward and qualified, period of overlap between evangelical universalism and some of the basic goals of the Civil Rights Movement came to a swift and bitter end. In August 1965, only two months after the Montgomery crusade, Graham flew to the Los Angeles neighborhood of Watts, where via helicopter and protected by a bullet-proof vest he toured the riot-torn community with Reverend E. V. Hill and other city leaders. A prominent African-American minister and mayoral appointee whom Graham had met two years earlier and who would later join the BGEA board, Hill was also a founding member of the SCLC who had nominated King as

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[152] V. O. Key, *Southern Politics in State and Nation* (New York: A. A. Knopf, 1949), 664.

president, although he had subsequently distanced himself from the organization.[153] The Watts visit occurred toward the close of Graham's two-year focus on domestic issues. During the remaining period of the Johnson administration, the evangelist concentrated largely on promoting global evangelical unity, hosting an important conference in Berlin and holding meetings in communist Yugoslavia.[154]

The tour of Watts left a distinct impression on observers of Graham, and the headlines regarding it differed markedly from those concerning his turn in Alabama. In 1958, Graham had told a Charlotte crusade audience that segregationist violence was sowing "the seeds for anarchy and overthrow of the government."[155] Seven years later, he felt similar premonitions about the rioting in Los Angeles. In response to Watts—which in popular memory has come to mark the disintegration of the classic, non-violent phase of the Civil Rights Movement—the evangelist grew nothing short of apoplectic, speaking, in an impolitic manner reminiscent of his more youthful days, about a "great racial revolution" of a more pernicious quality than the civil rights struggle he had sometimes labeled similarly. For Graham, Watts was "only the beginning—a dress rehearsal for revolution." He warned ominously of "sinister forces" working to divide the nation, called for appropriate congressional action, and asked King to use his influence to call for a moratorium on further demonstrations.[156] Conservative media

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[153] Graham, *Just As I Am*, 427. Martin, *Prophet*, 315. On Hill, see Gerald S. Strober, *Graham: A Day in Billy's Life* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, 1976), 49; Pollock, *Evangelist to the World*, 128; and *Los Angeles Times*, 14 August 1970, in BGCA, CN 360, R33.

[154] Hopkins, "Race Problem," 142. Graham, *Just As I Am*, 384-386.

[155] *Atlanta Constitution* (AP), 16 October 1958.

[156] AP, 16 August 1965, in BGCA, CN 360, R30; and *New York Times* [UPI], 16 August 1965. According to Branch, Graham's pronouncements motivated King to visit Watts and meet with residents of

outlets immediately capitalized on these comments, as well as his subsequent condemnations of urban riots.[157] Graham's outburst over Watts contained a number of meanings and even included an element of catharsis, coming as it did after years of prophesying that racial violence in the North would exceed that of the South—a point he made again following his tour.[158] Even before Watts, Graham had asserted that the early examples of such conflicts meant that northerners could no longer "point their accusing, self-righteous fingers" at the region.[159] The evangelist's reaction to Watts also revealed his strict adherence, even in the face of gross injustices, to a code of civility, a characteristic that distinguished him from King, but which had previously allowed him to support basic civil rights laws. What the nation now needed was not new legislation, Graham believed, but rather obedience of existing laws.[160]

The contrast between the Watts tour and the Alabama visits highlighted a critical rightward pivot for the socio-political implications of appeals to law and order, which in popular political discourse became almost the exclusive domain of conservatism. The Alabama meetings offered glimpses of the Sunbelt style that would ascend in the 1970s—image-conscious, "color-blind" boosterism combining developmentalist politics and evangelical piety. For regional boosters, as for Graham, the South had found a way to solve its major social problems, and a better future lay ahead. Graham's interracial

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the neighborhood. Branch, *At Canaan's Edge: America in the King Years, 1965-1968* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2006), 294-297.

[157] *Charlotte News*, 17 August 1965; and *Dothan* (AL) *Eagle*, 4 August 1967 [reprinted in *Alabama Baptist*, 14 September 1967].

[158] AP, 17 August 1965, in BGCA, CN 360, R30.

[159] "The Risen Christ," BGCA, CN 191, T742c.

[160] "Solving Race Problems," *U. S. News & World Report*, 25 April 1966, in BGCA, CN 345, 46-3.

gatherings served as legitimizing mechanisms for this brand of moderate southern politics. His response to Watts, in contrast, hinted at the "silent majority" that Richard Nixon would later invoke in office. Watts, of course, stood in stark relief to the glowing visage of the Sunbelt South; it violated the basic tenets of racial decency and law and order, and for Graham, it was not a southern problem. In asserting these beliefs during the remainder of the decade and throughout the Nixon years, Graham's crusades assumed a much more distinctly conservative cast.

CHAPTER V

BILLY GRAHAM'S SOUTHERN STRATEGY

Yes, there is a 'quiet revolution' going on, and every one here tonight is a candidate for this revolution.

Billy Graham[1]

Charlotte and the changing South are in difficult struggle, much of which has a moral dimension to which people are blinded. Mr. Graham's court in Washington plays it, almost always, as nothing more than a political drama.

Charlotte Observer[2]

Graham's concerns about the increasing social and racial chaos in his nation—first voiced in response to the 1957 Little Rock crisis, but later amplified in the aftermath of the 1965 Watts riots—ultimately dovetailed with the electoral prospects of Richard Nixon. In December 1967, Graham received the Great American Award, given by Atlanta business leaders and radio station WSB, the self-described "Voice of the South." Still recovering from a serious bout with pneumonia, the evangelist used the opportunity to deliver the kind of sermon his illness would prevent him from making for another three months. His acceptance speech reprised his preference for avowedly Christian marches as alternatives to more explicitly political demonstrations. Now, however, he distinguished such evangelical demonstrations not from civil rights or antiwar protests, but rather from the "rioting and rebellion" of the previous summer. In contrast to this

[1] "The Quiet Revolution," Great American Award presentation, 29 December 1967, Billy Graham Center Archives (BGCA), CN 345, Box 43, Folder 3 (43-3).

[2] *Charlotte Observer*, 15 October 1971.

turmoil, which had enthralled the media, Graham celebrated those Americans who were responding to the tumultuous times by turning to Christ and, hence, returning to the nation's moral foundations. These persons, whom the evening news ignored, were candidates for what Graham touted as a "quiet revolution." He included the same phrase in a nationally-syndicated newspaper commentary released that holiday season.[3]

Discussing a different type of candidacy during a press conference earlier that day, Graham made clear his desire to see his friend Richard Nixon win the Republican presidential nomination, calling him "the most experienced" possible GOP candidate during a year when experience should particularly matter.[4] The evangelist soon regretted this seeming endorsement and called Nixon's secretary to explain himself. Later that night, Nixon invited the ailing Graham to visit him in Key Biscayne, Florida. Nixon had not yet officially declared his candidacy and he wanted to discuss the matter with his friend. On the third day of the visit, Nixon finally put the question of a run to Graham. In Nixon's telling, the evangelist urged him to seek office, noting the providential course of his receiving a second legitimate shot at the presidency.[5] In a subsequent campaign commercial (a much more prominent venue than the Great American Award banquet), Nixon invoked another body of quiet citizens: "the forgotten Americans, the non-

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[3] "The Quiet Revolution," BGCA, CN 345, 43-3. Graham Newsday, Inc., article in *Mattoon* (IL) *Journal-Gazette*, 12 January 1968, in BGCA, CN 360, R31.

[4] *Atlanta Constitution*, 30 December 1967; see also Atlanta press conference, 29 December 1967, T13.

[5] Narrative authored by Graham, undated [1976], Richard Nixon Library (RNL), Post Presidential Correspondence, 1974-1979 Billy Graham (PPBG), 1-1. While Graham recalled advising Nixon to run, his recounting does not include the use of providential language. Richard M. Nixon, *RN: The Memoirs of Richard Nixon* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1978), 292-293.

shouters, the non-demonstrators."[6] Once in office, he famously labeled this group the "silent majority."[7] He strategically tapped the anxieties of those citizens who had sat out the decade's progressive movements and who needed reassurance that their version of America remained viable. In differing, yet complementary ways, Graham and Nixon honored socio-political communities they had spoken into existence.

The thematic overlap between Graham and Nixon was no coincidence. Their deep and well-known relationship has been viewed by the evangelist's supporters as a loyal, if flawed, friendship—and by his critics as a case either of disingenuous partisanship on the part of Graham or raw manipulation on the part of Nixon. These conflicting perspectives conceal the full complexity of their two decades of collaboration, which derived not only from an undeniable friendship, but also from a profound, enduring ideological synchronicity from which both men perceived potential benefits. While Graham loyally defended his friend late into the Watergate crisis, the evangelist had spent the previous two decades assisting Nixon's political ambitions (to an extent he did with no other politician) primarily because he supported Nixon's values and style of leadership. He believed in Nixon the political leader, in addition to Nixon the man. Nothing revealed this fact more than Graham's persistent and public support for the Nixon presidency, which began at a time when the evangelist had reached the height of his national and international influence. Graham supported Nixon well after his evangelistic enterprise stood to benefit substantially from close proximity to power.

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[6] Quoted in Matthew D. Lassiter, *The Silent Majority: Suburban Politics in the Sunbelt South* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006), 236.

[7] "Address to the Nation on the War in Vietnam," 3 November 1969, Public Papers of President Nixon (PPPN), http//:www.nixonfoundation.org (accessed 20 February 2006).

From the moment the evangelist spoke before bowed heads at the 1969 inauguration, his backing of President Nixon became a central and, for many observers, the defining moment of his public career, a period that tarnished his reputation and threatened to damage his ministry. His intimacy with Nixon far surpassed his closeness to other political figures, including Eisenhower and Johnson. With those presidents, Graham had served alternately as a consultant, liaison, or a politically useful chum. For Nixon, Graham was all of these things and more. Most famously (or infamously), he served in a public capacity as a "White House chaplain," "court prophet," or whatever label his many detractors affixed to him. Behind the scenes, he was a strikingly candid, occasionally incisive, and periodically overwrought political advisor, offering the president and his aides insights they valued and selectively applied.

To assume that Nixon simply "used" Graham, then, is to grossly underestimate the political side of an evangelist who, in 1960, 1968, and 1972, acted as an honorary member of the Nixon presidential campaign team. Emphasizing Graham's naiveté also does not adequately explain why, well before the Watergate scandal, he proactively and knowingly risked his reputation on behalf of Nixon. Graham was always more of a political creature than either those who praised or dismissed him would concede. He was more of a political creature than even he could admit. If Nixon politicized Graham, he also provided the forum through which the evangelist played out his political dreams. For a two-decade stretch extending through the presidential election of 1972, Nixon stood as Graham's ideal national leader, a political risk worth taking.

The Graham-Nixon relationship takes on particular significance when considered in the context of both the American South (the homeland of the evangelist and a central

focus of Nixon's political ambitions) and the intimately related issue of the white evangelical electorate. The complex—and, often, mutually rewarding—friendship between Graham and Nixon began in the early 1950s and climaxed with the evangelist's important role in the southern and evangelical politics of the 1969-1974 Nixon administration. In between lay many moments when evangelistic activities intersected with political priorities. During the 1960, 1968, and 1972 campaigns, Graham operated not only as a Nixon supporter, but also as a kind of GOP partisan (contrary to his belatedly emphasized status as a registered Democrat). In the latter two campaigns, the evangelist involved himself both implicitly and directly in the Republican "southern strategy," Nixon's attempt to attract white southern voters. In the process, Graham inserted himself into a contentious debate over who should point the political compass of the newest New South. He was something more than a just role player in Nixon's quest for a new political majority. While his connections with Nixon and other participants in the southern strategy clearly assisted that end (and consequently drew sharp criticism), they also reflected Graham's underlying political commitments, which he sought to extend throughout the South and nation.

Prelude to the Power and the Glory

Graham and Nixon clearly possessed a mutual affection for each other. Yet a close comfort with electoral politics coexisted with their many visits to the golf greens. As was not the case with the vast majority of the "good friends" Graham possessed in the world of politics (a bipartisan group ranging from the liberal Hubert Humphrey to the arch-conservative Strom Thurmond), the evangelist saw enough to like in Nixon to assist

his ambitions through private advice and public stamps of approval. Nixon clearly respected the input of Graham, and the frequency of their communication followed the election cycle. To be sure, the evangelist was one of several religious leaders Nixon cultivated during his decades in electoral politics, and Nixon unabashedly used Graham to enhance his public image. Yet White House staffers recognized the credit Nixon granted Graham as a political thinker and a successful salesman in his own right. Former Nixon Chief of Staff H. R. Haldeman described Graham as someone whom the president might call at the end of the day in order to "chat."[8] Those talks, however, often involved much more than friendly banter. During them, Nixon scarcely departed from his stock role as the constant politician.

Graham and Nixon first met in 1950 or 1951 by way of North Carolina Senator Clyde Hoey, although the evangelist already knew Nixon's parents from a revival service.[9] From his mother Nixon had inherited a western brand of Quakerism "more akin to free-church fundamentalists that to the quiet pacifists of the East." Despite the many differences between the Quaker and Reformed theologies of their respective upbringings, Nixon and Graham were equally familiar with the culture of revival tents and altar calls.[10] Nixon thus differed from many of Graham's high-profile peers who concealed their discomfort with the salesmanship and panache of evangelism. Moreover, the politician

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[8] Gerald S. Strober and Deborah H. Strober, *Nixon: An Oral History of His Presidency* (New York: HarperCollins, 1994), 74-75. See also Harry S. Dent, *The Prodigal South Returns to Power* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1978), 270.

[9] Graham, *Just As I Am: The Autobiography of Billy Graham* (New York: HarperCollins, 1997), 441. Graham address at Hannah Milhous Nixon memorial service, 3 October 1967, RNL, Post Presidential Correspondence, Special People A-K, Graham, Billy and Ruth (PPSP), 1-5.

[10] This is not to suggest that Nixon shared Graham's conservative theology—only that he was comfortable with it. Charles P. Henderson, Jr., *The Nixon Theology* (New York: Harper & Row, 1972), 8-11, 109 (quoted in 51).

readily drew a connection between fishing for souls and campaigning for votes. At least through 1972, the evangelist was only slightly less amenable to this analogy.

In certain respects, the early careers of Nixon and Graham paralleled each other. They rose to fame during the late 1940s, powered in part by the emerging Cold War culture of southern California (Nixon's home region and the cite of Graham's landmark 1949 Los Angeles crusade). Their profiles similarly benefited from close proximity to Dwight Eisenhower. Graham, who likely was impressed with Nixon's anticommunist credentials, undoubtedly delighted in his placement on the 1952 Republican ticket. The two had already commenced a long-running tradition of golf outings.[11]

Nixon's vice presidential papers contain extensive correspondence with Graham, who grew increasingly forward in offering political advice and proposing speaking engagements. The evangelist's letters reflect the flattery he routinely lobbed at political authorities of all stripes. Nixon was the "greatest Vice President in history" and momentarily warranted the title "Mr. President" during one of President Eisenhower's health scares. To a prospective Nixon biographer, Graham labeled him a "Christian gentleman" who had "added luster to the office of Vice President."[12] Following the 1956 Democratic National Convention, Graham made sure Nixon knew he did not approve of the quasi-sermon his close friend Tennessee Governor Frank Clement had delivered there against the Eisenhower administration.[13] Graham felt personally compelled to distance

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[11] Golf in Leonard Lurie, *The Running of Richard Nixon* (New York: Coward, McCann, Geoghegan, 1972), 222.

[12] Graham to Nixon, 7 January 1956 and 25 June 1956; and Graham to *New York Herald Tribune* reporter, 29 September 1958; all in National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), Pacific Region, Laguna Niguel (PRLN), Richard M. Nixon Pre-Presidential Papers (RNPP), Series 320 (S320), 299-"Graham, Billy" (299-G).

himself from Clement, who had entered the convention as a vice presidential candidate. Surely unbeknownst to Nixon, the evangelist had offered the governor at least two rounds of recommendations for the speech, including advice not "to attack Eisenhower or Nixon personally." Clement later sent Graham a thank-you letter.[14]

Flattery aside, Graham tended to address Vice President Nixon (or, by August 1956, "Dick") as the friend he was, in contrast to the more deferential, even fawning tone the evangelist struck with President Eisenhower. Graham felt comfortable enough with Nixon to mention the relevance of biblical prophecy for Cold War and Middle East policy. He also candidly asked Nixon for assistance with his overseas crusades in such places as India and Egypt, where the vice president helped set up meetings with heads of state. Nixon also intervened in the Department of Treasury's evaluation of the tax status for the evangelical magazine *Christianity Today*, which Graham had helped to found.[15]

By the close of the 1956 election season, two enduring, related themes had surfaced in their correspondence: the status of Nixon in the South and the desire of Graham for Nixon to align with the conservative Protestant electorate. Much of their correspondence concerned Nixon's political status—both his electoral prospects and opportunities for him to gain influence, particularly in the South and within the evangelical community. Nixon consulted Graham during the September 1957 Little

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[13] Graham to Nixon, 24 August 1956, NARA, PRLN, RNPP, S320, 299-G. On Clement's speech, see Charles Reagan Wilson, *Judgment and Grace in Dixie: Southern Faiths from Faulkner to Elvis* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1995), 3-4.

[14] Graham to Frank Clement, undated [Summer 1956]. After the convention, Graham wrote a cordial letter to Clement, but added that "I am sure that you would not expect me to agree with all that you had to say. In fact, I seriously doubt if you agree with all you said. . . . [Y]ou certainly presented the views of the modern day Democrats." See Graham to Clement, 20 August 1956. Clement to Graham, 23 August 1956. All in Frank Goad Clement Papers (FCP), Tennessee State Library and Archives (TSLA), 17-6 (R4).

[15] Graham to Nixon, 24 August 1956, 10 November 1956, 2 December 1957, and 7 January 1956; Raymond A. Hare to Nixon, 11 May 1959; and unnamed author to Nixon, 18 December 1957; all in NARA, PRLN, RNPP, S320, 299-G.

Rock high school crisis.[16] Afterwards, the evangelist urged him to attend a Presbyterian gathering in Miami, where southern racial moderates would be in attendance. These clergy, Graham stressed, represented "the most powerful influence on public opinion in the South." The following year, Graham asked Nixon to visit his "fully integrated" crusade in Charlotte, where Nixon's presence "would be extremely helpful at this moment of racial tension." Moreover, he wanted to chat with the vice president "on this racial situation."[17]

The religious South contained a wealth of political capital, as Graham alternately implied or stated outright in his correspondence with Nixon. Although Nixon turned down the Miami and Charlotte offers, as well as several others, Graham continually pitched opportunities for the vice president to address important Christian gatherings. Protestant leaders had begun to quiz the evangelist about his reliably conservative, yet religiously aloof friend. "Very frankly," Graham wrote to Nixon in 1956, "you are in need of a boost in Protestant religious circles. . . . I think it is time that you move among some of these men and let them know you." With the permission of Nixon, he had already advertised the vice president as a possible speaker at 1956 denominational meetings in the South. Nixon soon accepted invitations to appear at summer gatherings of the Southern Baptist, Methodist, and Presbyterian denominations. Graham passed along suggestions for the addresses, in which Nixon appealed for the church's assistance in race relations. Since all three gatherings took place in western North Carolina, the

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[16] Graham, *Just As I Am*, 201.

[17] Graham to Nixon, undated [Fall 1957]; and Graham to Nixon, 22 September 1958; both in NARA, RNPP, S320, 299-G.

retreat capital of southern white Protestantism, Nixon delivered the addresses in one busy day and still found time for his first visit to the Graham home in Montreat.[18]

Graham proposed such engagements for Nixon because he wanted to enhance the standing of conservative Protestants in the Eisenhower administration, but also because he saw Nixon as cut from presidential timber. By the time of the 1956 election, they had already discussed Nixon's presidential ambitions, and by March of the following year Graham considered him "well on the road to being the next President of the United States." Toward the end of 1957, the evangelist wrote the first of several letters analyzing the vice president's electoral prospects. At that early date, he identified Massachusetts Democratic Senator John F. Kennedy as a potentially "formidable foe," even though he thought the "religious issue" could work against the Catholic Kennedy. Thereafter, almost every substantive letter Graham authored to Nixon contained some commentary on the upcoming presidential contest. "There is no doubt that you will win the Republican nomination," wrote an increasingly sanguine Graham in 1958. Nixon would face a Democratic Party divided by both religion and, as the evangelist had stressed to Eisenhower back in 1956, race. "There is also a growing possibility of a deep split within the Democratic ranks on the race issue," wrote Graham in a letter that demonstrated the strong political tone of his correspondence with Nixon. "Therefore I think there is every reason for at least mild optimism."[19]

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[18] Graham to Nixon, 4 June 1956, 13 September 1955, and 14 July 1956; all in NARA, PRLN, RNPP, S320, 299-G. *Charlotte Observer*, undated [6 August 1956], in BGCA, CN 360, R25.

[19] Graham to Nixon, 10 November 1956, 28 March 1957, 2 December 1957, and 27 August 1958; and Nixon to Graham, 16 August 1956; all in NARA, PRLN, RNPP, S320, 299-G.

During the election year of 1960, the evangelist offered advice to Nixon in eight formal letters, in addition to numerous telegrams, phone calls, and visits to Washington, DC.[20] One of those trips was for the National Capitol Crusade, where he introduced Nixon at a service.[21] Much of Graham's political advice centered on the South, where he thought Nixon could continue the Republican advances of 1952 and 1956. Here, the pivotal figure remained Eisenhower, whom the evangelist encouraged to stump for Nixon in a region where "even you do not realize with what affection you are held." The president, who remained cool toward the transparently ambitious Nixon, replied that he awaited orders from his vice president. Graham cited this letter when giving the same advice to Nixon, who noted that Eisenhower was already scheduled to appear in Texas.[22]

Although Graham saw race as a divisive issue within the Democratic Party, he viewed religion as the main reason why Nixon could succeed in the South. In the context of a possible Democratic run by Massachusetts Senator John F. Kennedy, the "religious issue" (as Graham and others called it) translated as the matter of Kennedy's Roman Catholicism. Graham likely remembered why his father and many other Charlotte whites had voted against the 1928 Democratic presidential nominee, Al Smith, a Catholic and a foe of prohibition.[23] He understood that a Kennedy candidacy would stir similar anti-Vatican sentiments and expressed no reservations about that prospect. "I think there is a distinct possibility that you can capture several Southern states if Kennedy is your

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[20] Contents of NARA, PRLN, RNPP, S207, 299-G.

[21] Unlabeled clipping, 23 June 1960, in NARA, PRLN, RNPP, S207, 139-G. Graham introduced Nixon as "a golfing partner who usually beats me."

[22] Graham to Eisenhower, 4 August 1960; and Eisenhower to Graham, 10 August 1960; both in BGCA, CN 74, 1-12 [originals in NARA, Eisenhower Presidential Materials].

[23] *Atlanta Journal and Constitution*, 9 October 1994.

opponent," Graham wrote to Nixon in May 1960. As evidence, Graham sent Nixon a clipping about a Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) resolution urging that public officials be "free from sectarian pressures"—a thinly veiled nod to fears that Kennedy would acquiesce to the Vatican. Graham, who at that same gathering had urged Southern Baptists to "take a place of leadership" in race relations, was not terribly concerned about the political effects of the race issue.[24] He suggested that Nixon (who, along with his party, was not then perceived as racially conservative) meet with Martin Luther King, Jr., and advised the vice president that "in the South and border states . . . in spite of the civil rights issue the more conservative platform of the Republican Party and the religious issue could well put some of these states in your column." The presence of Texan Lyndon Johnson on the Democratic ticket would not put the South out of reach, Graham argued. Nixon appeared to agree and noted the great reception he had received during summer visits to Greensboro, Birmingham and Atlanta. His final two campaign visits to the region received assistance from Graham.[25]

As Graham's analysis of the southern electorate indicated, he interpreted the election of 1960 primarily through the lens of religion. According to information he passed along to Nixon in June, House Speaker Sam Rayburn and Senate Majority Leader Lyndon Johnson had confirmed that "the religious issue is <u>the</u> paramount issue in the forthcoming campaign." It was, of course, also the paramount issue for Graham. With likely nominee Kennedy destined to attract the exclusive support of American Catholics,

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[24] *Chicago Tribune*, 21 May 1960, in NARA, PRLN, RNPP, S320, 229-G. *Dallas News*, 21 May 1960, in BGCA, CN 360, R27.

[25] Graham to Nixon, 22 August 1960; 27 March 1960; 23 August 1960; and Nixon to Graham, 29 August 1960; all in NARA, PRLN, RNPP, S320, 299-G.

Graham urged Nixon to "concentrate on solidifying the Protestant vote." Along these lines, he proposed his friend, Minnesota Congressman Walter Judd, an anticommunist stalwart and former missionary to China, for the vice presidency. The suggestion revealed how religious and regional concerns blended in Graham's mind. Judd, he argued, would enable Nixon to "present a picture to America that would put much of the South and border states in the Republican column and bring about a dedicated Protestant vote to counteract the Catholic vote." Already in town for his Washington, DC, crusade, Graham made himself available to "talk this point over with you or any of your associates," and Nixon soon proposed a private luncheon with the evangelist, Judd, two political aides, and Kentucky Senator Thruston Morton, chair of the Republican National Committee.[26] Later in July, when a Judd nomination appeared unlikely, Graham recommended New York Governor Nelson Rockefeller (ideologically, at the opposite end of the party spectrum from Judd). The highest priority was clearly a Nixon victory.[27]

Graham's position in the 1960 presidential campaign involved much more than his loyalty to Nixon. Although the evangelist had distanced himself from the papacy-bashing world of fundamentalism, he clearly feared the prospect of a Roman Catholic in the White House. He shared his concerns with a host of leading Protestants, including theological conservatives, such as his strongly anti-Catholic father-in-law, and less doctrinally-oriented ministers, such as celebrity minister Norman Vincent Peale, whose brand of "popular Christianity" blended therapeutic theology with optimistic American

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[26] Graham to Nixon, 21 June 1960; appointment sheet, 23 June 1960; unnamed to "Don," 24 June 1960; all in NARA, PRLN, RNPP, S320, 299-G. The documents are inconclusive about whether the luncheon ever occurred. Either way, Nixon, Graham, Judd, and other guests dined together on 25 June 1960. Judd was among Nixon's final three choices. See Stephen Ambrose, *Nixon: The Education of a Politician, 1913-1962* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1987), 553.

[27] Graham to Nixon, 22 July 1960, NARA, PRLN, RNPP, S320, 299-G.

individualism.[28] At the start of the election year, Graham and Peale refused a request by Kennedy to sign an open statement criticizing opposition to a Catholic president along religious lines.[29] Graham may have believed that Nixon could win votes in the South simply by accentuating his faith, yet he was more than aware that many anti-Catholics wanted to accentuate *Kennedy's* faith for the very same reason.

Graham stoked the religious issue in 1960 more than he has ever been able to acknowledge. That August, he convened a group of around twenty-five Protestant leaders in Montreux, Switzerland, for the ostensible purpose of discussing world evangelism.[30] Perhaps the most pressing agenda among the strongly anti-Kennedy group, however, was the looming election. Peale and Bell were among the participants in discussions that, ironically, resembled the very type of clandestine cabal many of them associated with the Vatican. The attendees sized up Nixon's chances in the South and fretted about the Kennedy team's superior organization. Graham agreed to join Peale in encouraging Nixon to address religion more specifically in his public speeches. The evangelist, though, astutely refrained from lending his name to another Montreux proposal: a meeting in Washington, DC, to address Protestant concerns over the election.

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[28] Following the 1960 election, a distraught Nelson Bell wrote to Nixon expressing fears of "a slow, completely integrated and planned attempt to take over our nation for the Roman Catholic Church. Many Roman Catholics are good friends of mine and many of them are completely unaware of what is taking place." Mr. and Mrs. Bell to Nixon, 11 November 1960, BGCA, CN 318, 39-15. Carol V. R. George, *God's Salesman: Norman Vincent Peale and the Power of Positive Thinking* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), vii-x.

[29] Thomas J. Carty, *A Catholic in the White House? Religion, Politics, and John F. Kennedy's Presidential Campaign* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2004), 54.

[30] This description of the Montreux conference is based primarily on Graham to Nixon, 22 and 23 August 1960; both in NARA, PRLN, RNPP, S320, 299-G. Background on the role of religion in the 1960 campaign (including the Montreux meeting and its fallout) comes from Thomas J. Carty, *A Catholic in the White House? Religion, Politics, and John F. Kennedy's Presidential Campaign* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2004), 49-66; and George, *Salesman*, 201-210.

Shedding additional light on Kennedy's Catholicism, the Montreux group believed at the time, would only benefit the Nixon campaign.

While Graham conveniently remained overseas, the Montreux machinations brewed into a political storm stateside. In early September 1960, Peale served as chair for the National Conference of Citizens for Religious Freedom, a Montreux-inspired event with close ties to the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE). Graham encouraged Peale, who did not normally move in NAE circles, to attend the gathering. Journalists promptly levied charges of anti-Catholicism at what they branded the "Peale group." Peale—who, like Graham, prized respectability more than prophecy—quickly dissociated himself from the conference. For understandable reasons, Peale's supporters later alleged that Graham, whose links to the controversy remained largely unknown, had let Peale take the fall for what could just as accurately have been labeled the "Graham group."[31] To Nixon, who had steered clear of the conference, such developments confirmed his previously voiced belief "that you just can't win on that issue!"[32]

The Peale flap also confirmed Graham's reconsideration of the role religion would play in the campaign, as he observed how allegations of religious bigotry could work to the advantage of Kennedy. (Lost on Graham and Nixon alike, of course, was the eminently justifiable nature of those allegations.) The evangelist had moved to protect his image even before the Montreux gathering. Through Lyndon Johnson, Graham informed Kennedy in early August of his desire "to stay as much out of the political campaign as possible." Likely conscious of the open-ended nature of this promise,

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[31] George, *Salesman*, 200-210. Encouragement of Peale in Graham, *Just As I Am*, 391.

[32] Nixon to Graham, 29 August 1960, in NARA, PRLN, RNPP, S320, 299-G. Bell to Nixon, 9 September 1960, BGCA, CN 318, 39-15.

Johnson wrote a gracious reply on Kennedy's behalf.[33] A week after detailing the Montreux meeting to Nixon, Graham released statements to *Time* and *Newsweek* denouncing religious bigotry and declaring he would not raise the religious issue during the campaign.[34] As a result of the Peale fiasco, Graham's advised Nixon to adjust his use of the religious issue. While the candidate should still address "spiritual things" in his speeches (particularly in light of the NAE's efforts to mobilize voters), Graham argued, he needed to recruit surrogate speakers—preferably, respected Republican elders, such as Thomas Dewey or Eisenhower himself—to denounce the Democratic manipulation of the religious issue. In both cases, the evangelist waited in vain for action.[35]

Unresolved in the aftermath of the Peale fiasco was the question of a public endorsement of Nixon. More than anything, the vagaries of the religious issue contributed to the evangelist's final decision not to officially back his obvious choice for president. It was a close call, however, as Graham ultimately confined his definition of endorse to the word's most declarative sense. An endorsement had earlier appeared likely. "I have taken my stand," Graham wrote to Nixon in late 1959, "and intend to go all the way." After proposing to come out for the vice president during a June 1960 appearance on *Meet the Press*, however, the evangelist began to waffle. Perhaps, he thought, a strategy of leaving "the implication" of support for Nixon, as he had done at the SBC gathering in May, would carry "greater strength than if I came all out for you at

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[33] Graham to Johnson, 8 August 1960; and Johnson to Graham, 16 August 1960; both in Lyndon Johnson Presidential Library and Archives (LJPA), Lyndon Baines Johnson Archives, 4-"G."

[34] Graham to *Time*, 28 August 1960; statement to *Newsweek*, undated [August 1960]; and Graham to Nixon, 1 September 1960; all in NARA, PRLN, RNPP, S320, 299-G.

[35] Graham to Nixon, 1 September 1960, 24 September 1960, 17 October 1960, and 2 November 1960; all in NARA, PRLN, RNPP, S320, 299-G.

the present time." At some point, possibly during a meeting involving Judd, the possibility was apparently raised of a public endorsement slated to occur before the August Democratic National Convention.[36]

Graham's overseas travels from August to October, when he held services throughout Western Europe, bought him some time, but seemed merely to delay the inevitable. In his correspondence concerning the Montreux meeting, the evangelist reported that he had sent a letter to members of his mailing list urging them to vote in November. The list was numerically strongest in the heavily populated states of the California, Pennsylvania, New York, and the Midwest. "I think in these areas plus the South we can be of greatest help," he wrote, noting the likelihood that a majority of the recipients were Democrats or independents. "I am on the trans-Atlantic phone constantly with people in various parts of America," he added, "and will be delighted to be of any service I possibly can." He also suggested Nixon visit him in North Carolina that fall. Unimpeded by modesty, Graham forecast that such "a dramatic and publicized event . . . might tip the scales in North Carolina and dramatize the religious issue throughout the [n]ation without mentioning it publicly." Nixon did not accept the offer. When he and his wife arrived at the Charlotte airport during an October campaign swing, though, Graham's mother greeted them with a bouquet of flowers. By then, Graham had come to believe that, because of "what the [p]ress did to Peale," he could not overtly mention religion even if he did endorse Nixon. Graham proposed to endorse Nixon on the presumedly unbiased grounds of his superior leadership experience as vice president, thus

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[36] Graham to Nixon, 17 November 1959; Len Hall to Nixon, 23 May 1960; Graham to Nixon, 27 May 1960; unsigned handwritten note, undated [June 1960?] containing text, "Billy Graham—Come out for RN before Democratic National Convention"; all in NARA, PRLN, RNPP, S320, 299-G.

making the evangelist "not so much against Kennedy as I am for you." In the final days of October, though, Graham publicly declared that he would not endorse a candidate. He chose to remain on the path he had adopted in 1952 and 1956: offering advice, imploring Christians (implicitly, Protestant ones) to vote, and utilizing opportunities to, as he succinctly wrote to Nixon, "make statements by implication that will be interpreted as favorable to you without getting directly involved."[37]

The final decision to eschew an endorsement, however, occurred after an incident, unpublicized at the time, which captured the precarious nature of Graham's engagement with Nixon. In mid-October, Graham discussed his endorsement conundrum with publishing mogul Henry Luce, a longtime Republican and an enthusiastic booster of the evangelist. Luce invited him to contribute a piece to *Life* magazine explaining why he supported Nixon. Despite some misgivings, the evangelist dashed off an enthusiastic article clearly endorsing Nixon, while avoiding direct criticism of Kennedy. In the article, Graham invoked his "responsibility as a citizen of the United States to let my views be known," something he noted Reinhold Niebuhr and other religious leaders who supported Kennedy had already done. The evangelist praised Nixon's qualifications, while marshaling his pastoral authority as a judge of character. "But in my estimation, his outstanding quality is sincerity," Graham wrote in language that, if published, would surely have resurfaced fourteen years later during the Watergate crisis.[38]

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[37] Graham to Nixon, 22 August 1960; Nixon to Mrs. W. Frank Graham (and related note), 22 October 1960; Graham to Nixon, 24 September 1960; Graham to Nixon, 1 September 1960; and AP, 30 October 1960; all in NARA, PRLN, RNPP, S320, 299-G. *Charlotte News*, 11 September 1968, in BGCA, CN 360, R31.

[38] This recounting of the *Life* narrative relies on two letters from Graham to Nixon, dated 12 June 1961 and 17 July 1961; and "Billy Graham's story LIFE magazine did not use," undated [October 1960]; all in NARA, PRLN, RNPP, S320, 299-G.

The piece ultimately found its way into the archives, rather than *Life* magazine. No sooner had Graham sent the article to Luce than he began to seriously reconsider it. With Ruth, he prayed for some type of divine guidance. Seeming answers soon arrived. Two of his conservative friends, journalists David Lawrence and Paul Harvey, strongly advised him against letting the article run. Meanwhile, Luce had experienced his own doubts and mentioned the article to Kennedy, who unsurprisingly thought *Life* should also publish a piece by Niebuhr or another Protestant Democrat. With publication delayed by a week, concerned phone calls to Montreat soon arrived from Florida Senator George Smathers, former Tennessee Governor Frank Clement, and North Carolina Governor Luther Hodges, southern Democrats and friends of the evangelist. A similar appeal came from *Atlanta Constitution* editor Ralph McGill, who almost certainly had been alerted about the *Life* draft, urging the evangelist to avoid endorsing Nixon and to stay away from the religious issue. The extra time gave Graham time to compose a substitute article promoting the duty of every citizen to vote. Luce reluctantly agreed to run this decidedly less newsworthy piece, in which Graham still managed to warn the American people against voting as a bloc, reflexively supporting a particular party, or choosing a candidate based on who "is more handsome or charming"—points easily interpretable as jabs at Kennedy. Throughout the frantic deliberations over the *Life* article, the evangelist had repeatedly attempted to contact Nixon, whose staff remained conflicted about how the piece would play politically. Nixon himself was unsure. In Graham's telling of the incident, he eventually received "a definite green light" from the Nixon campaign, but only after the substitute article had already gone to press.[39] This

detail does not appear in Nixon's published account of the matter two years later, which has him overruling his staff out of sensitivity to the volatile religious issue.[40]

Graham soon offered Nixon a generous consolation prize. On November 3, four days after declaring he would not endorse a candidate and five days before the election itself, the evangelist appeared with Nixon in the tightly contested state of South Carolina. Graham traveled to the state capital of Columbia at the urging of Nixon supporter James Byrnes, a segregationist whom the evangelist praised for attending his 1958 service at Fort Jackson. Graham gave an invocation at the start of a televised address during which Nixon, in a manner foreshadowing his more racialized southern strategies of 1968 and 1972, argued that Democrats had abandoned states' rights and other "time-honored beliefs."[41] Nixon and Graham appeared together on the statehouse steps—where, two years earlier, the evangelist had been prevented from holding a desegregated crusade—beneath a banner reading, "Dixie is No Longer in the Bag."[42] The sign slightly exaggerated the status of the GOP in the greater South, where Nixon picked up electoral votes only in Virginia, Florida, Tennessee, Oklahoma, and Kentucky, and ultimately lost a closely contested election.

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[39] Graham to Nixon, 12 June and 17 July 1961; both in NARA, PRLN, RNPP, S320, 299-G. Ralph McGill to Graham, 28 October 1960, Emory University Special Collections, Ralph McGill Papers, 10-3. Graham, "'We Are Electing a President of the World,'" *Life*, 7 November 1960, 109-110.

[40] Nixon, *Six Crises* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1962), 365. In subsequent works, Nixon emphasized that he had always advised Graham not to risk his ministry by endorsing him. See, for example, Nixon, *In the Arena: A Memoir of Victory, Defeat, and Renewal* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1990), 90-91.

[41] *Greenville* (SC) *Piedmont*, 4 November 1960; and *Cleveland Press-News* (UPI), 3 November 1960; both in BGCA, CN 360, R27.

[42] Lowell S. Streiker and Gerald S. Strober, *Religion and the New Majority: Billy Graham, Middle America, and the Politics of the 70s* (New York: Association Press, 1972), 61.

Two months after the November disappointment, Nixon revisited the *Life* article, calling the original version "[p]robably the best and most effective statement in my behalf in the entire campaign." He soon pitied himself that the piece was not published and still contended decades later that the article might have "made the difference" in the race. "While I did not come out openly for you," Graham replied, "yet [sic] I believe tens of thousands knew where I stood by my public and private statements—and by appearing with you in Columbia!"[43] Both of them had a point. Any serious inquirer could have surmised the leanings of Graham through the many well-publicized compliments he paid to Nixon. Still, an outright endorsement in such a tight election might have a swayed a few more evangelical voters—especially among Democratic-leaning southerners skeptical of Kennedy, but also wary of a candidate who had long ago garnered the nickname "Tricky Dick." In later elections, Nixon would remember the difference Graham might have made in 1960. Likely, as well, he took away lessons from the religious issue about how and how not to appeal to the prejudices of possible supporters.

Graham's friendship with Nixon survived the election and likely grew in strength during the 1961-1968 interregnum. After the 1960 election, Graham attempted to contact the vice president on several occasions to offer solace and to inform him that he had accepted an invitation, via George Smathers and with the approval of James Byrnes, to play golf with President-elect Kennedy.[44] Nixon soon invited the evangelist to visit him

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[43] Nixon to Graham, 15 January 1961 and 17 August 1961; and Graham to Nixon, 12 June 1961; all in NARA, PRLN, RNPP, S320, 299-G. Nixon to John Pollock, 30 December 1985, RNL, PPSP, 1-4.

[44] Telephone messages, 15, 23, and 26 November 1960; and Graham to Nixon, 28 November 1960; all in NARA, PRLN, RNPP, S320, 299-G. Graham eventually met with Kennedy in January 1961. Through Brooks Hays, Graham later invited Kennedy to attend a service at the 1962 Chicago crusade. The president politely declined. See Hays to Ralph Dungan, 30 March 1962; and Kenneth O'Donnell to Hays,

in Washington.[45] In January, Nixon sent Graham a gracious letter thanking him for his friendship and offering flattering words about his political instincts. Graham's post-election correspondence with Nixon commenced with an offer of pastoral care, yet quickly returned to the topic of politics, namely Nixon's future. By February 1961, Graham wrote Nixon of his confidence "that you will be the next president of the United States" and he soon urged Nixon to speak up on matters of foreign policy. Later that year, Nixon asked for Graham's input on a possible run for the California governorship. During the unsuccessful 1962 campaign, Nixon remained cognizant of Graham's potential assistance. "We have to get these people to go to work," he wrote in a campaign memo regarding the evangelist and his supporters. Graham, who had been "following with tremendous interest the developments in . . . California," invited Nixon to contribute to *Decision*, the flagship magazine of the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association (BGEA), which he noted had a circulation of 100,000 in the Golden State.[46] Nixon's article, titled "A Nation's Faith in God," appeared in the November issue.[47] In July of that year, Nixon's publicist told the evangelist that his candidate, whose campaign was stalling, needed more photographic coverage. A shot of a Nixon-Graham golf outing soon appeared in the *Los Angeles Times*.[48] After the election ended in bitter defeat and a seemingly career-ending meltdown during Nixon's concession speech, Graham wrote to

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2 April 1962; both in NARA, John Fitzgerald Kennedy Library, White House Central Name Files, 1035-"Graham, B."

[45] Graham to Nixon, 17 August 1974, RNL, PPBG, 1-2.

[46] Nixon to Graham 15 January 1961; Graham to Nixon, 2 February 1961; Graham to Nixon, 17 May 1961; Nixon to Graham, 17 August 1961; Nixon to unnamed, 23 February 1962; Graham to Nixon, 12 March 1962; and Nixon to Graham, 18 June 1962; all in NARA, PRLN, RNPP, S320, 299-G.

[47] Nixon, "A Nation's Faith in God," *Decision*, November 1962, 4.

[48] Graham, *Just As I Am*, 443. *Los Angeles Times*, 26 July 1962, in BGCA, CN 360, R29.

Nixon reaffirming their friendship. He also proposed with more than a little forwardness that Nixon host a banquet for journalists and offer a cordial mea culpa. "Strange as it may seem," the evangelist added, "I feel that if you can come through this defeat with flying colors, you will have another major opportunity in the next few years to serve the American people."[49] He soon made a similar comment at a press conference.[50]

Graham did his part to facilitate Nixon's long comeback, serving as both a private and public cheerleader. He continued to speak highly of Nixon in national venues, including *McCall's* magazine. "I've heard people say, 'I don't like Nixon,'" he wrote. "I have never understood this, because he is one of the warmest and most likable men I've ever known." Elsewhere, he called Nixon a possible "American Churchill," and his similar comments during the election year of 1964 caught the attention of at least one editorial board.[51] During the 1968 campaign and in later years, Nixon cited the evangelist's encouragement at Key Biscayne as having "a great deal to do" with his final decision to seek the presidency. Nixon, who had spent the better part of the mid-1960s ingratiating himself with GOP elites around the nation, almost certainly had made up his mind to run by the time of the December 1967 visit.[52] Still, he clearly viewed Graham as a valuable consultant concerning his political future.

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[49] Graham to Nixon, 11 November 1962, NARA, PRLN, RNPP, S320, 299-G. Nixon did not see this letter until January 1963.

[50] *Houston Post* (AP), 14 November 1962, in BGCA, CN 360, R29.

[51] Graham, "Billy Graham's Own Story: 'God is My Witness,'" Part III, *McCall's*, June 1964, 64. *Houston Press*, 28 October 1963; and *Arkansas Gazette*, 27 May 1964; both in BGCA, CN 360, R29.

[52] *Good Housekeeping* article [1968] cited in undated narrative authored by Graham [1976], RNL, PPBG, 1-1. See also Jonathan Aitken, *Nixon: A Life* (Washington, DC: Regnery, 1993), 346-347. Bebe Rebozo, perhaps Nixon's closest friend, and T. W. Wilson, Graham's chief aide, were also present at Key Biscayne. On Nixon's pre-campaigning, see Dan T. Carter, Carter, *The Politics of Rage: George Wallace,*

From the Quiet Revolution to the Silent Majority

While Nixon prepared the groundwork for a possible run in 1968, Graham helped to stir the tide his friend eventually rode into office. The evangelist's public rhetoric appeared to suggest the need for a mainstream candidate willing to run on a strong law-and-order platform. During the latter years of the Johnson administration, Graham grew increasingly concerned about the direction of American society, especially the direction of the church. He focused specific attention on the renaissance of social gospel-influenced theology within liberal Protestant circles, whether in the form of the trendy "God is Dead" theology or, more pervasively, the increasing involvement of clergy in opposing the Vietnam War. "There is no doubt that secularism, materialism, and even Marxism not only have invaded the Church but deeply penetrated it," the evangelist warned in a *Christianity Today* article, titled "False Prophets in the Church."[53] Although Graham remained supportive of social concern among Christians, he argued that the trend had moved too far in that direction. In response, he reasserted his evangelical universalism. "There is one Gospel and one Gospel only," he wrote, "and that Gospel is the dynamic of God to change the individual and, through the individual, society."[54]

These theological apprehensions dovetailed with the anxieties about lawlessness Graham had first voiced in the aftermath of Watts. "There is no doubt that the rioting, looting, and crime in America have reached the point of anarchy," he declared in a 1967

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the Origins of the New Conservatism and the Transformation of American Politics, 2nd edition (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2000), 325.

[53] Graham, "False Prophets in the Church." See also "Social Injustice," *Hour of Decision* sermon (Minneapolis: BGEA, 1967).

[54] *Alabama Baptist* (Religious News Service, RNS), 12 October 1967, 1.

sermon with the stark title, "Rioting or Righteousness." The nation needed "new, tough laws" to deal with "subversive elements that are seeking the overthrow of the American government."[55] The nation also needed a new kind of Supreme Court Chief Justice, he believed. Responding to Chief Justice Earl Warren's initial declaration of his intent to resign, the evangelist wrote to the president in 1968 urging him to "give serious consideration to balancing the Court with a strong conservative as Chief Justice." Graham was "convinced that many of the problems that have plagued America in the past few years are a direct result of some of the extreme rulings of the Court, especially in the field of criminology." John Connally, whom Graham had supported for Texas governor in 1962 and whom he had subsequently labeled a superlative future presidential candidate, "would make an ideal and popular choice," despite likely opposition from "extreme liberals and radicals."[56] The electoral implications of Graham's recommendation were obvious. "With elections coming up next year . . . ," he predicted in the same 1967 sermon, "the American people are going to show their displeasure by the ballots they cast. The majority of the American people want law, order, and security in our society."[57] The specter of a lawless society would reappear throughout the Nixon's 1968 campaign.

As the 1968 presidential race approached, observers wondered whether Graham's closeness with Nixon would threaten his loyalty to Lyndon Johnson. Before Johnson

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[55] "Rioting or Righteousness," *Hour of Decision* sermon (Minneapolis: BGEA, 1967).

[56] Graham to Johnson, 21 June 1968, LJPA, WHCF, NR, 227a-"Box 227a WHCF Name." *Dallas Times-Herald*, 14 January 1963, in BGCA, CN 360, R29. In 1969, Nixon named Warren Burger to replace Warren. Graham backed Connally's Texas gubernatorial candidacy when crusading in El Paso just before the 1962 election and later cited the incident as the only time he had ever endorsed a candidate. See, for example, *The Lee Phillips Show* ("Noonbreak"), 15 September 1980, in BGCA, CN 74, V31.

[57] "Rioting or Righteousness," *Hour of Decision* sermon.

withdrew from the race (a surprising move for most observers, but not necessarily for Graham, to whom the president had much earlier confessed he might not run again, citing health concerns), the evangelist faced the prospect of the man he had long encouraged to run, Nixon, opposing an incumbent whom he had mostly supported in office.[58] After Graham declared Nixon the most-qualified potential GOP nominee in December 1967, he sent a letter reassuring the Johnson team of his intention to avoid political involvement.[59] At Key Biscayne, though, the evangelist informed a highly skeptical Nixon of his opinion that Johnson would not seek reelection.[60] Around this time—possibly for the first time in public—the evangelist began highlighting his status as a registered Democrat, something he had not done even when H. L. Hunt tried to draft him as a Republican candidate in 1964. Although he continued to call himself a Democrat throughout the Nixon administration and beyond, few media outlets heeded his self-description. A 1972 *Parade* article, for example, placed Graham at the top of a list of powerful "behind the scenes" Republicans. The *Arkansas Gazette*, then emerging as one of his harshest critics, labeled him "one of those self-styled 'Southern Democrats'" who voted like a member of the other major party.[61]

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[58] Graham interview, 12 October 1983, LJPA, http://www.lbjlib.utexas.edu/johnson/archives.hom/oralhistory.hom/Graham-B/Graham-B.PDF (accessed 20 February 2006).

[59] George Christian to Graham, 15 January 1968, LJPA, WHCF, CF, NF, 146-"GR."

[60] Narrative authored by Graham, undated [1976], RNL, PPBG, 1-1. Graham claimed that, at the time of the Key Biscayne conversation, Johnson had not explicitly told him he would not run.

[61] Atlanta press conference transcript, 29 December 1967, BGCA, CN 24, 1-7. *Virginian-Pilot*, 7 May 1972, in BGCA, CN 360, R34. *Arkansas Gazette*, 30 November 1969, in BGCA, CN 360, R31. A 1960 biography of Graham described him as a registered Democrat who nonetheless appeared to favor Republican policies. See William G. McLoughlin, *Billy Graham: Revivalist in a Secular Age* (New York: The Ronald Press, 1960), 96-97.

After Johnson bowed out of the campaign, intrigue about the evangelist's role in the race only intensified. Democrats from Tennessee expressed alarm that Graham was ready to "come out for Nixon," something they knew he had almost done eight years earlier. They asked Johnson how such a development might be avoided. A handwritten note on their letter offered one logical possibility: "John Connally?"[62] Probably unbeknownst to anyone on the president's staff, however, Graham was then attempting (unsuccessfully, for the moment) to woo his ideal chief justice toward support for Nixon.[63] Meanwhile, on the Republican side, a Philadelphia newspaper columnist termed Graham the "X Factor" in the upcoming campaign and cited concerns among GOP supporters of rival candidate Ronald Reagan that the evangelist would back Nixon.[64] A different source had the evangelist pitching Texas Representative George Bush, another Graham acquaintance from the Lone Star state, as an ideal GOP running mate. Graham denied the allegation.[65]

The role Graham eventually played in the 1968 campaign takes on particular significance when understood in the larger context of Nixon's southern strategy. This strategy primarily consisted of Nixon's outreach to the traditionally-Democratic southern white electorate. More immediately, though, Nixon needed to woo the many southern delegates at the Republican National Convention who found the strongly conservative Reagan more appealing. Before and during the Miami GOP convention, South Carolina

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[62] James Rowe to Johnson, 31 July 1968, LJPA, WHCF, NF, 227a-"Box 227a WHCF Name."

[63] Dent, *Prodigal*, 269.

[64] *Philadelphia Inquirer* column published in *Acworth* (GA) *North Cobb News*, 6 June 1968, in BGCA, CN 360, R31.

[65] *Los Angeles Times*, 5 June 1968, in BGCA, CN 345, 45-6; and *Houston Tribune*, 13 June 1968, in BGCA, CN 360, R31.

Senator Strom Thurmond, a 1964 convert to the party of Lincoln, kept the South alive for Nixon. With the encouragement of Thurmond aide Harry Dent, Nixon had already met with southern Republicans and pledged his reliability on a slate of issues ranging from Supreme Court nominations to forced busing and textile policy. Nixon repeated these pledges at the convention, where in backdoor meetings he convinced southern delegates of his trustworthiness on civil rights.[66]

Graham was a conspicuous presence at the GOP convention, much more so than at the subsequent Democratic convention in Chicago, where he gave an invocation. In Miami, the evangelist did more than offer a blessing. According to reports leaked by the Nixon campaign team and tacitly confirmed by Graham, North Carolina GOP gubernatorial candidate Jim Gardner confided to the evangelist his support for Nixon, only to renege and embrace Reagan.[67] The Associated Press, meanwhile, reported that Graham had discreetly visited Nixon's convention headquarters to pick up a packet containing information about members of the highly-vulnerable Alabama delegation, which eventually voted 14-12 for Nixon over Reagan.[68] As Graham directly acknowledged, he took part in high-level discussions between nominee-elect Nixon and party officials concerning the candidate's vice presidential choice. At the invitation of Nixon, Graham participated in a second, more conservative (and mostly southern and western) group whom the candidate consulted. When Nixon unexpectedly asked

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[66] Nadine Cohodas, *Strom Thurmond and the Politics of Southern Change* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1993), 365; Dent, *Prodigal*, 77-84, 97; and Carter, *Rage*, 329-330.

[67] *Durham Herald* and *Lexington* (NC) *Dispatch* (UPI), 2 November 1968; both in BGCA, CN 360, R31.

[68] A Nixon staffer said that Graham merely wanted to get in touch with friends from Alabama at the convention. See *Arkansas Gazette*, 27 June 1970, in BGCA, CN 360, R33. Dennis Wainstock, *The Turning Point: The 1968 United States Presidential Campaign* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 1988), 107.

Graham, the lone non-politico present, for his input, the evangelist proposed Oregon Senator Mark Hatfield, among the most liberal vice presidential possibilities. A highly unlikely nominee who would not have survived a Thurmond veto, Hatfield was a dedicated Southern Baptist whom Graham thought might balance the ticket and whom Nixon knew the evangelist favored. Later that night, Graham informed Hatfield that he had not been selected.[69]

Nixon, of course, harbored hopes of continuing and even expanding the Republican Party's presidential inroads in the South. In 1968, he desired to engage the region in a manner resembling Eisenhower's campaigns, in contrast to Barry Goldwater's 1964 appeal to the politics of massive resistance. The resounding failure of Goldwater, who had alienated moderates nationwide, led Nixon toward a strategy by which, in the 1969 words of Republican analyst Kevin Phillips, the GOP "abandoned its revolutionary Deep South scheme and returned to reliance on evolutionary inroads in the Outer South."[70] This "suburban strategy," as one historian has recently termed it, focused on the region's growing Sunbelt metropolises, invoking a rhetoric of color-blindness, rather than of overt racial backlash.[71] Although Nixon aspired to be a national candidate with

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[69] Lewis Chester, et al, *An American Melodrama: The Presidential Campaign of 1968* (New York: Viking Press, 1969), 486. Jules Whitcover, *The Resurrection of Richard Nixon* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1970), 353. Graham, "Watergate," *Christianity Today*, 4 January 1974, 12. Graham, *Just As I Am*, 446-447. *Miami Herald*, 10 August 1968, in BGCA, CN 360, R31.

[70] Kevin P. Phillips, *The Emerging Republican Majority* (New Rochelle, NY: Arlington House, 1969), 206-207, 250.

[71] Lassiter, *Silent Majority*, 232-241. The term "southern strategy" retains much usefulness, however, provided that it is *not* a) viewed as a static phenomenon that had the same meaning in 1968, 1970, 1972, or later; b) interpreted in isolation from Nixon's many other electoral ambitions; or c) seen as necessarily a successful enterprise. Nixon targeted the South for a number of evolving and not always complementary reasons, including fear of Reagan's challenge in 1968, concerns about the Wallace runs of 1968 and 1972, memories of lost opportunities during the 1960 election, displeasure with the Democratic Congress in 1970, and dreams about creating a longterm electoral majority.

broad-based appeal, his 1968 southern strategy lite emerged only after the third-party candidacy of Alabama Governor George Wallace appeared irreversible.

Graham, Nixon later told H. R. Haldeman, "was enormously helpful to us in the Border South in '68 and will continue to be in '72."[72] The evangelist was particularly useful in Nixon's efforts to minimize the electoral impact of Wallace, who single-handedly kept several Deep South states out of the Republican column. Nixon ultimately responded to Wallace by casting himself as "opposed to segregation but favoring only voluntary integration."[73] In seeking to accentuate the contrast between a reliable Nixon and a fire-breathing Wallace, Nixon staffers remained aware of Graham's status as "the second most revered man in the South among adult voters." Campaign aide William Safire went so far as to propose using Graham directly against Wallace, an idea Nixon vetoed. Nixon adman Harry Treleaven, meanwhile, sought to "follow up on the suggestion that we produce a Billy Graham program for use in the South."[74] Advice along these lines undoubtedly contributed to Graham's visible attendance at a staged question and answer session that Nixon taped in Atlanta. During the early October recording, which appeared on television screens throughout the South, Nixon contrasted his style with the oppositional approach of Wallace and cited Graham when discussing a

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[72] Nixon to Haldeman, 30 November 1970, BGCA, CN 74, 3-7 [original in NPM].

[73] Earl and Merle Black, *The Rise of Southern Republicans* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), 210.

[74] Campaign memos quoted in Joe McGinniss, *The Selling of the President 1968* (New York: Trident Press, 1969), 124, 238. The memo describing Graham as the "second most revered man in the South" did not indicate whether Wallace resided in first place. William Safire, *Before the Fall: An Insider's View of the Pre-Watergate White House* (New York: Doubleday, 1975), 55-56. Nixon did allow to Safire that a "The Dick Nixon I Know" magazine piece by Graham might be acceptable.

religious revival among American youth.[75] Even Nixon's September appearance at a Graham crusade service in the swing state of Pennsylvania played out against the backdrop of southern politics. The televised service, during which the evangelist glowingly introduced Nixon, was broadcast the week before election day in a number of states—including, as newspapers noted, closely contested South Carolina and Texas. In response, the Texas chapter of Wallace's American Independent Party demanded a federal investigation into what his supporters saw as an unregulated advertisement for Nixon. One San Antonio station consented to grant Wallace "equal time."[76]

In the election of 1968, Graham's greatest contribution to the ambitions of Nixon in the South and elsewhere may have been his role in raising law-and-order issues in a manner beneficial to a mainstream conservative candidate. His presence at the chaotic Democratic convention in Chicago only reinforced his sentiments along these lines; he remembered commiserating with Southern Democrats worried about the future of their nation and, likely, of their party.[77] Race hovered over all of these concerns, of course, no matter how much Nixon sought to sell himself as a color-blind moderate.[78] His calculated inattention to civil rights matters made him a respectable alternative to Wallace. With Wallace running well in the Deep South and the plantation-belt regions of the Upper South, Nixon sought and largely won over the growing affluent suburban

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[75] *Atlanta Constitution* and *Toledo Blade*, 4 October 1968; both in BGCA, CN 360, R31.

[76] *Hastings* (NB) *Tribune* (UPI), 4 November 1968; *Dallas News* (UPI), 5 November 1968; and *Anderson* (SC) *Daily Mail*, 12 November 1968; all in BGCA, CN 360, R31.

[77] Graham, *Just As I Am*, 448.

[78] Dan Carter has argued that Nixon was "disingenuous" in not conceding the racial implications of his political strategy. Carter, *Rage*, 327.

population of the region, picking up several peripheral southern states, as well as Thurmond's South Carolina.[79]

On a larger level, Graham was emblematic of the longterm, if gradual, success of the Republican Party in attracting presidential adherents in the South. The evangelist was a forerunner among a powerful political, social, and religious network of southerners that had gravitated toward Nixon since the Eisenhower era. Some of these southerners officially joined the GOP, while others remained conservative Democrats who supported Republican presidents. Prominent members of what amounted to a kind of Nixon-Graham nexus included John Connally, who eventually served as Secretary of Treasury under Nixon; Winton Blount, a key founder of the modern southern GOP who served as Nixon's Postmaster General and later headed Connally's unsuccessful 1980 presidential campaign; and William Walton, cofounder of the Memphis-based Holiday Inn hotel chain and an occasional guest at the Nixon White House.[80] More peripheral figures included James Byrnes, who endorsed Nixon in 1960 and 1968; Democratic congressional Representatives Mendel Rivers and Frank Boykin, who had supported Eisenhower during the 1950s; Florida Democratic Senator George Smathers, who later backed his friend Nixon in 1972; George H. W. Bush, also a friend of Blount's; and even Marvin Watson, a Southern Baptist and former Johnson aide whom the evangelist hoped might switch parties in the early 1970s.[81] What these persons held in common was a

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[79] Hugh D. Graham and Numan V. Bartley, *Southern Politics and the Second Reconstruction* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1975), 127.

[80] Journalist and historian Wayne Greenshaw called Blount one of the "four or five people [who] more or less founded the modern-day Republican Party." See *Atlanta Journal*, 19 October 1988. *Washington Post*, 8 August 1979. William Walton interview, 9 May 1978, BGCA, CN 141, 14-28.

friendship with Billy Graham, which in some cases preceded their support for Nixon. Their closeness with Graham by no means ineluctably impelled them toward Nixon; but the synergy between the two trends is difficult to dismiss as a coincidence or a mere byproduct of the evangelist's general popularity.

In 1968, as in 1960, Graham flirted with an endorsement of Nixon, but settled for something similar. According to Harry Dent, who left Thurmond to serve as Nixon's point man for the South, the evangelist was "prepared" to endorse the candidate "if necessary."[82] Graham was still useful in many other capacities. His brother and son-in-law were members of North Carolina's sixteen-person Nixon campaign committee.[83] More significantly, the evangelist put his relationship with the sitting president to use by extending an olive branch to Johnson on behalf of Nixon. During a mid-September meeting, which the evangelist had requested concerning a matter of "some importance," Graham communicated the candidate's respect for the president and assured Johnson that, if elected, Nixon would consult him and do nothing to damage his reputation. The evangelist was repeating instructions Nixon had given him during their appearance together in Pittsburgh. A gracious, if probably wary, Johnson reiterated his loyalty to the Democratic candidate, but said he would cooperate with a President Nixon. According to a leading Johnson biographer, the overture worked at least momentarily, as an embittered Johnson remained no more eager to assist Hubert Humphrey, his vice president, than

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[81] Grady Wilson to Mendel Rivers, 21 November 1952; and Wilson to Frank Boykin, 21 October 1952; both in BGCA, CN 544, 1-2. Charles Colson to John Connally, 24 June 1972, BGCA, CN 275, 9-11. H. R. Haldeman, *The Haldeman Diaries: Inside the Nixon White House* [CD-ROM] (Santa Monica, CA: Sony Imagesoft, 1994), 1 March 1973.

[82] Kenneth L. Woodward, "The Preaching and the Power," *Newsweek*, 20 July 1970, 54.

[83] *Raleigh News and Observer*, 7 September 1968, in BGCA, CN 360, R31.

Eisenhower had been to help Nixon in 1960.[84] When Johnson supporters later believed Nixon had broken his pledge not to criticize the ex-president on Vietnam, Graham wrote a letter disputing the charges.[85]

The evangelist contributed to the 1968 campaign in several other, more visible ways. Graham and Nixon appeared together in widely-circulated wire service photographs three times during the last two months of the campaign. The Pittsburgh service was the most publicized of these appearances. There, Graham felt compelled to remind the audience of his policy of avoiding political positions (and, for balance, read a telegram message from Hubert Humphrey).[86] Two weeks later, Nixon again saw Graham's mother during an election year, this time for a publicized tea at her home in Charlotte. While campaigning in the Queen City, Nixon told a television interviewer of his basic agreement with the *Brown* decision, but expressed opposition to busing programs or other forms of "forced integration." At a well-attended rally, he invoked the "forgotten Americans."[87] The visit occurred nine days before Billy Graham Appreciation Day, an event sponsored by the city leadership. Upon returning to his hometown, Graham spoke about "a great unheard from group . . . both black and white, who [is]

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[84] Bob Faiss to Jim Jones, 10 September 1968, BGCA, CN 74, 3-6 [original in LJPA]. Lyndon B. Johnson, *The Vantage Point: Perspectives of the Presidency, 1963-1969* (New York, et al: Holt, Rhinehart, and Winston, 1971), 555. Robert Dallek, *Flawed Giant: Lyndon Johnson and His Times, 1961-1973* (New York: Oxford, 1998), 578-580.

[85] Graham to W. Thomas Johnson, 19 November 1969, LJPA, LBJ Archives, Post-Presidential Name File, 4-"Reverend Billy Graham."

[86] Introduction of Richard Nixon, Pittsburgh, PA, 3 September 1968, BGCA, CN 345, 19-10. Streiker and Strober, *Religion and the New Majority*, 68. In May 1968, days before the Oregon GOP primary, Graham introduced Julie Nixon, daughter of the candidate, and her fiancé, David Eisenhower, at a Portland crusade service. See *Nashville Banner* (AP), 27 May 1968, in BGCA, CN 360, R31.

[87] *Columbia* (SC) *Record* (AP photograph), 12 September 1968, in BGCA, CN 360, R31. Lassiter, *Silent Majority*, 137, 233.

probably going to be heard from loudly at the polls."[88] The tea with Morrow Graham came amid sagging poll numbers for the candidate and was part of a late effort to emphasize the personal and familial side of a candidate ever vulnerable to the "Tricky Dick" tag. When a former member of the Johnson administration questioned Nixon's integrity, the evangelist countered with an October 16 statement describing his "friend" as "a man of high moral principles."[89] The two soon attended a church service together in Manhattan, talking a very public stroll afterwards.[90] Around that time, a flu-stricken Graham returned to New York to preview a campaign documentary that presented Nixon as a family man. Nixon thought it "too personal," yet had agreed to let it run pending the approval of Graham. The film soon received national release.[91] Six days before the election, Graham confided to a Dallas newspaper that he had cast an absentee ballot for Nixon, a fact southern strategist Harry Dent used in television advertisements that likely had been in the works well before the evangelist's revelation.[92]

Two days before Graham turned age fifty, the evangelist received what one congratulatory telegram termed a "nice birthday embellishment," a Nixon victory.[93] The

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[88] *Charlotte News*, 19 September 1968, in University of North Carolina at Charlotte Manuscript Special Collections, A. Grant Whitney Papers, 5-15.

[89] Streiker and Strober, *Religion and the New Majority*, 68.

[90] *Miami News* (AP), 21 October 1968, in BGCA, CN 360, R31.

[91] Leonard Garment, *Crazy Rhythm: My Journey from Brooklyn, Jazz, and Wall Street to Nixon's White House, Watergate and Beyond . . .* (New York: Times Books, 1997), 134-136.

[92] *Dallas Herald Times*, 31 October 1968, in BGCA CN 360, R31. "The Preaching and the Power," 54. Martin, *Prophet*, 354. Graham also alluded to his vote for the Democratic gubernatorial candidate in North Carolina, Bob Scott. Scott's opponent was the North Carolina delegate who had switched his convention vote from Nixon to Reagan. See *Durham Herald* and *Lexington* (NC) *Dispatch* (UPI), 2 November 1968, in BGCA, CN 360, R31.

[93] Phil Jane to Graham, 7 November 1968, BGCA, CN 15, 3-1.

evangelist visited Nixon at his campaign headquarters early the morning after election day. With victory assured, Nixon asked Graham to lead a prayer.[94] The presidential transition period left Graham at the height of his influence as a national figure. During the final months of the Johnson administration, the evangelist visited South Vietnam on behalf of the sitting president, but also found time to ask John Connally to serve in the future administration as either Secretary of Treasury or Defense.[95] When Nixon assumed office, the evangelist quite literally remained at his station. He and Ruth had spent the final weekend of the administration as the Johnsons' lone guests in the White House, and the following Monday the evangelist led a prayer at Nixon's inauguration.[96]

During his inaugural address, Nixon spoke eloquently of a "crisis of the spirit," which in turn demanded an "answer of the spirit."[97] These words, while emblematic of the lofty, metaphysical turns of phrase common to speeches of state, also revealed a telling similarity between his rhetoric and that of Graham. Since the mid-1950s, the evangelist had delivered a durable stock sermon on the theme of "America's Great Crisis." In the sermon, Graham outlined four major crisis points in American history: the American Revolution, the Constitutional Convention, the Civil War, and finally, the present predicament. Cold War anxieties aside, the contemporary crisis did not derive from a war or a political impasse. It was rather a crisis of moral decline threatening to

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[94] McGinniss, *Selling*, 163. Nixon to John Pollock, 30 December 1986, RNL, PPSP, 1-4.

[95] Johnson to Graham, 23 November 1968, LJPA, WHCF, NF, 227A-"WHCF Name." John Connally, *In History's Shadow: An American Odyssey* (New York: Hyperion, 1993), 231.

[96] Graham, *Just as I Am*, 416.

[97] Inaugural address, 20 January 1969, PPPN.

sever the nation from its religious heritage.[98] During the early years of the Nixon administration, the evangelist readily latched onto the president's similar invocation of a crisis uniquely confined to the realm of character and values. He quoted the inaugural address at an October prayer breakfast in Washington, where he delivered his own crisis sermon. "I think that Mr. Nixon is right when he says that ours is a spiritual crisis," he told an interviewer on British television.[99] Graham believed the Nixon presidency would counteract this national crisis and revive the spiritual progress he thought had defined the latter half of the Eisenhower administration.[100] Nixon's inaugural performance caught the attention of other evangelical leaders, including SBC President Herschel Hobbs, a former Johnson supporter, who thanked the evangelist for his role in the service and praised Nixon for his spiritual earnestness. "I have been delighted with the wonderful way that your administration is beginning," Hobbs wrote to the president. "I want it to continue that way not only because I happen[ed] to vote for you, but because I have a deep interest in you personally through our mutual friend Billy Graham."[101]

At the White House, in the Stadium—and on the Telephone

During and after the fall of Nixon, Graham often insisted that, contrary to popular perceptions, he had actually spent more time in the Eisenhower and Johnson White

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[98] "America's Great Crises," *Hour of Decision* sermon (Minneapolis: BGEA, 1957).

[99] Henderson, *Nixon Theology*, 12-13. Interview in David Frost, *Billy Graham Talks with David Frost* (Philadelphia and New York: A. J. Holman Company, 1971), 35.

[100] Curt Smith, *Long Time Gone: The Years of Turmoil Remembered* (South Bend, IN: Icarus Press, 1982), 41.

[101] Herschel Hobbs to Graham, 21 January 1969; and Hobbs to Nixon, 22 January and 28 February 1969; all in Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Herschel Harold Hobbs Papers, 27-1.

Houses than he had with Nixon. His point, while difficult to believe at the time, probably was technically accurate, particularly in light of his numerous overnight stays at the Johnson White House, which Graham once estimated at twenty-six in all.[102] Nixon was not nearly as social a man as his predecessor. Yet such clock-consciousness on the part of the evangelist belied the manifold other ways in which he assisted President Nixon. Indisputably, the evangelist played a vastly more important role in the Nixon administration than in any other administration before or since. More than a sanctifying symbol or a link to a vital constituency (although he was those, too), Graham served as a political advisor who offered himself as such and whom Nixon saw as such. He both administered and received political favors, and he delighted in analyzing the president's television coverage and offering media pointers. His periodic conversations with Nixon, who often phoned Graham (as well as many other supporters) after delivering major addresses, revealed the strikingly political nature of their relationship. The president "wants to get Billy Graham in tomorrow to talk about politics" read one entry in Chief of Staff H. R. Haldeman's diary.[103]

Besides their numerous conversations, the evangelist assisted Nixon by supporting or seeming to support his policies on such controversial issues as school busing and the Vietnam War. He also appeared with Nixon at high-profile events intended in part to connect the president with his asserted silent majority. Whether the issue was busing, Vietnam, or a national crisis of the spirit, the evangelist's rhetoric often paralleled what pundits would now call the "talking points" of the administration. For a

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[102] Smith, *Long Time*, 50.

[103] Haldeman, *Diaries*, 31 January 1972.

president who had courted the moderate white South so assiduously, the school desegregation issue presented a political dilemma (if not a moral one). After a 1969 Supreme Court decision mandating immediate integration, the president struggled to support obedience of the law without demonstrating enthusiasm for it.[104] On the cusp of the 1970 school year—the first integrated term for many districts in the Deep South—Nixon and aide Leonard Garment asked Graham to record five television spots for broadcast throughout the region. The evangelist did so with the help of Charlotte-based media mogul Charles Crutchfield, a racial moderate cut in the mold of Winton Blount (i.e., a southern moderate on race, but little else) and with close ties to both Graham and the president.[105] The spots contained a mixture of the evangelist's traditional support for lawfulness and his equally customary defensiveness about the South. He reaffirmed his regional identity and argued that most southerners recognized the value of the public education system. While many persons "don't agree with the changes that are taking place" in the schools, he contended, "I really believe the South will set an example of respect for law." In the end, he asserted, "anybody who expects to be able to make the South the butt of their jokes this fall is going to have to look for a new source of amusement." Many southern whites who heard him on donated media time throughout the region undoubtedly found these words more agreeable than an outright endorsement of integration. Nixon later praised Graham for his work, both publicly and behind the scenes, "in developing support in the South for my civil rights policies." In truth, the

[104] Alexander v. Holmes County (MS) Board of Education, 396 U.S. 1218 (1969).

[105] Dent, *Prodigal*, 153-154; Garment, *Rhythm*, 215; Nixon, *Memoirs*, 443; and *Minneapolis Star*, 5 September 1970, in BGCA, CN 360, R33. On Crutchfield, see Brian Ward, *Radio and the Struggle for Civil Rights in the South* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2004), 222-234. Crutchfield recruited other celebrities, both black and white, to make similar spot announcements (349).

president sent strategically mixed signals to southern whites and blacks alike on the nature of those policies. The 1970 television spots perpetuated this ambiguity. In one version, Graham mentioned the "on record" opposition of Nixon to "busing to achieve racial balance."[106] Soon afterwards, the evangelist predicted that "blood will flow in the streets of northern cities" if the Supreme Court upheld judicially-mandated busing programs, which had then commenced in his hometown of Charlotte.[107]

Graham did not record media spots on behalf of Nixon's Vietnam policy, yet he supported it through unmistakable gestures and only slightly less-explicit public statements. Characteristically, the evangelist denied any charges that he was an unabashed supporter of the war effort. If his communication with Johnson and Nixon is any indication, though, he remained a committed, if chastened hawk into the early 1970s. Writing to Johnson weeks before Nixon assumed office, Graham declared himself "enthusiastically optimistic about the prospects of Vietnam becoming a strong free nation in Southeast Asia. I am certain that history is going to vindicate the American commitment if we don't lose the peace in Paris."[108] While these words were partly intended to lift the spirits of Johnson, and while Graham followed most Americans in questioning the viability of a long-term American presence in Vietnam, they evinced an unwillingness to question the legitimacy of a war that continued into the administration of Nixon (who had also had much to lose in the Paris negotiations). A more specific

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[106] Spots 1 and 2, "Interview & Short Spots w/ Billy Graham," [dated 10 September 1970, but recorded earlier in the month], NARA, NPM, White House Communications Agency Videotape Collection, VTR #3839. Nixon quoted in Nixon to Pollock, 30 December 1986, RNL, PPSP, 1-4.

[107] *Orlando Star*, 12 September 1970, in BGCA, CN 360, R33. On Charlotte, see Lassiter, "The Suburban Origins of 'Color-Blind' Conservatism: Middle-Class Consciousness in the Charlotte Busing Crisis," *Journal of Urban History*, 30.4 (May 2004): 573.

[108] Letter, Graham to Johnson, 3 January 1969, LJPA, WHCF, NF, 227A-"WHCF Name."

indication of Graham's views on Vietnam came from reports, based on conversations with missionary friends stationed in Southeast Asia, which the evangelist passed along to Nixon and, on a separate occasion, to Secretary of State Henry Kissinger. The missionaries and, by strong implication, Graham supported the policy of Vietnamization; they remained fiercely opposed to North Vietnam, but had grown skeptical about the viability of a visible American presence in South Vietnam.[109] Whatever doubts Graham possessed about Vietnam (and they were not the doubts of a dove) rarely surfaced publicly. When they did, he either mentioned that escalation of the war had occurred under Democratic administrations or, more commonly, he attempted to differentiate between support for the war and support for the president.[110] While he had not "taken any public stand since the beginning on the Vietnam War," he declared on a television show in 1970, he was "going to take the president at his word."[111] In the text of a Birmingham crusade service two years later, Graham more bluntly urged his crusade audience to "get behind the president's goal and objectives of getting out of Vietnam."[112] Wary of a land war from an early date, the evangelist appears to have favored a "hit quick and hit hard" war policy, one that would "get it over with," yet "maintain the honor and dignity of America." He had made similar comments since 1964, well before Vietnam

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[109] "CONFIDENTIAL MISSIONARY PLAN FOR ENDING THE VIETNAM WAR (submitted by Graham to Nixon), 15 April 1969; and letter (with enclosure), Graham to Kissinger, 28 December 1970; both in BGCA, CN 74, 3-7 [originals in NPM].

[110] Graham, "A Clarification," *Christianity Today*, 19 January 1973, 36. White House conversation 1-14, 7 April 1971, NARA, NPM. In this conversation, Graham told the President that in an upcoming statement he was "putting all of the blame of this whole thing on Kennedy."

[111] *The Dick Cavett Show*, 5 May 1970, NARA, NPM, WHCA, VTR #3704.

[112] Sermon text, 20 May 1972, BGCA, CN 17, 25-15.

became a quagmire.[113] Early in 1973, he called Nixon to reaffirm his support for the president's Vietnam policies. Nixon hardly needed any reassurance; Graham had assisted his foreign policy in a multitude of ways.[114]

What would resonate in the memories of many Americans, though, were those moments when Graham services or appearances seemed to double as Nixon campaign rallies. During a time when the evangelist had grown especially comfortable doing the kinds of things celebrities do (e.g., appearing on the late-night *Dick Cavett Show* and serving as Grand Marshall of the Rose Bowl Parade), he and Nixon made controversial appearances at high-profile events staged in the fictive Middle America. These appearances came with Graham's approval and, often, his direct encouragement.[115] The first such event during the Nixon administration was the Knoxville crusade of May 1970. The East Tennessee Crusade occurred amid the 1970 congressional campaign, the second and more intense run of the southern strategy, when Nixon "waged a midterm campaign with very few parallels in American history."[116] Seeking to expand his right flank, the president intervened in a number of congressional campaigns, including Tennessee

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[113] White House conversation 24-33, 8 May 1972, NARA, NPM. UPI, 22 May 1964, in BGCA, CN 360, R27.

[114] Dwight Chapin to Haldeman 8 January 1973, BGCA, CN 74, 3-7 [original in NPM]. In his foreign travels, Graham helped to communicate Nixon's policy to foreign leaders. For example, he took notes for Nixon on his meeting with Indian President Indira Gandhi and, in a striking performance as a proxy diplomat, explained Nixon's China policy to a concerned Generalissimo and Madame Chiang Kai-sheck, who had asked him to visit them. Graham also accompanied Pat Nixon on an official visit to Liberia. Graham to Nixon, undated [1972], NARA, NPM, National Security Council Files (NSCF), NF, 816-"Dr. Billy Grahamm[sic]. Haldeman to Kissinger, 11 and 19 November 1971 [with attached talking points], BGCA, CN 74, 3-7 [original in NPM]. White House conversation 16-124, 10 December 1971, NARA, NPM.

[115] Calvin Trillin, "Waiting for the Roses," *New Yorker*, 16 January 1971, 85-89. Haldeman, *Diaries*, 15 May 1971.

[116] Robert Mason, *Richard Nixon and the Quest for a New Majority* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 77.

Republican Bill Brock's senatorial challenge to liberal incumbent Albert Gore, Sr. With encouragement from Winton Blount and others, Nixon also opposed the gubernatorial run of George Wallace, who needed the office as a base for his presidential ambitions. In advance of this more aggressive stage of the southern strategy, the Nixon team had already shifted from a nominal 1968 theme of national unity to an outright embrace of the silent majority (or, alternately, Middle America) and was keen to engage in suitable symbolic politics.[117] Harry Dent suggested inviting country and western musicians to perform at White House functions. Graham had already proposed the services of his new friend, Johnny Cash, who had accepted an invitation to perform in Knoxville.[118]

The Knoxville crusade differed from Graham's earlier desegregated services in the 1950s and 1960s South because it wholly affirmed community norms, rather than even modestly prodding them.[119] Knoxville indicated the momentary alignment of his domestic crusades with the Nixonian political style. As the crusade approached its end, newspapers reported that the president would participate in a service billed as "Youth Night." Although he had attended and been introduced at other crusade services, Nixon took the unprecedented step of addressing the audience in Knoxville, located in a heavily

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[117] On Nixon's shifting political strategy, see Mason, *New Majority*, 88, 37-76; and Carter, *Rage*, 387.

[118] Dent to Haldeman, 16 March 1970, NARA, NPM, White House Special Files (WHSF), Staff Member and Office Files (SMOF), Harry S. Dent (Dent), 8-"1970 Middle America [2 of 2]." Nixon to Haldeman, 9 February 1970, in Bruce Oudes, ed., *From: The President: Richard Nixon's Secret Files* (New York: Harper & Row, 1989), 95. *Tennessean*, 1 February 1971, in BGCA, CN 318, 39-9. Graham recited Bible verses in a Cash song, titled "The Preacher Said, 'Jesus Said,'" in *Man in Black* (Columbia Records: House of Cash, 1971), in BGCA, CN 74.

[119] For a Durkheimian interpretation of the Knoxville crusade, see Donald Clelland, et al, "Conversion in a Billy Graham Crusade: Spontaneous Event or Ritual Performance?" *The Sociological Quarterly* 16 (Spring 1975): 162-170. For an overview of Nixon's appearance in Knoxville, see Randall E. King, "When Worlds Collide: Politics, Religion, and Media at the 1970 East Tennessee Billy Graham Crusade," *Journal of Church and State* 39.2 (Spring 1997): 273-295.

Republican part of Tennessee. The visit was apparently the president's idea. His presence complicated Graham's earlier promise to "stay away from politics" during the crusade.[120] An overflow crowd of 100,000, twice the size of the average crusade crowd in Knoxville, gathered inside and around the University of Tennessee's Neyland Stadium to hear Nixon and the evangelist. Introducing Nixon, Graham quoted Nixon on the "crisis of the spirit" and highlighted the stature and difficulty of his job: "All Americans may not agree with the decisions a President makes—but he is our President," the leader of "the blacks as well as the whites." As the conservative *Knoxville Journal* and many of the letters that poured into both city papers argued, the service functioned as a performance of the silent majority, complete with a small, but vocal group of protesters who acted as foils. In his brief address, Nixon echoed Graham's conciliatory tone, although he expressed pleasure that "there seems to be a rather solid majority on one side rather than the other side tonight." The other side consisted of around three-hundred demonstrators who intermittently chanted antiwar slogans throughout the service. To the delight of most audience members, the protesters struck a nerve in black BGEA vocalist Ethel Waters. "If I was over there close enough, I would smack you," she declared. "But I love you, and I'd give you a big hug and kiss."[121]

The Nixon appearance received widespread news coverage, not for its theatrics, but because it played out amid his continuous catering to the white southern electorate and, more recently, his efforts to improve his standing among American youth. (This

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[120] *Knoxville Journal*, 28 May 1970. Haldeman, *Diaries*, 25 May 1970. Graham quoted in *Knoxville Journal*, 22 May 1970.

[121] *Knoxville News-Sentinel*, 29 May 1970; *New York Times*, 29 May 1970; Graham remarks, 28 May 1970, BGCA, CN 345, 28-12; and *Knoxville Journal*, 29 May 1970. Commentary in *Knoxville Journal*, 30 May 1970; and *Knoxville News-Sentinel*, 2 and 5 June 1970; both in BGCA, CN 360, R30.

was his first public appearance since the Kent State massacre of May 4.)[122] CBS television news reporter Dan Rather linked the visit with Nixon's intervention in the gubernatorial race in nearby Alabama.[123] Connections with the Tennessee senatorial race were more evident. The delegation traveling with Nixon from Washington, DC, to Knoxville consisted of Bill Brock, several other Tennessee Republicans running for office that year, and a Democrat whose district included East Tennessee. Despite having an event scheduled in Knoxville that very day, Senator Gore was not invited, ostensibly on the grounds that he did not hail from East Tennessee (even though a Memphis Republican was part of the delegation). Nixon and Brock posed beside each other in group photographs.[124] As the 1970 election grew nearer, Graham explicitly denied any connection to the southern strategy. He did, though, echo a Nixon campaign theme in declaring his preference for "the moderates and the conservatives" whom he believed voters should give "a chance."[125] Whether assisted or not by the Knoxville service, Brock went on to defeat Gore in November. The crusade also reverberated in local politics when a Republican congressional incumbent falsely accused his Democratic opponent of picketing the Graham service.[126] Overall, though, 1970 was not a propitious year for Nixon in the South, where his rightward shift reprised the Goldwater failure of

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[122] Garry Wills, "How Nixon Used the Media, Billy Graham, and the Good Lord to Rap with Students at Tennessee U," *Esquire*, September 1970, 119-122, 179-180.

[123] CBS News, 28 May 1970, in BGCA, CN 74, V1.

[124] *Knoxville News-Sentinel*, 29 May 1970. See also Hall Gulliver and Reg Murphy, *The Southern Strategy* (New York: Scribner's, 1971), 122.

[125] Baton Rouge press conference transcript, 19 October 1970, BGCA, CN 24, 1-27. Black Mountain, NC, press conference transcript, 13 October 1970, CN 24, 1-26.

[126] *Knoxville Journal*, 28 October 1970, in BGCA, CN 360, R33.

1964. The GOP gained two Senate seats, but surrendered twelve net seats in the House, and Wallace regained the Alabama governorship.[127]

Two other events highlighted the Graham-Nixon friendship for millions of Americans. The first of these, the Honor America Day celebration of July 4, 1970, represented a somewhat anticlimactic fruition of the evangelist's desire for alternative rallies in the face of political protests. With the approval of Nixon, Graham helped to plan the nominally bipartisan affair, which featured performances by Bob Hope, Glenn Campbell, and other beacons of Middle America. At the rally, which Graham unsuccessfully encouraged Nixon to attend, the evangelist delivered a rousing defense of American institutions and patriotism. He tapped E. V. Hill, a black minister from Los Angeles whom Graham viewed as a possible Nixon ally, to emcee the service.[128]

Another controversial event took place over a year later in Charlotte, where Charles Crutchfield proposed an extravagant gala in honor of the evangelist. Nixon (whom Crutchfield invited), Connally, Strom Thurmond, and most of the leading politicians of North Carolina journeyed to Charlotte to celebrate Billy Graham Day. According to the patently unsubtle notes of Haldeman, the event was also a "contrived deal to calm [the] So[uth]" and to bring blacks and whites together amid the implementation of court-ordered desegregation programs. It was scheduled so as not to coincide with the start of the school year.[129] Nixon clearly followed Eisenhower and

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[127] Lassiter, *Silent Majority*, 251-275; and Mason, "'I Was Going to Build a new Republican Majority and a New Majority': Richard Nixon as Party Leader, 1969-73," *Journal of American Studies* 39.3 (2005): 473.

[128] *New York Times*, 5 July 1970. Haldeman, *Diaries*, 12 May and 26 June 1970. On Hill, see "The Power and the Glory," 55; and Haldeman to Garment, 22 October 1969, NARA, NPM, WHCF, SF, RM, 20-"RM-3 . . . [69/70]."

Johnson in thinking of Graham as an ideal mediator of southern race relations. The political benefits of the event struck many observers as much more apparent, though.

Billy Graham Day encapsulated both the obvious and indirect elements of the southern strategy. As one Nixon critic noted, the October 15 celebration coincided with a major administration announcement on textile policy.[130] The day's festivities included a parade, a private reception complete with cross-shaped sandwiches, and the unveiling of a plaque at Graham's birthplace. In an address at the Charlotte Coliseum, Graham praised his hometown, which had "peacefully" followed "demanding" court rulings. "If all Americans were like the people of the Piedmont section of the Carolinas, we would have little of the problems we have today in the country," the evangelist said. Nixon's brief address received national coverage and (as Graham reminded him) was broadcast nationwide on the BGEA's *Hour of Decision* radio show. "And while it was, indeed, Graham's Day, it might as well have been the beginning of President Nixon's campaign," declared the critical *Charlotte Observer*. Subsequently released documents showed somewhat tense consultations among city leaders, White House staffers, and local Republican leaders in organizing the event. Presidential aide Charles Colson solicited follow-up phone calls to leading Southern Baptists and reported their positive responses to the Charlotte visit. "I'll you this, boy," Nixon replied to Colson. "Billy Graham country . . . . They'll go out and pray and work like nothin[g]."[131]

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[129] Hand-written notes [Haldeman], June 1971, in BGCA, CN 74, 3-5 [original in NPM].

[130] *Charlotte Observer*, 1 November 1971, in BGCA, CN 360, R33.

[131] *Charlotte Observer*, 15 and 16 October 1971. Charlotte *News*, 16 October 1971. *Charlotte Observer*, 8 June 1974, in BGCA, CN 360, R35. White House conversations, 11-141 and 11-148, 19 October 1971; and 11-163, 20 October 1971; all in NARA, NPM (quoted in 11-163).

While Graham's relationship with Nixon was not completely a one-way street, the traffic flow remained imbalanced. To be sure, Nixon made attempts to reciprocate Graham's loyalty. The president once ordered a report on a *Washington Post* journalist who had written a critical piece about the evangelist.[132] Similarly, a Baton Rouge VISTA director who had criticized Graham during a crusade there soon faced a federal investigation.[133] After the evangelist complained to John Connally about a possible tax audit of the BGEA, Nixon pledged to ensure that the IRS instead looked into his Jewish critics and the head of the liberal National Council of Churches.[134] For his part, Graham thanked Nixon for the fact that many of the president's friends had apparently started supporting the BGEA, as well.[135]

Ultimately, though, the value of these contributions paled in comparison to the price Graham paid for his loyalty to Nixon. The toll continued into the present century with the 2002 release of a White House recording that quickly came to symbolize the nadir of Graham's association with Nixon. Their exchange of February 1, 1972, suggested how distant Graham's relationship with Nixon then stood from any semblance of pastoral care. The heart of their conversation was tinged with anti-Semitism. It began as a typical discussion about the upcoming presidential race, with Graham counseling the president to run on his record and his "integrity," and (perhaps with Knoxville and

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[132] Staff Secretary to Hebert Klein, 17 July 1969; and Klein to Nixon, 18 July 1969; both in NARA, NPM, WHCF, Subject Files (SF), Religious Matters (RM), 1-"1-69/12-70."

[133] *Athens* (TN) *Post-Athenian* (AP), 2 November 1970, in BGCA, CN 360, R33. For more on the Baton Rouge crusade, see Chapter VI.

[134] Nixon and Haldeman conversation, 13 September 1971, in Stanley Kutler, ed., *Abuse of Power: The New Nixon Tapes* (New York: Free Press, 1997), 31-32.

[135] White House conversation 16-124, 10 December 1971, NARA, NPM.

Charlotte in mind) to use television more effectively by creating "events" at which to appear. The evangelist then mentioned an upcoming meeting with the editors of *Time* magazine, which he said had "dropped" him after the passing of conservative publisher Henry Luce. Ever ready for a round of media criticism—and, by extension, Jew-bashing—Nixon launched into a tirade against the Jewish-dominated media. Graham was more concerned with the pornography industry than with mainstream publications, yet he certainly agreed with the thrust of Nixon's critique of liberal media elites. Graham likewise denounced the Jewish "stranglehold" on the media and, as the president urged him on, declared that even those Jews who "swarm around" him because of his support for Israel did not "know how I really feel about what they're doing to this country." He "would stand up under proper circumstances," he cryptically added. The conversation revealed the extent to which mainstream evangelicals like Graham distinguished between Jews as a People and Jews as people. In response to the latter, non-covenantal sense of Jewry—which Graham apparently segregated from his intimacy with Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir and his friendliness toward the Anti-Defamation League—he was willing to indulge Nixon's prejudices and, in this case, voice a few of his own. Graham did not share Nixon's obsession with liberal Jews, but neither was he willing to contradict it. The conversation eventually turned away from the Jewish media and back to Nixon's intended topic: politics, namely the status of John Connally in the administration. Nixon, who harbored dreams of asking Connally to serve as his second-term vice president, was concerned about the possible resignation of the Treasury Secretary, then suffering from health problems.[136] Nixon often discussed Connally with Graham and in 1970 had

considered asking the evangelist to make a second request to Connally to join the administration; Haldeman eventually made the successful pitch. In the February 1972 conversation, Graham averred that Connally was "important politically right now" and agreed to lend his help with what Haldeman called the "Connally problem."[137]

The infamous Graham-Nixon exchange revealed the depths of Graham's involvement in the 1972 campaign, during which he behaved in a manner further belying his self-proclaimed nonpartisanship. After momentarily considering steering clear of the election—to the point where he had drafted a letter to Nixon saying he would do so—Graham explicitly made himself available for campaign work that day. According to Haldeman, Graham "agreed to hit the key states during the fall, especially Pennsylvania, Ohio, Illinois, maybe New York, and California." Graham, the Nixon aide continued, would "answer attacks on us and that sort of thing whenever he felt he could, if I would direct the request to him."[138] Nixon assigned Haldeman to handle direct communication with the evangelist and later gave him instructions to call Graham "about once every two weeks to discuss the political situation."[139] Haldeman was to keep in touch with Connally, as well. Using Haldeman as an intermediary kept Nixon, who wanted to make sure Graham felt included in the campaign, removed from overt politicking with the evangelist. The arrangement also protected Graham, allowing him to claim in a press

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[136] White House conversation 662-4, 1 February 1972, NARA, NPM. Graham and Nixon continued to criticize *Time* in their post-presidential correspondence. Graham to Nixon, 18 August 1986; and Nixon to Graham, 2 September 1986; both in RNL, PPSP, 1-5. On Meir, see Graham to Nixon, 20 September 1969, BGCA, CN 74, 3-7 [original in NPM]. Arthur Gilbert, "Conversation with Billy Graham," *ADL Bulletin*, December 1967, 1-2, 8, in BGCA, CN 345, 45-1.

[137] Haldeman, *Diaries*, 4 December 1970; and 1 February 1972. See also Mason, *New Majority*, 130, 162. White House conversation 662-4, 1 February 1972, NARA, NPM.

[138] White House conversation 662-4, 1 February 1972. Haldeman, *Diaries*, 1 February 1972.

[139] Nixon to Haldeman, 14 March 1972, in *From*, 388.

conference that he only occasionally talked with Nixon and that the president never sought advice on specific policies.[140] According to talking papers prepared for Haldeman, suggested topics for discussions with Graham and Connally included the candidacy of George Wallace, school busing, and the status of prospective Democratic nominee Edmund Muskie. Thus, while the evangelist undoubtedly remained oblivious to the dirtiest tricks of the Nixon campaign, he offered advice of obvious use for the reelection effort.[141]

As in earlier campaigns, Graham's direct political assistance to Nixon in 1972 fell into two broad categories: a southern strategy and an outreach to evangelical voters. Updated and intensified since the 1968 election, both elements complemented the president's search for a new electoral majority.[142] Much of Graham's advice held implications for the South, where the evangelist had ties with figures ranging from Johnson to Wallace and Ruben Askew, the moderate Democratic governor of Florida. Graham consulted Askew about the status of McGovern in the Sunshine State and reported to Nixon about his election-year conversations with Johnson, whom the evangelist believed to be "secretly in favor of Nixon." With great exaggeration, Johnson had earlier told Graham, "I'm still a Democrat," but "I'm not sure how long I'm gonna remain one." Later in the election year, Haldeman asked Graham to advise Johnson on how to handle an upcoming visit with Nixon's campaign chair. Graham did as requested and passed along a suggestion from Johnson (prescient, in retrospect) that Nixon should

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[140] Philadelphia press conference transcript, 7 June 1972, BGCA, CN 345, 62-1.

[141] Talking papers, 15 February and 26 April 1972; both in BGCA, CN 74, 3-7 [original in NPM].

[142] See Mason, *New Majority*.

appear presidential and largely ignore his opponent. (Graham, meanwhile, encouraged Nixon to attack the welfare state in his August acceptance speech.) Around that time, Graham turned down a request from Democratic vice-presidential candidate Sargent Shriver to pray at the Democratic convention, and Johnson informed Graham that he would not stump on behalf of his party's ticket.[143]

By the spring of 1972, Nixon's most realistic barrier to reelection was another Wallace campaign, which would surely cost the president votes in the South. Graham had helped to effect this comfortable situation. One year earlier, he had expressed concern about the popularity in the South of prospective Democratic candidate Edmund Muskie.[144] On the GOP side, Harry Dent had informed Graham that Oregon Senator Mark Hatfield, a prospective Republican protest candidate for president, would receive Nixon's full backing for reelection if he stayed out of the presidential primaries.[145] If Wallace would also stay out of the presidential race, a landslide victory appeared likely. In 1968, Nixon had cast himself as a moderate vis-à-vis Wallace, and Dent had argued afterward that a "moderate South would help 'bring the nation together' and concurrently help the fortunes of the Nixon Administration as well as Republicans generally." Soon, however, political analysts Ben Wattenberg and Richard Scammon published alluring data from the 1968 election. In the South, 80 percent of Wallace voters would have otherwise backed Nixon. "Only in . . . a two-party context," warned Kevin Phillips, "would the racially-motivated core Wallace vote be available to the President in 1972."

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[143] Haldeman, *Diaries*, 14, 17, and 22 August 1972. Graham, *Just As I Am*, 417. White House conversation 22-160, 16 April 1972, NARA, NPM.

[144] Nixon to Haldeman, 8 February 1971, in *From*, 213.

[145] Notes, undated [1971?], BGCA, CN 74, 3-7 [original in NPM].

Such an apple was too tempting for Nixon to resist taking a complete bite, rather than the more restrained nibble of 1968. Recognizing the obvious benefits of modifying his 1968 strategy and ensuring that Wallace run as a Democrat (where he would not survive the primaries), Nixon put Dent in charge of his "Wallace-watch."[146]

Graham unofficially served on this watch. He was particularly valuable because of his cordial relationship with Wallace, which dated back to their awkward meeting during the 1965 Montgomery crusade. In June 1972, Nixon told Haldeman that the evangelist

> has a line to Wallace through Mrs. Wallace [Cornelia, his second wife], who has become a Christian. Billy will talk to Wallace whenever we want him to. [Nixon] feels our strategy must be to keep Wallace in the Democratic Party and Billy can help us on that. . . . Graham should put the pressure on Wallace to decide whether he's going to be used as a spoiler, which would surely help elect [George] McGovern.[147]

This exchange occurred two months after an assassination attempt had left the governor paralyzed from the waist down. Graham talked with Wallace in a pastoral capacity during the week of the shooting, and in July the evangelist agreed to help dissuade the ailing governor from a third-party run.[148] In a conversation with Wallace following a major operation, Graham told him that his candidacy would take away many more votes from Nixon than from McGovern. "Wallace said he would never turn one hand to help McGovern . . . ," Haldeman recorded, "and that he's 99 percent sure he won't do it, but

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[146] Dent to Haldeman and John Ehrlichman, 3 February 1969, NARA, NPM, WHSF, SMOF, Dent, 8-"Southern GOP [3 of 3]." Phillips to Dent, 12 March 1970, NARA, NPM, WHSF, SMOF, Dent, 4-"1970s MEMOS TO THE PRESIDENT MARCH-DEC." Poll data and "watch" in Carter, *Rage*, 369, 379.

[147] Haldeman, *Diaries*, 19 June 1972.

[148] *Birmingham News*, 22 May 1972. Haldeman, *Diaries*, 14 July 1972.

he won't close the door completely."[149] The president considered Graham for the task of making a final appeal to Wallace. Nixon chose Connally for the job instead, although Graham agreed to "get a read" on Wallace in late September. Blount, who ran unsuccessfully for a Senate seat in 1972, had also served as a liaison between Nixon and the governor, whose health prevented serious consideration of a renewed run.[150]

If Nixon's attempted co-option of the Wallace vote stood as the foremost evidence of his decision to embrace racial politics in the white South, then his belated support for the senatorial run of converted Republican Jesse Helms in 1972 offered further confirmation. Here, as well, Graham had a part. In an election in which Nixon hung out to dry a number of GOP senatorial candidates in the South, including Winton Blount, the president found time to visit North Carolina and publicly endorse Helms days before the election.[151] At some point during the election year Helms and his wife had paid a well-photographed visit to the Graham home in Montreat.[152] A turn in Montreat was becoming something of a rite of passage for Tarheel politicians. (The Democratic gubernatorial candidate also visited that year, motivated by an ad his GOP opponent had run picturing a golf outing with the evangelist.)[153] Still, a decision on Graham's part to avoid the particularly contentious and controversial Helms campaign, which had drawn national attention, would have been more than understandable. The Montreat visit likely

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[149] Haldeman, *Diaries*, 20 July 1972.

[150] Carter, *Politics of Rage*, 449, 410. "Read" in Haldeman, *Diaries*, 26 September 1972.

[151] Mason, *New Majority*, 161-191. Winton Blount interview, 10 July 1974, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Southern Historical Collection, Southern Oral History Program, #4007, A-4 (Blount). The failed Blount campaign did attract volunteer work from a future president, George W. Bush. Nixon, "Remarks at Greensboro, North Carolina," 4 November 1972, PPPN.

[152] Photographs of Jesse Helms visit [dated 1972], BGCA, CN 17.

[153] *Winston-Salem* (NC) *Journal*, 3 October 1972, in BGCA, CN 360, R34.

benefited the former radio and television host Helms, who ran on the racially- and ethnically-loaded slogan, "He's One of Us!"[154]

Graham's involvement by degrees in the Republican southern strategy raises the question of his ultimate complicity in the Nixonian politics of race. Little reason exists to believe that the evangelist avowedly endorsed Nixon's shift toward Wallace-style strategies and rhetoric, or that he considered the president or even Helms to be a race-baiter.[155] Yet Graham knew well that the motivations of many southern white voters extended beyond simply supporting the most God-fearing candidate, and he knew why southerners in Charlotte and elsewhere felt marginalized. His election advice dating back to 1956 and 1960, as well as his efforts to check Wallace, demonstrated his awareness and apparent acceptance of the fact that the race issue could work to the GOP's advantage. Like any effective politician, moreover, the evangelist recognized the importance of communicating by suggestion rather than by declaration. Graham came about his own dissembling with much more anguish and much less calculation than did Nixon, yet he had repeatedly skirted the truth when praising the president while denying any political motivations. In the early 1970s, Graham clearly knew the electoral score. He knew why Haldeman asked him about the politics of busing. He knew why most Wallace supporters would rather back Nixon than McGovern—and, despite previous hopes to the contrary, he eventually confessed to Haldeman his sense that the president stood little chance of attracting new black voters in 1972.[156] Content in his belief that

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[154] Ernest B. Furgurson, *Hard Right: The Rise of Jesse Helms* (New York: Norton, 1986), 92-102.

[155] In a 1988 letter to Nixon, Graham noted that he did not "always agree" with Helms. Still, he considered the senator to be intelligent and a good Christian. Graham to Nixon, 30 December 1988, RNL, Post Presidential Correspondence, Special People A-K, Graham, Billy and Ruth (PPSP), 1-4.

further court rulings or strict enforcement of existing civil rights laws would only exacerbate tensions in the South, Graham could reassure himself that Nixon's popularity and reelection would serve to benefit other, more important causes. Conscious intentions aside (and included), Graham implicated himself in Nixon's racial politics. He abetted a return to Barry Goldwater's 1964 strategy of "hunting where the ducks are."[157]

As long as Wallace remained out of the race, though, Nixon largely had his ducks in a row in Dixie, where his liberal antiwar opponent, George McGovern, had little chance of summoning traditional Democratic loyalties. The evangelical community, however, stood as an enticing source for additional inroads. Following the 1970 midterm elections, the president emphasized to Haldeman the need "to remember that our primary source of support will be among the fundamentalist Protestants, and we can probably broaden that base of support."[158] Graham—with his obvious appeal among fellow evangelicals, including many traditionally Democratic southerners—was a logical choice to assist such an effort. In keeping with Nixon's dreams of a sweeping electoral realignment, Graham hoped to widen the president's support among evangelicals (especially evangelical youth), whom Graham somewhat excessively feared might be attracted by McGovern's credentials as a minister's son.[159] The 1972 race represented the high point of Graham's service as both a bridge to evangelicals and a strategist in the

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[156] Haldeman, *Diaries*, 16 September 1972.

[157] On Goldwater, see Rick Perlstein, *Before the Storm: Barry Goldwater and the Unmaking of the American Consensus* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2001).

[158] Nixon to Haldeman, 30 November 1970, BGCA, CN 74, 3-7 [original in NPM]. The contents of this memo contradict the recent argument by Robert Mason that, for the 1972 campaign, the "consolidation and expansion of . . . Protestant support was not an element of the search for a new majority." However, Mason does note the role of Graham as Nixon's leading contact with Protestants. See Mason, *New Majority*, 151.

[159] Haldeman, *Diaries*, 27 June 1972.

larger effort to establish them as a pillar of the new majority. While he had previously served as a conduit between presidents and conservative Protestants, his work intensified during Nixon's first term, when one presidential supporter proposed him as a "liaison between the Office of the President and the various religious groups in this country."[160] Although Graham never accepted an official position, he helped to organize the unprecedented and controversial White House church services and prepared a broad-ranging list of possible Protestant participants.[161] Traffic on the bridge between evangelicals and the White House ran both ways, of course, to the point where Graham complained of an inability to satiate the many evangelicals who expected him to facilitate face time with Nixon.[162]

Graham did his best to balance supply and demand, although in most cases the push came from Nixon, much to the delight of the evangelist. In addition to his assistance with the White House church services, Graham set up numerous meetings between Nixon and clergymen, usually Protestants and quite often of the conservative type Nixon preferred. (Meanwhile, Department of Veterans Affairs administrator and Southern Baptist leader Fred Rhodes kept Charles Colson apprised of Graham's public statements about Nixon.)[163] Some of these meetings concerned specific policy matters, while others were clearly electoral in nature. In 1970, for example, Graham advised

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[160] James A. McIntosh to Dwight Chapin, 18 February 1969, NARA, NPM, WHCF, SF, RM, 1-"RM . . . 2-28-69."

[161] Charles B. Wilkinson to Graham, 24 January 1969; and "CONFIDENTIAL and PRIVATE List of Suggested Protestant Clergymen To be Invited for White House Services," 25 January 1969; both in BGCA, CN 74, 3-7 [original in NPM].

[162] San Francisco press conference transcript, 7 September 1972, BGCA, CN 345, 62-1.

[163] See, for example, Joan Hall to Charles Colson, 7 June 1972, NARA, NPM, WHSF, SMOF, Charles W. Colson, 113-"Southern Baptist Convention."

Nixon to meet with the moderate Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs and made sure to note two Catholic-related policies many Baptists opposed: funding for parochial education and U.S. relations with the Vatican.[164] The evangelist also facilitated an extended March 1970 meeting between the president and a group of about a dozen black church leaders, including E. V. Hill, who were upset by administration plans to cut social programs. Graham proposed the meeting at a low-profile gathering he had called between white and black evangelicals seeking to find common ground.[165]

Of more striking and long-term significance, though, were Graham's efforts to connect Nixon with the conservative white evangelical establishment. In August 1971, Nixon met with a "who's who" of evangelical leaders and Graham supporters, including Harold Lindsell of *Christianity Today* and W. A. Criswell. Afterwards, Nixon and Graham chatted in the oval office. "Well, they will go back," the president told Graham, "and they influence so many people, you know." Graham voiced hope that Criswell was coming around on the issue of granting recognition to mainland China, a policy that had exposed Nixon to much criticism from Cold War hawks on the right. "That's what we wanted," added the evangelist, who had set up the meeting at the request of the president.[166] Indeed, the evangelist helped to mollify the periodic tensions between Nixon's conservative rhetoric and some of his more moderate policies. Graham used his

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[164] Neil Yates to Dwight Chapin, 29 July 1970, NARA, NPM, WHCF, SF, RM, 20-"RM-3 . . . [69/70]."

[165] Attendance list, 15 March 1970, BGCA, CN 345, 47-3; and Garment to Graham, 4 May 1970, NARA, NPM, WHCF, SF, RM, 1-"RM . . . 1-69/12-70." Gerald S. Strober, *Graham: A Day in Billy's Life* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, 1976), 54. *Los Angeles* Times, 14 August 1970, in BGCA, CN 360, R33. Hill to Graham, 20 December 1969, BGCA, CN 345, 47-1.

[166] White House conversation 560-3, 10 August 1971, NARA, NPM. Haldeman to Kissinger, 3 August 1971, BGCA, CN 74, 3-7 [original in NPM].

influence to ease worries among conservative Protestants about the appointment of Henry Cabot Lodge, Jr., as special envoy to the Vatican, recommending that Nixon invite SBC President Carl F. Bates to officiate a White House church service.[167] He later organized a consultation between Henry Kissinger and a diverse group of several dozen Christian "friends and acquaintances of Billy Graham" to again explain the administration's China policy. The guest list ranged from divines to donors (i.e., from televangelist Oral Roberts to Holiday Inn head William Walton).[168]

Years removed from the intense electioneering of the Nixon White House, Graham would express incredulity when presented with evidence of his role in such a deeply politicized administration (a role that, of course, liberal critics of both Graham and Nixon at the time took for granted). The president "made it clear to Haldeman that he wanted to nurture whatever influence I might have with certain religious leaders," the evangelist wrote with seeming ingenuousness in his autobiography. "Needless to say, this was not discussed with me at the time."[169] Here, as with many of Graham's professions of political innocence, the evidence strongly indicates otherwise. It also suggests that Graham viewed Nixon as an ideal conduit for his own concerns, specifically his desire to maximize the influence of evangelicals in national politics. Of utmost importance in this respect was the reelection of the president in 1972. In addition to assisting with damage control among evangelicals, Graham helped to secure the coalition that gave Nixon a triumphant second-term mandate. The election year saw an all-out

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[167] Constance Stuart to George Bell, 23 July 1970, BGCA, CN 74, 3-7 [original in NPM].

[168] "Washington Meeting, March 29, 1972," in BGCA, CN 74, 3-7 [original in NPM]; Nixon to Haldeman, 14 March 1972, in Oudes, *From*, 388; and Bill Rhatican to Coleman Hicks, 29 March 1972, NARA, NPM, NSCF, NF, 816-"Grahamm [sic]."

[169] Graham, *Just As I Am*, 452.

effort by the Nixon campaign to woo conservative religious groups, be they Catholic or Protestant (or, in a few cases, Jewish). Retaining and expanding the evangelical vote, though, was a paramount priority in a White House that, to its eventual detriment, refused to take victory for granted. Indeed, Graham had already stressed to Nixon aide Leonard Garment the hunger among many church-goers for a brand of social involvement more palatable than the liberal activism presumably emanating from so many pulpits.[170] Colson's notes from an apparent talk with Nixon include a blunt proposal for appealing to this population: "[U]se Graham's organization."[171] Haldeman's records suggest a similar ambition and also reveal the extent to which Graham reciprocated (but not to the point of surrendering the BGEA's mailing list).[172]

In addition to speaking highly of Nixon at nearly every possible moment in press conferences or interviews during the 1972 campaign, Graham served less conspicuously as a liaison between Nixon and a wealth of conservative Protestant electoral capital. He recommended, for example, that Nixon establish contacts with the pentecostal-charismatic evangelist Oral Roberts, who had expressed to Harry Dent a desire to assist the campaign.[173] That year, Nixon considered accepting an invitation to address the SBC, where Graham was scheduled to appear. He would have been the first president to do so, and even some pro-Nixon Southern Baptists opposed such a blatantly political move.[174]

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[170] Graham to Garment, 18 May 1970, NARA, NPM, WHCF, SF, RM, 1-"RM . . . 1-69/12-70."

[171] Colson hand-written notes, 27 June 1972, NARA, NPM, SMOF, Colson, 16-"Presidential Meeting Notes [1972-1973]."

[172] Note [almost certainly Haldeman], 28 June 1972, BGCA, CN 74, 3-5 [original in NPM]. Martin, *Prophet*, 398.

[173] Dent to Nixon, 11 August 1972, NARA, NPM, WHCF, SF, RM, 2-"RM . . . 1-1-71/[12-72]."

Graham also wanted Nixon to attend Explo '72, a well-publicized Dallas festival proposed as an evangelical alternative to the counterculture; but Campus Crusade for Christ director Bill Bright objected to such a visit. A talking paper for one of Haldeman's conversations with Graham notes that a survey of Explo '72 participants indicated strong backing of the president. "Is it now appropriate . . . to work with [BGEA team member] T. W. Wilson to bring some staff of the Committee for the Re-Election of the President [CREEP] together with Bright of Campus Crusade?" Haldeman was to ask Graham. Either Haldeman or Graham proposed that Bright and the evangelist remain in the background, while putting the Nixon forces in touch with evangelical youth workers potentially willing to take leave time for campaign work. Graham soon passed along "the names of all his Christian youth types." He also facilitated a consultation between Nixon's youth division and a group consisting of BGEA staffers and/or evangelical youth leaders.[175] Although CREEP ultimately chose to eschew the formal mobilization of Nixon-leaning clergy, the BGEA apparently surrendered the services of Harry Williams, the evangelistic equivalent of a precinct whiz.[176] As if to confirm the success of the Nixon campaign's outreach to evangelicals (and his own role in this effort), Graham sent to Haldeman an election-eve story noting the influence among evangelicals of his

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[174] *Shreveport* (LA) *Journal*, 19 February 1972, in BGCA, CN 360, R34; and *The Baptist Messenger*, 2 March 1972, in NARA, NPM, WHSF, SMOF, Colson, 113-"Southern Baptist Convention."

[175] Martin, *Prophet*, 394-395; talking paper, 27 June 1972, BGCA, CN 74, 3-7 [original in NPM]; and Haldeman, *Diaries*, 28 June, 11 July, and 24 July 1972. The Explo gathering was a likely reason for Graham's early assertion that his greatest assistance to Nixon in 1972 would be with the youth vote. See Haldeman, *Diaries*, 7 February 1971.

[176] An October 1972 memo states that, while "CREP [more infamously abbreviated as CREEP] does not feel that at this time it is in the interest of the public good to organize clergy, by reason of their clerical profession, to participate in partisan political activity," support from individuals was most welcome. John McClaughlin to Dave Parker, 5 October 1972, NARA, NPM, WHCF, SF, RM, 2-"1-1-71/[12-72]." Williams in Haldeman to Ken Rietz, 26 July 1972, BGCA, CN 74, 3-7 [original in NPM]. This memo was written after the meeting between youth leaders and Nixon workers.

backing of the president. Earlier, when Graham had called Haldeman to recommend Bible verses for Nixon to reference during his acceptance speech at the Republican convention, the evangelist argued that the president's strongest supporters would be expecting as much.[177]

Graham had more than earned the right to expect reciprocation from the president. A few weeks before the election, he told Nixon he was available to do "anything you can think of you want me to do. . . . I'm not in a position to know all I could do, but you just tell me and I'll do it." With his reelection effectively guaranteed, Nixon assured the evangelist that he did not "need any guidance. . . . Your political instincts are very good."[178] By then, Graham had again declared his intention to vote for Nixon.[179] In the aftermath of the landslide victory, the evangelist's influence in the Nixon White House appeared as entrenched as ever. In February 1973, Nixon told Haldeman "to use Billy Graham also in the kitchen Cabinet," which Nixon was assembling to discuss his second-term agenda.[180] Graham could take comfort in the knowledge that Nixon had won an overwhelming victory among evangelicals, southerners, and most Americans. The quiet revolution was silent no more. Within five months of the election, though, the Watergate crisis began to expose a side of the Nixon White House Graham may never have known directly, but from which he could not escape implication.

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[177] Graham to Haldeman, 21 October 1972, BGCA, CN 74, 3-7 [original in NPM]. Haldeman to Nixon, 19 August 1972, BGCA, CN 74, 3-5 [original in NPM].

[178] White House conversation 31-85, 16 October 1972, NARA, NPM.

[179] Santa Barbara, CA, press conference transcript, 6 September 1972, BGCA, CN 345, 62-1.

[180] Haldeman, *Diaries*, 26 February 1973.

Whither the New South?

During the years of the Nixon administration, Graham exposed himself to an unprecedented degree of criticism, spread equally among secular and religious commentators, mostly of a liberal persuasion. Some saw Graham as pernicious, others saw him as naive, and almost all left-leaning critics linked him with socio-political reaction. (Fundamentalist critics, meanwhile, still saw him as a sell out to ecumenism.) A less skeptical generation of journalists had, with a few exceptions, considered his visibility in the Eisenhower and Johnson White Houses, in addition to his less-remembered presence at Kennedy's prayer breakfasts, as more ceremonial than political—as transparent parades of symbolism rather than conniving products of memoranda.[181] In contrast, Graham's support for President Nixon took on a more publicly partisan air, making it one of the defining issues of his career, the persistent opening question during his election-year press conferences. For *Life* correspondent Barry Farrell and other elite journalists, the evangelist shifted when Nixon took office from being a source of mere disapproval (an influential simpleton, but little more than a proxy for the underside of Cold War society) to being an "American Rasputin" (a serious threat to the liberal consensus). For another author, Graham was the atavistic "voice of old country boys and Middle Americans everywhere," and for aging nemesis Reinhold Niebuhr, the evangelist had helped to effect the "unofficial establishment" of religion in the White House.[182] Other analysts applied sociologist Robert Bellah's popular "civil

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[181] AP photograph, 1 March 1962, in BGCA, CN 360, R28. *Vallejo* (CA) *Times-Herald* (UPI), 8 February 1963, in BGCA, CN 360, R29.

[182] Barry Farrell, "Billy in the Garden," *Life*, 4 July 1969, 2B. John Corry, "God, Country, and Billy Graham," *Harper's*, February 1969, 38. Reinhold Niebuhr, "The King's Chapel and the King's Court," *Christianity and Crisis*, 4 August 1969, 211.

religion" thesis to the Honor America Day speaker and Rose Bowl Parade grand marshal. In a 1967 essay, Bellah defined civil religion as a set of rituals, beliefs, and symbols that legitimated and lent transcendence to the national mission, broadly conceived and often historically interpreted through the narrative lens of the biblical Israel. Importantly, he distinguished this civil religion from official religions, including Christianity. While Bellah saw civil religion as a vehicle potentially useful for all types of political ends, many more Vietnam-era critics saw its obvious expression in the unabashed God-and-country talk of war supporters, including Billy Graham.[183] The civil religion thesis left the evangelist vulnerable to charges not only of blind patriotism, but of heresy, as well. Several Bellah-influenced works appeared denouncing the "Christian Americanism" and "folk religion" of Graham and the Nixon White House.[184]

The presence of Graham in the Nixon administration took on particular significance for southern observers participating in a larger debate over the direction and fate of the South. At this critical stage for a region ambiguously on the cusp of the post-civil rights era, the evangelist provoked strong criticism from such liberal-leaning southerners as prophet-theologian Will D. Campbell and newspaper editor Reese Cleghorn. In earlier periods—during the Little Rock school crisis and, later, during the early years of the Johnson administration—Graham and many white southern liberals had not stood so far apart on racial matters. The polarizing politics of the southern strategy, though, forced southerners to choose sides.

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[183] Robert N. Bellah, "Civil Religion in America," *Daedalus* 96.1 (Winter 1967): 1-21. Interestingly, if somewhat superficially, Bellah's religious interpretation of American history resembled Graham's. The sociologist identified three national "time[s] of trial": independence, slavery, and the present struggle for "responsible action in a revolutionary world" (16).

[184] See, for example, Joe E. Barnhart, *The Billy Graham Religion* (Philadelphia: Pilgrim Press, 1972), 14; and Henderson, *Nixon Theology*, xi.

The most publicized criticism of Graham from the southern left appeared in the form of "An Open Letter to Billy Graham," published in early 1971 by Campbell and Berea College professor James Y. Holloway in *Katallagete*, the eclectic publication of the Committee of Southern Churchmen. Campbell, the lone white participant in the founding of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, had risked his career and livelihood on behalf of racial equality. Since the mid-1960s, he had criticized liberals and conservatives alike for failing to address the needs of poor southern whites. Holloway shared these sentiments. The *Katallagete* letter read partly as a squabble among southerners, with Campbell and Holloway accusing their "Baptist brother" of becoming a "court prophet" for Nixon. As students at liberal divinity and graduate schools during an earlier era, the authors had defended Graham's evangelism. Now, in his services in Knoxville and in his comments about busing and Vietnam, Graham blessed the Nixon line. Such concerns with civility and respectability, Campbell and Holloway implied in their open letter and elsewhere, served as crutches for existing institutions and sapped Christianity of its prophetic character. In an intentionally eccentric invocation of scripture, they urged Graham to "prophesy to the Pentagon and White House—in the tradition of Micaiah, son of Imlah" (i.e., to declare divine judgment on temporal rulers). The shift of Campbell and Holloway from defending (or tolerating) Graham to criticizing him held significance for larger debates about the South. Only with the rise of Nixon's southern strategy had they begun to associate the evangelist with negative influences on the region. In many respects, their Baptist perspective held more in common with Graham's theology than with the ideology of many New Left radicals; they shared a wariness of liberal legalism and a bias toward personal redemption. They

differed sharply, though, on matters of political power, specifically that of the Nixon administration, which Campbell and Holloway saw as part of a fallen order.[185] When Graham became a spokesman for this ordained authority, he lost the support of two previously sympathetic southerners. Their open letter received national coverage and, in a rare direct response to critics, drew a cordial letter from Graham, who offered to meet with the authors. According to Campbell, though, their subsequent inquiries went without response.[186]

Another reader of the *Katallagete* piece was *Charlotte Observer* editor Reese Cleghorn, who applied it to the Billy Graham Day festivities. Cleghorn, who came to the paper from the liberal Southern Regional Council, had sharply criticized the evangelist in a 1969 column for the *Atlanta Journal*, where he then worked. The evangelist's "abysmally shallow" theology and "often ill-informed" world views were prominently on display during Billy Graham Day, Cleghorn believed. An *Observer* editorial blasted the evangelist for his comfort with "the material things," as well as "the affluent and the powerful." Discreetly alluding to the *Katallagete* piece, the editorial linked the day with the machinations of the southern strategy. "Charlotte and the changing South are in difficult struggle, much of which has a moral dimension to which people are blinded," the editorial read. "Mr. Graham's court in Washington plays it, almost always, as nothing

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[185] Will D. Campbell and James Y. Holloway, "An Open Letter to Dr. Billy Graham," *Katallagete*, Winter 1971, inside cover-3. For background, see Steven P. Miller, "From Politics to Reconciliation: *Katallagete*, Biblicism, and Southern Liberalism," *The Journal of Southern Religion* VII (2004), http://jsr.fsu.edu/Volume7/Millerarticle.htm (accessed 20 February 2006).

[186] *Washington Post* (RNS), 20 March 1971; and *Nashville Tennessean*, undated [March 1971]; both in University of Southern Mississippi Archives (USMA), Will Campbell Papers (WCP), 48-18. Graham to Campbell and Holloway, 6 April 1971, USMA, WCP, 4-1. Frady, *Parable*, 395.

more than a political drama."[187] The more conservative *Charlotte News*, in contrast, praised Graham as a forward thinker who, especially on racial matters, had "contributed, in his own way, to deepening the social consciousness of conservative Christianity."[188]

Both of the Charlotte editorials contained elements of truth. Through his personal connections and his popularity as a public figure, Graham participated in the southern strategy of Richard Nixon. In the process, he continued helping to facilitate a new type of southern politics in which the GOP became more appealing to white southerners—first, on a national level, and with time, on a local one, as well. Yet Graham did not do so through appeals to the shibboleths of racial solidarity. A southern moderate who had supported desegregation at an early date and who later tolerated the thrust of the Great Society, but who evinced a clear preference for Republican presidential politics, Graham spoke a language of regional progress suggestive of the Sunbelt image, rather than the white backlash. Whatever the personal preferences for business-oriented racial moderation among Graham's GOP intimates during the Nixon presidency, though, many of them opportunistically dipped into the playbook of Wallace (or tolerated doing so), especially after the 1968 election. As long as Graham remained an obvious Nixon partisan, he could not avoid association with such political realities. As Campbell and Holloway recognized, the evangelist ultimately represented a decidedly non-prophetic politics more than a reactionary posture. During the polarized Nixon era, however, when the president implicitly and sometimes overtly asked Americans to choose between the

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[187] *Atlanta Journal*, 29 January 1969. *Charlotte Observer*, 15 October 1971. The *Arkansas Gazette*, a liberal newspaper that had treated Graham well in the past, had become one of the most persistent editorial critics of the evangelist by the late 1960s. See, for example, *Arkansas Gazette*, 17 January 1973, in BGCA, CN 360, R35.

[188] *Charlotte News*, 15 October 1971.

stark options of a silent majority or a privileged elite, non-prophetic politics often functioned as reactionary politics. The strategies followed by Graham's ideal politician ironically collapsed or subsumed the very space where the politics of decency had found refuge. Centrism became synonymous with cynicism, threatening to render Graham's brand of moderation a rhetorical impossibility or simply another path to partisanship. Graham was complicit in these developments and he did little to abate them. Earlier, in 1968, Jesse Helms had written to ABC television suggesting Graham as an ideal speaker to counter "the glorification of Martin Luther King, Jr.," following the assassination of the civil rights leader.[189] A posturing Helms proposed a voice of moderation on behalf of his own reactionary agenda. The nominally neutral Honor America Day presented a similar dynamic of inescapable partisanship for Graham.

The Nixon years so thoroughly politicized Graham that such complicating details as his record of support for racial tolerance or his friendships with certain liberals grew blurry amid the whirl of photo ops, church services, and bull sessions. He could not help but to sanctify the Nixon way (even that which occurred beyond his notice) because he had not only offered his services carte blanche, but had actively sought opportunities for political work. The evangelist remained blind to the plumbing beneath Nixon's politics, although not to the basic assumptions above it. Nixon, the usual suspect in all things Machiavellian, did not have to manipulate Graham so much as he merely had to assent to the evangelist's own proposals. Rather than treating the evangelist as an innocent or a tool, Nixon treated him like the politico he had momentarily become. In this respect, the Watergate crisis would out Graham along with Nixon. Before then, though (while liberal

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[189] Letters, Helms to Bell; and Helms to Nat Cavalluzzi, 9 April 1968; both in BGCA, CN 318, 29-3.

critics, lacking access to such smoking guns as the White House tapes and Haldeman's diary, slugged away at the standing target of civil religion), the evangelist retained a distinctive voice in many parts of the South, one that resonated with a brighter side of Nixon's southern strategy, the side of Connally rather than of Helms. This was the voice of a Sunbelt on the make.

CHAPTER VI

CRUSADING FOR THE SUNBELT SOUTH

It may well come to lie with the South in the near future, as it lay with the North in 1860, to save the Union in its own way.

Walker Percy[1]

While Graham abetted the southern strategy, the southerners he best identified with tried to project an altogether different image. That visage was never as removed from the region's Jim Crow past, nor as separated from the specter of racial politics, as either Graham or many of his southern crusade supporters preferred to believe. In September 1976, more than two months after the national bicentennial extravaganza, a special issue of *Time* magazine boasted that the "present Southern emotion is a sense of imminent victory—over circumstances, poverty and history." While the seventy-one pages dedicated to "The South Today" contained some glaring misreadings of the magnolia leaves (in the aftermath of Watergate and on the cusp of a Carter victory, *Time* presented the GOP as a paper elephant in the New South), one truism emerged: The South's image had changed for the better. Even Birmingham, slightly more than a decade removed from pressure hoses and attack dogs, was "A City Reborn" and "a model of Southern race relations." Further evidence of regional progress included photographs of the "shimmering skyline of Charlotte" and of a Charlotte native, Billy Graham,

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[1] Walker Percy, "Mississippi: The Fallen Paradise" (1965), in *Signposts in a Strange Land*, ed. Patrick Samway (New York: Picador, 1991), 51.

addressing a gathering of the rapidly growing Southern Baptist Convention.[2] The two pictures held more than circumstantial connections. A symbol of Charlotte-style growth, a suburban high rise housing the regional offices of IBM, also contained a plaque, unveiled by Richard Nixon in 1971, commemorating the "[w]orld-renowned evangelist, author, and educator and preacher of the gospel of Christ to more people than any other man in history." The memorial was a bow to the building's location: the birthplace of Graham. "My father had a red clay farm that he hardly earned a living on when I was a boy," Graham told an interviewer in 1977. "But some of the best part of Charlotte moved on top of it—banks, IBM, Esso headquarters for the Southeast." Journalist Marshall Frady, himself of Southern Baptist stock, treated the replacement of dairy farm with IBM building as a metaphor for Graham's theology, which remained bound to the pieties of a vanquished South. Frady mistook burgeoning modernity for latent liberalism, as had many students of southern Protestantism. Writing fifteen years later, another journalist offered a corrective. In Charlotte, Peter Applebome wrote, "God and mammon—a desire to do good and a desire to do well—are knitted together . . . like threads in an intricate pattern."[3] The visual contrast between farmstead and officeplex concealed a deeper affinity between evangelical faith and the booster ethos of the Sunbelt South.

A range of elements—entrepreneurialism, asserted racial progress, and traditional faith—combined to form what commentators during the 1970s began calling the Sunbelt or, more specifically, the Sunbelt South. Coined by political analyst Kevin Phillips and

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[2] "Special Section: The South Today," *Time*, 27 September 1976, 30, 45, 55, 38, 86, and passim.

[3] Marshall Frady, *Billy Graham: A Parable of American Righteousness* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 1979), 45, 19, 28. Vernon Patterson interview, BGCA, CN 141, 5-29. Graham quoted in *Atlanta Journal & Constitution Magazine*, 9 October 1977. Frady to Don Bailey, undated [1974], Billy Graham Center Archives (BGCA), CN 345, Box 52, Folder 7 (52-7). Peter Applebome, *Dixie Rising: How the South is Shaping American Values, Politics, and Culture* (New York: Random House, 1996), 155.

later popularized by journalist Kirkpatrick Sale, the Sunbelt (which Sale usually called the "Southern Rim") was originally defined to include the Southwest and California, in addition to the South proper.[4] Yet, as historian James C. Cobb observed, "the term became increasingly interchangeable with *the South*."[5] While the notion of a Sunbelt found its most eager audiences on the extremes of discussions about the modern South (i.e., among the region's boosters and critics), the term did capture a key impression of the newest New South as race declined, however ambiguously, as a distinguishing factor for the region. During the postwar decades, corporate leaders and their political allies in the metropolitan South had embraced a "Sunbelt Synthesis" consisting of "a booster vision designed to transcend the burdens of the region's history through the twin pillars of rapid economic development and enforced racial harmony."[6] This image crested during the 1970s, even as race- and class-tinged controversies over school busing and municipal annexation threatened its continuation. At the start of the post-civil rights era, a peculiar blend of folksy piety and flashy modernity began to replace racism as an ingredient in many popular representations of the South. When Sale wrote of "the

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[4] Kevin P. Phillips, *The Emerging Republican Majority* (New Rochelle, NY: Arlington House, 1969), 437-443. Kirkpatrick Sale, *Power Shift: The Rise of the Southern Rim and Its Challenge to the Eastern Establishment* (New York: Random House, 1975), 3-15.

[5] James C. Cobb, *The Selling of the South: The Southern Crusade for Industrial Development, 1936-1990*, 2nd edition (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 187. For additional scholarly treatments of the Sunbelt South, see Raymond A. Mohl, ed., *Searching for the Sunbelt: Historical Perspectives on a Region* (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 1990); Cobb, *Selling*, 179-208; and especially, Bruce J. Schulman, *From Cotton Belt to Sunbelt: Federal Policy, Economic Development, and the Transformation of the South, 1938-1980* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991). Schulman noted that the Sunbelt concept only represented the most visible, prosperous portion of the South. See also Schulman, *The Seventies: The Great Shift in American Culture, Society, and Politics* (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo, 2002), 102-117. For a brief critique of the Sunbelt thesis, see C. Vann Woodward, *Thinking Back: The Perils of Writing History* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 1986), 140.

[6] Matthew D. Lassiter, *The Silent Majority: Suburban Politics in the Sunbelt South* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006), 11.

unmistakable and irreversible shift of power . . . away from the Eastern Establishment and toward the Southern Rim," he cited Billy Graham's influence in the Nixon White House as evidence of this transition.[7] As the *Time* series suggested, Sale lamented, and novelist Walker Percy conceded, Graham was a significant player in the cultivation of the Sunbelt image.[8]

Two Graham crusades in the 1970s South—Birmingham (1972) and Atlanta (1973)—revealed the role of the evangelist in promoting the Sunbelt. In the case of Birmingham, civic and religious leaders viewed the crusade as a chance to show how far this newly christened "All-America City" had advanced since Graham's desegregated rally there in 1964, several months after the bombing of Sixteenth Street Baptist Church. In the flagship New South city of Atlanta, crusade chair Tom Cousins was even more ambitious. Cousins sought to use the crusade to shape a new generation of leaders for a city on the cusp of electing its first African-American mayor. Graham was a willing partner in both projects. The successes and struggles of the Birmingham and Atlanta crusades seemed to confirm and expose what *Charlotte Observer* editor Reese Cleghorn and other southerners had feared in the evangelist's alliance with Richard Nixon: the potent superficiality of nominal post-segregationism stamped with a religious mandate. To supporters of the evangelist, however, his crusades placed a welcomed spotlight on a region once reviled, now revived. Graham's avowedly non-prophetic brand of activism both reflected and impelled the particular combination of traditional evangelicalism and

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[7] Sale, *Power Shift*, 13-14, 94-95 (quoted in 14).

[8] Walker Percy interview, *New York Times*, 20 February 1977.

dynamic boosterism that came to characterize the Sunbelt South, an imagined region blending piety, modernity, and—increasingly—Republican politics.

Revivals, Graham, and New South Discourse

A rich historiographical tradition exists for viewing religious revivals not simply as secondary products of larger cultural and economic transformations, but rather as active congealers of new social relations. Such a perspective, while not without risks, is useful for the historical settings at hand and is in keeping with the critique of secularization theory proffered here. In an American context, the argument that revivals can serve to reify larger shifts in social structures appears most famously in Paul Johnson's *A Shopkeeper's Millennium*. Johnson analyzed Charles Finney's 1831 revival in what was then emerging as the evangelical heartland of the nation, Rochester, New York, where the revival "created a community of militant evangelicals that would remake society and politics." Their post-millennialist optimism, while at some level utopian, served on a temporal level to strengthen capitalist structures. The initial targets of revival were the masters and manufacturers themselves, who in turn channeled their newfound behavioral restraints into workplace discipline. Johnson, to be sure, wrote about a society in which Christianity possessed a type of prescriptive authority not attainable following the "second disestablishment" of American religion during the interwar years of the twentieth century. Moreover, some reviewers have taken Johnson to task for seemingly reducing the significance of personal faith to social location.[9]

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[9] Paul E. Johnson, *A Shopkeeper's Millennium: Society and Revivals in Rochester, New York, 1815-1837* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1978), 102, 110, 136-141. For similar, if less class-focused, interpretations of other evangelists, see James F. Findlay, Jr., *Dwight Moody, American Evangelist, 1837-*

Disestablishment, however, was (and perhaps remains) much less of a reality in the American South, where both a general and conversion-centered evangelicalism have overlapped unselfconsciously with the spheres of business and politics. In the cases of Birmingham and Atlanta during the early 1970s, this was so much the case that, to a striking degree, local crusade organizers did not always feel compelled to describe their motivations in religious terms. The argument here is not that Graham crusade committee members internalized the lessons of Rochester. Yet their behavior did agree with the representative of *Dixie Business* magazine who, when awarding Graham its 1975 "Man of the South" award, candidly declared religion "the greatest business in the South and in the world."[10] Piety did not always require specific declaration; it was, as Graham himself argued with some exaggeration, an assumed requirement for seeking public office in the South.[11] Still, even granting the sincere faith of most crusade committee members (and there are few reasons not to), many of them clearly sought more from a Graham crusade than conversions. These benefits included a more unified leadership class and an improved image for the city. At a basic level, as well, Graham crusades (like modern political conventions and the Olympics) were an opportunity to showcase new stadiums, highways, and other civic improvements. The evangelist encouraged such signs of

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1899 (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1969); and Robert F. Martin, *Hero of the Heartland: Billy Sunday and the Transformation of American Society, 1862-1935* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002). On the "second disestablishment," see Robert T. Handy, *A Christian America: Protestant Hopes and Historical Realities*, 2nd edition (New York: Oxford, 1984), 159-184. For an alternative to Johnson's approach, see Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989), 220-226. Other historians have linked revivalism with challenges to social norms, such as opposition to slavery and support for gender equality. See Michael J. McClymond, "Issues and Explanations in the Study of North American Revivalism," in *Embodying the Spirit: New Perspectives on North American Revivalism*, ed. McClymond (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), 24-27.

[10] Hubert F. Lee, "Billy Graham Presented 'Man of the South' Award By Wm. H. Barnhardt in Charlotte as 105,000 Watch," *Dixie Business*, Summer 1975, 8.

[11] "The South Today," 87.

progress. He was keenly aware, for example, of the importance of stadiums and arenas to the image of the urban South. In 1972, Graham chided Charlotte for lacking a large outdoor stadium (which, of course, would benefit his own evangelism), "because you are moving very rapidly to big city status like Atlanta or Dallas and to be a big city today one of the things you have to have is a stadium." Seventeen years earlier, he had made similar comments when dedicating Charlotte's indoor coliseum.[12]

At press conferences and other venues, Graham's eschatological pessimism regarding national and world events almost reflexively turned to optimism when the subject switched to the South. "During the past few years, the South has been undergoing a gigantic economic and social revolution," the evangelist told his weekly radio audience in 1965. "It is one of the most exciting places in the entire world."[13] His advocacy on behalf of his home region—what might be termed his New South discourse—gave prospective boosters hope that a successful wooing of the evangelist would reflect well on their cities.[14] Woo they did. When Graham announced his 1965 visit to Alabama, letters poured in from across the state.[15] During the Greenville, South Carolina, crusade of the following year, clergy from Macon, Georgia, and Memphis attended in hopes of attracting the evangelist.[16] While the Memphis crusade never

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[12] Charlotte press conference transcript, 14 April 1972, BGCA, CN 24, 1-36. *Charlotte Observer*, 12 September 1955, in BGCA, CN 1, 6-9. In the early 1960s, Graham urged federal and state funding to expand the interstate highway system in western North Carolina, arguing that doing so would enhance tourism. See excerpts, Grandfather Mountain, NC, address, 5 August 1962, BGCA, CN 1, 6-9.

[13] "By the Foolishness of Preaching," *Hour of Decision* sermon, 13 June 1965, BGCA, CN 191, T805c.

[14] On notions of the New South, see Paul Gaston, *The New South Creed: A Study in Southern Mythmaking* (New York: Knopf, 1970).

[15] See BGCA, CN 17, 7-7. For more on the Alabama visits, see Chapter IV.

occurred because of Graham's health problems at the time, the correspondence surrounding it was telling. Not only the white ministerial elite of Memphis, but also the mayor, the head of Holiday Inn, and the presidents of Memphis State and Mississippi State Universities implored the evangelist to visit. Even black Methodist minister James Lawson, one of the leading teachers of Gandhian tactics of civil disobedience during the Civil Rights Movement, requested Graham's presence. "Prophetic preaching from such a person as you now, [sic] could make a significant impact upon the atmosphere of Memphis," Lawson wrote to the evangelist in 1966, undoubtedly at the behest of the Memphis Ministers Association, whose executive committee he had recently been invited to join. In an effort to impress the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association (BGEA), an executive committee list identified Lawson by his race.[17]

Graham's popularity in the South showed no signs of diminishing in the early 1970s, even though the Nixon years represented a low point for popular representations of the evangelist, a time when Lawson would have been much less likely to support a crusade. The newspapers of the urban South (Birmingham's, especially, and Atlanta's, to a lesser extent) tended to treat the evangelist with more deference than did their counterparts in other regions. Since the 1950s, Graham had consistently argued that the South would eventually surpass the North in the quality of its race relations, and such rhetoric persisted two decades later. He continued to complain about the lack of network news coverage of his 1965 desegregated services in Alabama, which he later described as

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[16] *Greenville News*, 11 March 1966.

[17] William Martin, *A Prophet With Honor: The Billy Graham Story* (New York: William Morrow & Company, 1991), 372. Wallace E. Johnson to Graham, 3 December 1963; D.W. Colvard to Graham, 15 October 1963; C.C. Humphreys to Graham, 17 October 1963; J. M. Lawson, Jr., to Graham, 13 December 1966; and R. Paul Caudill to Graham, 4 January 1967; all in BGCA, CN 345, 46-13.

part of the "quiet revolution" of average Americans.[18] In the subsequent era of the southern strategy and Sunbelt hype, his advocacy on behalf of the South grew more salient. Graham not only defended the South against its detractors; he cast the region as a potential model for the nation. "[T]o me it is rather hypocritical for people up North to be talking constantly about the problems in the South," he declared during his 1970 crusade in Baton Rouge, when "they've got it right on their doorstep and it's ready to explode."[19] Elsewhere that year, Graham said he was "very proud" of how the South had responded to court-ordered busing—something, he suggested, a Boston or a New York City would not handle so well.[20] Upon the death of famed southern liberal and *Atlanta Constitution* editor Ralph McGill, whom the evangelist had earlier labeled "Mr. New South," Graham praised him as "a courageous pioneer in race relations and social reform" who had offered critical advice over the years.[21] In the context of the Sunbelt 1970s, though, Graham's comments on the South reflected the interests not of liberal supporters of the Southern Regional Council, but of regional boosters, most of whom were recovering segregationists. "The South is no longer the old South that we once knew," Graham stated in a 1972 press conference in Atlanta. "It's become probably the most dynamic part of America."[22] Two months earlier in the same city, when delivering

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[18] "The Quiet Revolution," Atlanta, GA, 29 December 1967, BGCA, CN 345, 43-3.

[19] Baton Rouge press conference transcript, 10 October 1970, BGCA, CN 24, 1-27.

[20] Black Mountain, NC, press conference transcript, 13 October 1970, BGCA, CN 24, 1-26.

[21] Graham to Ralph McGill, 12 March 1966, Emory University Special Collections, Ralph McGill Papers, 15-7. "Statement ... upon death of Ralph McGill," 4 February 1969, BGCA, CN 345, 45-8.

[22] Atlanta press conference transcript, 14 December 1972, BGCA, CN 24, 2-12.

a speech reflecting the ideas of southern strategist Harry Dent, Richard Nixon had likewise described the South's progress as "probably the greatest of all in the nation."[23]

The Birmingham Easter Rally, Continued

By 1972, the city of Birmingham touted its own progress as among the greatest in the nation. The 1964 Easter rally figured prominently in this narrative from "Bombingham" to "All-America City" (so designated in 1970 by the National Municipal League), from miscreant to model.[24] City boosters had immediately presented the Easter rally as both a fresh start and a confirmation that Birmingham had not fallen so far, after all. Crusade chair and regional newspaper baron Arthur P. Cook recognized the image-shaping value of the rally in a letter to the Jefferson County sheriff: "On the front pages of . . . major dailies in the nation were glowing, good remarks about Birmingham. This is certainly something that we have all tried to gain for our city for a long time." To Mayor Albert Boutwell, Cook wrote that "we now have a beachhead established."[25]

Understandably, Birmingham's leaders wanted more of a good thing. Efforts to have Graham return for a full crusade commenced almost immediately after the Easter rally and included the requisite invitation from the Ministerial Association of Greater Birmingham (which, by then, contained one black "Associate") "to return to Birmingham

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[23] "Remarks of the President to Southern Regional Reception ...," 12 October 1972, National Archives and Records Administration, Nixon Presidential Materials (NPM), White House Special Files, Staff Member and Office Files, PATRICK J. BUCHANAN 1969-72, 5-"Dent – 1972."

[24] For more on the 1964 rally, see Chapter IV. According to the *Birmingham News*, the All-America City award "brought with it the opportunity for a new image which [the city's] leaders have since made the most of." *Birmingham News*, 19 December 1971.

[25] Arthur P. Cook to Melvin Bailey, 4 April 1964, BGCA, CN 17, 4-17. Cook to Albert Boutwell, 4 April 1964, Birmingham Public Library Archives (BPL), Albert Burton Boutwell Papers (ABBP), #264.10.34.

for a full length Crusade at the earliest time." The invitation arrived too late to ensure such a possibility.[26] Still, an eventual crusade seemed likely. Graham, who claimed to consider southern invitations with particular regard, had something of a special relationship with Birmingham, the largest southern city in which he had not held a full crusade.[27] His 1964 visit, as well as his nominal involvement in the rebuilding of Sixteenth Street Baptist Church, had occurred following comments in which Graham had described Birmingham as emblematic of racial violence. During the rally, he publicly declared his desire to return to the city, a pledge to which BGEA staffers felt bound and which longtime crusade advocate Gilbert L. Guffin (dean of religion at Samford, nee Howard, University) was not inclined to let them forget.[28]

By May 1965, Birmingham leaders had identified an ideal period for Graham to return: the city's centennial celebration, set to extend through 1972**.** Crusade promoters pitched the visit as the climax of centennial festivities—a spiritual gut check for a city on the move—and informed Graham of the city's racial progress. Denson N. Franklin, vice president of the centennial planning committee and a Methodist minister, remained in frequent contact with Grady Wilson, to whom in 1967 he stressed that blacks and whites in the city were "ready to move forward. . . . I have seen this city change completely in atmosphere during the last three years. As one of our leading Negroes says, 'Birmingham has made more improvement than any city in America in human

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[26] Invitation, 4 May 1964, BPL, Protestant Pastors' Union Papers, #911.2.30; and Walter Smyth to James S. Cantrell, 7 May 1965, BGCA, CN 17, 128-118.

[27] Atlanta press conference transcript, 14 December 1972, BGCA, CN 24, 2-12. *Birmingham News*, 12 May 1972.

[28] Stanley Mooneyham to Russ Reid, 12 October 1964; and Gilbert L. Guffin letters; all in BGCA, CN 17, 128-118.

relations.'" Other correspondents reiterated the pivotal role of the Easter rally. City Council President M. E. Wiggins echoed these sentiments, but added that "much remains to be accomplished." Indeed, crusade boosters were sure to note the primacy of religious motivations for the crusade. Despite the support of business leaders and the Chamber of Commerce for the crusade, wrote three Birmingham clerics, "the motivation of everyone seems to be a deep sense of need for a spiritual awakening among us and not as a mere event in the centennial." Indeed, argued Guffin, centennial plans had "quickened the pace of the [c]ity and, of course, economic growth and expansion are natural consequences. What we need most of all, and critically, is a great spiritual awakening." What Birmingham needed, that is, was a crusade to mediate (and perhaps stimulate) progress. "How has God used Birmingham?" asked a centennial-year promotional booklet. "The answer is simple. For He is not yet through."[29]

A letter copied to Graham outlined early plans for the centennial festivities in a city the promotional booklet described as "still reaching for national acceptance." In 1960, the author declared, Birmingham had ranked thirty-sixth in the nation in population, "and if we sit still and do nothing we'll still be 36th in the nation" a decade later. Unstated in the letter, but surely implicit, was concern over the city's lingering connotation with racial violence. The centennial celebration would do its part through four huge bonfires, to be lighted on Red Mountain, four-hundred feet above the city. The fires would "rival, in height and heat, the famous Pharos light at Alexandria, the mouth of

[29] Hill Ferguson to Graham, 5 May 1965; Denson N. Franklin to Jim McCormick, 25 May 1970; Grady Wilson to Smyth, 3 May 1968; Franklin to Wilson, 27 November 1967; M. E. Wiggins to Graham, 26 May 1970; Franklin, et al, to Smyth, 7 August 1968; and Guffin to Smyth, 4 December 1969; all in BGCA CN 17, 128-118. *Portrait of Birmingham, Alabama* (Birmingham: Birmingham Centennial Corporation, 1971), 17.

the Nile River." A final flame would shine during a Graham crusade, proposed as the climactic event of the centennial year, since "no man in this world can so ably tie up the present day world with that of Christ as could Billy Graham."[30] In the end, though, the centennial festivities kicked off in December 1971 with the opening of a more temporal emblem of the city's progress, a new civic center.[31]

The Billy Graham Alabama Crusade finally occurred in May 1972.[32] Birmingham greeted Graham with public sentiments in keeping with those previously expressed in private correspondence. City boosters now cited the 1964 rally as "the first integrated public outdoor meeting in the city's history," when, "[i]n a twinkling, racial segregation at public meetings had become obsolete in the city." (No mention was made of the much more significant role of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, as well as the demonstrations that preceded it, in ending public segregation in the city.) According to this glossy narrative, Graham's visit had sparked what crusade executive committee chair Mark Hodo called a "renaissance." Hodo had served on the same committee in 1964, when Birmingham's reputation had reached its nadir. Since then, declared the Presbyterian and head of the City Federal Savings & Loan Corporation with more than a hint of paternalism, "we have had less racial disturbance than any city . . . in proportion to our size. We developed a communication during that period. We brought in the blacks to meet with us and . . . we developed a camaraderie and a communication that has

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[30] *Portrait of Birmingham, Alabama*, 7. Hill Ferguson to John Jemison, 4 May 1965, BGCA, CN 17, 128-118.

[31] *Birmingham News*, 18 December 1971.

[32] Nixon preceded Graham to Birmingham by a year. In anticipation of the centennial, the president praised the city's economic progress and patriotism. "Remarks on Arrival in Birmingham, Alabama," 25 May 1971, Public Papers of President Nixon, http://www.nixonfoundation.org (accessed 20 February 2006).

been terrific." Mayor George G. Seibels, Jr., a Republican, declared the crusade week "Billy Graham Days," when the Graham team would accentuate "the spiritual heritage which has helped to make this an All-America City." The *Birmingham News*, a fount of journalistic boosterism whose motto was "Serving a Progressive South," picked up its affirming editorials where it had left off in 1965. Graham's earlier visit had enabled the resolution of problems that now seemed confoundingly simple, although how exactly these problems had been resolved remained unspecified. In a toast to evangelical universalism, the paper welcomed Graham's social message that "only through spiritual revival of the individual will come improvement in the quality of life of the community, and that without the brotherhood of man no city or people can endure."[33] Indeed, Graham added in a crusade sermon, "we could create the finest conditions and still have crime, war, and prejudice so long as our relationship with God has been broken."[34]

In terms of social issues, the most significant theme of the crusade was that which was nominally missing: race, a matter crusade boosters viewed as resolved. Relative lack of discussion about race, of course, itself represented a type of racial discourse—a qualified admission of past problems, but an even stronger relegation of those problems to the dustbin of history. This perspective willfully ignored, among other things, the numerous riots Birmingham had experienced since 1964 in response to such issues as police brutality.[35] "In 1964 the races learned they could sit side by side," gushed the

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[33] *Birmingham News*, 14 May 1972. Birmingham press conference transcript, 11 May 1972, BGEA, CN 24, 1-37. Mayoral proclamation, 14 May 1972, BGCA, CN 17, 128-122. On desegregation in Birmingham, see Glenn T. Eskew, *But for Birmingham: The Local and National Movements in the Civil Rights Struggle* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 326 and passim.

[34] *Birmingham News*, 21 May 1972.

News. "In 1972 they learned they could work side by side." Graham seemed to concur. "There is a rare situation in Birmingham," he declared at a press conference where he sat alongside Hodo and J. L. Ware, a prominent black Baptist minister who had also participated in the Easter rally. "Things have changed greatly," the evangelist added, noting that blacks had greater access to higher education than ever before. Later that week, Graham referred to a period of southern racial problems a decade or more removed from the present. For the Easter 1964 sermon, the *News* wrote, "the problem was racial. *This time, other issues are at hand*—the decaying church institution, the Vietnam War, a generation of youth questioning the very basis on which this country is founded" (emphasis mine).[36] These latter issues, of course, did not leave the South singled out for ridicule. The *Birmingham World*, a Republican-leaning black newspaper that rightly viewed racial inequality as still a substantial problem in the city, offered only minimal (if supportive) coverage of the crusade.[37]

Amid crusade appearances by Dallas Cowboys coach Tom Landry, Alabama Crimson Tide head man Bear Bryant, and former Tide star Joe Namath, Graham's sermons and statements hinted at the emergence of newly salient gender and family issues, as well as the lingering dilemma of American involvement in Vietnam. In his opening press conference, Graham made good on his assurance to Nixon Chief of Staff

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[35] Eskew, *But for Birmingham*, 328; and J. Mills Thornton III, *Dividing Lines: Municipal Politics and the Struggle for Civil Rights in Montgomery, Birmingham, and Selma* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2002), 514. On Birmingham's tense transition toward biracial politics, see Jimmie Lewis Franklin, *Back to Birmingham: Richard Arrington, Jr., and His Times* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama, 1989), 60-91.

[36] *Birmingham News*, 22 May 1972. *Tuscaloosa News* and *Mobile Register* (AP), 12 May 1972; both in BGCA, CN 360, R34. Birmingham press conference transcript, 19 May 1972, BGCA, CN 24, 1-38. *Birmingham News*, 11 May 1972, in BGCA, CN 360, R34.

[37] Survey of B*irmingham World*, April-June 1972.

H. R. Haldeman that he would affirm Nixon's renewed hard line in Vietnam. The president, Graham said, wanted peace as much as anyone, but believed in sticks, as well as carrots; in a sermon, the evangelist urged the audience to support Nixon's plan for pulling troops out of Vietnam.[38] Regarding American social issues, Graham suggested the application of "biblical laws" in the face of crime and violence.[39] While backing down from previous calls for a constitutional amendment regarding school prayer, he continued his tradition of calling for alternative, faith-based demonstrations by saying he might lead his own "march on Washington" on behalf of that cause. In another sermon, Graham reaffirmed traditional gender roles, as opposed to "masculinizing women and feminizing men." There is "no unisex in the Bible," he added.[40]

Another event quickly supplanted the crusade in the minds of most Alabamians: the shooting of Alabama Governor George Wallace, then seeking the Democratic Party presidential nomination. On the second day of the crusade, Wallace was shot at a campaign rally in Maryland, leaving the governor paralyzed in both legs. Graham and Wallace had held a cordial, semi-private meeting during the 1965 Montgomery crusade, and since then they had maintained a line of communication that, as Wallace might well have reasoned, ultimately ended at the Nixon White House. The evangelist had talked

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[38] *Birmingham News*, 20 May 1972, in BGCA, CN 360, R34. White House conversation 24-33, 8 May 1972, NARA, NPM. Birmingham press conference transcript, 11 May 1972, BGCA, CN 24, 1-37. Sermon text, 20 May 1972, BGCA, CN 17, 25-15. Graham's affirmation of Nixon's Vietnam policy contradicts biographer William Martin's contention that "Graham dealt with his confusion over Vietnam by refusing to comment on it during 1972." See Martin, *Prophet*, 422.

[39] *Birmingham Post-Herald*, 17 May 1972, in BGCA, CN 360, R21. According to the *Post-Herald*, Graham's subsequent suggestion that biblical laws be applied specifically to matters of social justice garnered only "scattered applause."

[40] *Gadsen* (AL) *Times*, 12 May 1972, in BGCA, CN 360, R34. *Birmingham Post-Herald*, 20 May 1972, in BGCA, CN 360, R34. On the roots of the shift of salient social issues from law and order to family values and gender relations, see Chapter VII.

with Wallace the day before the shooting, and the two kept in touch throughout the recovery process. The governor had planned to attend services later in the week, when Graham said the candidate "probably would have been asked to sit in the audience and not on the stage to avoid any political overtones" (in contrast to the treatment Nixon had received in Knoxville). Upon learning of the shooting, Graham called it "a terrible shock indicating the sickness of the country," a condition he attributed to Satan. He asked for a moment of silent prayer and adjusted the topic of his sermon to address the "pornography of violence." All Americans, "black and white, conservative and liberal," Graham declared, should pray for recovery, "whether we agree with him or not. . . . He knew we had differences, especially in the matter of race. But he's always warm and friendly."[41] The moment represented an uncomfortable, if not at all uncommon, intersection of Graham's ministerial responsibilities and his political involvement, of his public duties and the partisanship he tried to reveal only selectively. Conscious of Haldeman's assignment "to keep Wallace in the Democratic Party," Graham talked with the governor following an operation two months later and received assurance that a third-party candidacy remained unlikely.[42]

In Birmingham, the evangelist criticized the national television media for not covering those who ventured to Legion Field "to demonstrate for God and in peace" as much as they had covered earlier marches in the city.[43] This contention possessed

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[41] *Birmingham Post-Herald*, 16 May 1972. *Birmingham News*, 16 and 22 May 1972

[42] H. R. Haldeman, *The Haldeman Diaries: Inside the Nixon White House* [CD-ROM] (Santa Monica, CA: Sony Imagesoft, 1994), 19 June and 20 July 1972. On Wallace in the 1972 race, see Chapter V. In 1998, Franklin Graham stood in for his father (who was ill) in delivering the eulogy at Wallace's funeral. See *Atlanta Constitution* and *Washington Post*, 17 September 1998.

[43] *Birmingham Post-Herald*, 22 May 1972.

obvious racial overtones that, at the very least, reflected his continued hesitancy to privilege racism as a sin in need of redress. The *News* shared Graham's critique of the media elite and editorialized against one of many published works labeling him a practitioner of civil religion.[44] Certainly, the city's leadership class hoped others were taking notice of what was happening in this cradle of the silent majority. Total attendance stood at nearly 375,000, or around 47,000 nightly in the 70,000-seat Legion Field—an above-average crowd for an American city in keeping with the high turnouts typical of southern crusades. African Americans comprised over one-third of the crowd on some nights, numbers similar to Graham's 1964-65 services on Alabama.[45] Gilbert Guffin was sure the crusade would go down as the most significant event of the centennial year. Another correspondent, City Clerk Jackson B. Bailey, described the crusade as the "mountain-top experience of all our public celebrations." Birmingham's renewed image, he insisted, would not have been possible without the improved race relations dating back to the 1964 Easter rally.[46]

Graham compensated for the lack of network news coverage by speaking well of Birmingham to other outlets. Likewise, he assured Mayor Seibels, BGEA broadcasts of the services would mean that "[m]illions throughout American and in other parts of the

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[44] *Birmingham News*, 22 May 1972.

[45] "Reaching Black America," *Decision*, August 1973, 10. A member of the Graham team explained the regional dynamics of crusade attendance: "Up North, the crusades have a higher percentage of persons responding to the invitation. . . . This is because in the South more churches preach evangelistic style sermons and make the altar call available more often." See *Birmingham News*, 23 May 1972, in BGCA, CN 360, R34.

[46] Guffin to Smyth, 23 May 1972, BGCA, CN 17, 128-127. Jackson B. Bailey to Graham, 30 May 1972, BGCA, CN 17, 129-36.

world will be able to see and hear about Birmingham."[47] To the chagrin of militant Protestant Ian Paisley, one of Graham's next stops was Northern Ireland, whose religiously rooted violence Graham contrasted with developments in the All-America City. On the front page of the *News* a week after the crusade, an Associated Press story quoted Graham upholding Birmingham as proof that a "spiritual awakening" could turn around any city, perhaps even Belfast. "I suddenly realized that Birmingham had perhaps the best race relations of any city in the southern part of the United States. . . . It is one of the most progressive cities in America," Graham said.[48] His characteristic hyperbole was consistent with his description of the South as a whole, a perspective *Time* would echo in its 1976 special issue on the region. An editorial in the *Florence* (SC) *News* delighted in Graham's use of a southern example. The flagship magazine of the BGEA, *Decision*, reiterated the post-Easter rally narrative of a city that had straightened out its priorities. "We're an All-America city . . . ," declared a crusade leader," but we need spiritual renewal."[49] A newspaper headline for the 1964 Easter rally had read, "Graham Calls on City to Lead." Eight years later, according to the *News*, Graham "found a changed city" when he returned to Birmingham. In 1972, despite the overt persistence of racial inequalities and tensions in Birmingham, city crusade leaders told themselves and others that they had answered Graham's call and become a model, a Sunbelt city claiming a spiritual stride with every social and economic one.[50]

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[47] Graham to George G. Seibels, Jr., 20 March 1972, BGCA, CN 17, 128-122.

[48] *Birmingham News* (AP), 30 May 1972. Paisley later attacked Graham during a sermon at Bob Jones University. See *Greenville* (SC) *News*, 4 November 1972, in BGCA, CN 360, R35.

[49] *Florence* (SC) *News*, undated [late May 1972], in BGCA, CN 360, R34. "Springtime in Dixie," *Decision*, August 1972, 8.

Atlanta: Tom Cousins' Dream

Unlike Birmingham, Atlanta desired to maintain, rather than surmount, its image. Indeed, during the early 1960s, the city had cemented its identity as New South capital (in the famous words of Mayor William Hartsfield, a city "too busy to hate") in explicit contrast to the violence 150 miles west in Birmingham. While Bull Conner terrorized the black community of Birmingham, Mayor Ivan Allen, Hartsfield's heir, endorsed what became the Civil Rights Act of 1964. In the mid-1960s, the mayor even lured a Major League Baseball franchise and its star African-American slugger, Henry Aaron, away from Milwaukee, a move that solidified Atlanta's big city status.[51] Also attracted was the BGEA, which in 1964 opened its Team Office near Hartsfield Airport, meaning that all domestic crusades were henceforth coordinated from Atlanta, rather than from the main office in Minneapolis. At the press conference announcing the new office, Graham cited Atlanta's progressive stance on race as a reason for the move. (The city was also closer to the homes of most team members.) He even put in a word of reassurance for persons concerned about how Atlanta would receive Aaron, as the evangelist's black associates could vouch for the city's racial tolerance.[52]

In the early 1970s, then, it only seemed natural for Atlanta real estate developer Tom Cousins to believe that a Billy Graham crusade could harvest a new generation of

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[50] *Birmingham Post-Herald*, 30 March 1964, in BGCA, CN 360, R29. *Birmingham News*, 31 December 1972. On Birmingham's continued racial injustices, see Eskew, *But for Birmingham*, 325-340.

[51] Frederick Allen, *Atlanta Rising: The Invention of an International City, 1946-1996* (Atlanta: GA: Longstreet Press, 1996), 69, 112-138.

[52] Atlanta press conference transcript, 5 November 1964, BGCA, CN 24, 4-15. Most observers have overlooked the Atlanta Team Office or not understood its significance. From 1964 to 1976, when the office moved to the BGEA headquarters in Minneapolis, Atlanta was the more important office in terms of Graham's daily work.

leaders for the city. A Nixon administration document (possibly using Graham's own words) identified Cousins as among "the brilliant, rising young business tycoons of the South. Now frequently introduced as 'Mr. Atlanta.'"[53] Cousins had ascended during the 1960s from a model home builder to a sports franchiser and a major force in downtown development. Widely assumed to be one of the inspirations for Charlie Croker, the stoically southern protagonist of Tom Wolfe's 1998 novel, *A Man in Full*, Cousins conformed to the stereotypes of an ambitious Atlanta mogul, including owning the requisite quail plantation in southwest Georgia. Cousins was involved in many of the projects through which Atlanta had started defining itself as not only an all-America, but an "international" city, as well. These undertakings included the quintessentially Sunbelt Omni International, a multi-use complex containing a mall, a theme park, and—fittingly—a sports coliseum. Cousins also owned the Atlanta Hawks of the National Basketball Association and the Atlanta Flames of the National Hockey Association, the primary tenants of his coliseum and additional symbols of Atlanta's big-city status.[54] In short, Cousins was an Atlanta booster extraordinaire, a predecessor of the more flamboyant Ted Turner.

Cousins and Graham first met during the 1965 crusade in Montgomery, where Cousins owned a lakeside home. Through the evangelist's brother-in-law, Leighton Ford, they kept in contact during the following years, and by the early 1970s Cousins

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[53] "Washington Meeting, March 29, 1972," BGCA, CN 74, 3-7 [original in NPM].

[54] Tom Wolfe, *A Man in Full: A Man in Full* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1998). Cousins in *Atlanta Journal and Constitution*, 29 November 1998. Tom Barry, "Georgia's Most Respected CEO of 1999: Thomas G. Cousins," *Georgia Trend* 10.10 (June 1995), http//:www.proquest.umi.com (accessed 20 February 2006).

began pitching the possibility of a crusade.[55] Cousins described himself as a former agnostic (in his words, not a "religious fanatic") who was initially attracted to church work more than worship services.[56] Not unlike Richard Nixon, Cousins evinced a certain reticence about personal expressions of religiosity, possessing what one friendly observer called "a religious faith reflected in deeds not words."[57] This image was in keeping with both his reputation for having a low-key demeanor (as much as was possible for a prominent developer) and his identity as a Presbyterian. He seemed most comfortable when employing the language of a business prospectus, a mixture of salesmanship and the bottom line.

Atlanta during the late 1960s and early 1970s was experiencing a significant transition within its political and economic leadership, and Cousins thought a Graham crusade would help ease this transition. For decades, Atlanta politics had revolved around an alliance between moderate, business-oriented whites and the city's African-American leaders. The 1970s in Atlanta saw "a major reformulation of the tacit rules of engagement between city government and the business community, as well as the emergence of a new set of players."[58] From the perspective of the white downtown establishment, the inevitability of black political power in a city moving rapidly toward a black majority represented the most significant change of all. In 1969, Atlanta elected its first black vice mayor, Maynard Jackson. While hailing from the "Morehouse Man"

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[55] Tom Cousins interview, 4 May 1990, BGCA, CN 141, 47-54.

[56] *Atlanta Constitution*, 22 March 1973, in BGCA, CN 360, R35. Minutes, "Preliminary Meeting for Atlanta Crusade," 15 March 1972, BGCA, CN 345, 34-1.

[57] Barry, "CEO."

[58] Charles Rutheiser, *Imagineering Atlanta: The Politics of Place in the City of Dreams* (London: Verso, 1996), 171.

lineage of elite black leadership, Jackson threatened a closely guarded tradition of racially moderate, yet inescapably paternalistic white control over city politics.[59] Cousins was part of a new group of white leaders who, while not especially attached to the stewardship tradition of Hartsfield and Allen, were worried about the direction Atlanta would take if black politicians felt no accountability to business leaders.[60] Their concerns reflected scarcely concealed racial and class anxieties. In 1971, a report by the Atlanta Chamber of Commerce pronounced the death of its "marriage" with a City Hall. "The 'junior partner' role of the black leadership in the last decade has been rejected by the black leaders," the report stated.[61] Cousins candidly recalled almost identical concerns about a new generation of Atlanta politicians who thought the business establishment had overlooked them. He believed these tensions would hinder the development and economic vitality of the city.[62] To ward off polarization, he proposed "a shock treatment for Christ"—that is, "spiritual and moral growth along with bricks and mortar."[63]

A Graham crusade could provide just this shock treatment, Cousins reasoned. During the extensive mobilization the crusade would entail, Cousins hoped to identify a biracial group of current and future leaders and to ensure their involvement in the crusade effort. In March 1972, he brought together area ministers to outline his vision for the crusade that was to occur fifteen months later. After clarifying that he neither had

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[59] On Atlanta's shaky transition toward black political power, see Allen, *Rising*, 167-190.

[60] Bill Schemmel, "Atlanta's 'Power Structure' Faces Life," *New South*, Spring 1972, 62-68.

[61] Quoted in Kevin M. Kruse, *White Flight: Atlanta and the Making of Modern Conservatism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), 236.

[62] Cousins interviews, 4 May 1990, BGCA, CN 141, 47-54; and 25 May 1977, BGCA, CN 141, 3-6.

[63] *Atlanta Constitution*, 22 March 1973, in BGCA, CN 360, R35.

gubernatorial ambitions nor merely sought a new client for his coliseum, Cousins described his "particular first personal concern" for the crusade. Atlanta, he declared, could become "the finest city in the world," a place "where people can live together." For the moment, however, the city was "at a cross roads" and its leadership was "either dying out or being pushed out." The leaders who would inevitably emerge during the crusade would get a taste of how they might influence the city in the future.[64] Despite worries that Cousins prioritized social matters at the expense of spiritual ones, he remained the face of the crusade. Likewise, while Cousins admitted that his intentions for the Atlanta crusade might not square perfectly with the BGEA's mission statement, he retained the full backing of Graham. The BGEA had accepted Atlanta's invitation for a crusade on the conditions that Cousins chair the executive committee and that the black community of Atlanta support the evangelist's visit.[65] Whatever Atlanta's reputation, the latter stipulation proved more difficult to satisfy.

The civic justifications Cousins offered for the crusade would have given militant fundamentalist critics of Graham additional reason to believe that his evangelism had strayed from the narrow path. "I don't know that you even have to be Christian to appreciate" the value of a Graham crusade, Cousins declared in the Sunday paper. "I think the non-Christian would acknowledge that the true, convicted Christian is an excellent citizen," he added. (Cousins may have aimed these comments at Jewish members of the Chamber of Commerce who held understandable reservations about an evangelistic effort.) As an Atlanta journalist wrote about Cousins, "He speaks of 'new

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[64] "Preliminary Meeting," BGCA, CN 345, 34-1.

[65] Cousins interview, 4 May 1990, BGCA, CN 141, 47-54.

leadership' in the sense that some present or future leaders may become 'new' men in Christ as a result of Billy Graham's crusade." After all, a godly city would be a better place for everyone, and in Atlanta such a condition seemed distinctly possible—a sentiment Graham reinforced in his press conferences. Cousins thus set about identifying a new generation of leaders to chair the numerous crusade committees. Most of these persons, according to the same journalist, came "straight out of the power structure." Cousins also garnered a crusade invitation from the Chamber of Commerce (an uncommon source) and a letter from Governor Jimmy Carter urging members of the state General Assembly to attend Graham's services.[66]

A photograph in the Sunday paper featured Graham smiling over the very downtown Atlanta skyline Cousins had helped to shape.[67] Graham's comments regarding the city appeared to support the ambitions of Cousins, even as the evangelist continued his custom of denying socio-political motivations of his own. As much as in Birmingham, however, Graham operated in full booster mode regarding a city he called "one of my hometowns."[68] In press conferences before and after the crusade, Graham voiced confidence about Atlanta's race relations and its position in the nation. The racial situation in Atlanta "with all your problems is still one of the best in the country," he said. "And I think that Atlanta has been one of the most progressive cities. I think that what happens in Atlanta gives direction to the rest of the South." Compared to other cities, Atlanta was "a little bit of heaven." Again, the city was "an example of good race

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[66] *Atlanta Journal & Constitution Sunday Magazine*, 17 June 1973. Cousins interview, 25 May 1977, BGCA, CN 141, 3-6. Jimmy Carter to Georgia General Assembly, 15 June 1973, BGCA, CN 4, 18-17.

[67] *Atlanta Journal & Constitution Sunday Magazine*, 17 June 1973.

[68] *Atlanta Constitution*, 25 June 1973.

relations and progressiveness and economic boom"—as well as, most importantly, "a city of churches."[69] Graham even credited Atlanta's recently retired police chief, Herbert Jenkins, with influencing his own move away from segregation in the early 1950s.[70]

As Graham had done during the 1965 Montgomery Crusade, he published daily articles in the city's two largest newspapers, thus adding to his social message a layer of intentionality that had been missing a year earlier in Birmingham. The pieces reflected Graham's evangelical universalism and provided a more overtly spiritual component to the boosterism of Cousins. In one article, Graham quoted Martin Luther King, Jr., on the difference between love and race-consciousness before defining prejudice as "the distance between your biased opinions and the real truth." Honesty before God would eliminate this distance. "Where we've missed the mark in handling racial problems," Graham added in a statement representative of his theory of social change, "is simply that we'[v]e legislated new moral and legal standards, (which incidentally I am for) without suggesting the power that could implement them." In another article, fittingly titled "Social Justice a By-Product of God's Love and Mercy," Graham argued that social justice "is never the main part of the Gospel, nor of a crusade effort. We need something deeper and higher than that—the life-changing experience of faith in Christ." While the evangelist addressed non-racial social issues somewhat less than in Birmingham, he described a nationwide spiritual and moral "crisis"—a theme he had voiced since the mid-1950s, but which also resonated with the tone of many Nixon speeches—and argued that the Ten Commandments should be read in every school classroom. As if to rein in

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[69] Atlanta press conference transcript, 14 December 1972, BGCA, CN 24, 2-12; and Atlanta press conference transcript, 25 June 1973, BGCA, CN 24, 3-8.

[70] *Atlanta Journal*, 20 June 1973.

whatever utopian expectations Cousins might have unleashed, Graham carefully framed what he offered as an evangelist, clarifying that he was "not a social reformer; I'm not a political leader. I don't ever intend to go into politics."[71] Ralph McGill's successor at the *Atlanta Constitution* affirmed these sentiments, advising that the crusade not be "thought of in a political context at all."[72] The *Atlanta Daily World*, an influential black newspaper supportive of both Graham and Nixon, echoed this sentiment.[73]

Such a wish proved naive in light of Atlanta's racial climate, as well as the emerging politics of Watergate. In Atlanta, unlike in Birmingham, race ultimately surfaced and exposed the one-sidedness of the Sunbelt image of the South, as the crusade suffered from pervasive criticism and low attendance by significant portions of the black community. This occurred in spite of what Cousins considered a good-faith effort to ensure the black support Graham desired. Very early in the crusade planning process, Cousins included Rev. Martin Luther King, Sr.—the father of the civil rights martyr, and a civic leader cut out of the more conservative "broker" tradition. King became a consistent and public backer of the crusade. Cousins also secured a biracial executive committee, including black and white co-chairs (in keeping with a tradition dating back to the Birmingham Easter rally), although his subsequent claim that the committee contained nearly equal numbers of whites and blacks was greatly exaggerated.[74]

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[71] *Atlanta Constitution*, 14, 15, 18, and 20 June 1973. Graham's disavowal of personal political ambitions, while truthful, rested somewhat uncomfortably beside his continued admission that, had he not become an evangelist, he "probably would have gone into politics." See David Frost, *Billy Graham: Personal Thoughts of a Private Man* (Colorado Springs, CO: Chariot Victor, 1997), 47.

[72] *Atlanta Constitution*, 18 June 1973.

[73] *Atlanta Daily World*, 19 June 1973.

The Graham team and a number of civic leaders of both races assisted with these efforts. Crusade director Harry Williams suggested that an interview with King would enhance publicity in Atlanta and elsewhere.[75] Crusade supporters produced a detailed list of leading black Atlantans, and the ministers from this list received invitations to a special meeting hosted by Andrew Young, U.S. Representative and former executive director of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), at the Butler Street YMCA, a black Atlanta institution. "While a few of us may have had some reservations about the crusade," the invitation read, "we feel that most of these have been resolved" to the point where they could "work toward bringing Black and White Christians together."[76] Young and Carter had already hosted a breakfast meeting with similar intentions.[77] Carter went so far as to grant leave time for a staff member, Rita Samuels, to focus on stimulating black interest in the crusade.[78]

For the most part, these efforts did not have their intended effects. Black attendance remained conspicuously low throughout the crusade. Graham himself estimated that no more than 5 percent of the average crusade audience was black—a number much lower than in any of his meetings in Alabama, although more in line with

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[74] Cousins interviews, 25 May 1977, BGCA, CN 141, 3-6; and 4 May 1990, BGCA, CN 141, 47-54. Executive board directory, January 1973, BGCA, CN 4, 16-3. No more than three out of the thirteen non-BGEA persons Cousins invited to a preliminary meeting were black. See "Preliminary Meeting For Atlanta Crusade," 15 March 1972, BGCA, CN 345, 34-1. In Birmingham, by comparison, the initial crusade executive committee contained at least five black members out of a total of 34. See Article of Incorporation, Birmingham crusade, 10 November 1971, BGCA, CN 17, 25-3.

[75] Minutes, publicity committee, 28 March 1973, BGCA, CN 4, 18-8.

[76] "BLACK LEADERS OF ATLANTA," undated [1973]; and John H. Cox to black pastors; both in 11 June 1973, in BGCA, CN 4, 17-14.

[77] Jimmy Carter to Harry Williams, 11 May 1973, BGCA, CN 4, 15-23.

[78] Executive committee minutes, 16 May 1973, BGCA, CN 4, 18-23. Greater black participation was also a major concern at the Charlotte crusade, which preceded the Atlanta crusade by one month. See Norman Sanders to Williams and Larry Turner, 12 November 1971, BGCA, CN 4, 12-28.

his early desegregated crusades in such places as Louisville and Charlotte.[79] While Graham received his customary attacks from the theological right, the most stinging and publicized criticisms came from the black activist community, thus continuing a tradition of black skepticism toward Graham that had evolved into outright animosity during the Nixon years. Black criticism of Graham made headlines days before the first crusade meeting, when Hosea Williams, a civil rights veteran and president of the Atlanta chapter of SCLC, accused the evangelist of practicing a "theology of hypocrisy" and urged blacks and "right-thinking whites" to boycott the crusade. A survivor of the nightsticks and tear gas of Selma, Williams had developed a well-earned reputation as an activist gadfly. Tellingly, Cousins dismissed him as a notorious racist. Williams was joined in his opposition by national SCLC President Ralph Abernathy, who claimed his church had not received materials advertising the crusade. Williams, on the other hand, lamented the "high pressure" crusade supporters had exerted on black ministers to back the revival. Protesters picketed the first crusade service with signs reading, "Billy Graham is a Racist" and "Billy Graham Feed the Hungry."[80]

Hosea Williams offered a thorough list of his problems with Graham. His criticisms resembled those of Baton Rouge activists who had confronted the evangelist during his 1970 crusade there. The evangelist had not only "furnished the theology" of Nixon, said Williams; he had failed to oppose the numerous federal cutbacks supported by the Nixon administration. Unbeknownst to Williams, Graham had in fact invited

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[79] *Atlanta Constitution*, 26 June 1973.

[80] *Atlanta Journal*, 15 and 20 June 1973. Cousins interview, 4 May 1990, BGCA, CN 141, 47-54. *Atlanta Constitution*, 19 June 1973. Religious News Service (RNS), 22 June 1973, in BGCA, CN 345, 34-2.

Nixon to attend a service in Atlanta or at three other crusades later that year. (He had also invited Lyndon Johnson to attend the Baton Rouge crusade.) In addition, Williams charged, Graham was on record as a supporter of capital punishment. While, in truth, Graham had publicly stated that he was reconsidering the issue of capital punishment, the matter had particular salience in the recent aftermath of an offhand remark from Graham that rapists should face the penalty of castration. The racially loaded comment, which Graham had made while holding desegregated rallies in South Africa, was roundly denounced in the American black press. Graham had also spoken optimistically about the future of South Africa's race relations, drawing an analogy with "the early days of integration in the Southern part of the United States." In response, Abernathy had castigated him as someone who "heaps praise on South Africa, a country which is worse than South Louisiana." Lastly, charged Williams, Graham had yet to speak critically about the allegations surrounding the Watergate break-in.[81] Indeed, while Williams ignored Graham's recent op-ed piece in the *New York Times* arguing in favor of prosecuting Watergate-related crimes (which Graham did not link to Nixon), the Watergate crisis represented to Graham in Atlanta what the Wallace shooting had in Birmingham: an outside issue the evangelist could not escape no matter how much he selectively circumscribed his role as a public figure. In the case of Watergate, though, Graham's investment in the issue was a matter of public assumption, not to mention

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[81] Williams comments in *Atlanta Journal*, 15 June 1973. News release from Citizens Concerned with Social Responsibilities of the Church in Baton Rouge, 19 October 1970, BGCA, CN 345, 29-18; and "A Plea for Peace and Social Justice," leaflet distributed on 25 October 1970, BGCA, CN 345, 29-19. Rose Mary Woods to Nixon, 16 June 1973, BGCA, CN 74, 3-7 [original in NPM]. Graham to Lyndon Johnson, 8 September 1970, BGCA, CN 4, 4-19. Atlanta press conference transcript, 24 April 1973, BGCA, CN 24, 3-2. Edward E. Plowman, "Billy and the Blacks: Atlanta and Graham Revisited," *Christianity Today*, 20 July 1973, 40. *Today Show* interview with Barbara Walters, 27 April 1973, BGCA, CN 345, 68-1. *Beaumont (TX) Enterprise*, 14 March 1973, in BGCA, CN 360, R35.

public intrigue. As he continually ducked the many questions about Watergate that came his way, his *lack* of comment made headlines.[82]

A final source of black criticism grew out of the very nature of Cousins' ambitions. The crusade quickly became associated with the business elite of Atlanta, a connection a Sunday paper profile of Cousins helped readers make. "When Billy Graham came to Atlanta, who was his host?" asked Williams. "Mr. Cousins, one of the richest men in the Southeast. When Jesus Christ came into a town, he dwelled among the poor people."[83] The *Washington Post* likewise quoted an SCLC official who wondered why Graham had not reached out more extensively to lower-income residents. Instead, Graham had "established ties with the rich," with "people like Tom Cousins."[84]

Cousins, unsurprisingly, was not inclined to accept this explanation for the low black attendance, about which he and Harry Williams expressed initial perplexity. As possible reasons, they cited the difficulty of communicating with Atlanta's many small-sized black churches and, most importantly, an unexpected, mid-week strike by city bus drivers. The latter explanation had credence, since many Atlanta blacks relied on the bus system. Cousins successfully sought a court injunction against the allegedly wildcat strike, but the ruling did not take effect until after the crusade had ended.[85] Despite the strike, overall attendance remained high, justifying the decision to hold the crusade in the baseball stadium of the Braves, rather than in the Omni Coliseum, as Graham had

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[82] *New York Times*, 6 May 1973. *Atlanta Constitution*, 13 June 1973. For more on Graham and Watergate, see Chapter VII.

[83] *Rome (GA) News-Tribune*, 26 June 1973, in BGCA, CN 360, R35.

[84] *Washington Post*, 29 June 1973.

[85] *Atlanta Journal*, 25 June 1973. Cousins interview, 25 May 1977, BGCA, CN 141, 3-6.

originally desired.[86] In the end, the strike could not account for the depth of Graham's unpopularity among many African Americans, a trend that had only increased during the months since the Birmingham crusade. In Atlanta, a city with more extensive black activist networks than Birmingham, the distrust of Graham was especially acute. This wound, as subsequent crusades in Raleigh and Minneapolis revealed, would not begin to heal until well after Watergate and Nixon had run their courses.[87]

The Graham team responded to its race problem with a mixture of denial and adjustment. Having predicted a solid black response to the crusade, the evangelist initially downplayed the criticism, describing Hosea Williams as a long-time friend (albeit a "misinformed" one) and inviting him and his supporters to attend services whether "they come with a picket or not."[88] The evangelist referenced the past support of Martin Luther King, Jr., whose grave he had recently visited with the elder King, noting that the younger King had played a role in an earlier invitation to hold a crusade in Atlanta.[89] Graham also gave an interview to the friendly *Atlanta Daily World* in which he again spoke highly of South Africa and argued that blacks had "more freedom today and [a] higher standard of living" as a result of civil rights advances.[90] Because of the unavoidable nature of the issue in Atlanta, Graham's sermons addressed race in a more direct manner than in Birmingham—or any previous southern crusade, for that matter.

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[86] *Dade City* (FL) *Banner* (UPI), 14 November 1972, in BGCA, CN 360, R35.

[87] Martin, *Prophet*, 414. *Raleigh Times*, 20 September 1973, in BGCA, CN 360, R35.

[88] *Grenada* (MS) *Sentinel-Star* (UPI), 26 April 1973; and *Asheville* (NC) *Times* (AP), 16 June 1973; both in BGCA, CN 360, R35.

[89] Atlanta press conference transcript, 15 June 1973, BGCA, CN 24, 3-7. Graham was possibly referring to a 1964 meeting.

[90] *Atlanta Daily World*, 24 June 1973.

Agape love, he stressed, remained "the key to the race question in Atlanta or any other city in America." Graham also declared, as he had to selected audiences since the 1950s, that Jesus had brown, not white, skin. Still, he dedicated more substantive time in his sermons to other social matters, such as marriage, which he claimed faced greater threats than at any time "since Sodom and Gomorrah."[91]

Other responses to the low black turnout were more programmatic. John Wilson, a white former president of the Atlanta Chamber of Commerce, urged members to bring their black friends to the crusade.[92] The Graham team prominently featured at least one black platform guest during each crusade service. Invitees included former president of Morehouse University Benjamin Mays, who had expressed sympathy for Graham's Birmingham rally back in 1964 (but who did not accept the invitation). Martin Luther King, Sr., gave the invocation during one service, as had his son sixteen years earlier in New York City. Another platform guest was Rev. Edward V. Hill, a strong Graham backer and founding member of SCLC (who was introduced as such).[93]

The Graham counteroffensive climaxed with a mid-week public affirmation of the crusade released by seven leading black clerics, including J. A. Wilborn of Union Baptist, co-chair of the executive committee. Released the same night when Graham received eight bound volumes of signatures from South Carolinians eager for their own crusade, the ministers' statement urged greater black attendance and declared that black leaders had been included in all aspects of the crusade from the beginning. The statement

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[91] *Atlanta Journal*, 19 June 1973. *Atlanta Constitution*, 25 June 1973.

[92] *Atlanta Constitution*, 20 June 1973.

[93] List of platform guests, 18-24 June 1973, BGCA, CN 4, 18-14. Robert H. Jones to Benjamin Mays, 15 June 1973, BGCA, CN 4, 18-19. Plowman, "Billy and the Blacks," 40.

bolstered the accuracy of Graham's subsequent claim that a majority of black ministers in the area supported him. An *Atlanta Journal* article mentioned in passing that a meeting between the black ministers and Cousins had preceded the release of the statement. Cousins remembered the meeting as a critical moment when he let his guard down, blasting the ministers for not countering Hosea Williams. In paternalistic fashion, Cousins reminded them of the many times they had asked him for help in the past; this relationship, he bluntly stated, was now in jeopardy. According to Cousins, he then left the room, and the ministers voted in favor of a statement.[94] Still, the gesture did little to increase black attendance. Out of an average crowd of 38,000 per service, black attendance reportedly dipped as low as 400 one night.[95]

Following the crusade, Graham grew more candid about his frustrations; like Cousins, he struggled to find explanations. Some black ministers had suggested to Graham that black Atlantans were hesitant to leave their homes at night for fear of robbery. Besides, the total population of metro Atlanta area was only 20 percent black, making the 5 percent turnout appear somewhat less extreme. Graham contended that he lacked the appeal of Reverend Ike (Frederick Eikerenkoetter), a black evangelist and wealth gospel advocate.[96] The crusade caused much soul searching within the BGEA,

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[94] *Atlanta Journal*, 21 June 1973. Atlanta press conference transcript, 25 June 1973, BGCA, CN 24, 3-8. Cousins interview, 4 May 1990, BGCA, CN 141, 47-54.

[95] Plowman, "Billy and the Blacks," 40. The total crusade attendance was 266,000. See "Glory in Georgia," *Decision*, September 1973, 14.

[96] *Atlanta Constitution*, 23 June 1973. Atlanta press conference transcript, 25 June 1973, BGCA, CN 24, 3-8.

which soon released a booklet documenting Graham's desegregated crusades as far back as Chattanooga in 1953. The booklet included a small photograph of the Atlanta choir.[97]

Cousins was likewise unsure about the upshot of the crusade for his vision of a renewed Atlanta leadership. His ambivalence reflected larger tensions within a city transitioning away from the civil rights era and toward black political dominance. Because of the biracial crusade planning process, Cousins optimistically insisted four years later, Atlanta's race relations clearly exceeded those of northern cities. By then, many of the persons he had identified for roles in the crusade remained involved in civic activities. Cousins and fellow crusade boosters had discussed such matters as crime and poverty, and had even proposed asking area ministers to boycott the city's liberal newspapers. A biracial "What Now?" committee, headed by John Wilson and created for the purpose of implementing Cousins' vision, yielded few substantive results, however. The major reason was the race issue. As a result of the crusade's problems, the otherwise theology-shy Cousins professed a definite belief in Satan, a force Graham often told crusade committees could disrupt even the most bountiful evangelistic harvest.[98] For the bus strike, at least, Cousins could find no other explanation. Like the real estate king in *A Man in Full*, Cousins went on to hit an economic rough patch during the mid-1970s, when his Omni Coliseum failed to fulfill its promise as a downtown magnet. Likewise, white Atlanta business elites struggled to adjust to Mayor Maynard Jackson, who won office several months after the crusade and who, while by no means a Hosea Williams-

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[97] *Billy Graham and the Black Community* (Minneapolis: World Wide Productions, 1973), 36. See also *Raleigh Times*, 20 September 1973, in BGCA, CN 360, R35.

[98] Cousins interviews, 25 May 1977, BGCA, CN 141, 3-6; and 4 May 1990, BGCA, CN 141, 44-54. *Atlanta Journal*, 20 June 1973, in BGCA, CN 360, R35.

style activist, possessed majority strength in the very neighborhoods where Graham's crusade had held little sway. Both Cousins and his fellow Atlanta elites, however, saw better times by the subsequent decade, when they continued the city's tradition of reinventions on a New South theme.[99] For Cousins, this meant following the flow of capital to the suburbs.[100] In Atlanta's successful bid for the 1996 Summer Olympics, it sold itself as "a city that has managed to shape a technologically-advanced environment without compromising its moral vision or charming quality of life."[101] Perhaps this was what Cousins originally had in mind.

The Posited Model South

In both Birmingham and Atlanta, to be sure, Graham never fully embraced the more civically oriented ambitions of area crusade boosters, reiterating on numerous occasions the primacy of his spiritual motives. Before the Atlanta crusade, he denied any aspirations for his revival to affect Atlanta's politics.[102] BGEA staffers appeared to share this concern. Longtime Graham supporter Vernon Patterson complained of a trend, noticeable in Charlotte one month before the Birmingham crusade, in which the crusade leadership consisted of visible civic figures, rather than well-known Christians.[103]

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[99] Allen, *Rising*, 167-241.

[100] U.S. Newswire, 2 December 2002, http//:www.proquest.umi.com (accessed 23 January 2006).

[101] Quoted in Rutheiser, *Imagineering*, 3. Racial unity was a major of theme when Graham returned to Atlanta in 1994. Then, as well, several high-profile black clergy did not support the effort. See *Atlanta Constitution*, 25 October 1994.

[102] *Atlanta Journal & Constitution Magazine*, 17 June 1973.

[103] Vernon Patterson interview, May/July 1976, BGCA, CN 141, 5-29.

Another BGEA staffer asked an Atlanta crusade leader whether he thought the crusade was primarily an effort to improve the image of the city and ease its racial struggles.[104]

Yet the same Graham who had communicated to the point of exaggeration his electoral usefulness to Richard Nixon surely supposed his crusades might boost the civic, as well as the religious, spirits of Birmingham and Atlanta. For both types of leaders in those cities, the perceived benefits of a Graham crusade clearly extended beyond the BGEA's stated mission of spreading salvation. While this dynamic had been present in Graham crusades since the early 1950s, it assumed particular relevance for the urban South during a period when the evangelist possessed a discernable socio-political identity. In Birmingham and Atlanta, Graham supported the interests of white leaders distancing themselves from their segregationist pasts. At least since his 1958-1959 interventions in Clinton and Little Rock, he had stressed the significance of his evangelism for the larger social trials of the South. Like Charles Finney's 1831 revival in Rochester, moreover, Graham crusades paid special attention to the city's leadership class, emphasizing high-profile conversions and platform appearances. While this strategy undoubtedly paid deference to the cult of celebrity, it also evinced a corollary to the regenerational theory of social change. If Graham assumed that social transformation would flow outward from the regenerated individual heart, then his crusade practices suggested that temporal change was also a top-down endeavor in which Christ-filled leadership would yield better citizens. Ultimately, whatever his reservations about Cousins' motivations for the crusade, Graham was willing to be employed—indeed, *used*—on behalf of Sunbelt boosterism. He implicitly (and often explicitly) confirmed

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[104] Russell Dilday interview, 5 March 1980, BGCA, CN 141, 11-10.

assertions that the South had somehow solved most of its racial problems. Indeed, he readily spoke the language of boosterism in newspaper and national publications, and he eagerly connected the Nixon administration with persons such as Cousins. At the same time, Graham affirmed an evangelical faith that, as attendance figures showed, resonated most effectively in the South. At the start of the post-civil rights era and during a decade when evangelicalism entered the White House, such faith became an overall benefit to the region's reputation—a distraction from race and, moreover, a means of presenting the South as worthy of emulation.[105]

In the end, Graham's crusades in Birmingham and Atlanta (and, by extension, his contemporaneous visits to Baton Rouge, Charlotte, Raleigh, and Jackson) assisted in the creation of a nominally post-segregation South desiring to shake off images of racial oppressiveness.[106] Graham's use of New South discourse alongside his altar calls suggested that the region might do so without also shaking off its evangelical loyalties. As many of his critics within and outside of the region recognized, this newest New

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[105] *Newsweek* declared 1976, the same year as the *Time* special issue on the South, "The Year of the Evangelicals." See "Born Again!" *Newsweek*, 25 October 1976, 68-78.

[106] During the Baton Rouge crusade of 1970, a group of religious activists confronted the evangelist at his opening press conference, informing him that several local Southern Baptist churches would not permit racially mixed groups to attend services. The chair of the Baton Rouge crusade executive committee apparently belonged to one of those churches. Feeling rebuffed by Graham's unresponsiveness to their concerns, either this group or a closely related one soon produced a leaflet criticizing Graham for his lack of social involvement and asking him to use his influence to promote peace in Vietnam. The evangelist also received a petition asking him to do the same. The controversy made the AP wire after Organization of Economic Opportunity head Donald Rumsfeld, acting on a complaint from either Graham or (more likely) a BGEA associate or crusade worker, ordered an investigation of a Citizens Concerned spokesperson who was also a VISTA supervisor in the area. As was true in Atlanta, though, Graham received cooperation from certain elite black ministers in Baton Rouge, including veteran civil rights leader Reverend T. J. Jemison. News release from Citizens Concerned with Social Responsibilities of the Church in Baton Rouge, 19 October 1970, BGCA, CN 345, 29-18. *Baton Rouge Reveille*, 22 October 1970; and *Athens* (TN) *Post-Athenian* (AP), 2 November 1970; both in BGCA, CN 360, R33. "A Plea for Peace and Social Justice," leaflet distributed on 25 October 1970, BGCA, CN 345, 29-19. RNS, 3 November 1970, in BGCA, CN 506, 2-8. "Betty" to Eva Prior, 30 October 1970; and related clippings; both in BGCA, CN 345, 29-17. Louisiana Billy Graham Executive Committee list, 28 July 1970, BGCA, CN 345, 29-11.

South would not satisfy liberal hopes for a new class-based politics, nor would it please such civil rights veterans as Hosea Williams and Ralph Abernathy. Visions of the South as a potential model shifted out of the hands of activists and into those of post-segregation boosters, who cast the region as an entrepreneurial boon and a bastion of social decency, ignoring the wealth of evidence to the contrary. This was the Sunbelt South, a region Graham publicly affirmed and that Nixon's southern strategist Harry Dent envisioned as part of a new Republican majority. This imagined South had solved its racial problems—had not only rejoined the nation, but could now make that nation better, modeling good faith, as well as good politics. According to this viewpoint, the social problems of the nation were no longer racial in nature (or, if they were, remained limited to the North); only liberals and black activists, absorbed in their own crusades, still considered race a pressing matter. The Atlanta crusade, of course, challenged this thesis and exposed the post-racial rhetoric of the Sunbelt as an attempt to whitewash reality. Atlanta also revealed the extent to which Watergate was becoming a millstone for Graham. When feasible, though, lack of discussion about race created space for a new set of social concerns. In the words of the *Birmingham News*, "other issues" had emerged. On these issues, as well as on Watergate, Graham had much to say.

CHAPTER VII

"BEFORE THE WATERGATE"

> And all the people gathered as one man into the square before the Water Gate; and they told Ezra the scribe to bring the book of the law of Moses which the LORD had given to Israel. . . . And he read from it facing the square before the Water Gate from early morning until midday, in the presence of the men and the women and those who could understand; and the ears of all the people were attentive to the book of the law.
>
> Nehemiah Chapter 8, Verses 1 and 3 (Revised Standard Version)

> Actually, the seeds of my decision had been planted . . . by the Reverend Billy Graham. He visited my family for a summer weekend in Maine. . . . Over the course of that weekend, Reverend Graham planted a mustard seed in my soul, a seed that grew over the next year. He led me to the path, and I began walking. . . . It was the beginning of a new walk where I would recommit my heart to Jesus Christ.
>
> George W. Bush[1]

Despite tensions in Atlanta and elsewhere, the main domestic issue that dogged Graham by 1973 was not race, but the Watergate crisis, a matter the evangelist studiously avoided in the immediate aftermath of the 1972 presidential election. While the Sunbelt image gained appeal, the politician who had done so much to facilitate that image—Richard Nixon—resigned and left office in disgrace. A host of galvanizing social issues, such as abortion and the Equal Rights Amendment, bubbled beneath the surface of Watergate and would gain momentum later in the decade.

Graham finally went public regarding Watergate during the spring of 1973, when he accepted an invitation from *New York Times* publisher Arthur Sulzberger to author an

[1] George W. Bush, *A Charge to Keep* (New York: William Morrow, 1999), 136. Graham's visit to Maine occurred in 1985.

op-ed piece, titled "Watergate and Its Lessons of Morality." The cynicism evident in the transgressions of Watergate, Graham wrote, was "but a symptom of the deeper moral crisis that affects the nation." While Graham urged firm, but fair punishment for Watergate-related crimes (assuming Nixon had no part in them), his primary target was a nation that had "condoned amoral permissiveness that would make Sodom blush." Preaching his standard brand of soft jeremiad, the evangelist appealed for a return to biblical norms. He quoted a coincidental, yet seemingly appropriate passage from the Old Testament book of Nehemiah in which post-exilic Jews—having returned from the Babylonian captivity, the product of previous un-repentance—gathered "before the Water Gate" in Jerusalem to hear the scribe Ezra read from the law of Moses, a body of covenantal precepts Graham thought no less relevant to the Watergate scandal.[2] Graham's use of scripture exemplified a phenomenon, which anthropologist Susan Friend Harding has observed in fundamentalist preaching (although it applies equally to the evangelical Graham), wherein scripture takes on a "generative quality" and is "at once a closed canon and an open book, still alive, a living Word."[3] Indeed, Graham's sermons frequently absorbed contemporary catch phrases into established biblical concepts, folding newspaper headlines into scriptural timelines. In the case of Watergate and "Water Gate," however, growing numbers of commentators accused Graham of a reverse operation: employing biblical language for the secular end of defending Nixon by any

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[2] *New York Times*, 6 May 1973. William Martin, *A Prophet With Honor: The Billy Graham Story* (New York: William Morrow, 1991), 425. Graham claimed that his first exposure to the verses came from a *New York Times* article by Harrison Salisbury. See Dallas press conference transcript, 14 June 1973, Billy Graham Center Archives (BGCA), CN 24, Box 3, Folder 6 (3-6).

[3] Susan Friend Harding, *The Book of Jerry Falwell: Fundamentalist Language and Politics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton, 2000), 27-28. In Graham crusades, observed a skeptical journalist, "[p]olitical slogans are spiritualized and depoliticized." As examples, the journalist cited "moral ecology" and "Real peace through God." *Chicago Sun-Times*, 12 June 1971, in BGCA, CN 360, R21.

means—or analogy—necessary. As the ramifications of Watergate intensified throughout 1973, Graham struggled to find a balance between protecting the president and interpreting the crisis for evangelistic purposes. Initially, the tasks complemented one another; Watergate as synecdoche, or "symptom," served to de-personalize the scandal and shift attention away from Nixon. Defending Nixon proved more difficult, though, as investigators and the public increasingly linked the sins of Watergate with the president himself.

The evangelist's citation of Nehemiah 8 revealed two dynamics that would resonate within American political culture during the 1970s and beyond: his evangelical relativizing of the Watergate crisis and his concomitant appeal for a national return to biblical norms. The two trends operated somewhat uncomfortably beside each other. Putting Watergate in perspective reflected a tragic, post-"Fall" reading of human society (i.e., one informed by the biblical story of the Garden of Eden), while using the crisis to evangelize evinced a moralistic, covenantal perspective subsequently associated with the Christian Right. Yet Graham influenced both phenomena. Although the Christian Right garnered more headlines, the evangelical social ethics evident in Graham's explanation of Watergate suggested a somewhat more subtle, but equally enduring role for faith-informed politics—one very much alive in the second Bush White House.

Graham's influence in the public sphere endured long after a presidential crisis from which he did not escape untainted. It did so despite his largely successful, if somewhat misleading, effort to depoliticize himself in the years following Watergate. His evangelical explanations of Watergate—how he, as well as several former Nixon staffers, described the crisis in terms simultaneously universalistic and relative—revealed

one reason why this was so. Another reason concerned the rapid emergence of the Christian Right during the latter half of the 1970s. The evangelist exemplified a larger regional shift away from explicitly racial matters and toward a range of gender- and family-oriented social issues that influenced the growth of conservative Christian activism. While Graham's relationship to the Christian Right was ambiguous, his legacy in the aftermath of Watergate continued to inform the paramount position of evangelicalism in the political culture of the post-civil rights era South and, increasingly, the nation. In short, Graham and Watergate created space for the evangelicalization of American politics. More than a specific Christian social ideal, this trend entailed the triumph of evangelical discourse—a turn toward character and confessionalism coexistent, more often than not, with conservative politics.

"There's a little bit of Watergate in all of us."

The Watergate crisis brought about the nadir of Graham's public image, a fact relished by the many commentators who cast him as, at best, a lackey of the Nixon administration or, at worst, a dangerously influential reactionary. His periodic proposal of the adage, "There's a little bit of Watergate in all of us," did little to dissuade his critics. From September 1973 until Nixon resigned eleven months later, the evangelist uttered these words (or variations on them) on at least five occasions, including once to a national television audience.[4] While the maxim conveyed an obvious amount of

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[4] Religious News Service (RNS), 27 September 1973, in BGCA, CN 345, 68-1; "The National Crisis," televised *Hour of Decision* sermon delivered on New Year's Eve, 1973 (Minneapolis: Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, 1974); Manhattan, KS, press conference, 4 March 1974, BGCA, CN 24, T20; *Cleveland Press*, 13 April 1974, in BGCA, CN 360, R35; and *Atlanta Journal*, 14 June 1974, in BGCA, CN 360, R35.

evasiveness, it also reflected an evangelical social ethic that Graham continued to express throughout the Watergate crisis, as he reflexively and then awkwardly, defended his friend Nixon. By personalizing Watergate, Graham also defined it as part of a more important, if also more general, crisis of individual hearts. He emphasized the sinful proclivities of humanity (made all the more so by a permissive society), as opposed to focusing on the structural flaws of the political system or even the individual crimes within the Nixon administration. In locating the meaning of Watergate in human sinfulness writ large and writ individual, rather than in the White House, the evangelist, along with a number of Watergate-era converts to evangelicalism, spoke a language of post-Fall universalism that cast the affair itself in relative terms. Graham's prescription for Watergate thus involved a double standard. Spiritually, the crisis necessitated a universal mandate for repentance and revival; politically, it was but another sin, rather than a constitutional crisis.

Graham passed through three stages in his responses to Watergate. These stages, while developmentally discrete, compounded into an awkward and muddled mixture of theology and partisanship. At first, Graham simply denied the significance of the crisis. Later, he employed the scandal for devotional and prophetic purposes before, lastly, directing the language of conversion toward the inevitable embodiment of Watergate, Nixon himself. Like most of the nation, Graham did not anticipate the tumult to come when news of the Watergate burglary and its possible links to the Nixon re-election effort first appeared during the summer and fall of 1972. Days before the presidential election that year, Graham dismissed the alleged crimes as "shenanigans," averred that he was "convinced that President Nixon knew nothing about it," and criticized George

McGovern for accusing the Nixon administration of immoral practices.[5] Privately, Graham told Nixon that he would emphasize the president's "personal morality and integrity" at an upcoming press conference and expressed to Chief of Staff H. R. Haldeman consternation "that people who made a hero of [Daniel] Ellsberg for stealing the Pentagon Papers are so deeply concerned about the alleged escapade at Watergate." The evangelist also volunteered to vouch for the characters of Haldeman and fellow aide Dwight Chapin, both of whom later saw prison time for Watergate-related crimes.[6] As the crisis intensified during the winter of 1973, Graham attempted to frame his relationship to Nixon—alternately, as a pastor or friend—so as to minimize his responsibilities regarding the public discussion of Watergate. "When a member of the congregation is hurt or in trouble, the heart of the pastor goes out to him and to his family," Graham said of Nixon in a statement published on May 1, 1973, immediately following the forced resignations of Haldeman and fellow staffer John Ehrlichman, as well as the firing of White House Counsel John Dean.[7] Still, Graham defended Nixon with the passion of a friend and the rationale of a true believer. It was inconceivable to Graham that someone as ethically sound and politically intelligent as Nixon had any previous knowledge of the Watergate shenanigans.

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[5] *Alhambra (CA) Post-Advocate*, 2 November 1972, in BGCA, CN 360, R35. The most authoritative scholarly account of the Watergate affair is Stanley I. Kutler, *The Wars of Watergate: The Last Crisis of Richard Nixon* (New York: Knopf, 1990). For a cogent synthesis incorporating recent scholarship, see Keith W. Olson, *Watergate: The Presidential Scandal That Shook America* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2003).

[6] White House Conversation 31-85, 16 October 1972, National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), Nixon Presidential Materials (NPM). Graham to H. R. Haldeman, 21 October 1972, BGCA, CN 74, 3-7 [original in NPM]. Haldeman, *The Haldeman Diaries: Inside the Nixon White House* [CD-ROM] (Santa Monica, CA: Sony Imagesoft, 1994), 27 October 1972.

[7] *Asheville* (NC) *Citizen* (AP), 1 May 1973.

While Graham the political loyalist could not initially conceive of Watergate as anything other than a partisan attack on Nixon, Graham the evangelist eventually identified a certain devotional value in the crisis.[8] The use of Watergate for evangelistic purposes did not, as Nixon initially feared, signify a retreat from his support for the administration.[9] To the contrary, and to the benefit of Nixon, the meaning Graham found in Watergate remained within the framework of evangelical universalism, as Graham went to great lengths to keep the devotional and political elements of Watergate separate. His May 1 statement and *New York Times* op-ed represented the official line of the Graham team regarding Watergate: The bad apples behind the break-in should be punished, yet the proper national response to Watergate was not political retaliation, but a renewed focus on spiritual and moral slippage. In the *Times* piece, Graham employed Watergate to call for a "national and pervasive awakening," even while he urged readers to "put the Watergate affair in proper historical perspective."[10]

Throughout the Watergate crisis, then, Graham turned the affair into a morality tale in which, to cite one example, Nixon apparatchik Jeb Magruder represented a kind of everyman, swept toward lawlessness by the secular gusts of American society. "A nation confused for years by the teaching of situational ethics now finds itself dismayed by those in [g]overnment who apparently practiced it," Graham declared, citing an ethical system Magruder had attributed to his moral lapses. "We have lost our moral compass. We

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[8] The term "devotional" is used here in an evangelical Protestant sense (i.e., as a scripted, often anecdotal lesson to ponder and apply, rather than as a ritual to perform).

[9] Nixon feared that Graham was "jumping ship." Nixon and Ronald Ziegler, 28 April 1973, in Kutler, ed., *Abuse of Power: The New Nixon Tapes* (New York: Free Press, 1997), 353.

[10] Graham team members were encouraged to seek additional publication of both the *New York Times* op-ed and the May 1 statement. See Arthur Mathews to Team Members, 8 May 1973, BGCA, CN 345, 68-1. *New York Times*, 6 May 1973.

must get it back."[11] Moral reorientation would require spiritual repentance, as well as a renewed recognition of biblical authority—hence, the model from Nehemiah of Israelites turning to the Law of Moses during their time of trial. Here, Graham found a compromise typology between his self-characterization as a New Testament evangelist and the repeated calls that he imitate the Micahs and Amoses of the Old Testament: John the Baptist, the New Testament's lone prophet. "All I can do," he told a Chicago audience, "is be one voice in the wilderness crying out[,] Warning! Judgment is coming."[12] Graham the qualified prophet spoke to the nation as a whole, not to the Nixon administration in particular. In referring to situational ethics (and, elsewhere, to the ethos of civil disobedience perpetuated by the protest culture of the sixties), the evangelist cited the very type of "moral decadence" Nixon had campaigned against to explain the actions of the president's aides. Perhaps the ultimate example of Graham's desire to extract a meaning from Watergate without also damaging the president was his employment of the word "crisis," the tagline of Nixon's 1968 inaugural address, to describe the moral context of the scandal. The teleology of permissiveness, rather than the machinations of the Nixon White House, lent a certain inevitability to Watergate. Graham's proposed solution was no less inevitable. While even Adam and Eve had tried to "cover up," Graham said in terms reflective of Susan Friend Harding's observation about preacherly rhetoric, the "greatest cover up of all was Calvary, where our Lord shed his blood to cover our sins and we're all sinners."[13]

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[11] *New York Times*, 29 May 1974.

[12] *Cleveland Press*, 13 April 1974, in BGCA, CN 360, R35. Matthew 3:3 introduces John the Baptist by quoting Isaiah's prophecy concerning "[t]he voice of one crying in the wilderness" (RSV).

Thus, while Graham readily linked Watergate with moral declension, he did not describe this declension in terms readily translatable into a political or legal solution. As a result of Watergate, he told a sympathetic group of southern newspaper publishers, the media had an opportunity to lead a "moral revolution," an effort Graham did not believe required more investigative journalism.[14] Watergate was but a "*symbol* of political corruption and evil [italics mine]," yet another expression of human frailty. As he had done with the issue of racial strife during the Civil Rights Movement, Graham comfortably associated the Watergate affair with such international crisis spots as Cyprus and Vietnam. Both moves—distinguishing between moral and political solutions, as well as turning Watergate into a symbol—downplayed the singularity of the crisis. Even as Graham put greater public distance between himself and Nixon by the start of 1974, the evangelist's characterization of Watergate still distracted attention from the specific culpability of the administration. In a well-publicized interview with *Christianity Today* published in January 1974, Graham characterized allegations of his own implication in the crisis as McCarthy-style guilt by association. At the same time, he infused Watergate with an element of tragedy. During the 1972 campaign, he argued, Nixon staffers had employed an ends-justifies-the-means ethic because of their "magnificent obsession to change the country and the world"—an argument reminiscent of the testimony of John Mitchell, head of the 1972 reelection campaign.[15] Hubris was a part of the human

[13] "Watergate," *Christianity Today*, 4 January 1974, 14. *New York Times*, 29 May 1974. On "crisis," see *New York Times*, 6 May 1973; and Chapter V. *Cleveland Press*, 13 April 1974, in BGCA, CN 360, R35. Nixon himself cynically attempted to place Watergate in the context of a lawless counterculture that had ennobled civil disobedience. See *Washington Post*, 16 August 1973.

[14] Address to the Southern Newspapers Publishers Association, 16 September 1974, BGCA, CN 26, T55.

condition, the Watergate in everyone; it transcended party identification. "[T]he nation needs to repent—not just the Republicans, but my own party, the Democrats, as well," Graham told an audience at Duke University.[16] "What caused Watergate?" he asked a group of Southern Baptists two months before Nixon's resignation. "Sin. And there is a little bit of Watergate in all of us. So let's not go around being so self-righteous. I know bad people in both parties and all over the world."[17]

Graham's truncated moralization of Watergate conveniently allowed him to call for national repentance while expressing confidence that Nixon would survive in office and, even as late as June 1973, contending that it was "too early to make a moral judgment" on the political crisis.[18] Again, Graham attempted to keep politics and evangelism in separate spheres. This distinction often meant little more than the difference between a press conference and a sermon, however. His evangelistic uses of Watergate initially did little to threaten or even qualify his unabashed support for Nixon, whom Graham continued to counsel and praise. A month before Graham came out publicly for the punishment of Watergate wrong-doers, he wrote a supportive letter to Nixon likening the president's predicament to the struggles of the Israelite King David, whom he quote from Psalms 35:11-12: "They accuse me of things I have never even

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[15] "Watergate," 14, 9, 13. Martin, *Prophet*, 427. Martin provides a helpful narrative of Graham's responses to Watergate, yet he does not interrogate the larger relationship between Graham's explanation of the crisis and his social ethics (420-435). In John Mitchell's Senate testimony, he said: "The most important thing to this country was the reelection of Richard Nixon. And I was not about to countenance anything that would stand in the way of that reelection." Quoted in Olson, *Watergate*, 89.

[16] RNS, 27 September 1973, in BGCA, CN 345, 68-1.

[17] *Atlanta Journal*, 14 June 1974, in BGCA, CN 360, R35.

[18] *Raleigh News & Observer* (AP), 15 June 1973, in BGCA, CN 360, R35.

heard about. I do them good but they return me harm."[19] Four days before the May 6 *Times* op-ed appeared, the evangelist advised Nixon to seek out photo-ops with international dignitaries because, as aide Lawrence Higby summarized to Nixon, "[t]he American people need to be diverted from Watergate."[20] Graham did his part by nominating inflation as the most pressing problem for the nation.[21]

While many of Graham's public and private defenses of Nixon were no doubt arguments of expediency, his overall interpretation of Watergate reflected the evangelical social ethic outlined throughout this project. In popular memory, this social ethic manifested itself most acutely in his public reaction upon reading the initial transcripts of the Nixon White House recordings.[22] The evangelist fixated on the matter of Nixon's deleted expletives.[23] Unlike Nixon advisor and former Jesuit priest John McLaughlin (who later hosted a popular public affairs program), Graham could not dismiss swearing—especially taking the Lord's name in vain—as a form of stress release.[24] Yet Graham's focus on profanity in the midst of so many other damning abuses of power, whatever its value as an anecdote, should not distract from the larger significance of the social ethic of evangelical universalism that clearly informed his overall response to

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[19] Graham to Nixon, 6 April 1973, NARA, NPM, White House Central Files (WHCF), 73-"EX FO8 4/1/73-4/30/73." Graham quoted the Living Bible, a colloquial American paraphrase of scripture. See also telephone conversation, Nixon and Graham, 30 April 1973, in *Abuse*, 384.

[20] Lawrence M. Higby to Nixon, 2 May 1973, BGCA, CN 74, 3-5 [original in NPM].

[21] Dallas press conference transcript, 14 June 1973, BGCA, CN 24, 3-6.

[22] Graham himself did not appear in the initial release of the White House transcripts.

[23] *New York Times*, 29 May 1974. Nixon aide Charles Colson recalled his first response to seeing the phrase "expletive deleted" in the transcripts: "[Nixon's] dead in the Bible Belt." See Colson, *Born Again* (Old Tappan, NJ: Chosen Books, 1976), 213.

[24] Martin, *Prophet*, 431.

Watergate. As explicated earlier, evangelical universalism viewed the individual soul as the primary theological and political unit in society, prioritized relational over legislative solutions, and tended to acquiesce to the ultimately inscrutable realm of ordained authority. All three elements were evident in Graham's handling of Watergate.

Focusing on the individual soul and proffering relational (i.e., non-legal or non-political) solutions worked complementarily. Graham characterized Watergate as a call for national repentance, yet he ultimately described this call in individuated terms. Rather than specifically condemning Nixon or any other administration official, Graham focused on the generic sins of the generic individual, suggesting that the conversion of individuals would have a ripple effect on society. This "regenerational" approach prioritized the devotional value of Watergate over any legal or political meanings the crisis might hold. Appropriately, then, Graham called the Nixon tapes as "just a little foretaste of what is to come for all of us, when we have to sit before the Great Committee in Heaven and hear all of the tapes played of our own lives."[25] Still, Graham did not wholly abstract Watergate from temporal social relevance. To the contrary, he unabashedly hoped that the crisis would contribute to the restoration of a national "moral consensus."[26] Graham's description of this moral consensus, however, reflected a quality scholar Dennis P. Hollinger found in his study of evangelical social ethics: "a blurring together of personal and social dimensions of existence," in which "[s]ocial problems are regularly viewed as magnified personal problems."[27] For Graham, the nation's loss of

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[25] *Torrance* (CA) *South Bay Breeze*, 18 September 1974, in BGCA, CN 360, R35.

[26] Address to the Southern Newspapers Publishers Association, 16 September 1974, BGCA, CN 26, T55.

moral consensus boiled down to a breakdown in individual morality. Indeed, he identified the potential "great illusion" of Watergate as the belief "that you can have public virtue without private morality."[28] Morality flowed outward from the individual.

Whatever the lessons of Watergate, Graham's political defense of Nixon hinged not only on their friendship, but also on assumptions of Nixon's inherent legitimacy and the special nature of the presidency.[29] The evangelical focus on social transformation through the individual, which received healthy in-house critiques from Hollinger and a generation of "young evangelicals," coexisted with equally significant appeals for social order and respect for authority.[30] For Graham and other conservative Christians, *legitimate* authority tended to also mean *ordained* authority.[31] In this perspective, which

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[27] Dennis P. Hollinger, *Individualism and Social Ethics: An Evangelical Syncretism* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1982), 109, 108. Hollinger's study is a valuable introduction to the post-World War II synergy between evangelical theology and an individual-centered perspective more commonly associated with the libertarian wing of conservatism.

[28] Address to the Southern Newspapers Publishers Association, 16 September 1974, BGCA, CN 26, T55.

[29] Many evangelicals less intimate with Nixon came to be much more critical of the president. Likewise, members of the early New Right viewed Nixon as a traitor to the conservative cause, and future Christian Right spokesperson Pat Robertson blasted Nixon for having taken advantage of Graham to enhance his political image. See RNS, 12 August 1974 and 7 May 1974 (both in BGCA, CN 345, 68-1); and Richard A. Viguerie, *The New Right: We're Ready to Lead* (Falls Church, VA: The Viguerie Company, 1981), 50-64. However, Graham's hesitancy to blame Nixon for Watergate, as well as his equivalent lack of interest in legislative reforms, were representative of mainstream evangelicalism. To be sure, a number of non-evangelicals (such as the Reform Jewish leader Rabbi Robert I. Kahn and even George McGovern) also employed Watergate as a synecdoche for larger social problems. See RNS, 21 September 1974 and 14 August 1974; both in BGCA, CN 345, 68-1. Their calls for national introspection did not, however, parallel Graham's call for a nationwide revival, nor did they focus on personal sins to the same extent as Graham.

[30] Within the evangelical community, a small, but vibrant group of "young evangelicals" arose during the late 1960s and early 1970s to challenge the type of social ethic described in this chapter. The younger generation often harkened back to the evangelical social activism of the nineteenth century. Graham, however, remained very much in the mainstream of evangelical social thinking throughout the period considered here. On the origins of the evangelical left, see Richard Quebedeaux, *The Young Evangelicals: Revolution in Orthodoxy* (New York: Harper & Row, 1974).

[31] The classic proof texts for ordained authority are Romans 13:1 ("Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God." [RSV]) and, to a lesser extent, I Peter 2:13-14 ("Be subject for the Lord's sake to every

Graham had invoked as a moderate during the Civil Rights Movement, law becomes something to obey, to be subject to, rather than to create or invoke for progressive ends. In his interview with *Christianity Today*, Graham stressed Christians' "one primary duty to those in authority: to pray!"[32] More tellingly, in a quote ridiculed by a *Village Voice* cartoonist, the evangelist wondered if "we as Christians failed to pray enough for Richard Nixon."[33] Such advice assigned to individual Christians a strikingly passive role vis-à-vis ordained authority. Indeed, for all of his obvious attraction to the wheeling and dealing of politics and for all of his savvy as an advisor to politicians, Graham at a fundamental level remained in willful (and, at times, uncomprehending) awe of the workings of high political office. On a number of occasions during Watergate, Graham wondered if Americans expected too much out of their presidents. "The presidency does so much to a man," he said following Nixon's resignation. "The responsibility is almost too much." These lines—which might be read either as another Nixon apologia or as a faint echo of the influential "imperial presidency" thesis of historian Arthur Schlesinger, Jr.—also indicated an important dynamic in Graham's posture toward that political authority which he deemed ordained.[34] If one accepts a modified covenantal theology (i.e., that God actively works through nations or peoples), as Graham did, and if one tends to define sin in individual and not structural terms, as Graham also did, then the mechanics of legitimate political power fall into a unique category, difficult to hold

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human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to praise those who do right." [RSV]).

[32] "Watergate," 18.

[33] *Village Voice*, 5 September 1974, in BGCA, CN 360, R35.

[34] *Greenville News*, 10 August 1974, in BGCA, CN 360, R35. See also Barbara Walters interview, *Today Show*, 27 April 1973, in BGCA, CN 345, 68-1. Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., *The Imperial Presidency* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1973).

accountable to standards of individual morality. Power attains a degree of divine inscrutability, and something as nebulous as job difficulty can become a more plausible excuse for excessive use of that power. Graham found transgressions that were clearly individual and conscious in nature, be they swearing or breaking and entering, easier to identify and denounce than the sins of state.

In addition to reflecting an evangelical posture, Graham's support of Nixon was part of a regional phenomenon, an extension of Nixon's appeal in much of the white South. A number of observers at the time noted that the South remained the region seemingly most loyal to Nixon.[35] Despite the fact that many southern Republicans paid a political price for their loyalty, they were among the most strident congressional defenders of Nixon, who often visited the region when seeking electoral solace. Just after the resignations of Haldeman and Ehrlichman, Republican North Carolina Senator Jesse Helms, whom Nixon had supported during the 1972 campaign, told the president he had "a real friend there" in Graham.[36] The broader southern support for Nixon had much to do with resentment against the presumably liberal media, a sign that Nixon's southern strategy and invocations of the silent majority had yielded regional dividends. A prominent journalist quoted a South Carolinian as saying, "We support and sympathize with the President because we Southerners have been on the receiving end so long ourselves."[37] Graham's public opinions regarding media coverage of the South and the Civil Rights Movement, voiced as recently as his 1972 Birmingham crusade, certainly

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[35] See, for example, Kirkpatrick Sale, *Power Shift: The Rise of the Southern Rim and Its Challenge to the Eastern Establishment* (New York: Random House, 1975), 288-293; and Harry S. Dent, *The Prodigal South Returns to Power* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1978), 9.

[36] Helms to Nixon, 4 May 1973, NARA, NPM, WHCF, 12-JL.

[37] Sale, *Power Shift*, 90.

paralleled these sentiments. On a more intriguing note, his warning against self-righteousness bore resemblance to a more famous Nixon apologia by the southern rock band Lynyrd Skynyrd, whose anthem of sectional pride, "Sweet Home Alabama," feature the line, "Now Watergate does not bother me / Does your conscience bother you?"[38] One historian has argued that these lyrics "captured a wide-spread belief that Nixon was under fire only because liberal arbiters of opinion hewed to a double standard."[39] While Graham certainly echoed this feeling (e.g., his references to the sinfulness of Democrats, as well as Republicans), the evangelist and the rock band had another thing in common: a desire to turn Watergate into something other than a political scandal with a political solution. Through their obviously contrasting mediums, they called for self-reflection—with a goal, for Lynyrd Skynyrd, of northern retreat, and for Graham, of national revival.

The upshot of Graham's evangelical interpretation of Watergate was to present the crisis as a conversion opportunity not only for America, but also for the Watergate participants and for Nixon himself. As the crisis extended into 1974, the evangelist entered the final stage of his handling of Watergate. He urged Nixon to confess his own need for forgiveness. Graham went so far as to propose remarks for Nixon to voice at what turned out to be the president's final prayer breakfast:

> I hope I shall not be judged as hiding behind religion when I say that I have . . . been driven to my knees in prayer. . . . [W]e are all in need of God's forgiveness. Not only for mistakes in judgment, but [for] our sins as well. . . . I want to take this opportunity today to re-dedicate myself to the God that I first learned about at my mother's knee.

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[38] Ed King, Gary Rossington, and Ronnie Van Zant, "Sweet Home Alabama," *Second Helping* (MCA Records, 1974).

[39] David Greenberg, *Nixon's Shadow: The History of an Image* (New York: Norton, 2003), 194.

Perhaps aware of the potential domino effect of even a qualified *mea culpa*, Nixon did not take up Graham's proposal.[40] The suggested remarks reflected the universalization-relativization dynamic, as well as Graham's hope that Nixon would contritely model an evangelical response to Watergate. Graham wanted Nixon to act like the priest Ezra from the Book of Nehemiah, to declare publicly his faith in the Lord so that all might understand the true solution to the nation's crisis. In the eyes of an emerging majority of Americans, however, Nixon personified that very crisis.

Following that prayer breakfast, Graham urged Nixon to draw inspiration from Charles Colson.[41] The Nixon hatchet man was one of a number of high-profile converts to evangelical Christianity during and following Watergate. The conversions of convicted Watergate-related perpetrators Colson, Jeb Magruder and Harry Dent—or, more specifically, how they described their born-again experiences—echoed Graham's simultaneous universalization and relativization of the crisis. As loyalists who had suffered legal consequences because of Watergate, they were more willing than Graham to criticize Nixon as both a person and a leader. Still, none of them joined Common Cause as a result of their experiences; they described the lessons of Watergate in spiritual, rather than political, terms. They all moved on to careers in evangelical organizations directly or closely associated with the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association (BGEA). Magruder, who had overseen the cover up of the Watergate burglary and who later took a position with the youth evangelism organization Young

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[40] Text in Alexander Haig to Nixon, 30 January 1974, NARA, NPM, WHCF, 60-"CF SP 3-162 Prayer Breakfast Remarks." See also Martin, *Prophet*, 429.

[41] Graham to Nixon, 2 February 1974, in Bruce Oudes, ed., *From: The President: Richard Nixon's Secret Files* (New York: Harper & Row, 1989), 609-610.

Life, attributed his willingness to ignore the law during the 1972 campaign to the lax guidelines he had learned from a college ethics professor.[42] Graham echoed Magruder's assertion in his only sermonic reference to Watergate during the 1973 Atlanta crusade.[43]

The conversion of Colson, which occurred while he remained a consultant to Nixon, garnered the most press and, understandably, its fair share of cynicism. The dirty tricks specialist and contributor to the notorious "Enemies List" was led to Christ by Tom Phillips, head of the defense and electronics firm Raytheon, who himself had converted during a Graham crusade. Colson's post-conversion advice to Nixon paralleled that of Graham. Colson proposed that the president declare April 30, 1974 (the anniversary of Lincoln's 1863 National Fast Day) a national day of prayer. Doing so might save Nixon's political skin; but it would also turn Watergate into an ironic good. "I believe that the country has to be lifted out of the doldrums of Watergate," Colson wrote. "Our best hope is to bring about a rebirth of faith and a renewed commitment to God."[44] In later reflections, while not glossing over the specific failings of Nixon, Colson parlayed Watergate into a critique of liberal humanism, the source of the hubris that had infected the White House. "Were Mr. Nixon and his men more evil than any of their predecessors?" the founder of the Prison Fellowship ministry (who did not become

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[42] RNS, 7 December and 28 April 1976; both in BGCA, CN 345, 68-1. Interestingly, the pre-conversion Magruder contradicted Graham's argument that a moral private life would necessarily lead to a moral public life. Magruder wrote, "I think that most of us who were involved in Watergate were unprepared for the pressures and temptations that await you at the highest levels of the political world. We had private morality but not a sense of public morality. Instead of applying our private morality to public affairs, we accepted the President's standards of political behavior, and the results were tragic for him and for us." See Magruder, *An American Life: One Man's Road to Watergate* (New York: Atheneum, 1974), 318.

[43] *Spartanburg* (SC) *Herald*, 25 June 1973, in BGCA, CN 360, R35.

[44] Colson to Nixon, 21 November 1973, NPM, WHCF, 60-"CF SP 3-162." To the satisfaction of Colson, Nixon did reference Lincoln's faith in his prayer breakfast remarks. Tom Phillips had given Colson a book about Lincoln's faith. Colson, *Born Again*, 182-183.

associated with the Christian Right until the presidency of George W. Bush) asked in language strikingly similar to Graham's interpretation of Watergate.

> That they brought the nation Watergate is a *truth*. But is it not only part of a larger *truth*—that all men have the capacity for both good and evil, and the darker side of man's nature can always prevail in any human being? If people believe that just because one bunch of rascals [is] run out of office all the ills which have beset a nation are over, then the real lesson of this ugly time will have been missed—and that delusion could be the greatest tragedy of all. . . . Having seen through Watergate how vulnerable man can be, I no longer believe I am master of my destiny. I need God; . . .[45]

Harry Dent's path to born-again Christianity was the least dramatic of the three and technically represented a reaffirmation of faith (although he described it in terms of a conversion). During his tenure as Nixon's political coordinator, the architect of the southern strategy received much publicity as a Southern Baptist, a known teetotaler, and an organizer of the White House prayer breakfasts.[46] Unlike Colson and Magruder, Dent saw no jail time and suffered minimal political damage for his Watergate-related conviction. Nonetheless, Dent, who during the 1980s served as director of the Billy Graham Lay Center, traced his 1978 spiritual renewal to the fundamental questions Watergate had raised for him about "the nature of man." His devotional-style book on the matter, *Cover Up: The Watergate in All of Us*, invoked Graham's own phraseology and offered perhaps the most extreme version of the Watergate-as-metaphor trope. "The story of Watergate," Dent wrote, "is a replay, thousands of years later, of the Garden of Eden." He defined a personal Watergate as "a sudden confrontation with an event or experience which contains the potential . . . for destruction of our personal honor, worth,

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[45] Colson, *Born Again*, 108-117 and passim (quoted in 11).

[46] "Up at Harry's Place," *Time*, 11 July 1969, 15; and Dent interview, 2 March 1987, BGCA, CN 141, 47-74.

safety or well-being, or that of our family." According to this therapeutic schema, the day of judgment becomes the "ultimate Watergate," and Hitler succumbed to his own Watergate by committing suicide.[47] .

None of the above born-again experiences entailed a clear political upshot. Colson, Magruder, and Dent described their conversions almost wholly in spiritual terms and all three eventually ceased their political work. At the same time, they did not appear to depart from the broader contours of conservative politics. At a 1987 conference on the Nixon presidency, for example, Colson offered an explicitly biblical justification for the occasional lie of state. His critique of liberal humanism would later resound in popular conservatism (and actually resembled Nixon's own campaign language).[48] Dent, like many Republicans throughout the South, softened his tone on race, yet he remained identified with his adopted party.[49] Magruder, meanwhile, questioned the role government programs could play in solving national problems.[50]

In the end, Graham unsuccessfully attempted to fit Nixon into the conversion narrative modeled by Colson and Magruder, and later embraced by Dent. The evangelist's optimism regarding Nixon was, in a word, resilient. Following an early post-resignation meeting with Nixon, Graham declared that the former president had turned to

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[47] Harry S. Dent, *Cover Up: The Watergate in All of Us* (San Bernardino, CA: Here's Life Publishers, 1986), 44-45, 61, 26-27, 13-14, 105. Also like Graham, Dent cited the "water gate" of the Book of Nehemiah in calling for a "spiritual revival" (15). The Billy Graham Lay Center was founded partly to meet the needs of high-profile converts, such as the subjects treated here. See interview with Graham, *Christianity Today*, 18 November 1988, 23.

[48] Leon Friedman and William F. Levantrosser, eds., *Watergate and Afterward: The Legacy of Richard M. Nixon* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1992), 89.

[49] *Washington Post*, 22 August 1981; and Dent interview, 2 March 1987, BGCA, CN 141, 47-54. Although Dent did repent of his racial politics, he had more or less already done so before his faith recommitment.

[50] RNS, 7 December 1976, in BGCA, CN 360, R33.

religion.[51] The evangelist had expressed similar sentiments following Nixon's final prayer breakfast.[52] While Graham's efforts toward this end were less than successful, his general approach to Watergate, including his invocation of an evangelical social ethic, has continued to resonate within American political culture in the years following the crisis. It has resonated beyond the oft-cited "post-Watergate policing of character" (or the correlative "post-Watergate morality"), standards of public scrutiny Graham scarcely applied to Nixon.[53] The value system of evangelical universalism helps explains not simply why Graham found Nixon's profanity more problematic than his abuses of power; it also suggests why Colson and Dent, especially, could convert to evangelical Christianity without substantially altering (or even seriously questioning) their political orientations. While Nixon himself did not pursue this route, a host of subsequent politicians (including George W. Bush and Tom DeLay) exchanged the profane bottle for the priestly garb of Ezra.[54] Also, Graham's approach to Watergate bears intriguing resemblance (if not, of course, a direct causational connection) to the strategies contemporary conservatives have employed to explain (away) political crises that have threatened their partisan commitments. Just as Graham argued that decades of moral slippage had culminated in Watergate, conservative pundits contended in 2002 that the corporate scandals at Enron had grown out of the morally permissive environment of the

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[51] *Tampa Tribune* (UPI), 19 March 1975, in BGCA, CN 360, R35.

[52] Colson, *Born Again*, 183.

[53] Greenberg, *Nixon's Shadow*, 265; and Michael Schudson, *Watergate in American Memory: How We Remember, Forget, and Reconstruct the Past* (New York: BasicBooks, 1992), 154-159.

[54] On Delay, see Lou Dubose and Jan Reid, *The Hammer: Tom Delay, God, Money, and the Rise of the Republican Congress* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2004), 53-56. DeLay dedicated his life to Christ after watching a video on fatherhood produced by Christian Right leader James Dobson.

Clinton years.[55] More recently, Pennsylvania Senator Rick Santorum, a conservative Roman Catholic, drew a connection between his Church's sexual abuse scandal and "cultural liberalism."[56] In all three cases, the focus was on individual morality unleashed by society's decadence, rather than on corruption enabled by the political or financial system. In the cases of Watergate and Enron, the specific role of the sitting president (i.e., the seat of ordained authority) remained largely free from interrogation.

Up from Watergate

In April 1974, four months before Nixon's resignation and another month before the silver anniversary of Graham's watershed Los Angeles crusade, evangelical historian Richard Pierard published an article pointedly titled, "Can Billy Graham Survive Richard Nixon?"[57] The question was more than appropriate in light of the public beating Graham had taken over the Watergate scandal. Many newspaper editorial boards focused specifically on the connection Graham drew between Watergate and a decline in national morality. "The business of blaming a permissive society, a decadent people, and a population prone to sinfulness for high crimes and misdemeanors in the White House will get us nowhere," editorialized the *Norfolk Virginian-Pilot* in response to his *New York Times* op-ed piece. Graham's "short-order sermon," another paper snapped, possessed "the texture and appearance of a flat soufflé."[58] Such criticism gained particular

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[55] "Blaming Liberalism for Enron," 21 January 2002, http://www.slate.com/id/2061023 (accessed 20 February 2006).

[56] *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, 14 July 2005.

[57] Richard Pierard, "Can Billy Graham Survive Richard Nixon?" *Reformed Journal*, April 1974, 7-13.

credence, first, as documents revealed attempts by Haldeman to derive political capital from protests at the Billy Graham Day celebration in Charlotte, and second, as former White House Counsel John Dean testified that Nixon sought to quash Internal Revenue Service inquiries about the tax status of the BGEA.[59] In Christian circles, criticism of Graham's response to Watergate was not confined to the predictable realm of liberal Protestantism. The Presbyterian Church in the United States (Southern Presbyterian), no bastion of theological modernism, briefly considered a resolution imploring Graham to urge Nixon to come clean regarding the Watergate allegations. The resolution failed, undoubtedly to the relief of the denomination's outgoing moderator, Nelson Bell.[60] Additional criticism came from the normally friendly pen of conservative commentator and fellow evangelical Paul Harvey, who back in 1960 had urged Graham not to publicize his endorsement of Nixon in *Life* magazine. Harvey imagined Graham's response to the White House transcripts: "You are remembering that the President never once talked like that around you. . . . It hurts, Billy, but you asked for it."[61]

Yet Graham did survive Watergate, as Pierard suspected he could. The evangelist gradually sought to distance himself from Nixon, a process that began tentatively with a public statement, apparently recorded with the help of his friend and fellow Nixon intimate Charles Crutchfield for release on Thanksgiving Day 1973. Graham said he did

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[58] *Norfolk Virginian-Pilot*; and *Port Chester (NY) Item*, 8 May 1973; both in BGCA, CN 360, R35.

[59] A White House memo indicated that Haldeman relished the possibility of rowdiness and obscene signs among the Billy Graham Day protesters. See *Durham Sun* (AP), 2 August 1973, in BGCA, CN 360, R35. Several protesters filed an unsuccessful lawsuit claiming they had been denied admission to the rally because of their appearance. See *Charlotte News*, 12 September 1975, in BGCA, CN 360, R36. *Atlanta Journal*, 17 July 1974, in BGCA, CN 360, R35. On the origins of the IRS flap, see Chapter V.

[60] *Dallas Times Herald*, 13 June 1973, in BGCA, CN 360, R35.

[61] *Albany* (GA) *Journal*, 24 May 1974, in BGCA, CN 360, R35.

"not always agree" with the administration's actions, yet averred that the "tragic events of Watergate will probably make [Nixon] a stronger man and a better President."[62] He put additional public space between himself and Nixon following the late January 1974 presidential prayer breakfast, his last public appearance with the sitting president. Returning from a major evangelism conference in Switzerland on the cusp of the president's August 9 resignation, Graham placed several unsuccessful phone calls to Nixon. The president may have been seeking to shelter him from the Watergate fallout.[63] During the intervening months, Graham had tellingly revised his description of their relationship. The evangelist had claimed during the 1972 campaign to "know the President as well as anyone outside his immediate family."[64] Nearly two years later, however, Graham suggested that he was never an intimate of Nixon, "contrary to what people thought."[65] Graham again emphasized that he had spent more time in the White House with Lyndon Johnson than with the current president—a count that, while perhaps technically accurate, did not factor in campaign appearances and phone conversations.[66]

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[62] Charles Crutchfield to Graham, 20 November and 7 December 1973; and transcript labeled "For Billy Graham interview 11/21/73"; all in Charles H. Crutchfield Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1-"Graham Papers." Crutchfield passed along the Thanksgiving statement, which was actually intended to bolster support for the president, to the White House. See Rose Mary Woods to unnamed [Nixon], undated [1973] BGCA, CN 74, 3-5 [original in NPM].

[63] Graham to Nixon, 17 August 1974, Richard Nixon Library (RNL), Post Presidential Correspondence, 1974-1979 Billy Graham (PPBG), 1-2. In this letter, Graham enclosed a *Time* article explaining why he "had to be in Europe so long this summer." Graham later claimed that Nixon did not field his repeated phone calls because the president was "protecting" him. Haldeman and Colson doubted the accuracy this claim, although (when prompted by an interviewer) Nixon separately confirmed its basic assumption. See *Charlotte Observer*, 18 May 1975; Martin, *Prophet*, 430; and Graham to John Pollock, 30 December 1986, RNL, Post Presidential Correspondence, Special People A-K, Graham, Billy and Ruth (PPSP), 1-4.

[64] *Alhambra* (CA) *Post-Advocate*, 2 November 1972, in BGCA, CN 360, R35.

[65] *Atlanta Constitution*, 10 August 1974, in BGCA, CN 360, R35.

[66] Manhattan, KS, press conference, 4 March 1974, BGCA, CN 24, T20.

(Johnson likely would not have found time to call Graham from China, as Nixon did at the close of his path-breaking diplomatic visit there.)[67] Interviews with Haldeman and Colson unsurprisingly revealed a much different assumption about the evangelist, whom Haldeman classified as "definitely in [Nixon's] inner circle."[68]

By no means, however, did Graham depart from his general defensiveness about Nixon's stature as a national leader and, more strikingly, Nixon's ultimate culpability in the Watergate affair.[69] Graham privately lobbied President Gerald Ford in favor of a presidential pardon and publicly expressed a sense that attempts "to further hurt [Nixon] would cause great division in the country."[70] Following the pardoning of Nixon, Graham released a statement in support of Ford's action.[71] During the twenty remaining years of Nixon's life, Graham kept in regular touch with the beleaguered ex-president, on whom the evangelist lavished praise in private and then again in public on the occasion of Nixon's 1994 funeral. The details of their many conversations, most of which touched on foreign affairs, occasionally surfaced in the press in a manner reflecting favorably on Nixon. While Graham did not abandon his desire to convert the former president to a more active brand of Christianity, he did little to counter sentiments among Nixon defenders that the media stood to blame for the Watergate crisis.[72]

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[67] Graham to Nixon, 3 April 1988, RNL, PPSP, 1-4; and 18 November 1981, RNL, PPSP, 1-6.

[68] Quoted in Martin, *Prophet*, 393.

[69] In a 1977 interview, Graham said he did not believe Nixon had "yet been totally proven guilty." See *Charlotte Observer*, 8 February 1977.

[70] Graham, *Just As I* Am, 468. Atlanta *Constitution*, 10 August 1974, in BGCA, CN 360, R35.

[71] Statement by Graham, 8 September 1974, BGCA, CN 345, 68-1.

[72] Graham to Nixon, 17 August 1974 and 15 March 1975; and *Albuquerque Tribune*, 18 March 1975; all in RNL, PPBG, 1-2. Graham to John Pollock, 30 December 1986, RNL, PPSP, 1-4. Graham,

In the years following Watergate, Graham liked to publicize his newfound distance from the world of politics. He even conceded that his White House church services had been a mistake.[73] Any assumption that Watergate led Graham to take a page from the Old Testament prophets Amos or Micah oversimplifies matters greatly, however. In truth, the evangelist never completely forsook the political arena.[74] While steering very clear of the excesses of the Nixon years, he continued to find his way into White House memos and, inevitably, onto the borderlands of campaign politics.

Graham's initial dealings with President Gerald Ford suggested that the evangelist initially failed, or chose not, to grasp one apparent lesson of Watergate: that proximity alone can imply partisanship. The evangelist telephoned President Ford during his first day in the office and soon wrote to declare his "total and complete backing and support" and to make himself available as a prayer partner and "someone to talk to who won't quote you." As if to ensure Ford's awareness of the full menu of his services as national pastor, the evangelist also invited him to attend a crusade in Norfolk, Virginia. Ford did not accept the offer, but he eventually followed Nixon's footsteps to Charlotte, appearing with Graham at the bicentennial celebration of the Mecklenburg Declaration of Independence. The two remained in regular contact. Early in the election year of 1976, Graham open-endedly asked Ford to call him "if there is anything that I can do to help in the months ahead." As the election approached, presidential staffers kept on the lookout

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Just As I Am, 463-465. Ruth Graham, who arguably held more conservative political views than her husband, strongly shared his loyalty to Nixon. She speculated that to Nixon that "you signed your political death warrant with the Alger Hiss-Whitaker Chambers case. . . . There are many, many of us who wish you were back in the saddle today." Ruth Graham to Nixon, 3 July 1979, RNL, PPBG, 1-1.

[73] CBS Evening News, 8 August 1976, in BGCA, CN 74, V2.

[74] Eric J. Paddon, "Modern Mordecai: Billy Graham in the Political Arena, 1948-1990" (Ph.D. Dissertation, Ohio University, 1999), 267.

for ways to connect their candidate with the evangelist. That September, apparently at Ford's behest, Graham invited the president to attend a crusade service in his home state of Michigan. Graham stipulated, however, that he would also extend an invitation to Democratic challenger Jimmy Carter (just as the evangelist had invited Hubert Humphrey to the 1968 Pittsburgh crusade, which Nixon had attended). Likewise, Ford would not be permitted to address the audience.[75] Only Ford's running mate, Bob Dole, ultimately traveled to Pontiac and his flight there via a campaign jet caught the attention of reporters.[76] So did Graham's visit to the White House soon thereafter. Accepting an invitation from Ford, who had reason to believe he might still win over evangelical voters from the increasingly vulnerable Carter, Graham rode in the presidential limousine on the occasion of a reception hosted by Liberian President William Tolbert, a Baptist and a friend of the evangelist.[77]

The ambiguity of Graham's relationship with Jimmy Carter provides strong evidence that the evangelist remained a Republican in all but registration. "Graham's partisanship," wrote a critical biographer wrote as far back as 1960, "has been camouflaged by a professed apoliticalism."[78] Scholars have been surprisingly hesitant to

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[75] "Support" in Graham to Gerald Ford, 17 August 1974, Gerald R. Ford Library (GFL), WHCF/IV, 9-"IV/1974/ST 46." Ford to Graham, 24 August 1974; Warren S. Rustand to Graham, 25 October 1974; Jerry H. Jones to Bill Nicholson, 20 April 1976; and Graham to Ford, 10 September 1976; all in GFL, WHCF, NF, 1233-"Graham, Billy." "Anything" in Graham to Ford, 15 January 1976, GFL, WHCF/PR, 11-"PR 3 1/1/1976-3/31/1976. *Charlotte Observer*, 18 May 1975.

[76] During the Michigan crusade service, Graham introduced Dole, but did not permit him to speak. See *Jackson* (MI) *Citizen Patriot*; and *Washington* (DC) *Star*, 25 October 1976; both in BGCA, CN 360, R36. *New York Times*, 31 October 1976.

[77] *Washington Post*, 23 September 1976. CBS Evening News, 22 September 1976, in BGCA, CN 74, V2. Starting in the summer of 1976, Ford sought to woo southern evangelical voters away from Carter. See Daniel Kenneth Williams, "From the Pews to the Polls: The Formation of a Southern Christian Right" (Ph.D. Dissertation, Brown University, 2005), 159-160, 166-168.

look past these persistent professions and identify Graham as a Republican partisan, rather than simply as an Eisenhower and Nixon backer, or someone who tended to support GOP leaders and policies.[79] On the other hand, journalists during the Nixon era often assumed that Graham was a Republican, or listed his Democratic registration as a *non sequitur*. In explaining the lack of intimacy between Carter and the evangelist, another Graham biographer rightly cited both the evangelist's post-Watergate hesitancy to involve himself in high-profile political activity and, more importantly, Carter's assumption that Graham might not offer him support.[80] At the time, columnists Rowland Evans and Robert Novak contended that Carter initially shunned the evangelist because he feared alienating his liberal supporters.[81] Much more than his fellow parishioner Billy Graham, furthermore, Carter maintained a traditional Baptist belief in a firm separation between church and state—a reality that contradicted his media-driven image as a politician who wore his religion on his cardigan.[82]

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[78] William G. McLoughlin, *Billy Graham: Revivalist in a Secular Age* (New York: The Ronald Press, 1960), 93.

[79] Martin described Graham's politics as Republican-leaning, but did not identify Graham as even a *de facto* Republican. See Martin, *Prophet*, 462-464 and *passim*. Paddon drew a similar conclusion. See Paddon, "Mordecai," 80. Martin E. Marty more directly termed Graham "a moderate Republican." See *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, 31 May 1993.

[80] Another reason cited to explain Graham's lack of closeness with Carter was a widely-publicized, if surprisingly short-lived financial scandal centering on the World Evangelism and Christian Education Fund (WECEF), a private foundation based in Dallas and supported largely by donations funneled through the BGEA. Although WECEF was legal and funded causes in keeping with its name, its secretive existence (which Graham said was intended to limit the number of requests, while retaining the BGEA's access to smaller donors), its whopping assets ($22.9 million), and the connection of Graham relatives and peers to real estate purchased by WECEF raised momentary questions about the evangelist's financial propriety. See Martin, *Prophet*, 464-471; and Graham, "Billy Graham On Financing Evangelism," *Christianity Today*, 26 August 1977, 18-20. The WECEF scandal broke during the summer of 1977, however—just *before* Carter's first publicized overtures to Graham. See below.

[81] *Washington Post*, 8 December 1977.

[82] Garry Wills, "Jimmy Carter & the Culture of Death," *New York Review of Books*, 9 February 2006, http://www.nybooks.com/articles/18670 (accessed 20 February 2006).

Yet there were legitimate reasons to suspect that Graham might offer at least tacit support for his fellow southerner. In the immediate aftermath of Watergate, Graham made every effort to accentuate his nominal party affiliation, going so far as to tape a message for a Democratic Party fundraising telethon urging Americans to support the party of their choosing. (His friend, Republican George H. W. Bush, had earlier done the same thing.)[83] Moreover, Carter—a moderate, avowedly Southern Baptist Democrat whom one South Carolina paper cited as the very fulfillment of Graham's prophecy that the South would solve its racial problems ahead of the North—seemingly more than satisfied the office-holding ideals the evangelist had been touting for the last quarter of a century.[84] (To be sure, the Episcopalian Ford also possessed a number of evangelical credentials, including the fact that his son had attended Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, on whose board Graham served.)[85] The evangelist and Carter also had a history. In the mid-1960s, Carter had overseen a desegregated showing of a BGEA film in Americus, Georgia, and as governor he had assisted Graham's efforts to attract a larger African-American audience for the 1973 Atlanta crusade.[86] Lastly, Graham had much

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[83] The Democratic Party telethon appearance is best interpreted in light of Graham's attempts to free himself from the residue of Watergate. His efforts succeeded, as newspapers increasingly identified him as a registered Democrat. Graham agreed to the appearance for three additional reasons: his friendship with Democratic Party chair (and Texan) Robert Strauss, who first broached the subject to Graham when they both testified as character witnesses in the corruption trial of John Connally; the fact that Republican George Bush had made a similar appeal in an earlier Democratic telethon; and Graham's desire to reaffirm the American political system. See *Cedar Rapids* (IA) *Gazette*, 23 July 1975; and *Coos Bay* (OR) *World*, 29 July 1975; both in BGCA, CN 360, R36.

[84] *Pickens* (SC) *Sentinel*, 14 July 1976, in BGCA, CN 360, R36.

[85] *Atlanta Constitution*, 10 August 1974, in BGCA, CN 360, R35.

[86] Graham, *Just as I Am*, 491.

earlier nominated a Carter-style candidate, Ruben Askew, the governor of Florida and an outspoken Christian, as an ideal Democratic presidential candidate.[87]

When the presidential campaign season arrived, however, Graham made several moves that gave little indication he was behind the peanut farmer from Plains. The evangelist had pledged that year to stay "a million miles away from politics" in 1976.[88] One of his election-season comments traveled nearly as far. "I would rather have a man in office who is highly qualified to be President," Graham told the *Los Angeles Times*, "who didn't make much of a religious profession than to have a man who had no qualifications but who made a religious profession."[89] The statement, which emphasized the primary vulnerability of Carter at the expense of his perceived advantage, inspired a retort from one of the candidate's sons that Graham had purchase his "Doctor of Religion" degree through the postal system. The Ford team took notice of the quip.[90] Graham's words also garnered a *Washington Post* political cartoon showing the evangelist thumping a bumpkin-clad Carter with a Ten Commandments tablet. The same paper noted that Graham's visit with Ford during the Tolbert banquet had followed the publication of a controversial interview Carter had given to *Playboy* magazine.[91]

During Carter's term in office, though, he did seek out Graham on a number of occasions. The president invited Graham to the inauguration (which he did not attend because of illness), requested his advice on Middle East policy, and attempted

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[87] *Lake Wales* (FL) *Highlander* (AP), 20 September 1972, in BGCA, CN 360, R34.

[88] *Menominee* (MI) *Herald-Leader* (AP), 9 March 1976, in BGCA, CN 360, R36.

[89] Quoted in Martin, *Prophet*, 463.

[90] UPI story, 29 September 1976, in GFL, WHCF, NF, 1233-"Graham, Billy."

[91] *Washington Post*, 3 October 1976 and 27 September 1976.

unsuccessfully to gain his public endorsement of the SALT treaty and the Equal Rights Amendment. Graham and the president maintained a friendly correspondence, and the evangelist spent at least one night at the Carter White House.[92] Yet Graham was far from an ally of this avowedly evangelical president. Indeed, Graham saw fit to declare that Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) members need not feel compelled to endorse all of the policies of their fellow congregant.[93]

In the end, then, Graham never relinquished his deep interest in politics (as well as his equally deep attraction to politicians), but rather lowered the profile of his role as a political and a ministerial counselor. While Graham would never regain the degree of influence he possessed during the Nixon years (and probably did not aspire to such heights), the evangelist returned to a somewhat more visible role in the White House during the Reagan and first Bush administrations.[94] During the presidential primary season of 1980, Graham met with Reagan and campaign aide Ed Meese for a publicized breakfast in Indianapolis, where the evangelist was holding a crusade.[95] There, Graham turned down a casual request from the GOP candidate to put in a good word for him in the state of North Carolina.[96] Following Reagan's electoral triumph, Graham appears to have privately voiced support for Alexander Haig, whose Watergate ties threatened his

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[92] *Washington Post*, 8 January 1977 and 8 December 1977. Bob Maddox to Jimmy and Roselyn Carter, 5 September 1979; and Anne Wexler and Maddox to Carter, 26 October 1979; both in Jimmy Carter Library (JCL), WHCF, NF, 1282- "Graham, Bi." Graham, *Just As I Am: The Autobiography of Billy Graham* (New York: HarperCollins, 1997), 494.

[93] *Louisville Courier-Journal*, 17 June 1977, in BGCA, CN 544, 37-3.

[94] See Martin, *Prophet*, 473, 614.

[95] ABC evening news, 4 May 1980, in BGCA, CN 345, V9.

[96] Graham, *Just as I Am*, 529-530.

nomination as secretary of state.[97] Graham kept in close contact with George H. W. Bush during his vice presidency and presidency, privately and publicly blessing the 1991 Persian Gulf War.[98] Although Graham maintained friendly and supportive relations with Arkansas Democrat Bill Clinton during the 1990s (to the chagrin of anti-abortion activists and impeachment supporters), he publicly backed Republican George W. Bush two days before the 2000 election.[99] "I don't endorse candidates," an aging Graham told reporters while posing for photographs with George and Laura Bush, along with the evangelist's then lesser-known heir, Franklin Graham. "But I've come as close to it, I guess, now as any time in my life, because I think it's extremely important." He spoke these words on a Sunday morning when he shared a private prayer breakfast with the Bushes. The location was Jacksonville, Florida, a state where the evangelist was wrapping up a crusade and where Bush, fending off the recent disclosure of a 1976 arrest for drunk driving, had staked his electoral prospects. After the breakfast, Bush briefly recalled his life-changing 1985 meeting with the evangelist in Kennebunkport, Maine, where Graham had spent his customary summer weekend with the George H. W. and Barbara Bush family. Graham, who had prayed at George W. Bush's first gubernatorial inauguration in Texas, affirmed the presidential candidate's "integrity" in a manner resembling his praise for Nixon two decades earlier. Also reminiscent was Graham's insinuation that he had cast an absentee ballot for this Republican, as well. "I'll just let you guess who I voted for," said the

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[97] Graham to Nixon, 15 December 1980, NPL, PPSP, 1-6.

[98] See, for example, Graham to Nixon, 21 December 1989, NPL, PPSP, 1-4.

[99] Anti-abortion activists heavily criticized Graham for praying at Bill Clinton's first inaugural. See *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, 31 May 1993. During the early months of the Monica Lewinsky scandal, Graham's offer of forgiveness to Clinton drew a sharp retort from Christian conservative columnist Cal Thomas. See *Newsday*, 10 March 1998.

evangelist, who made sure to reiterate his status as a registered Democrat.[100] Most of these details (the timing of the arrest story excepted) received prominent play in a 2004 book celebrating Bush's spiritual strength.[101]

The Other Water Gate

As Graham began to downgrade his involvement in politics, a growing number of conservative evangelicals and fundamentalists moved into that world. The latter process had commenced during the years of the temporal Watergate scandal, when a number of social issues began to provide additional reasons for a summons to the biblical Water Gate. To some extent, these issues—abortion, homosexuality, and women's liberation, to name several of the more visible ones—comprised the broader crisis that allowed Graham to describe the specific crimes of the Nixon administration in relative terms. Indeed, Graham paralleled a larger transition among conservatives toward focusing on gender- and family-related concerns, in contrast to the more general themes of individual morality, anti-permissiveness, and law and order. This trend would climax with the birth of the Christian Right, a movement Graham helped to facilitate, even though he voluntarily remained outside of its inner sanctum.[102]

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[100] *Atlanta Constitution*, 6 November 2000. See also *Florida Times-Union*, 6 November 2000. Graham to Nixon, 18 August 1986, RNL, PPSP, 1-5. Graham, *Just As I Am*, 589-591.

[101] Paul Kengor, *God and George W. Bush: A Spiritual Life* (New York: ReganBooks, 2004), 21-24, 31, 78-79.

[102] The term "Christian Right" is employed here because it entails a greater degree of sociological specificity than another commonly used term, "Religious Right," and has proven unique and enduring enough not to require the modifier "New." A helpful definition comes from political scientist Clyde Wilcox, who defines the Christian Right as "a social movement that attempts to mobilize evangelical Protestants and other orthodox Christians into conservative political action." See Clyde Wilcox, *Onward Christian Soldiers? The Religious Right in American Politics*, 2nd edition (Boulder, CO: Westview, 2000), 5. Christian Right is used in reference to such efforts from the late 1970s to the present, with due

Recently, a number of historians of the American South have argued that the 1970s featured the start of a shift among many southern whites away from racial concerns and toward gender politics. Following the thrust of arguments put forth by Dan T. Carter, these historians have not stressed the abandonment of racial matters, but rather the identification of a new, related target.[103] In their rendering, gender politics encompasses a wide range of issues—including parental authority, sex education, and abortion—that ties into a broader discourse on sexuality and the family. Glenn Feldman states this thesis in perhaps the strongest terms, arguing passionately that a "New Racism," focused on character and morality, rather than skin color, came to replace overt race-baiting as the dominant trope of southern political culture. "Moral chauvinism, even moral authoritarianism," he writes, "has filled the void left by the delegitimization of white supremacy as a vehicle of politics."[104] Historians Marjorie Julian Spruill and Paul Harvey respectively have documented transitions among their subjects away from race and toward gender. Spruill identifies this trend among opponents of the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) in Mississippi and elsewhere. This finding leads her to highlight "the potential of gender issues as a replacement for racial issues in public discourse as socially acceptable rallying points for social conservatives believing in divinely inspired, innate

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acknowledgement that the broader movement has grown into an organized wing of the Republican Party. In the process, aspects of the Christian Right's agenda have become less distinguishable from that of more moderate, but politically conservative evangelicals. For other overviews of the Christian Right, see Martin, *With God on Our Side: The Rise of the Religious Right in America* (New York: Broadway, 1996); and Ruth Murray Brown, *For a 'Christian America': A History of the Christian Right* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus, 2002). Brown argues that the gender and family issues treated here were foundational for the Christian Right.

[103] Regarding the GOP's success in appealing to social conservatism, Carter argued that "race seemed to be the glue that held it all together." Dan T. Carter, *From George Wallace to Newt Gingrich: Race in the Conservative Counterrevolution, 1963-1994* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State, 1996), 80.

[104] Glenn Feldman, "The Status Quo Society, The Rope of Religion, and the New Racism," in *Politics and Religion in the White South*, ed. Feldman (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2005), 287-352.

differences and hierarchies."[105] Harvey applies a similar observation to southern religion. In an overview of conservative white southern Christianity in the post-civil rights era, he marshals such evidence as the SBC's patriarchal stance on marriage to argue that the "terrain of battle in the southern culture wars had shifted, in effect, from race to gender." One type of hierarchy had replaced another. This final "transformation of southern religious conservatism in the twentieth century"—a trend Spruill also detects among slightly more secular actors—helped to enable the emergence of the Christian Right.[106]

The race-to-gender thesis does have a few qualifiers. In a study of the SBC and race, historian Mark Newman provided a kind of pre-emptive caution against assumptions (or implications) that the broader social conservatism of many Southern Baptists merely represented the displacement of previous commitments to racial hierarchy. By the latter half of the 1970s, Newman argues, the majority of SBC conservatives had sincerely abandoned segregation and conscious racism, even while they retained their social traditionalism. "It would be mistaken," he wrote, "to assume that fundamentalist support for the family and law and order and opposition to welfare were necessarily code words for racism."[107] Proponents of the race-to-gender thesis themselves differ on the extent to which the new political discourse of gender employed coded language. Another historian, David L. Chappell, has made a related contention

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[105] Marjorie Julian Spruill, "'Women for God, Country, and Family,': Religion, Politics, and Antifeminism in 1970s America" (unpublished paper in possession of author).

[106] Paul Harvey, *Freedom's Coming: Religious Culture and the Shaping of the South from the Civil War though the Civil Rights Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 219.

[107] Mark Newman, "Southern Baptists and Desegregation, 1945-1980," in *Southern Landscapes*, ed. Tony Badger, et al (Tubingen, Germany: Stauffenburg Verlag, 1996), 202.

that the Civil Rights Movement taught white southerners to see religion as a more effective mechanism than race for political mobilization.[108]

The example of Billy Graham supports the argument that gender and family issues took on a new salience during the 1970s. More than suggesting an intentionally concealed continuity with racial prejudice, though, their prevalence revealed the superficial nature of many southerners' departures from the ethos of Jim Crow. Politically, they were quick to get their minds off of race and onto other social issues. The decline of the race issue in the eyes of many southern whites removed a lingering barrier between them and Graham. The evangelist clearly shared their concerns about declining American values. He theorized a forty-year period of moral decline (perhaps a conscious invocation of the Israelites' years of wandering before entering the Promised Land) that had coincided with four decades of liberal rule. This timeline, which Graham initially marshaled as an argument for electing conservative and moderate politicians during the 1970 elections, subsequently became the interpretive property of the New Right and its faith-based counterparts—and, eventually, of the Reagan revolution.[109]

Graham paralleled the evolution of social issues within popular American conservatism. During the late 1960s and early 1970s, he had served as both a sanctioning and a sanctifying spokesperson for the silent majority. The range of topics he addressed in this capacity reflected the "Social Issue" famously described in Benjamin J. Wattenberg and Richard Scammon's 1970 study of the American electorate, *The Real*

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[108] David L. Chappell, *A Stone of Hope: Prophetic Religion and the Death of Jim Crow* (UNC, 2004), 178.

[109] Address to the Southern Newspapers Publishers Association, 16 September 1974, BGCA, CN 26, T55. Black Mountain, NC, press conference transcript, 13 October 1970, BGCA, CN 24, 1-26.

Majority. The salient electoral issues they identified concerned such matters as crime, youthful protesters, school prayer, pornography, and the pace of integration (in spite of an overall liberalization of racial views), all matters that Graham regularly addressed in press conferences and other venues.[110] During the 1960s, Graham had periodically made such declarations as, "We ruled prayer out of the schools and put sex in." He was particularly critical of Supreme Court rulings on criminal rights and branded as "diabolical" the 1970 report of the President's Commission on Pornography and Obscenity (which Johnson had commissioned).[111]

During the following decade, however, a set of issues emerged on the right that differed in telling ways from those Wattenberg and Scammon had delineated. The rhetorical silent majority gave way to the grassroots New Right as the bellwether of modern popular conservatism. A number of scholars have noted this transition. Sociologist Jerome L. Himmelstein has written, "The emphasis shifted substantially from the late 1960s and early 1970s, when the important social issues focused on blacks (racial inequality, civil unrest, civil rights, busing, affirmative action) and youth (premarital sex, marijuana use, political dissent), to the late 1970s and early 1980s, when the issues of gender, the family, education, and the relationship between the church and the state rose to prominence."[112] Political analyst Kevin Phillips similarly identified a "second-issue

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[110] Richard Scammon and Benjamin J. Wattenberg, *The Real Majority* (New York: Coward-McCann, 1970), 20, 40-43.

[111] *Issues and Answers*, American Broadcasting Company (radio), 24 August 1969, in BGCA, CN 74, T14. Black Mountain, NC, press conference transcript, 13 October 1970, CN 24, 1-26.

[112] Jerome L. Himmelstein, *To the Right: The Transformation of American Conservatism* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1990), 99.

wave" of "religious, moral and sexual controversies" as having emerged by 1980.[113] The point here is neither to discount the foundational role of Goldwater- and Nixon-style critiques of liberal excess nor to ignore the persistence of race-baiting in southern politics, but rather to highlight the role of gender and family issues in sparking the Christian Right.

Graham's responses to three second-wave social issues—women's liberation, homosexuality, and abortion—slightly preceded the timelines of Himmelstein and Phillips. A more seasoned Graham had learned to modify some of his more controversial public stances by the close of the 1960s (e.g., his previous support for a constitutional amendment to protect prayer in public schools).[114] Still, in 1972, he accused public schools of promoting secularism and voiced support for a Southern Baptist proposal to launch an integrated private school network. He made the latter comment a mere month after he had produced television spots supporting public education in the South.[115] On the matter of women's liberation, Graham was likewise unsuccessful in striking a moderate pose. In a 1970 article in *Ladies' Home Journal* that earned him no allies among feminists, he declined a position on the ERA, yet raised a number of possibilities soon to become shibboleths for the "Antis," including unisex bathrooms and women in combat. His dismissiveness was palpable. "'The Problem That Has No Name' is boredom," he wrote in a particularly obtuse reference to Betty Friedan's *The Feminine*

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[113] Kevin Phillips, *Post-Conservative America: People, Politics and Ideology in a Time of Crisis* (New York: Random House, 1982), 23.

[114] Historian Richard Pierard viewed Graham's hesitancy to commit himself on particular issues as a sign of his growing "political maturation" during the mid- and late-1960s. See Pierard, "Billy Graham and Vietnam: From Cold Warrior to Peacemaker," *Christian Scholar's Review* 10 (1980): 37-51.

[115] Charlotte press conference transcript, 14 April 1972, BGCA, CN 24, 1-36. Black Mountain, NC, press conference transcript, 13 October 1970, BGCA, CN 74, 1-26. On the spots, see Chapter V.

Mystique.[116] Graham never took a formal stance on the ERA, although a Carter aide somewhat naively asked him to come out in favor of it.[117] While the evangelist professed to believe in gender equality and remained more welcoming of women as church leaders than most of his Southern Baptist peers (in spite of a conception of gender roles informed by a typology of Adam as breadwinner and Eve as child bearer), his most consistent response to women's liberation was to assert that true liberation came only through Christ.[118] Beyond the recourse of theology, though, his comments tended to abet conservative opinions. "I haven't taken a direct stand [on the ERA]," he told the *Washington Post* in 1979, "because I am in favor of women having all the rights. . . . You have to recognize that they are different physiologically and psychologically."[119]

Homosexuality and abortion seemingly contained less room for either ideological or theological flexibility than did women's liberation. During a 1975 press conference, Graham claimed to have never knowingly met a homosexual person.[120] He conceded to the *Charlotte Observer* that a gay person "can perhaps be a Christian," even though homosexual practices were incontestable sins.[121] Elsewhere, he expressed admiration for

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[116] Graham, "Jesus and the Liberated Woman," *Ladies' Home Journal*, December 1970, 40-44, 115 (quoted in 40). Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (New York: Norton, 1963). As a result of Graham's article, protesters at the 1971 Tournament of Roses Parade, which Graham marshaled, held up signs reading "Billy Is a Sexist" and "Welcome Balaam Graham—Sell-Out Prophet." See Calvin Trillin, "Waiting for the Roses," *The New Yorker*, 16 January 1971, 88.

[117] Carter aide Bob Maddox optimistically asserted that Graham "himself has no problem with the amendment." Bob Maddox to Jimmy and Roselyn Carter, 5 September 1979, JCPL, WSCF, NF, 1282-"Graham, Bi."

[118] Manhattan, KS, press conference, 4 March 1974, BGCA, CN 24, T20. Atlanta press conference transcript, 14 December 1972, BGCA, CN 24, 2-12.

[119] *Washington Post*, 19 January 1979.

[120] *St. Petersburg Independent* (AP), 25 July 1975, in BGCA, CN 360, R36.

[121] *Charlotte Observer*, 7 February 1977.

gospel singer and beauty queen Anita Bryant's crusade to overturn a gay-rights ordinance in Miami-Dade County. Bryant had performed at previous Graham services.[122]

The evangelist gave the abortion issue much more consideration. In contrast to the visible involvement of evangelicals in the pro-life movement during the Reagan years and beyond, conservative Protestants were relatively slow to mobilize against abortion in the immediate aftermath of the *Roe v. Wade* decision of 1973.[123] Graham had been on record as opposing the legalization of abortion-on-demand since the late 1960s. His elaboration of this stance paralleled the position of many mainstream evangelicals, including Carl C. H. Henry.[124] "I have stated my position on a number of occasions that I am against all abortion except for such things as rape," repeated Graham in 1972, "or where it's going to interfere with the health of the mother or where two or three doctors confer and agree with the (case of) the mother."[125] Although he admittedly did most of his thinking on the issue well after *Roe*, his position remained as stated at least into the 1980s and looked moderate compared to later militant groups, such as Operation Rescue, or even to an organization that he helped to found in 1975, the Christian Action Council (CAC). Moderation aside, Graham directly assisted this early manifestation of the Protestant anti-abortion movement. Along with theologian Harold O. J. Brown,

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[122] *Louisville Courier-Journal*, 17 June 1977, in BGCA, CN 544, 37-3. On Bryant, see, for example, New York crusade footage, BGCA, CN 113, V292.

[123] Scott Flipse, "Below-the-Belt Politics: Protestant Evangelicals, Abortion, and the Foundation of the New Religious Right, 1960-1975," in *The Conservative Sixties*, eds. David Farber and Jeff Roche (New York: Peter Lang, 2003), 127-141.

[124] Atlanta press conference transcript, 29 December 1967, BGCA, CN 24, 1-7. Carl F. H. Henry, "Christian Personal and Social Ethics in Relation to Racism, War, Poverty, and Other Problems," in *Let the Earth Hear His Voice: International Congress on Evangelism, Lausanne, Switzerland*, ed. J. D. Douglas (Minneapolis: World Wide Publications, 1975), 1170.

[125] Philadelphia press conference transcript, 7 June 1972, BGCA, CN 345, 62-1.

evangelical intellectual Francis Schaeffer, and future Surgeon General C. Everett Koop, the evangelist convened a 1975 meeting in Montreat, North Carolina, from which emerged the CAC. The organization, for which Ruth Graham (although not Billy himself) served as an official sponsor, lobbied Congress in favor of de-legalizing or restricting abortion and gained initial support from civil rights leader Jesse Jackson.[126]

Graham's early ties to the anti-abortion cause and his periodic outspokenness on other gender and family matters beg the question of his exact relationship to the Christian Right. This question is trickier than it might appear. Clearly, the evangelist had contributed mightily to the post-World War II neo-evangelical shift away from separatist fundamentalism toward a greater emphasis on social and political engagement. Moreover, his repeated calls for alternative Christian "demonstrations" implied on openness to forming a Christian-based political movement. Graham also possessed a long track record of urging Christians to run for political office and of selectively supporting politicians who met this qualification. The Watergate affair only reinforced his belief "that we need more devoted Christians who are living the Christian life in every area of their lives in the political arena."[127] In words reminiscent of Atlanta crusade booster Tom Cousins, Graham hoped that his 1975 Jackson crusade would result in

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[126] *Asheville* (NC) *Citizen*, 21 August 1975, in GFL, WHCF/PP, 4-"PP 5-1 7/22/75-8/31/75 Executive." Martin, *Prophet*, 585. Martin, *With God on Our Side*, 156, 193-194. RNS, 31 July 1976, in BGCA, CN 345, 68-8; and *Sherman (TX) Democrat* (UPI), 27 November 1975, in BGCA, CN 360, R36. CAC co-founder Brown later criticized Graham's position on abortion, saying "he praises it by faint damns." See *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, 31 May 1993. CAC survives as Care Net, which supports anti-abortion pregnancy crisis centers throughout North America.

[127] Raleigh press conference transcript, 21 September 1973, BGCA, CN 24, 3-22.

"spiritual growth in the political arena. We want to see the finest people entering politics at the local, state and national level."[128]

At the same time, Graham's politics and his political tone differed significantly from those of the Christian Right to come. Many practical incentives no doubt existed for Graham to keep his evangelistic enterprise publicly removed from a controversial figure such as Jerry Falwell. More importantly, though, Graham drew an important distinction, common among evangelicals and Southern Baptists, between the unassailable good of Christians in office and the more ambiguous status of Christianity as a political movement. He would have affirmed the 1958 sentiment of his friend, Texas Governor Price Daniel. "We believe in separation of Church and State in this land," Daniel wrote in *Christianity Today*, "but never have we believed in separation of Church and statesmen."[129] To assume a smooth or reflexive linkage between Graham and the Christian Right, then, would be to greatly oversimplify the nature of his social ethic, the difference between Christians in politics and Christianity as politics. Graham clearly facilitated the institutional coalescence of the Christian Right and his stature and popularity alone modeled the type of conservative ecumenism to which much of the Christian Right eventually aspired. Yet his role in the nascent movement was that of a shadow presence. When Graham did go public, he did so largely as a critic.

Any exploration of Graham's relationship to the institutional apparatus of the Christian Right must factor in his support for Richard Nixon, especially during the 1972 election. Writing about that campaign, biographer William Martin observed a "close

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[128] *Jackson* (MS) *Clarion-Ledger*, 16 May 1975.

[129] Price Daniel, "God and the American Vision," *Christianity Today*, 23 June 1958, 13; also cited in Hollinger, *Individualism and Social Ethics*, 182.

collaboration between Billy Graham and the White House that not only helped reelect Richard Nixon, but contributed importantly to the emergence, eight years later and under different leadership, of the [Christian Right]." This argument led Martin to title the opening chapter of his history of the Christian Right, "Billy Graham—Geared to the Times."[130] Such a narrative, however, may slightly overstate the case. As part of Nixon's effort to create a new majority, the president and Graham collaborated to solidify and expand his evangelical base. Noting the electoral significance of this effort, however, is a different project than explaining what led the Christian Right to coalesce as a self-conscious political movement attempting to usurp the very GOP establishment Nixon had come to epitomize.

The electoral politics of Richard Nixon partly explains why the Christian Right eventually chose to align with the Republican Party and why certain mainstream Republicans courted the movement. The policies of the Carter administration played an even larger role. However, the emergence of gender and family issues, as well as the rise of the New Right as a source of patronage and logistical support, best clarifies why the movement formed in the first place.[131] During a 1974 crusade in Virginia, Graham was asked to comment on the growing right-wing activism among the state's independent Baptists—one of whom, Jerry Falwell, went on to found the Moral Majority. At that point, Graham could truthfully say that he had only read about this relatively small group.[132] As Graham's advice to both Nixon and Carter indicated, though, the evangelist

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[130] For more on the 1972 election, see Chapter V. Martin, *Prophet*, 391. Martin, *With God on Our Side*, 25-46.

[131] On Carter and evangelicals, see Martin, *With God*, 153-159, 173, 189-190. On the Christian Right and the broader New Right, see Himmelstein, *To the Right*, 83, 97-128.

was more than aware of the political potential of mobilized conservative Christians.[133] A number of the persons whom Graham connected with Nixon (Bill Bright and W. A. Criswell, for example) later assumed major roles within the burgeoning Christian Right. Yet most evangelical leaders did not affiliate with those Christian Right leaders, largely of a fundamentalist bent, who made much noise during the run-up to the 1980 election. Following a brief period of support for Jimmy Carter, many conservative evangelicals settled into a less conspicuous position as part of the Reagan coalition.[134]

Accurately situating Graham in relation to the Christian Right, then, requires contextualizing his precise relationship with those persons who did eventually carry the mantle of the movement. The evangelist possessed obvious and close ties with many persons who became charter members of the Christian Right. Bright, whose interest in political work grew during the mid-1970s, had known the evangelist intimately since the early 1950s, and the two had since collaborated on a number of projects. When visiting Washington, DC, Graham sometimes stayed at the Christian Embassy, an evangelical outreach to capital politicos that Bright had helped to found.[135] The evangelist maintained a cordial, if not collaborative, relationship with the leading senatorial liaison to the New Right, Jesse Helms, whose influential political action committee received

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[132] Norfolk press conference transcript, 31 October 1974, BGCA, CN 24, 3-31.

[133] Since the mid-1950s, Graham had apprised Nixon of the potential electoral power of evangelical voters. See Chapter V. In 1979, Graham advised Carter to pay attention to what a memo termed "fundamentalist evangelical political coalitions." Maddox to Jimmy and Roselyn Carter, 5 September 1979, JCL, WSCF, NF, 1282-"Graham, Bi."

[134] For a treatment of evangelicals and recent American politics that parallels the approach offered here (i.e., viewing the Christian Right and the broader contours of evangelical politics as closely related, yet not synonymous phenomena), see Hart, *Old-Time Religion*, 144-171. This distinction, it might be argued, has collapsed somewhat during the George W. Bush administration.

[135] On Bright's role in the proto-Christian Right, see Williams, "From the Pews to the Polls," 148-153. Bill and Vonette Bright interview, 8 August 2000, BGCA, CN 141, 9-25. Rolfe H. McCollister interview, 24 July 1977, BGCA, CN 141, 13-32.

support from BGEA associate Grady Wilson.[136] Graham also remained close to several of the high-profile ministers who marshaled their evangelistic empires in support of Christian Right causes. This list included James Kennedy of Coral Ridge Presbyterian in Florida, which Nixon had visited during his presidency, and James Robison of Dallas-Forth Worth, a televangelist who had earlier caught the eye of oil man and Graham-admirer H. L. Hunt. Graham spoke at the opening service in Kennedy's new church building, as he also did for the dedication of the headquarters of Pat Robertson's Christian Broadcasting Network.[137]

These many ties aside, the Christian Right, along with the New Right as a whole, entailed a labyrinthine world of organizations and entities to which the evangelist had less enduring links. Moreover, Graham was unwilling to associate publicly with the social or political campaigns of these groups. He related most comfortably to Christian Right luminaries in a capacity, such as a dedication ceremony, that he could safely delineate as ministerial. On a number of well-publicized occasions, he sought to distinguish himself from the ambitions of the new generation of fundamentalist and evangelical political activism. The first such effort came in 1976, when he criticized Bright's early forays into politics and declared himself "opposed to organizing Christians into a political bloc." Noting that Bright had been "using me and my name for twenty years," Graham said he was "concerned about the political direction he seems to be

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[136] Helms to Grady Wilson, 14 January 1980 BGCA, CN 544, 49-2.

[137] *Washington Post*, 30 January 1981. *Fort Lauderdale News*, 1 February 1974, in BGCA, CN 360, R35. Martin, *With God on Our Side*, 198. Carol Flake, *Redemptorama: Culture, Politics, and the New Evangelicalism* (New York: Anchor, 1984), 129. Dedication of Christian Broadcasting Network building, 6 October 1979, BGCA, CN 240, V1.

taking."[138] Following the 1980 election, Graham told *People* magazine that the Moral Majority was not his "cup of tea," adding that he did not "intend to use what little moral influence I may have on secular, nonmoral issues like the Panama Canal," which the New Right strongly opposed abdicating.[139]

Much of Graham's public hand-washing resulted from his desire to revise his political identity in the aftermath of Watergate—a move he understood and explained in terms of his regeneration-centered theology and evangelistic priorities. The Nixon era, he claimed, had taught him the perils of playing God. "I learned my lesson the hard way," he said of his experiences.[140] Elsewhere, the evangelist referred to a time when he had "almost identified Americanism with Christianity." Now, he said, "I no longer think we are a Christian nation."[141] Nor was Graham willing to actively join the forces seeking to renew this status. As was true during the Civil Rights Movement (although much less so during the Nixon years), Graham sought to protect his evangelistic identity. His constituency had long since expanded beyond the realm of independent fundamentalist churches, the primary base for the Moral Majority, and his ambivalence about the Christian Right paralleled the response of many mainstream evangelicals (and more than a few Bob Jones-style purists) to their peers who had abandoned religious separatism for

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[138] "Politics From the Pulpit," *Newsweek*, 6 September 1976, 49-50. Ironically, Bright had opposed Graham's desire for Nixon to attend the Explo '72 youth rally. See Chapter V.

[139] "Jerry Falwell's Troubles," *Newsweek*, 23 February 1981, 23. Graham later quoted Falwell as asking him to "stay out of the Moral Majority. You keep doing what you're doing and I'll stay in what I'm doing." *Washington Post*, 28 April 1986. The rhetorical structure of this quotation closely resembles advice Graham remembered receiving from Martin Luther King, Jr., regarding civil rights activism. See Chapter IV.

[140] "Politics From the Pulpit," 49.

[141] James Michael Beam, "'I Can't Play God Anymore,'" *McCall's*, January 1978, 154, 156.

political activism.[142] As a result, Graham's rhetoric on social concerns differed tellingly from that of Jerry Falwell. While Falwell addressed a platform-driven "moral agenda," Graham used the less activist language of "moral renewal."[143] Graham's regenerative approach to social concern lent itself to support for Christian-friendly leaders, such as Nixon or George W. Bush, but it did not translate comfortably into a political movement—either in Washington, DC, or even, as his middle-ground response to the fundamentalist takeover of the SBC indicated, on a denominational level.[144] Nixon advised Graham to steer clear of the Christian Right, and Vice President George H. W. Bush privately distinguished Graham's kind of religious conservative from the "flamboyant money-mad, teary temple builders."[145]

Yet Graham undoubtedly had helped to construct the political and religious culture that made the Christian Right possible. Graham's suggestion that Nixon and Carter heed the potential influence of galvanized Christians represented sound political advice, but also grew out of a long-voiced desire for greater evangelical influence on policy making. Moreover, the evangelist kept his fingers near the pulse of the Christian Right and sympathized with the thrust of much of its agenda. His criticism of Bright and the leaders of the Moral Majority derived from personal, if largely behind-the-scenes, associations with their world. Indeed, Graham attended what turned out to be one of the

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[142] On the Moral Majority's limited core constituency, see Williams, "From the Pews to the Polls," 353-355.

[143] Elizabeth Noel Earl, "A Comparison of Billy Graham and Jerry Falwell: Ministers and Their Presidents" (Ph.D. Dissertation, Ohio University, 1991), 313-315.

[144] "Graham on the SBC," *Christian Century*, 20 March 1992, 536.

[145] Richard Nixon, *In the Arena: A Memoir of Victory, Defeat, and Renewal* (New York: Simon & Shuster, 1990), 90; and Graham, *Just As I Am*, 453. George H. W. Bush, *All the Best, George Bush: My Life in Letters and Other Writings* (New York: Scribner's, 1999), 320.

foundational meetings of the Christian Right, a two-day prayer and strategy session in 1979 to address the nation's moral slippage. Present at the Dallas meeting were such future Christian Right luminaries as Robison, Bright, and Robertson—along with Graham. Robison recalled that Graham declared himself in sympathy with the attendees, but stressed that his past experiences with political activity and his evangelistic priorities precluded any public association with their efforts. One year later, in August 1980, Graham explicitly absented himself from a more famous Dallas meeting, the National Affairs Briefing, where presidential candidate Ronald Reagan, following a brief introduction by W. A. Criswell, delivered an endorsement of the Christian Right.[146] Earlier that year, the evangelist had offered only token support for another Christian Right milestone, the Washington For Jesus rally.[147]

The disjuncture between Graham's public warnings against playing God and his private associations with the very targets of his criticism represented an incongruity analogous to his simultaneous friendships with King and Criswell during the civil rights era. Indeed, as students of Graham have observed, the evangelist ultimately served as something of a conscience figure vis-à-vis the Christian Right.[148] To label him even a *de facto* member of that movement would be mistaken, however. Graham deviated in important respects from the style and also the platform of the emerging conservative movement, just as he had earlier differed from his many right-wing peers on issues

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[146] Martin, *With God on Our Side*, 206, 214-218; *Washington Post*, 7 December 1980; and Jeffrey K. Haddon and Charles Swann, *Prime Time Preachers: The Rising Power of Televangelism* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1981), 130-133.

[147] Flake, *Redemptorama*, 210.

[148] Martin called Graham an "elder statesmen" of the Christian Right, while Patton referred to Graham's "friendly distance" from the movement to which he had "pass[ed] the baton." Martin, *Prophet*, 472; and Paddon, "Modern Mordecai," 279, 275.

ranging from desegregation to the War on Poverty. On abortion and homosexuality, the evangelist remained largely in tune with Falwell and his supporters—in substance, but rarely in tone. In a 1978 sermon attacking the "gay movement" and praising Anita Bryant, the firebrand James Robison acknowledged the significance of this distinction. Robison declared that he was addressing an issue his "friend," Graham, had "chosen not to speak on."[149] In other areas, though, the evangelist and the Christian Right differed in both substance and tone.

More than any other set of issues, Graham's perspective on foreign policy matters distinguished him from his bellicose peers in the Christian Right. During the mid- and late-1970s, he rekindled a tradition of moderate leanings that stretched back to the Johnson years and, on racial matters at least, to the Eisenhower administration. On domestic policy, Graham had already modified his position on capital punishment.[150] He next converted to the cause of arms control, a stance the former anticommunist militant accurately called "a rather later conviction of mine."[151] In 1979, just before the Moral Majority became a household name, Graham called Harry Truman's decision to drop the first atomic bomb a "mistake. . . . I wish we'd never developed [the Bomb]."[152] In the pages of a left-leaning evangelical magazine, Graham called for "SALT X . . . . Total destruction of nuclear arms."[153] He stressed, however, that he was neither a pacifist nor a

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[149] *Arlington* (TX) *News*, 30 March 1978, BGCA, CN 360, R37.

[150] Manhattan, Kansas press conference, 4 March 1974, BGCA, CN 24, T20.

[151] CBS Evening News, 29 March 1979.

[152] *Washington Post*, 29 June 1979.

[153] Quoted in Pierard, "Billy Graham and Vietnam," 38.

unilateralist.[154] In a "Dear Jerry" letter released after the 1980 election, Graham politely, but firmly admonished Falwell for failing to address arms control and other social-justice issues.[155] Having held crusades throughout the Eastern Bloc by the mid-1980s, he described nuclear disarmament as "my No. 1 social concern."[156] Such comments drew praise from unexpected sources (including peace activist Colman McCarthy and rebel Southern Baptist minister Will D. Campbell) and angered members of his home congregation in Dallas.[157]

By the mid-1980s, Graham had accomplished a notable public relations feat: disassociating himself in the popular imagination from his own political biases. He chose to emphasize an eschatological optimism that, while perhaps understandable coming from someone safely removed from the trials of Watergate and entering the final chapter of a successful career, remained markedly out of step with the polemics emanating from Lynchburg and Virginia Beach.[158] The result was a virtual watershed in how non-evangelicals interpreted Graham, despite the occasional surfacing of his political leanings. A 1984 analysis of popular evangelicalism, for example, dedicated several pages to detailing Graham's self-described "pilgrimage" toward a more internationalist, holistic understanding of the relationship between faith and social action.[159]

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[154] Graham address, John F. Kennedy, Jr., Forum, 20 April 1982, http://ksgaccman.harvard.edu/iop/events_forum_video.asp?ID=770 (accessed 21 February 2006).

[155] "Jerry Falwell's Troubles," 23.

[156] *New York Times*, 3 January 1985.

[157] *Washington Post*, 29 June 1979. Flake, *Redemptorama*, 272. *New York Times*, 16 April 1983.

[158] See Graham op-ed in *New Times*, 19 December 1981; and John F. Kennedy, Jr., Forum, 20 April 1982.

[159] Flake, *Redemptorama*, 273.

A Pulpit Setter

In his simultaneously partisan and theologically sincere attempts to parlay Watergate into Water Gate, Graham seemingly set the pulpit for a coming generation of conservative Christian activists and politicians. He was present at their conception, but not their fruition. Attempts to construct a less polarizing image of himself aside, post-Watergate Graham *was* in fact a mellower, more patient version of the former southern strategist and anticommunist zealot. Just as Graham had facilitated the southern strategy, yet had not indulged in its excesses, so he highlighted the new social concerns of the 1970s, but did not bless the apparent results of his repeated calls for a Christian march upon Washington. As in the previous case, his strategic distancing act also reflected his personal beliefs and priorities. His conservatism was ultimately of a less movemental stripe. To use a contemporary term, Graham was not a culture warrior at heart. He put his faith in Christian political leaders, of whom he mistakenly considered Nixon an ideal.

Indeed, Graham's emphasis on Christian statesmanship offers a window into what might comprise his most palpable influence on national politics—not as a progenitor, however ambiguously, of the Christian Right, but rather as an eminent evangelist whose Watergate apologetics and political work for Nixon foreshadowed a more diffuse chapter of the larger evangelicalization of American politics. In Graham's home region, a clear affinity existed between his evangelical discourse and the construction of an imagined, yet salable Sunbelt South. A similar posture drove the symbolic politics that Graham assisted during the 1972 campaign and that later resounded in his responses to Watergate. This approach manifested itself in converted politicians without converted politics,

individuated and spiritualized interpretations of political crises, and a selective reticence to fault ordained authority. What also emerged was a politics of soul-gazing—more attached to projections of piety than wedded to platforms—that has operated as a friendly cousin, rather than a loving partner, of the more conspicuous culture wars. Graham influenced this political style even as it immediately transcended him and his attachment to Nixon. This style has worked most effectively in the solidly Republican South and, more recently, in the presidency of George W. Bush. Vastly more comfortable behind the pulpit than was Nixon, Bush enhanced his political prospects when he accepted Graham's counsel that weekend in Kennebunkport two decades ago—or, rather, when he later recalled having done so.

CHAPTER VIII

CONCLUSION:
THE NEW SOUTH OF BILLY GRAHAM

He is the kind of man Rudyard Kipling had in mind when he wrote, "You can talk with crowds and keep your virtue, / Or walk with Kings—nor lose the common touch."

John Connally on Billy Graham[1]

My father had a red clay farm that he hardly earned a living on when I was a boy. But some of the best part of Charlotte moved on top of it—banks, IBM, Esso headquarters for the Southeast.

Billy Graham[2]

During the decades since the civil rights era came to a close, two theses have dominated portraits of the modern South that Billy Graham helped to create. Some observers have cast the South as a dynamic region of economic vitality and demographic relevance (the foil of the Rustbelt North).[3] Others, in contrast, have seen the region as the motherland of a popular conservative ascendancy traversing both faith and politics (the foil of the bicoastal liberal elite).[4] These images were, and remain, contradictory and confused in relation to each other. The banking center of Charlotte, North Carolina, and

[1] "John 3:16," *Hour of Decision* broadcast, 21 November 1965, Billy Graham Center Archives (BGCA), CN 191, T828c. The quotation is taken, somewhat inexactly, from the Rudyard Kipling's "If."

[2] *Atlanta Journal and Constitution Magazine*, 9 October 1977.

[3] See, for example, "Special Section: The South Today," *Time*, 27 September 1976, 28-99; and Peter Applebome, *Dixie Rising: How the South is Shaping American Values, Politics, and Culture* (New York: Random House, 1996).

[4] See, for example, Dan T. Carter, *The Politics of Rage: George Wallace, the Origins of the New Conservatism, and the Transformation of American Politics*, 2nd edition (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 2000); and Kevin M. Kruse, *White Flight: Atlanta and the Making of Modern Conservatism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press [Princeton], 2005).

the fundamentalist bastion of Bob Jones University, one-hundred miles down Interstate 85 in Greenville, South Carolina, symbolized modernity and reaction, respectively. On a different note, Newt Gingrich's booming, tax-loathing Cobb County, Georgia, and the colossal, cross-shaped headquarters of Pat Robertson's Christian Broadcasting Network (CBN) in Virginia Beach blended elements of both. These variegated regional snapshots have attached themselves to an equally diverse range of political signifiers: Richard Nixon's and Ronald Reagan's southern outreach, Jimmy Carter's and Bill Clinton's New South personas, and George W. Bush's celebrated electoral "base." All of the above images also intersected in some way with the life and career of Billy Graham. The evangelist was born in 1918 in what became a thriving section of Charlotte, briefly attended Bob Jones College in 1936, operated an office in the Atlanta suburbs from 1964 to 1976, and dedicated the CBN building in 1979.

From the vantage point of the soft twilight of Graham's remarkable sixty-year run as an evangelist and pastor to kings and commoners alike, such intersections might seem like coincidences or asides in a career that has taken place mostly outside of the South. They might also be viewed as mere manifestations of the larger historical forces that, through the blessings of time and place, Graham traveled toward the sunset of fame and influence. After all, the evangelist has not resided in his hometown since the mid-1930s, lasted less than one semester under the rule of Bob Jones, Sr., maintained his organization's official headquarters in Minneapolis until the present century, and moved comfortably among political figures as liberal as Sargent Shriver and as conservative as Strom Thurmond. Many Americans, regardless of their theological and political leanings, see Graham as a national and international icon—and, in an era of culture wars

and intense partisanship, as a beacon of stability and decency. He has, indeed, become all of these things. It would be unfortunate for the historical legacy of Graham, though, if the haze and glow of his final moments led scholars to reify a familiar, somewhat static narrative of an evangelist whose familiarity and overall consistency threaten to belie his complexity. In considering Graham's influence on his native South, this project has sought to prevent such a development and, in the process, to shed interpretive light on the coexistent and seemingly contradictory images of the modern South. Graham was a southerner by birth and remained one by choice; analyzing his role as such enables a better understanding of both him and his times.

The epigraphs from John Connally and Graham himself imply that the evangelist can be seen as either a mover or a metaphor. Likewise, he can be viewed alternately as a symbol of, or an agent in, the creation of the post-civil rights era South. Weighing one form of significance against the other entails evaluating the status of Graham as a public figure. Put more starkly, was the evangelist "an innocent tool of complex dynamics which he may little understand or appreciate," as one observer argued in the early 1970s, or did he at some level consciously shape the nature of his influence in the South, serving as a type of regional leader?[5] This project has considered Graham from both perspectives—as an actor in the South and as a window into regional change—because both viewpoints enrich our understanding of the newest New South.

The boosterism of the Sunbelt South has always tended to prioritize image over evidence, salesmanship over substance. Well into the 1980s, for example, Graham's home state of North Carolina, routinely celebrated as the most progressive part of the

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[5] Joe E. Barnhart, *The Billy Graham Religion* (Philadelphia: Pilgrim Press, 1972), 63.

former Confederacy, ranked at or near the bottom nationwide in industrial wages and per capita income.[6] Beginning in 1958, when Graham traveled to Clinton, Tennessee, two months after the bombing of its desegregated high school, his racially-mixed services contributed to this southern booster tradition, updated for an era of tense social transition. His southern interventions assisted regional change in two primary ways. First, they modeled, or were purported to model, a racially harmonious region, one that was too busy to hate because it was even busier worshipping (or constructing stadiums and sanctuaries in which to worship). Secondly, the evangelist's visits to southern cities, especially such trouble spots as Birmingham, served as a means of mediating and exerting some level of constraint over the course of what many southern whites saw as a social and economic revolution dictated by alien federal and judicial forces. Most southern whites ultimately supported Graham's visits (even if, in the cases of Orval Faubus and George Wallace, they did so grudgingly). For many of them, the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association represented a significantly more welcome form of intervention, foreign only in the sense that Graham possessed national and international bona fides, in addition to regional ones. While Graham hardly drove the region's most dramatic changes—which were the combined products of civil rights activism, federal policies, judicial rulings, and economic forces—his desegregated services and the positive publicity that surrounded them supplied an acceptable path upon which many southern whites could commence transitioning away from the racial status quo. He offered a safe, if incomplete, way out of unyielding support for Jim Crow, as well as a means toward some level of interracial cooperation. This fact was particularly striking,

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[6] Paul Luebke, *Tar Heel Politics 2000* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 83, 88.

especially to moderate southern whites and certain blacks, during Graham's 1964-1965 visits to Alabama. As the Atlanta crusade of 1973 revealed, though, it was significantly less impressive for black activists and white liberals amid the more racially moderate, but arguably more complex, environment of the early 1970s.

Graham, who discussed racial matters with political and religious leaders of both races in the South, never lost cognizance of his potential influence there. Nor did he voice anything but confidence in his home region. Even as he publicly distanced himself from any motivations not explicitly religious in nature, he rarely passed up an opportunity to hype the South's prospects, voicing from the early 1950s on a belief that the region possessed the social and spiritual tools to one day surpass the sneering North in the quality of its race relations. His hopefulness echoed the words, spoken for wildly varying and largely incompatible reasons, of southern civil rights activists, conservative defenders of regional folkways, and Sunbelt boosters alike. Beginning in the mid-1960s, his tone came to correlate most directly with the last of these groups. That correlation possessed profound political implications for the post-civil rights era South.

In his roles as desegregating evangelist and spokesperson for southern progress, Graham functioned as what political scientist Paul Luebke has called a "modernizer." Applied historically, modernizers were proponents of regional change and growth, whether the issue was bringing Jim Crow to a peaceful close, supporting public education, attracting industry, increasing interstate highway funding, or constructing civic centers. While obviously critical of reactionary politics in their region, they did not hew to national liberalism either in its New Deal or post-McGovern forms. They generally opposed an expanded welfare state or any type of cultural liberalism. In Luebke's

schema, most modernizers were Democrats (particularly in North Carolina, the focus of his study).[7] Beginning in the mid-1950s, Graham carried the banner of modernization in the statements he made, the company he kept, and the image he projected. His crusades gave southern cities another opportunity to sell themselves—as pious, to be sure, but also as progressive and relevant.

Despite his nominal and, eventually, strategic status as a registered Democrat, Graham ultimately maintained his most intimate political relationships with members or supporters of the Republican Party. His overall bias toward Republicans (and, hence, toward members of a party that benefited from the electoral residue of massive resistance) appears to rest in tension with his role as a modernizing figure. With the exception of his early friendships with a number of Cold War stalwarts, though, a clear tendency toward modernizing ran across the southern political actors to whom Graham remained particularly close—those whom he offered not only pastoral comfort, but also political support and occasional advice. Richard Nixon, John Connally, Frank Clement, and Lyndon Johnson stood out as the most prominent examples. The first two politicians from this list were (or became) Republicans. Along with Alabamian Winton Blount and nouveau Texan George H. W. Bush, two other Republicans and Graham intimates, they represented an oft-forgotten booster or Sunbelt style within the postwar southern GOP. By the 1970s, the race-baiting and race-coding techniques of Strom Thurmond and Jesse Helms had justifiably come to dominate impressions of southern Republicanism. In response to the electoral threat of George Wallace, Nixon himself embraced this type of

[7] Luebke contrasted modernizers with "traditionalists," who held conservative moral and racial views, while resisting threats to the region's low-wage economy. See Luebke, *Tarheel Politics*, esp. vii-ix, 19-46.

southern strategy. Republicans in the South turned rightward, allowing a generation of 1970s moderate Democrats to serve as spokespersons for the New South and delaying the full ascendance of the southern GOP until the Reagan years or even the mid-1990s.

The Sunbelt strand of southern Republicanism survived, though, in the flagship lands of the post-civil rights era South. Indeed, Nixon achieved his greatest southern appeal in those expanding middle-class suburbs experiencing economic vibrancy alongside white flight from the urban core.[8] Starting during the Nixon years, many such white southerners came to achieve a tacit, if rarely vocalized, rapprochement with the civil rights landmarks of the previous two decades. In the eyes of such southerners, these laws and rulings by themselves had adequately redressed Jim Crow by proscribing legalized segregation and upholding equality before the law. By implication, the lessons of the civil rights era applied only to the South of the recent, but vanquished past, to the South of Bull Conner or Jim Clark. The Civil Rights Movement, so this view went, had nothing constructive to offer the modern metropolises of the region, even though many of those areas remained no less (or more) residentially segregated than Jim Crow Birmingham or Selma. Nixon presented a version of this argument as early as 1968, when he spoke in Graham's hometown of Charlotte against forced busing as a solution to school segregation. Graham had come to embrace this same argument by his conscious associations—and by his own words, which echoed the Nixonian themes of forgotten Americans and silent majorities. In this context, the evangelist's efforts to depoliticize the race issue—to speak of it primarily in moral or spiritual terms and, hence, to downplay the effectiveness of legal solutions—led him to further politicize himself.

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[8] On the fate of the 1970s southern GOP and Nixon's "suburban strategy," see Matthew D. Lassiter, *The Silent Majority: Suburban Politics in the Sunbelt South* (Princeton, 2006), 225-275.

Ever hesitant to pronounce the white South guilty even during the height of massive resistance, Graham helped a portion of the region to subsequently declare itself racially absolved. As early as 1966, before such terms as southern strategy or busing had entered household parlance, the novelist Walker Percy wrote of a white South that, after so many decades of defeat, had emerged "happy, victorious, rich, patriotic, and Republican."[9] More prophetic than accurate at the time, these modifiers (along with "Christian") aptly describe the New South of Billy Graham, the image of the region he implicitly celebrated. This was a land of newfound "racial innocence," a land (and, in many respects, a nation) where many whites tried to disassociate themselves from the region's racial past.[10] By extension, they also attempted to excuse their opposition to any further remedies for the legacy of Jim Crow, turning instead to seemingly more important (and seemingly more color-blind) issues—be they abortion or, more likely, taxes. Graham characteristically avoided taking specific stances on most of these watershed issues of post-Jim Crow southern conservatism. Yet he had facilitated the conditions for their emergence. From the mid-1950s on, he had internalized and voiced an early version of the narrative of racial innocence, to the point where his evangelical prescriptions for racial prejudice tended to conflate guiltlessness and forgiveness. His blended celebration of piety and growth—of individual salvation and individual striving, of golf courses and family values—continues to inform today's GOP, particularly its southern wing. Such talk is an indication of conservative continuity, for many southerners, and newfound prosperity, for a smaller, more fortunate group.

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[9] Walker Percy, *The Last Gentleman* (New York: Avon, 1966), 149.

[10] Lassiter writes of "white" or "suburban racial innocence" in *Silent Majority*, 304, 323 and passim.

If Graham's political leanings appear somewhat obvious in retrospect, they often came across much less pointedly or controversially to the many American who encountered him primarily through his radio shows, television specials, and newspaper columns. Herein lies a key to understanding his broad-ranging appeal. John Connally was correct to quote poet Rudyard Kipling when introducing Graham at the 1965 Houston crusade. The evangelist gained, and rarely lost, the ears of multiple publics. A sensitive consideration of his full political cultural significance thus offers something of a challenge, in part because most of his supporters rightly interpreted him as first and foremost an evangelist, but also because the specter of the subsequent Christian Right looms over almost any treatment of evangelical faith and politics during the preceding decades. For many Americans, southerners and non-southerners alike, Graham reaffirmed and reinvigorated their basic assumptions about faith, family, and country—the composite beliefs that formed what one literary scholar has called the "Transparent American Subject."[11] His service in this capacity was especially salient (and, hence, particularly contentious) during the Nixon administration, when he appeared at numerous public celebrations of Middle America and the silent majority. Some of Graham's rhetoric during this time paralleled the later themes of the Christian Right, which since the late 1970s has sought to restore a vision of America that the evangelist, for the most part, had always considered normative.

Despite the jeremiadic quality of Graham's persistent calls for national revival, though, he was something other than a culture warrior. That is, he did not politicize common sense—or "normal" values—to the same extent his peers in the Christian Right

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[11] Linda Kintz, *Between Jesus and the Market: The Emotions that Matter in Right-Wing America* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997), 25.

later would. He occasionally and infamously wielded such language for partisan ends—particularly in the service of Nixon's presidential ambitions—yet he never went so far as to state definitively that one could not *be* a good Christian and American and still affirm, say, the rights of criminals or, on the opposite end of the political spectrum, the usefulness of racial segregation (two positions the evangelist generally opposed). This distinction had a difference. When pressed to comment on the above positions, the evangelist would routinely state his skepticism about them and occasionally add or imply that they lacked biblical justification. While Graham wanted Christians to vote for morally sound and faith-affirming candidates, he did not desire the creation of a sectarian political movement dedicated to a specific platform. The reasons for this were many: his evangelistic priorities, his abiding faith in the existing American political process (a confidence not all of his fundamentalist peers shared), the reality that he did not always employ religious reasoning in voicing his political opinions, and the fact that he moderated a number of his views starting in the late 1970s. By the mid-1950s, Graham operated independent of the social networks and rhetorical postures of American fundamentalism, even though he retained close theological and personal ties to parts of that world. His persistent popularity was in no small part the product of his flexibility and relative inclusiveness. With several important exceptions, the Nixon years being the most obvious one, Graham largely evaded extended criticism, even among most religious and political liberals. His astounding run of appearances on the Gallup poll's "Most Admired" list (forty-eight times from 1948 to 2004) comprised a recent clue on the television quiz show *Jeopardy!*[12]

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[12] *Jeopardy!*, 5 January 2006, show 4909, game 22064.

This is not to say that Graham made no enemies. Indeed, another important, if qualified, exception to the evangelist's popularity involved criticism from diehard segregationists (and, with them, many fundamentalists) in the South. These groups especially disparaged Graham during the years from 1956, when he heeded Dwight Eisenhower's request to play a more direct role in southern race relations, through 1965, when he visited strife-torn Alabama at the urging of Lyndon Johnson. For certain defenders of Jim Crow, Graham stood as a regional traitor, a political prostitute, and even a "nigger lover." Yet the southern right remained split in its responses to Graham, who kept the attention of many other segregationists. His ability to retain this audience derived from his asserted identity as a southerner, his privileged position as an evangelist, and his social ethic of evangelical universalism, which (unlike liberal or prophetic Christianity) remained resistant to charges of secularism or radicalism, and hesitant to single out Jim Crow for unique condemnation. Graham could question certain southern shibboleths by way of affirming other ones.

Expressed in terms of evangelical universalism, Graham's desegregated services, along with his other efforts to confront white racial prejudice, evinced an approach to race relations that would assume particular relevance in the post-civil rights era South. His racial views made him a moderate until the sit-ins and Freedom Rides of the early 1960s, when his sharp criticism of non-violent civil disobedience further distinguished him from most racial liberals. The racial continuum altered again during the Nixon years and beyond, as many liberals and others on the left started to advocate policies of affirmative action and notions of racial particularism. Meanwhile, as the urban tensions of the late 1960s came to an end and as policy debates evolved to consider the means of

desegregation, rather than the legal status of segregation, many political and religious conservatives came to embrace a soft brand racial universalism.[13] For quite a few conservatives in the South, this move represented a strategic response to the national discrediting of racial discrimination; for others, though, the shift entailed a legitimate, if often less than complete, departure from regional mores. Both phenomena were nowhere more evident than in the near-disappearance of the theological segregationism Graham had attacked since the early 1950s. The evangelist had long argued that Christians should not allow the secular world to set the pace for racial progress. By the 1970s, the white church had begun catching up, in part because the larger political culture had already slowed down.

What emerged during that decade was something Graham's post-segregation language had portended since the 1950s: a conservative rhetoric of color-blindness. Scholars have linked color-blindness (or its intellectual corollary, "racial realism") with such things as the anti-busing movement, neoconservative and New Right critiques of affirmative action, and even the original intentions of the *Brown* court.[14] Yet its religious

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[13] As used here, the dichotomous categories "universalism" and "particularism" come from Richard H. King's intellectual history of two postwar shifts among left-leaning Western intellectuals: first, toward an emphasis on cultural, rather than racial, differences; and secondly, from a "hope . . . that racial (and cultural) differences would fade in light of the assumption that all races enjoyed equal capabilities and aspirations" to an emphasis on "cultural pluralism." King, *Race, Culture, and the Intellectuals, 1940-1970* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), 1-17, 304-316 and passim. The story of conservatives occupying at least the rhetorical space of race-neutrality is treated in Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, "The Long Civil Rights Movement and the Political Uses of the Past," *Journal of American History* 91.4 (March 2005): 1233-1263.

[14] On busing, see Mathew D. Lassiter, "The Suburban Origins of 'Color-blind' Conservatism: Middle-Class Consciousness in the Charlotte Busing Crisis," *Journal of Urban History* 30.4 (May 2004): 549-582. See also Lassiter, *Silent Majority*. On neo-conservatism and the New Right, see Hall, "The Long Civil Rights Movement," 1237-1238. On the *Brown* decision, see Raymond Wolters, *The Burden of Brown: Thirty Years of School Desegregation* (Knoxville, TN: The University of Tennessee Press, 1984). On the broader intellectual origins of color-blindness, see Peter A. Kuryla, "Creating the Limited Civil Rights Movement: The Conservative Affirmation of Equality and Colorblindness" (unpublished article in

roots have not received due attention. The brand of faith and the social ethic voiced by Graham in his visits to southern crisis spots—as well as in his numerous articles, books, addresses, and statements on the subject of race—suggested an additional, evangelical route to color-blindness. While many white southerners did not follow the path of color-blindness away from Jim Crow, those who did could consult directions formulated in a familiar evangelical language. They could hear a message that God does not think in terms of race, even if His creation features persons of different colors. They could hear that race becomes irrelevant in the lives of truly regenerated humans, and that Christian love—rather than laws, which still require obedience—remains the most effective solution for ending existing racial tensions. This path operated alongside the parallel post-civil rights era narratives of white backlash, black political advances, and ascendant regional confidence. Two of the most prominent poles of the modern South, the Christian Right and the Sunbelt sensibility, came to fruition only after their spokespersons had abandoned (whether willingly or under duress) theological racism and legalized Jim Crow, respectively, for versions of the social ethic and public posture Graham had already modeled: evangelical universalism and the politics of decency. Such a dynamic helps to explain how Graham, a racial moderate who abetted Nixon's southern strategy, could contribute to the end of *two* Solid Souths: Jim Crow segregation and Democratic Party dominance.

What, finally, does this story—a tale of the intersection of evangelicalism, race, politics, and modernity—tell us about Graham and his South? Someone in his position, who possessed both the common touch and the support of kings, was peculiarly well-

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possession of author). For an impassioned critique of "racial realist" scholarship, see Michael K. Brown, et al, *Whitewashing Race: The Myth of a Color-blind Society* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 1-33.

positioned to help shepherd his region, however ambiguously, into a new era. Moving comfortably in many spheres, Graham's role was often indirect and sometimes symbolic. In many cases, though, it was also intentional. His influence derived from his seeming authenticity and his established identity, allowing him to gracefully change particular positions and to artfully avoid specifics about more controversial subjects in a manner elected politicians might have envied. He was a desegregationist who later criticized Martin Luther King, Jr., a southern strategist who had earlier supported Lyndon Johnson. Yet he retained a degree of consistency that has proven persistently frustrating to almost all of his critics and deceptively straightforward to many of his other interpreters. His central theme never altered; he preached Christ crucified and resurrected, with salvation through Christ available to all who would invite Him into their hearts. The message remained familiar, even while its context shifted dramatically. Thus, the transformation of Graham's Charlotte homestead into an IBM officeplex offers only a partial metaphor for a region that has demonstrated its own forms of continuity amid change. In the post-civil rights era South, skyscrapers, sports arenas, and megachurches have arisen. Racial traditions have waned and political loyalties have switched. Many faiths, however, have remained steadfast.

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Columbia (SC) *State*

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Jackson (MS) *Daily News*

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Life

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