

Public Relations, Racial Injustice, and the 1958 North Carolina Kissing Case

Denise Hill

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Approved by:

Barbara Friedman

Lois Boynton

Trevy McDonald

Earnest Perry

Ronald Stephens

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## **ABSTRACT**

Denise Hill: Public Relations, Racial Injustice, and the 1958 North Carolina Kissing Case  
(Under the direction of Dr. Barbara Friedman)

This dissertation examines how public relations was used by the Committee to Combat Racial Injustice (CCRI), the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), North Carolina Governor Luther Hodges, and the United States Information Agency (USIA) in regards to the 1958 kissing case. The kissing case occurred in Monroe, North Carolina when a group of children were playing, including two African American boys, age nine and eight, and a seven-year-old white girl. During the game, the nine-year-old boy and the girl exchanged a kiss. As a result, the police later arrested both boys and charged them with assaulting and molesting the girl. They were sentenced to a reformatory, with possible release for good behavior at age 21. The CCRI launched a public relations campaign to gain the boys' freedom, and the NAACP implemented public relations tactics on the boys' behalf. News of the kissing case spread overseas, drawing unwanted international attention to US racial problems at a time when the country was promoting worldwide democracy. In response, Gov. Hodges launched a public relations campaign to defend the actions of North Carolina authorities, and the USIA employed public relations tactics to manage the country's reputation overseas.

This dissertation analyzes the public relations campaigns of the CCRI and Gov. Hodges, focusing on public relations strategies and tactics, as well as public relations outputs and public relations outcomes. This dissertation also analyzes the public relations tactics implemented by the NAACP and USIA. In addition, it examines frames in the public relations material and frames in letters written by members of the public. Using racial formation theory as a foundation, this study also explores how race was reflected in the four groups' public relations efforts. This dissertation adds to the scholarship on public relations history, illustrating public relations practice of the 1950s and providing an example of how public relations was used for social change, specifically how public relations was used to help African Americans gain civil rights.

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*Where is the Jim Crow section  
On this merry-go-round,  
Mister, cause I want to ride?  
Down South where I come from  
White and colored  
Can't sit side by side.  
Down South on the train  
There's a Jim Crow car.  
On the bus we're put in the back—  
But there ain't no back  
To a merry-go-round!  
Where's the horse  
For a kid that's black?*<sup>1</sup>

## **CHAPTER 1: THE TABOO OF KISSING**

### **Introduction**

On warm October afternoon in 1958 in Monroe, North Carolina, a group of children played in a culvert. Included were eight-year-old David “Fuzzy” Simpson, nine-year-old James Hanover Thompson, both black, and Sissy Sutton, a seven-year-old white girl.<sup>2</sup> Despite a racially segregated society, it was not uncommon for young black and white children to play together.<sup>3</sup> During the course of play, a kissing game ensued and James and Sissy kissed one another. Sissy

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<sup>1</sup> Langston Hughes, *Selected Poems of Langston Hughes* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1959), 194.

<sup>2</sup> The words “black” and “African American” are used interchangeably throughout this dissertation. The words “Negro” and “colored” are used when quoting verbatim historical documents.

<sup>3</sup> Timothy Tyson, *Radio Free Dixie: Robert F. Williams and the Roots of Black Power* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 94.

later mentioned the kissing game to her mother, who was furious.<sup>4</sup> Although Sissy's father armed himself and searched for the boys, the police found them first. Unaware of what crime they had committed, the boys were jailed and held incommunicado. Six days later, they were charged with assault and molestation and sentenced to a reformatory for an indeterminate term, with possible release for good behavior before age 21.

Robert Williams, head of the Monroe chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), intervened on the boys' behalf. However according to Williams, officers at the national NAACP headquarters initially declined to get involved in a "sex case," especially one involving the volatile issue of miscegenation.<sup>5</sup> Yet Williams often operated independently of the national NAACP office, as he believed the NAACP's typically cautious approach insufficient to affect change in Monroe.<sup>6</sup>

Williams contacted New York-based civil rights lawyer Conrad Lynn, and Lynn engaged George Weissman, a writer and socialist active in labor and civil rights issues. In early November, a *New York Post* reporter heard of the situation in Monroe from one of the boys'

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<sup>4</sup> George L. Weissman, "The Kissing Case," *Nation*, January 17, 1959, 47. Weissman interviewed Sissy Sutton's parents for his *Nation* article. He does not provide their names, but describes her father as a "skilled worker" and her mother as a housewife. In addition, Weissman reported that "they hold very strong views on race issues, more extreme than the average Southerner."

<sup>5</sup> Robert Carl Cohen, *Black Crusader: A Biography of Robert Franklin Williams* (Secaucus, NJ: Lyle Stuart, 1972), 112; Conrad Lynn, *There is a Fountain: Autobiography of a Civil Rights Lawyer* (Westport, CT: Lawrence Hill, 1979), 143. The North Carolina chapter of the NAACP claimed its delayed involvement in the case was because Williams insisted on controlling the case, as he did not want the state or national offices involved. For additional information, see "A report of activities of the North Carolina State Conference of Branches in reference to the case of David Simpson and James H. Thompson of Monroe, North Carolina" from Kelly M. Alexander, president, NAACP North Carolina State Conferences of Branches to Roy Wilkins, executive secretary, NAACP, December 26, 1959. National Association for the Advancement of Colored People Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Part III A92 (hereafter cited as NAACP papers).

<sup>6</sup> Robert F. Williams, *Negroes With Guns* (New York: Marzani and Munsell, 1962), 50-74.

aunts and wrote about the boys' dilemma.<sup>7</sup> The NAACP maintained its distance, and so Williams and his allies, including Weissman, formed the Committee to Combat Racial Injustice (CCRI) and set a goal to free the boys. To do that, the CCRI launched a public relations campaign.<sup>8</sup>

Upon reading the *New York Post* story, a New York-based reporter from the *London News Chronicle* traveled to Monroe to interview the boys. After her story appeared in mid-December, other overseas newspapers reported on what had become known as "the kissing case." The increased visibility spurred NAACP leadership to reverse its position and offer legal assistance and financial support to the boys' mothers, and to implement some public relations tactics. However, the bulk of the public relations activities on the boys' behalf was handled by the CCRI.

As a result of the publicity and the CCRI's efforts, hundreds of letters, telegrams, and petitions flooded the office of Luther Hodges, governor of North Carolina. Sensing his political agenda and reputation were at stake, Hodges launched his own public relations campaign to justify the boys' incarceration. In the meantime, the United States Information Agency (USIA) stepped into the fray. During the Cold War, international attention to America's racial problems undermined US foreign policy, which was intended to promote democracy and contain the threat of communism. Thus, the USIA employed selected public relations tactics to help manage the country's reputation.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Ted Poston, "A Story of Two Little Boys in Carolina," *New York Post*, November 10, 1958.

<sup>8</sup> Fact sheet, "For NC Members Only To—Be Transmitted Verbally, Committee to Combat Racial Injustice," December 19, 1958, reel 9, Socialist Workers Party Records, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison (hereafter cited as SWP records).

<sup>9</sup> Richard G. Cushing, "USIA: A Hybrid of Public Relations and Diplomacy," *Public Relations Journal* 14, no. 5 (May 1958): article reprint—page numbers excluded.

This dissertation examines the public relations strategies and tactics of the CCRI, Governor Hodges, the NAACP, and the USIA as they relate to the kissing case, along with the corresponding results of those public relations activities.<sup>10</sup> The purpose of this dissertation is to explore the ways public relations helped a grassroots organization—the CCRI—advocate for African American civil rights and achieve its goal of freeing the boys, while an opposing organization, the governor’s office, used public relations to undermine the CCRI’s efforts and defend the decision to incarcerate the boys.

In contrast to the role of journalism in the civil rights era, the contribution of public relations has not been as well documented. Although scholarship in this area is growing, the public relations work by and for African Americans is largely absent from the historical record. The limited research tends to focus on larger, well-known civil rights organizations and leaders. This dissertation helps fill that gap by contributing to scholarship in this area.

## **Background**

Many historians identify the mid-1950s as the start of the modern civil rights movement, which emerged “in the South when large masses of black people became directly involved in economic boycotts, street marches, mass meetings and other disruptive tactics.”<sup>11</sup> The kissing case occurred in the early years of the movement, and background on American race relations is essential for a full understanding of the case. This section provides information on race relations in the South, including detail on black/white miscegenation. In addition, this background

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<sup>10</sup> The NAACP’s and USIA’s public relations work was limited to a few tactics. Those tactics are included in this analysis; however, most of this dissertation focuses on the public relations campaigns of the CCRI and Governor Hodges because they implemented the bulk of the public relations in response to the kissing case.

<sup>11</sup> Aldon Morris, *The Origins of the Civil Rights Movement* (New York: Free Press, 1984), 1. See also Clayborne Carson, *Eyes on the Prize: America’s Civil Rights Years, A Reader and Guide* (New York: Penguin Books, 1987), and Taylor Branch, *Parting the Waters: America in the King Years, 1954-63* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1988).

includes an overview of relevant racial issues in North Carolina generally and in Monroe, North Carolina, specifically.

### The Racial Environment in the American South

Although racial discrimination existed in all US states, in the South “it was codified in statute and *lived*, every minute of every day.”<sup>12</sup> By the 1950s, southern whites had established a comprehensive system whereby they exerted economic, political, and personal control over blacks.<sup>13</sup> Employment opportunities reflected the racial caste system in which status was conferred or denied by race. Blacks were concentrated in the lowest paying jobs and were excluded from the political process. If blacks had access to health care, it was substandard, as was education. Even for those few blacks who had gained admittance to higher education and secured better employment, the most intelligent, educated, wealthy black person was always inferior to the poorest, illiterate, uneducated white person.<sup>14</sup> Compounding the economic and political oppression was the racial segregation mandated by Jim Crow laws, which served as the legal enforcement, public symbols, and constant reminders of blacks’ inferior position.<sup>15</sup> The central purpose of Jim Crow laws was to “maintain a second-class social and economic status for blacks while upholding a first-class social and economic status for whites.”<sup>16</sup> In some instances, segregation meant exclusion. A black person in the South could not attend the same church, eat in the same restaurant, drink from the same fountain, ride the same elevator, read in the same

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<sup>12</sup> Jerrold M. Packard, *American Nightmare: The History of Jim Crow* (New York: St. Martins, 2002), vii-viii.

<sup>13</sup> Morris, *Origins of the Civil Rights Movement*, 1.

<sup>14</sup> Leon Litwack, “Trouble in Mind: Black Southerners in the Age of Jim Crow,” in *When Did Southern Segregation Begin?*, ed. John David Smith (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 2002), 162.

<sup>15</sup> C. Vann Woodward, *The Strange Career of Jim Crow* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974), 7.

<sup>16</sup> Packard, *American Nightmare*, vii.

public library, or use the same bathroom as a white person.<sup>17</sup> Racial segregation extended to public transportation, hospitals, housing, orphanages, jobs, prisons, blood supply, toilets, sports, marriage, funeral homes, and cemeteries.<sup>18</sup> Blacks were barred from most public recreational facilities such as amusement parks, tennis courts, swimming pools, bowling alleys, and skating rinks.<sup>19</sup> For example in Alabama, one of the Jim Crow laws stated: “it shall be unlawful for a negro and white person to play together or in company with each other in any game of cards or dice, dominoes, or checkers.”<sup>20</sup>

Exceptions to segregation illustrated blacks’ inferior social position under Jim Crow: Black servants and domestic workers were allowed into white homes; black men could ride in the same automobiles as whites when serving as drivers, and black nannies could accompany their charges into “whites only” playgrounds.<sup>21</sup> One Jim Crow law specified that “no persons of any race other than the white Caucasian race shall own, use, or occupy any building or any lot, except that this covenant shall not prevent occupancy by domestic servants of a different race domiciled with an owner or tenant.”<sup>22</sup>

At its height, Jim Crow discrimination was rigidly imposed by law enforcement agencies and courts, as well as “by ordinary white citizens who were neither policemen nor judges but

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<sup>17</sup> Richard Wormser, *The Rise and Fall of Jim Crow* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2003), xi-xii.

<sup>18</sup> Woodward, *The Strange Career of Jim Crow*, 7.

<sup>19</sup> Litwack, “Trouble in Mind,” 157.

<sup>20</sup> “Separate is Not Equal: Brown v. Board of Education,” Smithsonian National Museum of American History, <http://americanhistory.si.edu/brown/history/1-segregated/jim-crow.html>.

<sup>21</sup> Litwack, “Trouble in Mind,” 161.

<sup>22</sup> “Separate is Not Equal.”

who often took the law into their own hands as though they were.”<sup>23</sup> To maintain their supremacy, white southerners used every means at their disposal, from manipulating the legal system, to economic exploitation and suppression, paternalism, exclusion, political deception, harassment, deceit, physical intimidation, violence, and murder.

### *Miscegenation*

A driving force behind Jim Crow laws was the fear of black/white miscegenation. Miscegenation, a term coined in 1863 to mean a mixture of the races, presented the ultimate threat to white supremacy.<sup>24</sup> Miscegenation would destroy racial purity, as evidenced by the belief that merely one drop of black blood negated whiteness. The “one-drop rule” originated in the South in the nineteenth century, and by the twentieth century, it was accepted throughout the United States.<sup>25</sup> The belief was that “sex relations between Negro men and white women... would be like an attempt to pour Negro blood in the white race.”<sup>26</sup>

Of all the social codes and laws that reflected the power structures and racial ideologies of the time, the prohibition regarding black/white sexual relationships was the most dominant. Literature produced by the Ku Klux Klan (KKK) and similar groups usually included a demand to stop “race-mixing.”<sup>27</sup> In his landmark study, *An American Dilemma*, Swedish sociologist

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<sup>23</sup> Packard, *American Nightmare*, viii.

<sup>24</sup> Sidney Kaplan, “The Miscegenation Issue in the Election of 1864,” *Journal of Negro History* 34, no. 3 (July 1949): 277.

<sup>25</sup> Joel Williamson, *New People: Miscegenation and Mulattoes in the United States* (New York: Free Press, 1980), 1-2.

<sup>26</sup> Gunnar Myrdal, *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy* (New York: Harper & Row, 1944), 60.

<sup>27</sup> See, for example, “Save the White Race,” December 27, 1960 postcard; undated newsletter, *The Klansman: The Carolina Klan*; undated flyers: “Jew-Communists Behind Race Mixing;” “Scientists Say Negro Still in Ape Stage: Races Positively Not Equal, Mongrelization of the Races Would Destroy White Christian Civilization;” “This is



Gunnar Myrdal found that when white Southerners were asked to rank various types of discriminatory practice in order of importance, the prohibition against intermarriage and sexual intercourse with white women ranked highest.<sup>28</sup> In 1959, NAACP attorney Jack Greenberg wrote that the underlying reason whites opposed desegregation was their animus to sexual relations and/or intermarriage between black men and white women.<sup>29</sup> When the Gallup Organization asked white Americans in September 1958 if they approved or disapproved of intermarriage between whites and blacks, 94 percent said they disapproved.<sup>30</sup>

Intertwined with the fear of miscegenation was the veneration of southern white women. Myrdal suggested “the fixation on the purity of white womanhood” was in part related to how the puritan ethic of the South magnified the psychological efforts and “the sore conscience on the part of white men for their own or their compeers’ relations with, or desires for, Negro women.”<sup>31</sup> Phillip Dray wrote, “Perhaps to adjust somehow for their own animalistic lusting after black women, whites had placed their own women on a pedestal of virtue and purity—the polar opposite of the regard in which black women were held.”<sup>32</sup> In addition, white women were seen as the preservers of the white race. The white southerner believed that “white women

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Mongrelization: Socializing with Negroes Leads to Mixed Marriages.” James William Cole Papers, Joyner Library, East Carolina University, Greenville, NC (hereafter cited as Cole papers).

<sup>28</sup> Myrdal, *American Dilemma*, 589-590.

<sup>29</sup> Phyl Newbeck, *Virginia Hasn't Always Been For Lovers: Interracial Marriage Bans and the Case of Richard and Mildred Loving* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2004), 28.

<sup>30</sup> Gallup Organization. Gallup Poll (AIPO), September 1958 [survey question]. USGALLUP.58-605.Q056A. Gallup Organization [producer]. Storrs, CT: Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, iPOLL [distributor]. <http://www.ropercenter.uconn.edu>. Note: Other than the fact that those polled were white Americans, this survey does not include demographic information about the respondents.

<sup>31</sup> Myrdal, *American Dilemma*, 591.

<sup>32</sup> Philip Dray, *At the Hands of Persons Unknown: The Lynching of Black America* (New York: Modern Library, 2002), 70.

untouched and above suspicion were the key to racial purity and moral salvation. As long as white women were strictly separated from black men, no one need be alarmed.”<sup>33</sup>

Any action hinting of black male threat to white female sanctity was immediately addressed, within or outside the law. Any overture by a black man toward a white woman, whether real, perceived, fabricated or invited, risked reprisal that at its harshest was death by lynching. Just three years before the kissing case, fourteen-year-old Chicagoan Emmett Till, who was in Mississippi visiting relatives, was murdered for allegedly flirting with a white woman. Till’s white killers beat him with an ax, shot him, and threw his body in the Tallahatchie River.<sup>34</sup> Although they tied a 125-pound cotton gin wheel to his corpse, it bobbed to the surface and was found by a fisherman four days after his murder. His killers were tried and acquitted. Although they later admitted to the murder, double jeopardy prevented any legal action being taken against them.<sup>35</sup>

African Americans did not blithely accept their subordinate position and corresponding treatment by white society.<sup>36</sup> Although some historians date the beginning of the civil rights movement to the 1954 *Brown vs. Board of Education* decision, in which the Supreme Court ruled segregated schools unconstitutional, blacks had long struggled for the equality denied to them.<sup>37</sup> This struggle was evident in slave uprisings, organized efforts for black union

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<sup>33</sup> Joel Williamson, *New People*, 138.

<sup>34</sup> Dray, *At the Hands*, 424.

<sup>35</sup> Gene Roberts and Hank Klibanoff, *The Race Beat: The Press, the Civil Rights Struggle, and the Awakening of a Nation* (New York: Vintage Books, 2006), 86-108.

<sup>36</sup> Morris, *Origins of the Civil Rights Movement*, ix.

<sup>37</sup> See Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, “The Long Civil Rights Movement and the Political Uses of the Past,” *Journal of American History* 92, no. 4 (March 2005): 1234.

recognition, demands for legal redress, government intervention, boycotts, riots, and sit-ins, to name a few types of protest. In what Jacquelyn Dowd Hall describes as “the long civil rights movement,” African Americans rebelled against a social structure that regarded them as inferior well before the 1954 *Brown* decision.<sup>38</sup> Although the purpose of this dissertation is not to document early civil rights activities, the following are a few examples among many that illustrate this long tradition of protest. For instance, Ida B. Wells led anti-lynching crusades in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries; Mary Church Terrell began the black women’s club movement in the late 1800s; both Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. Du Bois begin writing about and advocating for the advancement of blacks in the late 1800s; Marcus Garvey began the United Negro Improvement Association in 1911; and in 1925 A. Phillip Randolph began a successful 12-year battle to gain recognition for the first black union. As further evidence, although the 1963 March on Washington is recognized as a watershed moment in modern civil rights history, the March on Washington Movement began in 1941 as an organized effort to desegregate the Armed Forces and provide fair labor to African Americans. Spearheaded by Randolph, this movement resulted in President Truman’s 1948 desegregation order, although the Armed Forces were not fully desegregated until the end of the Korean War in 1953.<sup>39</sup>

While there were other national efforts to gain African American civil rights, much of the protest occurred locally in what Aldon Morris describes as social organizations “within the community of a subordinate group, which mobilizes, organizes, and coordinates collective action

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> For an overview of African-American history, see Henry Louis Gates, *Life Upon These Shores: Looking at African American History, 1513-2008* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2011).

aimed at attaining the common ends of that subordinate group.”<sup>40</sup> Morris provides a number of examples, including the work of the Montgomery Improvement Association, which was formed in 1955 by church and other community leaders in Montgomery, Alabama, to organize a bus boycott. Lasting a little more than a year, the successful boycott led the US Supreme Court to declare segregated buses unconstitutional. According to Morris, by the mid-to-late 1950s, local movements were underway in a number of Southern cities. Participants confronted the local white power structure and in doing so, were often threatened, beaten, or faced other reprisals. However their resistance endured. By the time two young boys in Monroe were sent to a reformatory for allegedly kissing a white girl, there were numerous local groups actively fighting for African American civil rights. However despite or even due to these efforts, most Americans in 1958 thought the situation in the South between the races would only get worse in the coming year.<sup>41</sup>

### *North Carolina*

In the mid-1950s, the national press viewed North Carolina as moderate on race relations in comparison to other Southern states.<sup>42</sup> Although black North Carolinians faced the same economic, political, and social oppression as did blacks in other parts of the South, this view stemmed primarily from the state’s handling of the school desegregation issue.<sup>43</sup> After the 1954

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<sup>40</sup> Morris, *Origins of the Civil Rights Movement*, 40.

<sup>41</sup> Gallup Organization. Gallup Poll (AIPO), September 1958 [survey question]. USGALLUP.58-605.Q054. Gallup Organization [producer]. Storrs, CT: Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, iPOLL [distributor]. Note: This survey did not ask why respondents thought the situation would worsen. <http://www.ropercenter.uconn.edu>. <http://www.ropercenter.uconn.edu.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/CFIDE/cf/action/ipoll/ipollBasket.cfm>

<sup>42</sup> William Chafe, *Civilities and Civil Rights: Greensboro, North Carolina, and the Black Struggle for Freedom* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 54-56.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

*Brown* decision, Gov. William Umstead appointed a committee of sixteen whites and three blacks to study the impact of the Court's decision on North Carolina. Umstead died shortly thereafter, and Lieutenant Governor Luther Hodges ascended and shouldered oversight of the issue. The committee's recommendation, which became known as the Pearsall Plan, was to remove control of education from the state and return it to local school boards, which was a "clear effort to circumvent the *Brown* decision," historian William Chafe noted.<sup>44</sup> Hodges later appointed a seven-member Pearsall committee, this time excluding blacks. Referencing the previous committee, Hodges gave the following reason for this exclusion:

These Negro committee members were under great pressure from their fellow-Negroes, many of whom felt strongly that there should be immediate integration. Mr. Pearsall, others, and I discussed carefully and prayerfully the problem of the racial composition of the new, smaller committee of seven. We finally decided that we would not include a Negro because a Negro member of such a small group would have to work under almost impossible conditions because of outside pressure.<sup>45</sup>

Ultimately, the second Pearsall Plan permitted voluntary desegregation but allowed a district to close its schools if desegregation occurred; white students in those districts would be given state tuition aid to attend private schools. The Pearsall Plan allowed North Carolina to comply with the Supreme Court's ruling, while still promoting an anti-integration policy.<sup>46</sup>

In an August 1955 radio and television address about the school issue, Hodges said black education in North Carolina had been successful due to the help of white citizens. Integration, he argued, would cause whites to withdraw their support from schools, resulting in their closure and

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 50.

<sup>45</sup> Luther Hodges, *Businessman in the State House* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1962), 83.

<sup>46</sup> Chafe, *Civilities and Civil Rights*, 50-60. See also, undated brochure "The Pearsall Plan to Save Our Schools," Cole papers.

a corresponding decline in black education.<sup>47</sup> Speaking directly to black citizens of North Carolina, Hodges equated a desire for integration with a lack of racial pride. Without explicitly naming the NAACP, he denigrated its work. He requested that black citizens:

Not allow any militant and selfish organization to stampede you into refusal to go along with the program I am proposing in the interest of our public schools; take pride in your race by attending your own schools; and make it clear that any among you who refuse to cooperate in this effort to save our public school system are not to be applauded but are to be considered as endangering the education of your children and as denying the integrity of the Negro race by refusing to remain in association with it.<sup>48</sup>

Hodges told North Carolina's black citizens that remaining segregated was synonymous with black pride. He attempted to cultivate in blacks the same fear that whites had about the dilution of the white race: intermingling also would attenuate the Negro race. Furthermore, as Chafe noted, Hodges invoked the imagery of miscegenation by claiming the NAACP would have the black race "lose itself in another race" by encouraging blacks to sacrifice "their identity in complete merger with whites."<sup>49</sup> Hodges concluded his broadcast by warning black citizens that efforts to integrate, which he previously referred to as "show-off actions to demonstrate equality," would be strenuously and bitterly resisted by North Carolina's white citizens.<sup>50</sup>

Chafe referred to the Pearsall Plan as "a subtle and insidious form of racism" but noted that at the time, most North Carolina political leaders and white newspapers editors dubbed it a "moderate" solution to the school integration dilemma.<sup>51</sup> Hodges was disappointed when he was unable to obtain support among black groups, such as the statewide black teachers association.

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<sup>47</sup> Chafe, *Civilities and Civil Rights*, 51.

<sup>48</sup> Hodges, *Businessman*, 83.

<sup>49</sup> Chafe, *Civilities and Civil Rights*, 52.

<sup>50</sup> Hodges, *Businessman*, 88.

<sup>51</sup> Chafe, *Civilities and Civil Rights*, 54, 56.

According to Chafe, more telling than his disappointment was his surprise that black citizens would have an independent view in direct contradiction to a white edict.<sup>52</sup> In the fall of 1955, Hodges spoke to students at historically black North Carolina A&T University as part of its Founder's Day program. His speech did not focus on school desegregation; however, during the course of his address, Hodges criticized the NAACP and referred to "Negroes" as "Nigras," a slight he later claimed was indeliberate.<sup>53</sup> Students began to loudly shuffle their feet in protest, so much so that he asked Ferdinand D. Bluford, A&T's president, if he should continue. Hodges finished his speech, but was incensed at what he believed was discourteous behavior. Upon receiving a written apology from Bluford, Hodges provided a terse reply and refused to acknowledge any other letters "from Negro students at A&T or any other Negroes."<sup>54</sup> Although Hodges "was not a venomous white supremacist in the mold of Alabama Governor George Wallace," he was a segregationist.<sup>55</sup> Hodges believed that blacks were "ill prepared for citizenship" and "should gratefully accept white leadership."<sup>56</sup>

When schools opened in 1957, a dozen black students were enrolled in previously all-white schools in Charlotte, Greensboro, and Winston-Salem.<sup>57</sup> With token integration proceeding, Hodges turned his attention to improving North Carolina's economy. A former management executive in the textile industry, Hodges applied his business acumen to running the

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 54.

<sup>53</sup> Hodges, *Businessman*, 91.

<sup>54</sup> Tyson, *Radio Free Dixie*, 107.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> William S. Powell, *North Carolina Through Four Centuries* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989), 522.

state. In the early 1950s, North Carolina's per capita income was among the lowest in the nation. To boost that figure, Hodges sought to replace the state's low-income jobs with those in higher-paying industries. With a focus on economic development via industrialization, Hodges and others in his administration travelled the country touting the benefits of doing business in North Carolina.<sup>58</sup> Between 1956 and 1958, the governor's efforts brought approximately 300 new factories to the state.<sup>59</sup> In early 1959, Hodges decided to expand his promotion of "the North Carolina Story" to business leaders in Western Europe. At the end of the year, he and his staff traveled to ten major cities in France, Germany, Britain, Switzerland, the Netherlands and Belgium.<sup>60</sup>

In addition to his achievements in improving North Carolina's economy, Hodges was lauded for his management of the school desegregation issue, especially when compared with the actions of other southern states.<sup>61</sup> In stark contrast, Arkansas Governor Orval Faubus's fervid resistance to integration caused him to order the National Guard to stop nine black students from enrolling in the all-white Central High School in Little Rock on September 4, 1957. The National Guard was joined by mobs of white citizens incensed at the integration efforts. The students attempted to enter the school every day, and they were subsequently barred by the National Guard and harassed by the white protesters. The situation escalated to such a degree that on September 24, President Eisenhower superseded Faubus's actions and sent federal troops to Little Rock to enforce a federal desegregation order. The news media also were on site and

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<sup>58</sup> William A. Link, *North Carolina: Change and Tradition in a Southern State* (Wheeling, IL: Harlan Davidson, 2009), 376.

<sup>59</sup> Tyson, *Radio Free Dixie*, 106.

<sup>60</sup> Hodges, *Businessman*, 57-78.

<sup>61</sup> Powell, *North Carolina*, 518.



although only a few reporters were in Little Rock on September 4, four weeks later “there were 225, including reporters for three London newspapers.”<sup>62</sup> According to Gene Roberts and Hank Klibanoff, “A week after school opened, 67 percent of the newspapers in the North and 68 percent of the newspapers in the South were giving the events in Little Rock front-page headlines of five or more columns, and virtually all were running two or three related sidebars on the front page each day.”<sup>63</sup> In addition to domestic coverage, the events in Little Rock became international news that drew attention to America’s ongoing racial problems, thereby threatening its global image and damaging foreign relations during the Cold War. *Arkansas Gazette* Editor Harry Ashmore contrasted Faubus’s actions with those of Hodges’s. Ashmore wrote, “The North Carolina governor simply said that ‘North Carolinians do not like lawlessness’ and made it quite clear that anyone who had other ideas would be promptly dealt with.”<sup>64</sup> Ashmore noted that hecklers in Charlotte had been “taken in hand” by local authorities, and desegregation in North Carolina proceeded peacefully.<sup>65</sup>

Although North Carolina’s reputation for racial temperance may have “reflected a self-created mythology and congratulatory image-making,” Hodges’s achievements led *Time* to dub him “the South’s new leader.”<sup>66</sup> *Time* wrote that Hodges was “too busy in pursuit of twentieth century economic development to be inhibited by diehard last stands against school

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<sup>62</sup> Richard Lentz and Karla Gower, *The Opinions of Mankind: Racial Issues, Press, and Propaganda in the Cold War* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2010), 976. See also Mary L. Dudziak, “The Little Rock Crisis and Foreign Affairs: Race, Resistance, and the Image of American Democracy,” *Southern California Law Review* 70, no. 1 (1996): 1641-1716.

<sup>63</sup> Roberts and Klibanoff, *The Race Beat*, 163.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 172-173.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 173.

<sup>66</sup> Link, *North Carolina: Change and Tradition*, 398, and “The South’s New Leader,” *Time*, May 4, 1959.

integration.”<sup>67</sup> *Time* focused on Hodges’s success in bringing jobs and industry to North Carolina, balancing the state budget, and reducing corporate taxes. Other than a scant reference to school desegregation, the article does not mention race relations in North Carolina. In early 1959 when Massachusetts Senator John F. Kennedy was mentioned as a possible presidential candidate, Hodges was considered a potential running mate.<sup>68</sup> By the time the kissing case became an international incident, Hodges had cemented a positive reputation with a bright future.

### *Monroe*

It was against the Jim Crow system that Robert Williams directed the initial attention of the local NAACP chapter, which he joined when he returned to Monroe in 1955 after a stint in the Marines.<sup>69</sup> Located about 25 miles southeast of Charlotte, Monroe in 1950 had a population of 10,140. Thirty percent of Monroe residents were black.<sup>70</sup> As with many Southern towns, Monroe was segregated; the railroad tracks that ran through town separated black and white residential communities. Unwritten social codes of behavior dictated that blacks should avoid “getting into trouble with white people.”<sup>71</sup> By 1956, the Monroe NAACP chapter’s ranks had dwindled to six due to renewed harassment by local whites, whose fears of integration had been

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<sup>67</sup> “The South’s New Leader,” *Time*, May 4, 1959.

<sup>68</sup> “Senator Grooms Hodges as Veep Timber for ’60,” *Raleigh News & Observer*, January 16, 1959.

<sup>69</sup> For more information on Williams’s experiences in the segregated Armed Forces, see Tyson, *Radio Free Dixie* and Cohen, *Black Crusader*.

<sup>70</sup> United States Census of the Population, vol. I, part 35, North Carolina, (United States Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, 1960) Table 7 and 13.

<sup>71</sup> Interview with Mabel R. Williams by David C. Cecelski, August 20, 1999 K-0266, in the Southern Oral History Program Collection #4007, Southern History Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

stirred after the 1954 *Brown* decision.<sup>72</sup> The six members elected Williams president, and Dr. Albert Perry, a physician who had recently moved to his wife's hometown of Monroe, was elected vice president. To revive the chapter, 31-year-old Williams launched a one-man recruiting campaign, going to pool halls and walking the streets in search of farmers, domestics, and fellow veterans.<sup>73</sup> Once the chapter's ranks had been restored, its members set out to integrate the Union County Public Library, after the branch for blacks was destroyed by fire. Williams and a fellow black veteran went to the library, and the veteran went in while Williams waited in the car. The veteran checked out a book, without incident.<sup>74</sup> This success spurred Monroe NAACP members to tackle the desegregation of other public facilities.

Next was the public swimming pool, which had been built with Works Progress Administration funds as part of the New Deal.<sup>75</sup> Jim Crow laws prevented blacks from swimming in the public pool. Instead, black children swam in ponds, streams, swimming holes and drainage ditches, and as a result of these unsafe alternatives, several black children had drowned.<sup>76</sup> Williams and Perry asked the Union County Recreation Department to build a

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<sup>72</sup> Cohen, *Black Crusader*, 90. In his interview with Robert Cohen, Williams noted that there were six Monroe NAACP members in 1956. However NAACP records note 17 members in 1956. From 1957 to 1959, NAACP records indicate 97, 92, and 108 members, respectively. See Monroe, NC Branch Membership Record, NAACP papers, box C113, Monroe, NC folder.

<sup>73</sup> Cohen, *Black Crusader*, 91, and Robert Williams, "The Freedom Struggle in the Free World," undated, Robert F. Williams papers, box 2 (hereafter cited as Williams papers).

<sup>74</sup> That fact that Williams's compatriot was able to obtain a book from the library did not mean the library was integrated. Black citizens had a room inside the Winchester Recreation Center that served as their library. It was not until 1966 that the libraries were integrated and housed in one facility. See the Winchester, NC Branch flyer, Dickerson Genealogy and Local History Room, Union County Public Library, Monroe, NC. See also Kissing Case file and other Monroe, NC history files, Dickerson Genealogy and Local History Room, Union County Public Library, Monroe, NC.

<sup>75</sup> Cohen, *Black Crusader*, 93.

<sup>76</sup> Robert Williams, "The Freedom Struggle in the Free World," undated, Williams papers, box 2.

separate pool for blacks or allow them to use the public pool one or two days a week. They were told there were no funds for a separate pool. The request to use the pool one or two days also was denied for economic reasons—officials insisted the pool would have to be drained and refilled after being used by blacks. Undaunted, Monroe NAACP members organized “stand-in” campaigns in which blacks would go to the pool, attempt admission and, upon refusal, stand in protest at the entrance.<sup>77</sup> The authorities would then close the pool, which meant whites, too, were unable to swim. By this time, local white citizens were irritated with Williams, as they felt he was disrupting the community by fomenting trouble between the races. A group of whites circulated a petition demanding that Williams leave Monroe.<sup>78</sup>

The swimming pool protests caught the attention of the Monroe chapter of the KKK, which launched a campaign of night-riding, cross-burning, and rallies.<sup>79</sup> The Klan motorcade, led by the police chief to “keep order,” would often cruise through Monroe’s black neighborhood, “blowing their horns, throwing rocks, and firing pistol shots into the air.”<sup>80</sup> A group of black ministers asked Monroe town officials to “forbid the Klan from terrorizing their section of town.”<sup>81</sup> Williams made similar requests to Gov. Hodges, President Eisenhower, and various federal officials, all to no avail.<sup>82</sup> As a result, Williams and a group of veterans in the Monroe NAACP decided to take action. Williams wrote to the National Rifle Association (NRA) and

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<sup>77</sup> Tyson, *Radio Free Dixie*, 84-85; Cohen, *Black Crusader*, 94- 95.

<sup>78</sup> “Petition Circulated,” *Monroe Enquirer*, November 11, 1957.

<sup>79</sup> Weissman, “The Kissing Case,” 47.

<sup>80</sup> Tyson, *Radio Free Dixie*, 86.

<sup>81</sup> Cohen, *Black Crusader*, 96.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 97.

received a charter, which allowed his “NRA Rifle Club” members to purchase military-surplus weapons, as well as weapons from sporting goods stores and by mail order.<sup>83</sup> The veterans in Williams’s group trained those without weapons experience, and the group developed a counterintelligence system to forewarn them of attacks. In the meantime, KKK motorcades continued their night rides, often targeting Williams’s house, as well as Dr. Perry’s. Both men, along with other blacks in Monroe, received death threats. Perry was targeted because local whites believed he was bankrolling the NAACP. They also were resentful of his thriving medical practice and his large new house—a violation of the racial caste system.<sup>84</sup>

After the KKK called Perry’s wife and told her their house would be bombed, Williams and about 60 men armed themselves and guarded the house in shifts. One evening in October 1957, Klan members in a motorcade of about 50 vehicles fired upon Perry’s house. Williams and his men, hidden in foxholes and behind sandbags, returned fire. In response, the Klan fled. Although there were no deaths or injuries, the next day Monroe officials revised the city charter and outlawed any type of cavalcade of three or more automobiles without a permit. While not specifically referring to the KKK by name, the ordinance forbade anyone participating in a motorcade (pursuant to a permit) to “wear a mask or hood which would prevent recognition” by the police.<sup>85</sup>

Although Williams and the black clergy had previously asked for police and government intervention in the Klan’s attacks, no help was offered before the shoot-out at Perry’s. Despite the fact that a black community stood up to the Klan, Williams later noted that there was no

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> Robert F. Williams, “The Freedom Struggle in the Free World,” undated, Williams papers, box 2.

<sup>85</sup> The Code of the City of Monroe, North Carolina, 1958: The Charter, Certain Other Special Acts and the General Ordinances of the City (Charlottesville, VA: Michie City Publications, 1959), 474.

coverage by the mainstream white press, although a few black newspapers and magazines reported on the incident.<sup>86</sup> In contrast, when a large group of Lumbee Indians stopped a Klan attack in a nearby county two weeks after the Monroe shoot-out, the Lumbee victory received national media coverage.<sup>87</sup> In speaking to the press about the altercation between the Klan and blacks in Monroe, the town's police chief, A. A. Mauney, denied there was any shooting.<sup>88</sup> The *Monroe Enquirer* reported as such, and included an Associated Press story quoting Mauney's denial. No reporter contacted Williams for comment. He recognized the white-controlled press was often complicit in perpetuating the dominant racial conventions, a practice certainly not limited to newspapers in Monroe.<sup>89</sup> Mauney was rumored to be a member of the KKK, and the reporting in the *Monroe Journal* was more reflective of his attitudes than an objective account of the incident.<sup>90</sup>

Deviating from the NAACP's position of non-violence, Williams and his allies armed themselves and returned fire when fired upon. Williams did not promote aggression, but he did

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<sup>86</sup> Cohen, *Black Crusader*, 106. See also "Citizens Fire Back at Klan," *Norfolk Journal and Guide*, October, 12, 1957.

<sup>87</sup> See for example, "Bad Medicine for the Klan: North Carolina Indians Break Up Ku Kluxers' Anti-Indian Meeting," *Life*, January 27, 1958, 26-28. For Williams's speculation as to why the Lumbee victory over the Klan received extensive media coverage and the similar action by blacks in Monroe did not, see Tyson, *Radio Free Dixie*, 138-139; Cohen, *Black Crusader*, 108-109.

<sup>88</sup> "Night-Riding Klan, Negroes In Near Clash Here on Friday," *Monroe Enquirer*, October 7, 1957. This story also included an Associated Press story about the clash, which reported the denial by the police chief of any exchange of gunfire. His denial may have contributed to the lack of more widespread coverage of the incident.

<sup>89</sup> Cohen, *Black Crusader*, 108. For an example of how the press failed to provide a balanced account of civil rights-related events, see Barbara G. Friedman and John D. Richardson, "A National Disgrace" Newspaper Coverage of the 1963 Birmingham Campaign in the South and Beyond," *Journalism History* 33, no. 4 (2008): 224-232, and Laura Richardson Walton, "In Their Own Backyard: Local Press Coverage of the Chaney, Goodman, and Schwerner Murders," *American Journalism* 23, no. 3 (2006): 29-51.

<sup>90</sup> For an examination of how newspapers failed to fully and objectively report a race-related issue in 1939-1940, see Aimee Edmondson and Earnest L. Perry Jr., "Objectivity and 'The Journalist's Creed': Local Coverage of Lucile Bluford's Fight to Enter the University of Missouri School of Journalism," *Journalism History* 33, no. 4 (2008): 233-240.

advocate armed self-defense.<sup>91</sup> His viewpoint was considered radical, despite the fact that “years of terrorist actions against law-abiding black citizens by racist whites and the sanctioning of those acts by local authorities” helped him arrive at his position.<sup>92</sup> That fact that a black man would challenge a white man, regardless of the reason, was a violation of the unwritten codes of behavior in the South.

The day after Williams and others vanquished the Klan at Perry’s house, the physician was arrested on “the charge of performing a criminal abortion on a white woman,” an allegation he vehemently denied.<sup>93</sup> He was released on bond; however, his trial occupied the front pages of Monroe’s two newspapers for the remainder of the year. In addition to the accusation leveled at Perry, whites perpetrated various acts of violence on Monroe’s black citizens, with no legal redress. For example, there was an attempted rape of Mary Ruth Reid, a pregnant black woman, by Lewis Medlin, a white man; a black female hotel worker was kicked down a flight of stairs by a white man; and black neighborhoods were randomly attacked.<sup>94</sup> At the same time, Williams’s insurance company canceled his auto coverage because he was a KKK target. Citing the rocks

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<sup>91</sup> Robert F. Williams, *Negroes With Guns* (New York: Marzani and Munsell, 1962), 54-58. In May 1959, after a Monroe white man was found not guilty in the attempted rape of a pregnant black woman, a fed-up Williams publicly announced that blacks must be willing to meet violence with violence, resulting in his suspension from the NAACP later that year. See Cohen, *Black Crusader*, 122-131, and Tyson, *Radio Free Dixie*, 148-165.

<sup>92</sup> Ronald J. Stephens, “Praise the Lord and Pass the Ammunition: Robert F. Williams’s Crusade for Justice on Behalf of Twenty-Two Million African Americans as a Cuban Exile,” *Black Diaspora Review* 2, no. 1 (2010): 16.

<sup>93</sup> “Malpractice Case is Found by Doctors,” *Monroe Journal*, October 15, 1957.

<sup>94</sup> George Lavan, “The Monroe Story,” Committee to Combat Racial Injustice papers, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, box 2, folder 3 (hereafter cited as CCRI papers). George Weissman occasionally wrote under the pseudonym George Lavan; Lavan was his middle name. See also, “Five Receive Light Sentences in Racial Incident at Monroe,” *Raleigh News & Observer*, April 17, 1958; “Mother Who Accused White Man Evicted,” *Philadelphia Tribune*, December 2, 1958; “Kick Case Ready for NC Hearing,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, February 7, 1959.

thrown at his car and home several times by people driving by at night, the insurer said it was forced to cancel the comprehensive and collision portions of his policy.<sup>95</sup>

One month before the kissing incident, Williams tried unsuccessfully to enroll his children at the all-white school, further arousing the ire of local whites. Speaking of life in Monroe, Williams's wife Mabel later recalled, "I don't think that the white society—they didn't look on us as human beings. They just did not feel that we were people who had to be considered. We were just servants and kind of nuisance people in the community, I guess."<sup>96</sup> By October 1958, racial tensions in Monroe had long been running high, as evidenced by the reaction to a kiss exchanged between young children of different races during the course of a game.

### Public Relations in the 1950s

This dissertation is a historical study; therefore the public relations material here must be analyzed within a 1950s context to avoid presentism. To do so, I review how it was defined in the 1950s by public relations pioneer and counselor Edward Bernays and Rex Harlow, an accomplished public relations practitioner and educator. As illustration, I include examples of public relations practice in the late 1950s.

In his 1952 book *Public Relations*, Bernays wrote that public relations covers three areas of activity: information, persuasion, and integration.<sup>97</sup> He defined public relations as information given to the public; persuasion directed at the public to influence their attitudes or actions; and

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<sup>95</sup> See "Insurance Company Cancels Policy of NAACP Official," *Charlotte Observer*, May 12, 1958; "Negro's Insurance Cut," *New York Times*, May 13, 1958.

<sup>96</sup> Interview with Mabel R. Williams by David C. Cecelski, August 20, 1999 K-0266, in the Southern Oral History Program Collection #4007, Southern History Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

<sup>97</sup> Edward Bernays, *Public Relations* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1952), 3.



efforts to integrate actions or attitudes of an organization with its publics, and vice versa.<sup>98</sup>

Bernays outlined the elements of public relations planning as conducting research, setting objectives, identifying publics, developing and implementing tactics, and evaluation.<sup>99</sup> He stressed the importance of having clearly defined objectives, and as examples, provided the following: intensify already existing favorable attitudes, get the target audience to take a specific action, convert disbelievers, or disrupt certain viewpoints.<sup>100</sup> He also referred to the public relations process as the “engineering of consent,” explaining that if the public is convinced of the soundness of an idea, it will proceed to act on it.

In 1957, Rex Harlow offered a similar definition: “The public relations man must devote a large part of his time and efforts to attracting the attention of people, arousing their interest in his enterprise, winning their consent to consider his messages, and stimulating them to certain types of desired action.”<sup>101</sup> A public relations counselor, Harlow added, “strives to “sell” them on his enterprise—on its products, services, policies, personnel, management, program, or future plans; or, as the case may be, on such thing as the righteousness of the cause he champions.”<sup>102</sup> In some instances, the goal of a public relations program is to influence attitudes and affect public opinion, which Harlow acknowledged could be extremely difficult. Other public relations efforts focus solely on spurring the public to take a specific action, such as buying a product or writing a letter to an elected official.

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<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 157-316.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 162.

<sup>101</sup> Rex F. Harlow, *Social Science in Public Relations* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1957), 60.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

From its inception, publicity was important to the NAACP. According to historian Robert Jack, “When the NAACP was organized, it was immediately discovered that it must maintain means of publicity through which the work would become widespread, thus arousing interest and support from those who felt that the organization was fostering a worthy cause.”<sup>103</sup> In a history of the NAACP, Warren St. James noted the association’s “well-staffed public relations department,” which “has utilized all the modern means of communication—the press, telephone, telegraph, radio, television, and movies.”<sup>104</sup> To influence public opinion, the department implemented an “educational propaganda” campaign, in which it sent “important newsworthy items on Negro achievements to the leading white newspapers in an attempt to offset the stereotyped opinions about Negroes that are found among many whites.”<sup>105</sup> The purpose was not only to sway attitudes of the white public, but also to “educate Negroes to make more positive and militant efforts for the attainment of their civil rights.”<sup>106</sup> With this campaign, the public relations objectives were attitude change among whites and raising awareness and encouraging action among blacks.

St. James also provided an example of NAACP-conducted research to support these efforts. Specifically, the association researched crime statistics and discovered that felonies were not synonymous with any one racial group.<sup>107</sup> The NAACP incorporated this fact in educational

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<sup>103</sup> Robert L. Jack, *History of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People* (Urbana, IL: Meador Publishing Company, 1943), 9.

<sup>104</sup> Warren D. St. James, *The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People: A Case Study in Pressure Groups* (New York: Exposition Press, 1958), 106.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., 107.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., 106.

materials, which they sent to “schools, libraries, race-relations committees, civil bodies, and many other groups and persons interested in advancing democratic concepts and furthering racial understanding.”<sup>108</sup> Furthermore, St. James addressed evaluation by noting that “there are no reliable measurements of the effectiveness of the Association’s efforts in the area of public opinion.”<sup>109</sup> However by revisiting the NAACP’s chief objective of eliminating discrimination, he identified some successes, such as the admission of blacks to southern universities and a decline in race-related violence. His example highlights one of the ways public relations was measured at the time (and often still is). Specifically, if an organizational objective is achieved, the public relations practitioner assumes public relations must have played some role; therefore, the public relations efforts are labeled a success. However this approach does not isolate what role public relations played, thereby further illustrating the challenges of public relations measurement.

The January 1959 public relations report for the NAACP’s annual meeting, prepared by Public Relations Director Henry Lee Moon, offers another example of public relations practice in the 1950s. Moon reminded board members that the NAACP’s public relations objective was to enhance its image in order to gain public acceptance of its programs, methods, and goals.<sup>110</sup> One of its main constituencies was the black public, which Moon acknowledged was not fully informed about the NAACP and its activities. With the white public, Moon segmented them into three groups: those who were incontrovertible and opposed to everything the NAACP stood for, those who were committed to the NAACP’s position, and those whose moral principles

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<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid., 109.

<sup>110</sup> Henry Lee Moon, “Problems and Goals of NAACP Public Relations Activities: Report of the Department of Public Relations,” 49<sup>th</sup> NAACP Annual Meeting, January 5, 1959, Group III, Box A36, NAACP Papers.

conflicted with their current actions and viewpoint.<sup>111</sup> Moon believed that changing attitudes of the first group was beyond the NAACP's public relations efforts. Instead, public relations programs should be targeted primarily to the third group, whose members were open to alternative viewpoints. Moon reminded board members of the difficulty of this work "because our program challenges deeply rooted prejudices."<sup>112</sup> Without mentioning Bernays by name, Moon wrote, "The task of meeting these problems involves what one expert has called the 'engineering of consent' in an area of human relations full of emotional booby-traps."<sup>113</sup> Moon also defined objectives, segmented audiences, and stressed the importance of evaluation.

Furthermore, his public relations counsel illustrated that with some audiences, the primary purpose of public relations was to inform and educate, whereas with others, the objective was to disrupt existing viewpoints. Among the public relations tactics referenced by Moon and Bernays were writing and distributing communication material such as press releases, leaflets, bulletins, fact sheets, telegrams, letters, postcards, and brochures; speakers' bureaus; engaging audiences via conventions and events; holding press conferences; and arranging interviews in print and broadcast media outlets.

To summarize, public relations practice in the 1950s used communication tools to create awareness, influence attitudes and/or behavior, and to spur action. Public relations plans included objectives, target audiences, strategies, tactics, and occasionally, evaluation. Public relations tools included the following: press releases; press conferences; print and broadcast media interviews, whose purpose was to secure publicity; speaking engagements; speakers' bureaus;

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<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

special events; and a variety of written material, such as pamphlets, flyers, fact sheets, letters, telegrams, petitions, and postcards. Notwithstanding changes in technology, the public relations tools and elements of a public relations plan used in the 1950s are still being used in today's practice.

### Public Relations and Propaganda

Most examinations of public relations history cannot avoid the overlap between the terms “public relations” and “propaganda.” Although contemporary use of “propaganda” connotes pernicious behavior, Scott Cutlip posited that propaganda is an essential part of the public relations function if the word is used neutrally, because practitioners often propagate a cause, institution, or individual.<sup>114</sup> At the time of the kissing case, the terms were often used interchangeably, therefore the link between the terms must be addressed to avoid presentism. Thus, the last part of this background section considers the interplay between public relations and propaganda.

Public relations historian Jacquie L'Etang examined the challenges of trying to define public relations and propaganda as separate concepts. She found the term “propaganda” was not always cloaked in negativity. “Propaganda” began its descent into disrepute after World War I, and the decline accelerated after World War II, when propaganda was associated with Nazi manipulation. However despite its adverse subtexts, L'Etang argues that as late as the 1950s, “public relations practitioners in non-governmental contexts remained comfortable with the

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<sup>114</sup> Scott M. Cutlip, *Public Relations History: From the Seventeenth to the Twentieth Century. The Antecedents*. (Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1995), 122. See also Bruce Pinkleton, "The Campaign of the Committee on Public Information: Its Contributions to the History and Evolution of Public Relations," *Journal of Public Relations Research* 6, no. 4 (1994): 229-240.

term...and many...used the terms interchangeably.”<sup>115</sup> Civil rights leader Julian Bond, who served as director of public relations for the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) from 1961 to 1966, said the terms “public relations” and “propaganda” were fungible because “propaganda” did not always connote negativity. For example, SNCC volunteers may have spoken of “distributing our propaganda materials.”<sup>116</sup> Today, action phrased that way would likely be seen as an insidious practice focused on manipulation of truth. Yet in the mid-twentieth century, the expression meant that a public relations practitioner was disseminating public relations material, such as press releases, letters, flyers, or brochures. As L’Etang points out, part of the problem has been identifying the difference between acceptable and unacceptable forms of persuasion, as well as intention, moral position, and behavior. SNCC’s organizational goals, and its corresponding public relations goals, did not include using chicanery to achieve them. Asked how civil rights organizations used the term “propaganda” in the 1950s and 1960s, Bond replied, “We meant it to be something good!”<sup>117</sup>

## **Literature Review**

### Theoretical Framework

Writing in *The Souls of Black Folks*, W.E.B. Du Bois in 1908 identified the problem of the twentieth century as “the problem of the color line.”<sup>118</sup> Twenty-five years later, historian Ulrich B. Phillips wrote that Southerners were unified in their fierce determination to keep the

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<sup>115</sup> Jacquie L’Etang, “Public Relations and Propaganda: Conceptual Issues, Methodological Problems, and Public Relations Discourse,” in *Public Relations: Critical Debates and Contemporary Practice*, ed. Jacquie L’Etang and Magda Pieczka (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 2006), 26.

<sup>116</sup> Julian Bond, interview by Denise Hill via email, January 16, 2014.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid.

<sup>118</sup> W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1903), 5.

region a white man's country.<sup>119</sup> Although race-related issues were not limited to the South, Philips argued that the preservation of white dominion was a central theme of Southern history.<sup>120</sup> Given its dynamics, the kissing case certainly cannot be analyzed without taking race into account. However the construct of race has changed over time; therefore, this proposed dissertation must incorporate an understanding of race in the 1950s. To do so, it employs racial formation theory as a foundation in its analysis. In addition, because this study is ultimately about communication, framing theory will provide a conceptual foundation for the analysis of communication material and public opinion.

### *Racial Formation Theory*

The concept of "race" is one that developed over time, and "black" as a racial category evolved with the consolidation of racial slavery.<sup>121</sup> The mutable nature of race is foundational to a theoretical approach developed by scholars Howard Winant and Michael Omi. They argue that race is not a manifestation of some other category such as biology, ethnicity, nation, or class. According to Winant, "Although the concept of race appeals to biologically-based human characteristics (phenotypes), selection of these particular human features for purposes of racial signification is always and necessarily a social and historical process."<sup>122</sup> Further, "There is no biological basis for distinguishing human groups along the lines of race, and the sociohistorical categories employed to differentiate among these groups reveal themselves, upon serious

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<sup>119</sup> Ulrich B. Phillips, "The Central Theme of Southern History," *American Historical Review* 34, no. 1 (1928): 31.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid. See also, Myrdal, *American Dilemma*, 44-49.

<sup>121</sup> Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to 1980s* (New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1986), 64.

<sup>122</sup> Howard Winant, "Race and Race Theory," *Annual Review of Sociology* 26 (2000): 172.

examination, to be imprecise if not completely arbitrary.”<sup>123</sup> Put another way, “Races do not emerge full-blown.”<sup>124</sup> Instead, “They are the result of diverse historical practices and are continually subject to challenge over their definition and meaning.”<sup>125</sup>

Omi and Winant posit that race is a sociohistorical concept in which “racial categories and the meaning of race are given concrete expression by the specific social relations and historical context in which they are embedded.”<sup>126</sup> They define “racial formation” as “the process by which social, economic, and political forces determine the content and importance of racial categories, and by which they are in turn shaped by racial meanings.”<sup>127</sup> Race is an organizing principle of social relationships that operates at both a micro and macro level. At the micro level, racial meanings and awareness reflect the formation of individual identity through day-to-day practices and interactions.<sup>128</sup> Concurrently, the macro level of race is a matter of collective economic, political, and cultural/ideological social structures. Racial order is organized and reinforced between the interplay of these two levels.<sup>129</sup> Racial discrimination, then, reflects a macro-level set of social practices that have consequences at the micro level.

Elaborating on their theory, Omi and Winant describe race as “an unstable and decentered complex of social meanings constantly being transformed by political struggle.”<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

<sup>124</sup> Omi and Winant, *Racial Formation*, 64.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid., 60.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid., 61.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid., 67.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid., 68.



The transformation of race takes place over time through “political contestation over racial meanings.”<sup>131</sup> At any given time, there can be many different racial discourses and many different interpretations of race.<sup>132</sup> An example of the changeable nature of race can be seen in the various definitions of “Negro” in laws prohibiting black/white intermarriage.<sup>133</sup> While some states decided that individuals with any black ancestry or “blood” were considered black, other states decreed that a person was black if he had one-eighth percent black blood.<sup>134</sup> Virginia at one point had one-quarter as its percentage, but later changed it to one-sixteenth before ultimately deciding that any amount of “Negro” blood made an individual a “Negro.” Further complicating definitions of race were instances in which a mixed-race person might knowingly or unintentionally pass for white. Along with the varying determinate of what constituted a black person, the fact that an individual might visually be perceived as having white skin, despite having a drop of black blood, further reflects the inconsistency of the race construct itself.

A key element of racial formation theory is the racial project, which is “simultaneously an interpretation, representation, or explanation of racial dynamics and an effort to organize and distribute resources along particular racial lines.”<sup>135</sup> A racial project is an attempt at racial signification and identity formation, as well as a political initiative focused on organization and

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<sup>131</sup> Ibid., 69.

<sup>132</sup> Howard Winant, *Racial Conditions: Politics, Theory, Comparisons* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), 24.

<sup>133</sup> Over the course of 300 years, from the 1600s to 1960s, the colonies and most of the states have at some time banned marriage and/or sexual relations between whites and blacks. See Phyl Newbeck, *Virginia Hasn't Always Been For Lovers: Interracial Marriage Bans and the Case of Richard and Mildred Loving* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2004), 2. See also Peggy Pascoe, *What Comes Naturally: Miscegenation Law and the Making of Race in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

<sup>134</sup> Williamson, *New People*, 97.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid.

redistribution.<sup>136</sup> Elites, popular movements, state agencies, religions, and intellectuals of all types develop racial projects, which interpret and reinterpret the meaning of race.<sup>137</sup> The modern civil rights movement is an example of a racial project. Thus, public relations activities in support of African American civil rights were part a racial project.

Omi and Winant posit that “race is a significant dimension of hegemony, that it is deeply infused with the power, order, and indeed the meaning systems of every society in which it operates.”<sup>138</sup> They describe the pre-modern civil rights era as one of racial domination, in which the racial order was maintained by any means necessary so that whites could retain power. In the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s, the established system of racial meanings and identities experienced increasing strain and opposition, when individuals and organizations contested collective and individual meanings of race.<sup>139</sup> The civil rights movement challenged the racial hegemony that had been established via the racial state, which is comprised of “institutions, the policies they carry out, the conditions and rules which support and justify them, and the social relations in which they are embedded.”<sup>140</sup> The racial state can absorb, slight or inhibit a movement. In the 1960s, the racial state began absorbing the changes.<sup>141</sup> The civil rights movement challenged entrenched racial practices and stereotypes and pushed for blacks’ entry into the political and economic process. Consequently, racial awareness, racial meanings, and

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<sup>136</sup> Winant, *Racial Conditions*, 139.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid.

<sup>138</sup> Winant, *Racial Conditions*, 2.

<sup>139</sup> Omi and Winant, *Racial Formation*, 89.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid., 76.

<sup>141</sup> Kiljoong Kim and Casey Oberlin. “Racial Formation,” in *Encyclopedia of Race, Ethnicity and Society*, ed. Richard T. Schaefer (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2008), 6.

racial subjectivity began transforming, resulting in “the politicization of black identity or the rearticulation of black collective subjectivity.”<sup>142</sup> This change resulted in another racial project, which became known as the black power movement. At the same time, the racial state democratized new social structures and created new organizations and political norms.<sup>143</sup>

According to scholar Barbara J. Allen, the social construction of race has important implications for communication studies because racial formation processes occur through communication.<sup>144</sup> In this dissertation, I explore how race and racism were reflected in the public relations materials within the historical and social context of 1958. Furthermore, the social codes of behavior dictated by race may provide insights into why the CCRI and Governor Hodges chose the public relations strategies they did. As the CCRI pushed to challenge racial injustice and disrupt long-standing racial practices, Hodges, as part of the racial state, fought to inhibit this action and maintain the status quo. Thus, this dissertation incorporates racial formation theory in its analysis of the public relations campaigns and corresponding public opinion.

### *Frame Analysis*

This dissertation uses frame analysis to examine primary-source evidence related to the kissing case. According to Robert Entman, “To frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment

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<sup>142</sup> Omi and Winant, *Racial Formation*, 91-99.

<sup>143</sup> Winant, *Racial Conditions*, 44.

<sup>144</sup> Barbara J. Allen, “Racial Formation Theory,” in *Encyclopedia of Communication Theory*, ed. Stephen W. Littlejohn and Karen A. Foss (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2009), 3.

recommendation for the item described.”<sup>145</sup> Entman asserts that communicators make framing judgments, either consciously or unconsciously. Through word choice, placement, inclusion, exclusion and emphasis, frames highlight some bits of information about an item that is the subject of a communication, making it more noticeable or meaningful.

Frames can reflect prevailing attitudes, and they are “organizing principles that are socially shared and persistent over time that work symbolically to meaningfully structure the social world.”<sup>146</sup> Framing also is a process based in and bound by culture, and it reflects how forces and groups in society try to shape public discourse about an issue.<sup>147</sup> Frames define the roles social actors play and outline the interrelationship between beliefs, values and actions.<sup>148</sup> Within various frames employed, “A particular group may be seen as an essential actor in resolving a social problem, while in another the same group may be perceived as peripheral to its resolution or even a source of the problem itself.”<sup>149</sup> The source of frames can stem from “the deliberate attempt of individuals or groups to structure public discourse in a way that privileges their goals and means of attaining them.”<sup>150</sup> This aspect of framing is particularly relevant to this dissertation because I examine frames used by groups to influence opposing sides of an issue.

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<sup>145</sup> Robert Entman, “Framing: Toward Clarification of a Fractured Paradigm,” *Journal of Communication*, 43, no. 4 (1993): 52.

<sup>146</sup> Stephen D. Reese, “Prologue: Framing Public Life: A Bridging Model for Media Research,” in *Framing Public Life: Perspectives on Media and Our Understanding of the Social World*, ed. Stephen D. Reese, Oscar H. Gandy Jr., and August E. Grant (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 2001), 11.

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*, 13. See also Erving Goffman, *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1974), 27.

<sup>148</sup> James K. Hertzog and Douglas M. McLeod, “A Multiperspectival Approach to Framing Analysis: A Field Guide,” in *Framing Public Life*, 143.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*, 146.

For example, it is expected the CCRI will have employed frames to help free the boys, whereas Governor Hodges will have framed communication in a way to justify the boys' incarceration. In addition to the ways that frames work within communication, other scholarship has examined their effects. Framing effects occur when changes in the presentation of an issue or an event (how it is framed) cause a change in public opinion.<sup>151</sup>

According to Hank Johnson, "Whether framing activities are done by the media or by a social movement organization, they count only insofar as they penetrate the 'black box' of mental life to serve as determinants of how a situation is defined, and therefore acted upon."<sup>152</sup> In studying framing effects, Fuyuan Shen argued it is "important to differentiate news frames from individual frames or schemas."<sup>153</sup> News frames are those carried in the media, whereas individual frames are "schemas or knowledge structures that guide individuals' information processing."<sup>154</sup> In acting upon an individual's knowledge structures, media frames can cause a shift in interpretation or attitude. However, because individuals have different schemas on issues, effects are not uniform among all members of an audience. Shen found that when news frames were consistent with individual frames, audiences were more likely to generate frame-related thoughts and display frame-consistent attitudes.<sup>155</sup>

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<sup>151</sup> Dennis Chong and James Druckman, "Framing Theory," *Annual Review of Political Science* 10, no. 1 (2007): 102.

<sup>152</sup> Hank Johnston, "A Methodology for Frame Analysis: From Discourse to Cognitive Schemata," in *Social Movements and Culture*, ed. Hank Johnston and Bert Klandermans (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), 234.

<sup>153</sup> Fuyuan Shen, "Effects of News Frames and Schemas on Individuals' Issue Interpretations and Attitudes," *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* 82, no. 2 (2004): 402. Goffman referred to frames as "schemata of interpretation. See Goffman, *Frame Analysis*, 21 and 27. See also, Dietram A. Scheufele, "Framing as a Theory of Media Effects," *Journal of Communication* 49, no. 1 (1999): 103-122.

<sup>154</sup> Shen, "Effects of News Frames," 402.

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*, 411.

Similarly, Nicolas Winter posits that individual racial and gender schemas can be activated by frames.<sup>156</sup> Specifically, if an issue is matched to an individual's racial schema, the person will apply their thoughts and feelings about race relations to the issue.<sup>157</sup> A number of studies have had findings similar to those of Shen and Winter, concluding not only that news frames become more salient when they support audiences' existing attitudes, but that frames can activate existing racial prejudices and stereotypes.<sup>158</sup>

Both Shen's and Winter's findings are pertinent to this dissertation because as part of my examination of public relations campaigns, I explore audience segmentation, which in some instances was done by issue schema. The NAACP, for example, recognized that among its white publics, changing the attitudes of those who were in complete opposition to the organization was beyond the purview of its public relations efforts. In other words, the issue schemas advanced by the NAACP did not match the racial schemas of those the NAACP deemed incontrovertible. As NAACP Director Henry Lee Moon wrote, "The higher the regard for the Negro, the more acceptable is the NAACP and its program. Conversely, the lower the esteem in which the Negro is held and the lower his self-esteem, the more difficult is our task."<sup>159</sup> The NAACP directed its public relations efforts towards citizens whose views of African Americans reflected a middle

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<sup>156</sup> Nicolas J. G. Winter, *Dangerous Frames: How Ideas About Race and Gender Shape Public Opinion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 4.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>158</sup> See for example, John D. Richardson, "Switching Social Identities: The Influence of Editorial Framing on Reader Attitudes Toward Affirmative Action and African Americans," *Communication Research* 32, no. 4 (2005): 503-528; Thomas E. Nelson, Rosalee A. Clawson, and Zoe M. Oxley, "Media Framing of a Civil Liberties Conflict and Its Effect on Tolerance," *American Political Science Review* 9, no. 3 (1997): 567-583; and David Domke, Kelley McCoy, and Marcos Torres, "News Media, Racial Perceptions, and Political Cognition," *Communication Research* 26, no. 5 (1999): 570-607.

<sup>159</sup> Henry Lee Moon, "Problems and Goals of NAACP Public Relations Activities," January 5, 1959, NAACP Papers, Group III, box A39.

ground, described by Moon as those “who find the teachings of democracy and their religion in conflict with the practices they follow.”<sup>160</sup> Stated differently, their beliefs about inequality, justice, and liberty were in conflict with their actions. Therefore, the NAACP targeted its public relations efforts to whites whose racial schemas conflicted with their moral schemas, theoretically making them receptive to alternative viewpoints.

In addition to explanations of frames as content features that produce media effects, scholars have called for work that explores the relationship between frames and political and social power.<sup>161</sup> Specifically, they argue that the interaction between social movements and the news media provides a relevant means to evaluate the relationship between framing and power. According to the authors, the ability of social movements to challenge existing power structures is tied directly to their framing processes and effectiveness in influencing news discourse. Marginalized groups use frames to “highlight their concerns, mobilize support, and validate their existence as political actors.”<sup>162</sup> On the other hand, elites use frames to maintain their power position and disrupt the frames of marginalized groups. These conflicting frames often result in framing contests, or a “struggle over framing.”<sup>163</sup> This call for additional studies of framing and power is particularly relevant to this dissertation. The NAACP and CCRI represented a marginalized group that challenged the actions of those in power (Hodges and the USIA.) All four groups incorporated frames in their public relations material, and the corresponding framing contest between the marginalized and the elites reflected a struggle for power.

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<sup>160</sup> Ibid.

<sup>161</sup> Kevin Carragee and Wim Roefs, “The Neglect of Power in Recent Framing Research,” *Journal of Communication* 54, no.2 (2004): 214-233.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid., 225.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid.

**Framing of social issues also has been explored in terms of responsibility. Jon**

**Hanson** and Kathleen Hanson explored the ways that elites have framed responsibility for racial injustice, and their research is germane to this dissertation. They argue that people generally crave justice and will actively work to eliminate injustice. However, with racial injustice, rather than stop the discriminatory behavior, groups with power justify their actions by “conceiving of the victim as a person who actually deserves to suffer.”<sup>164</sup> Stated differently, elites create an illusion of justice through assumptions, arguments, or stereotypes about the blameworthiness of the victim.<sup>165</sup> This process entails not only blaming the victim, but excusing the perpetrator. Within a broader blame frame, the authors identify three frames: the god frame, the nature frame, and the choice frame. Under the god frame, a person’s behavior and place in society have been mandated by God, who supposedly created whites as superior and blacks as inferior. The nature frame deflects blame by relying on anthropology and biological schema in which blacks are presumed to be genetically inferior to whites. In the choice frame, what happens to an individual reflects his preferences and choices; outcomes are controlled by those who experience them. An individual has a good outcome because he has chosen such an outcome and in turn, those who experience poor outcomes chose that result. Correspondingly, an individual’s position in society reflects his ability to make good or bad choices and “good people enjoy good outcomes, and bad outcomes happen to bad people.”<sup>166</sup> In other words, if a minority group experiences hardship, it was not the dominant group that inflicted the adversity. Instead, under the choice frame,

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<sup>164</sup> Jon Hanson and Kathleen Hanson, "The Blame Frame: Justifying (Racial) Injustice in America," *Harvard Civil Rights-Civil Liberties Law Review* 41, no. 2 (2006): 419.

<sup>165</sup> *Ibid.*, 419.

<sup>166</sup> *Ibid.*, 445.



minorities choose and prefer their experiences. The choice frame excuses racial injustice as being situationally determined by market forces or individuals' choices, and "any other outcome would impede or ignore the preferences of people entitled to choose for themselves."<sup>167</sup> With the kissing case, responsibility for the boys' incarceration is an issue reflected in Governor Hodges's public relations campaign. Therefore, I consider these blame frames in my analysis of Hodges's communication strategies and tactics.

This dissertation examines the communication of an issue that transpired within cultural and societal mores. Given the social structure of frames, framing theory provides a fitting theoretical foundation from which to examine the groups' communication. Furthermore, these four groups occupied different social positions, and framing provides a basis by which to review their discourse from a dominant versus subaltern social group perspective.

### *Framing Analysis and Public Relations*

Framing analysis is typically applied to news content, yet some scholars have used it to examine public relations messages.<sup>168</sup> For example, in perhaps the only public relations and framing study focused on issues pertaining to African Americans, Stephynie Chapman Perkins compared the NAACP's frames and corresponding news frames regarding the 2000 election of George W. Bush.<sup>169</sup> To identify the NAACP's messages, Perkins examined press releases and information on the organization's website. She found the frames advanced by the NAACP focused on the following: advocacy, in which the NAACP positioned itself as the nation's

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<sup>167</sup> Ibid., 427.

<sup>168</sup> As an example, see Lois Boynton and Dulcie Straughan, "Appalling Sin or Despicable Crime: An Exploration of Media Frames Surrounding the Catholic Church Priest Sexual Abuse Scandal," paper presented at the Annual Conference of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication, Kansas City, MO, August 2003.

<sup>169</sup> Stephynie Chapman Perkins, "Un-Presidented: A Qualitative Framing Analysis of the NAACP's Public Relations Response to the 2000 Presidential Election," *Public Relations Review* 31, no. 1 (2005): 63-71.

leading civil rights organization; black voter disenfranchisement; unfair and illegal voting practices; unresponsive government; and a divisive Bush administration. According to Perkins, the media did not focus on these frames, instead writing about which candidate would prevail and by what margin. Although she concluded the mainstream media ignored the NAACP's messages, Perkins does not address the possibility that the media did not read the press releases and other information on the NAACP's website, nor does she consider other explanations the NAACP's frames were ignored.

For the 2000 election, Chapman noted the NAACP invested in a multi-million dollar media blitz to reach its publics. Although she does not identify the purpose of this blitz, she noted that minority voter turnout increased significantly in various states. If the purpose was to increase minority voter turnout, the public relations frames should have supported this objective. Instead, the NAACP used many different frames, apparently without linking them to a specific objective, thereby fragmenting its messages. Furthermore, although the NAACP does not endorse political candidates, it was concerned about the impact of a conservative administration on black civil rights; however, its frames in the 2000 election do not address this issue in relation to black voter disenfranchisement.

After the election, if an NAACP goal was to communicate election fraud, the organization should have identified and segmented the relevant publics, developed related messages and frames targeted to those publics, and identified communication channels that would best reach those audiences. Overall, the NAACP had too many messages and too many frames, none of which appeared to be explicitly linked to communication or organizational objectives. The number of frames diluted the power of any one frame, which may have caused confusion among reporters. Instead of conveying a clear direction, the multiple frames raised a

number of questions, such as whether the NAACP was focused on getting blacks to vote, on black voter disenfranchisement, or on reservations with the Bush administration. The NAACP might have been focused on all these issues, but communicating them simultaneously muddled the frames, which probably contributed to the reason they were ignored by the media. However, Perkins does not address these possibilities in her study.

Barbara Barnett also examined frames in public relations documents, specifically focusing on news releases generated by the National Organization for Women (NOW) from 1995 to 2003. Instead of looking at how the press framed the women's movement, Barnett's qualitative study investigated how the women's movement framed itself. She analyzed more than 100 news releases produced by NOW and found three key frames the organization used to convey its messages: vigilance, unity, and deviance. In the vigilance frame, NOW presented itself as watchful of government institutions and corporations, especially those that falsely claimed to have women's best interests at heart. The unity frame highlighted NOW's allegiance with others committed to fighting discrimination. NOW stressed the common bond among women, as well as the experiences they shared with racial minorities. In constructing the deviance frame, NOW cast its opponents as dishonest, contemptuous, and irrational. In using these three frames, Barnett surmised that a critical component of NOW's public relations effort was to challenge media frames that depicted NOW as dissident and rebellious, while also redefining the language used to characterize the women's movement.<sup>170</sup> Barnett noted that frames may be corrective, as in NOW's efforts to counter entrenched stereotypes about women

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<sup>170</sup> Barbara Barnett, "Feminists Shaping News: A Framing Analysis of New Releases from the National Organization for Women," *Journal of Public Relations Research* 17, no. 4 (2005): 355.

that were reinforced by the mainstream press.<sup>171</sup> Based on her findings, Barnett concluded that public relations practitioners can use framing not only to define debates and correct misperceptions, but to challenge journalistic frames “that ignore or dismiss the work of social movement organizations.”<sup>172</sup> Barnett’s study helps inform this study’s examination of how frames may have been used to combat and correct racial stereotypes and other misinformation.

Barnett acknowledged that her study did not examine newspaper coverage of NOW; therefore, she was unable to determine if NOW’s frames were suffused in the media. Although Barnett noted that NOW’s frames reflected its organizational goals, it was beyond the scope of her study to determine if the frames helped NOW achieve these goals. An aim of this historical study is to examine how public relations frames might have helped an organization achieve its goals.

Although he did not analyze frames in public relations material, Kirk Hallahan suggested how framing may be applicable to public relations practice. The foundation for his proposition is that public relations involves the construction of social reality. Specifically, Hallahan surmises that public relations counselors define reality for organizations “by shaping organizational perspectives about the outside world.”<sup>173</sup> At the same time, communication directed outward from the organization attempts to define reality related to the organization on behalf of its various publics. Although Hallahan says this construction process may be construed as manipulation, he argues that defining reality is the essence of communication, and

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<sup>171</sup> Ibid. For other examples of how communication was used to correct misinformation, see Dulcie Murdock Straughan, ed., *Women’s Use of Public Relations for Progressive Era Reform: Rousing the Conscience of a Nation* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen, 2007).

<sup>172</sup> Barnett, “Feminists Shaping News,” 341.

<sup>173</sup> Kirk Hallahan, “Seven Models of Framing: Implications for Public Relations,” *Journal of Public Relations Research* 1, no. 3 (1999): 205-242.

“constructionists would argue that the process is neither inherently good or bad.”<sup>174</sup> Hallahan highlights the role of framing in the social construction of reality “because it helps shape the perspectives through which people see the world.”<sup>175</sup> In suggesting how framing can be useful in examining the strategic creation of public relations messages and audience responses, Hallahan identified seven categories that identify what can be framed: situations, attributes, choices, actions, issues, responsibility and news. Hallahan used crisis communication as an example of how a public relations practitioner might employ the seven categories in combination.<sup>176</sup> Specifically, the public relations counselor would gather facts about the situation and ascertain what occurred or did not occur. She would identify issues surrounding the crisis, including responsibility. Based on her findings, she would recommend specific actions, ultimately consolidating these frames into how the company’s news will be presented to its various publics.

Hallahan’s seven models can be particularly beneficial to an analysis of framing used in public relations, in that he has provided a typology of tangibles and abstractions that can be framed. In this dissertation’s examination of frames in public relations material, including press releases, pamphlets, flyers, fact sheets, and letters, three of Hallahan’s categories help guide this dissertation’s analysis: framing of actions, framing of issues, and framing of responsibility.

For communicators, a key concern is how to frame actions necessary to achieve compliance with a desired goal.<sup>177</sup> In its public relations campaign to free the boys, one of the CCRI’s strategies was to encourage the public to take an action, specifically to write a letter to

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<sup>174</sup> Ibid., 207.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid.

<sup>176</sup> Ibid., 229.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid., 215.

the governor asking him to free the boys. As a result of the CCRI's campaign, Hodges received hundreds of letters protesting the boys' sentence. As part of my analysis, I examine the frames in the CCRI's communication material to illuminate how the committee appealed to the public to write to Hodges.

Hallahan describes an issue as "a dispute between two or more parties, usually over the allocation of resources or the treatment or portrayal of groups in society."<sup>178</sup> Parties involved in an issue often incorporate framing in their attempts to explain their position and sway others to their viewpoints. With the issue of the boys' sentencing, I look for common frames in the letters Hodges received from the public and explore how those frames may have been used to influence Hodges to free the boys.

According to Hallahan, most issues and social problems entail questions of cause and responsibility. This category is particularly relevant in analyzing Hodges's public relations campaign.<sup>179</sup> Part of his strategy was to focus on the boys' delinquency as the primary reason for their incarceration, thereby ascribing responsibility to the victim for his circumstances and in turn, deflecting blame from the perpetrator. This dissertation analyzes how Hodges framed responsibility in his public relations material and in response, how the public framed their letters to him.

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<sup>178</sup> Ibid., 217.

<sup>179</sup> Hanson and Hanson, "The Blame Frame," 413-480. The work of Jon Hanson and Kathleen Hanson, described in the "Frame Analysis" section of this proposal, will also inform my analysis.

## African Americans in Public Relations History

In 1994, Scott Cutlip published *The Unseen Power: Public Relations, a History*, which according to some scholars, remains a seminal work.<sup>180</sup> Although Cutlip surmised “the use of communication to influence public opinion and human behavior is as old as civilization,” he started his history at the dawn of the twentieth century, when he believed the roots of the public relations profession “flowered.”<sup>181</sup> His 776-page book focuses on public relations agencies and their founders, with profiles of the industry’s “influential pioneers.”<sup>182</sup> In the prologue, Cutlip noted that critics may lament the book’s absence of black public relations counselors and the dearth of women. This omission, he asserted, “is a fact of history, not a choice of mine.”<sup>183</sup> On the contrary, this omission may be more reflective of a “great man” outlook in which the recognized leaders were not just men, but white men. For example, Cutlip makes no mention of the NAACP’s Henry Lee Moon, an African American public relations counselor who began his career as a press agent for the Tuskegee Institute in 1924, after receiving a bachelor’s and master’s degree in journalism from Howard University and Ohio State University, respectively.<sup>184</sup> Among his career accomplishments, Moon served as director of public relations for the NAACP from 1948 until his retirement in 1974. Given Cutlip’s focus on public relations agency men, Moon may have been omitted because he had no agency experience. On the other hand, Moss Kendrix—also neglected in Cutlip’s history—founded an eponymous public

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<sup>180</sup> Bill Adams, et al., “Remembering Scott Cutlip, APR, Fellow PRSA,” *Public Relations Tactics* 7, no. 10 (October 2000): 37.

<sup>181</sup> Scott Cutlip, *The Unseen Power: Public Relations, a History* (Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1994), xiv and xvi.

<sup>182</sup> *Ibid.*, xvii.

<sup>183</sup> *Ibid.*, xi.

<sup>184</sup> Joseph Berger, “Henry Lee Moon Dead at 84: Ex-NAACP Spokesman,” *New York Times*, June 8, 1985.

relations firm after working at the Department of the Treasury promoting war bonds and later serving as director of public relations for the Republic of Liberia's centennial celebration.<sup>185</sup> One of his agency's key clients was the Coca-Cola Corporation, for whom he developed pioneering and successful public relations campaigns that targeted the African American market.<sup>186</sup>

The reason for mentioning Moon and Kendrix is not to highlight their accomplishments, although both men are certainly worthy of further study. Instead, it is to show that either or both could have been included in Cutlip's book. Hence, Cutlip's claim that blacks and women were not part of public relations history reflects his particular way of seeing, not historical fact. As further evidence of Cutlip's restricted view, the 1988 book *Blacks and Public Relations: History and Bibliography*, profiles a number of black public relations pioneers, including Joseph V. Baker.<sup>187</sup> Born in 1908, Baker spent his early career as a government administrator and later was the *Philadelphia Inquirer's* first black journalist. In 1934, Baker became public relations consultant for the Pennsylvania Railroad Company. Over the next 40 years, his eponymous public relations firm provided counsel for clients such as RCA, Procter and Gamble, NBC, Scott Paper, Hamilton Watch Corporation, Chrysler, and Gillette.<sup>188</sup>

In addition to the exclusion of African American public relations counselors, Cutlip provides scant mention of any public relations campaigns developed by his 17 white pioneers (15

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<sup>185</sup> "The Life and Legacy of Moss Kendrix," Museum of Public Relations, <http://www.prmuseum.com/kendrix/life.html>.

<sup>186</sup> See Laura Hymson, "The Company That Taught the World to Sing: Coca-Cola, Globalization, and the Cultural Politics of Branding" (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 2011).

<sup>187</sup> George A. Hill and Robert C. Farrell, *Blacks and Public Relations: History and Bibliography*. (Los Angeles: Daystar, 1988), 21.

<sup>188</sup> Ibid. See also, Andy Wallace, "Joseph V. Baker, 84, Pioneer in Journalism and Public Relations," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, May 12, 1993.



men and two women) on behalf of African Americans. One of Cutlip's public relations forerunners, William H. Baldwin, served on the board of trustees of the historically black Fisk University. Cutlip stated that Baldwin used his public relations expertise to direct a fund-raising drive for the university, which included promoting the Fisk Jubilee Singers. Cutlip includes that Baldwin's mother co-founded the National Urban League on Urban Conditions Among Negroes, which was later shortened to the Urban League. Baldwin worked briefly at the Urban League, although from Cutlip's description it does not appear that he did so in a public relations capacity. In addition to Fisk University, Baldwin served on the boards of the Urban League and the Southern Education Foundation. Cutlip wrote that, "Advancing African American education and improving the lot of the African Americans was a consuming interest of Baldwin as long as he lived."<sup>189</sup> Although Cutlip includes descriptions of a public relations campaigns conducted by Baldwin, there was no mention of any public relations work focused on African American issues, other than the fund-raising campaign for Fisk in the early 1920s.

In the section on Edward Bernays, Cutlip describes some of the many campaigns developed by Bernays and his wife and business partner Doris Fleischman. However Cutlip omits their work in handling publicity for the NAACP's annual convention in 1920, which was the first time the event had been held in the South. In contrast, Bernays devoted a chapter to this work in his memoirs, and he gave credit to the instrumental role played by Fleischman.<sup>190</sup>

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<sup>189</sup> Cutlip, *The Unseen Power*, 313.

<sup>190</sup> Edward L. Bernays, "Fighting Jim Crow in the South," in *Biography of an Idea: Memoirs of Public Relations Counsel Edward L. Bernays* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1965), 208-216. Fleischman went to Atlanta in advance of the conference to meet with editors of the mainstream Atlanta press. Each of Atlanta's three newspapers, as well as the Atlanta office of the Associated Press, provided objective coverage of the conference. Bernays remarked the "papers had reported on what previously had been taboo," and he credited Doris's advance meetings for that success. See Bernays, *Biography*, 215.

Cutlip continued his exploration of public relations history in a subsequent book that covered the seventeenth to the twentieth century, in which he described early attempts at using communication to influence attitudes and behavior that would today be termed “public relations.” Cutlip focused on how public relations played a role in number of events and for well-known figures in United States history, such as the Revolutionary War, various presidential campaigns, and the westward expansion. While Cutlip’s broad-ranging case studies provide an interesting overview of early public relations practice, he provided no criteria for inclusion. For example, he includes Clara Barton and the American Red Cross, but excludes the women’s suffrage movement, which employed a range of media forms to advocate its cause. Although Cutlip again excluded the work of African Americans, he noted that much of the anti-slavery work of abolitionist and newspaper publisher William Lloyd Garrison could be considered early public relations practice.<sup>191</sup> In addition, Cutlip posits that Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* “stands as one of the powerful propaganda tracts of all time.”<sup>192</sup> By doing so, Cutlip acknowledged that race-related work played a role in early public relations. However given the impact of African American political, economic, and social issues on US history, Cutlip’s brief mention of Garrison and Stowe presents a skewed outlook in which African Americans are underrepresented. At the end of his book, he devoted a chapter to the growth of social service organizations and the role of public relations in promoting social change. This chapter includes no African American issues related to social change, nor does it include the work of any black

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<sup>191</sup> Cutlip, *From the Seventeenth to the Twentieth Century*, 122.

<sup>192</sup> Ibid.

public relations practitioners. In a list of thirty-four national organizations promoting social change, the only one focused on African American issues is the NAACP.<sup>193</sup>

For the reader of Cutlip's two books on public relations history, blacks are largely absent, as practitioners and audiences. In a 1997 study, Linda Childers Hon proclaimed "the historical record of African Americans' contribution to public relations remains largely unwritten."<sup>194</sup>

Among the reasons she cites for this marginalization is the business and corporate focus of most historical accounts of public relations. She suggested blacks were excluded from most corporate and business enterprise, hence their omission from the grand narrative.<sup>195</sup> This bias has presented a distorted, often negative view of public relations as a business tool focused only on serving corporate ends. Other scholars also have noted the business-centrism of public relations history, arguing that this concentration has come at the expense of other historical frameworks, such as political, cultural, religious, or social.<sup>196</sup>

Alternatively, a number of scholars have studied the public relations work of activists, specifically in the Progressive Era.<sup>197</sup> As public relations historian Margot Opdycke Lamme discovered, some social reform groups had communications plans in place long before the

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<sup>193</sup> Ibid., 266.

<sup>194</sup> Linda Childers Hon, "'To Redeem the Soul of America': Public Relations and the Civil Rights Movement," *Journal of Public Relations Research* 9, no. 3 (1997): 163.

<sup>195</sup> Ibid., 164.

<sup>196</sup> Karen S. Miller, "US Public Relations History: Knowledge and Limitations," in *Communication Yearbook* 23, ed. M. E. Roloff (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage): 381-420. 2000. See also W. Timothy Coombs and Sherry J. Holladay, "Privileging an Activist vs. a Corporate View of Public Relations History in the US," *Public Relations Review* 38, no. 3 (2012): 347-353.

<sup>197</sup> For example, see Eric F. Goldman, "Public Relations and the Progressive Surge: 1898-1917," *Public Relations Review* 4, no. 3 (Autumn 1978): 52-62; Karla Gower, "US Corporate Public Relations in the Progressive Era," *Journal of Communication Management* 12, no. 4 (2008): 305-318; Stephen Ponder, "Progressive Drive to Shape Public Opinion, 1893-1913," *Public Relations Review* 16, no. 3 (Autumn 1990): 94-104; Kevin Stoker and Brad Rawlins, "The 'Light' of Publicity in the Progressive Era," *Journalism History* 30, no. 4 (Winter 2003): 177-188; Straughan, *Women's Use of Public Relations*.

supposed pioneers began practicing public relations.<sup>198</sup> This broader view of early public relations shows it was not solely the purview of white men.

A challenge to the white-male-dominant history can be seen in the work of Ida B. Wells's anti-lynching campaign. Frances Ward-Johnson stated that Wells, in her global quest to end lynching, "used all the communications tools at her disposal in what today would be considered a well-thought-out campaign strategy."<sup>199</sup> A former slave who became a journalist and civil rights activist, Wells recognized she needed to increase public awareness of lynching, but before doing so, she conducted research, a foundational step in a public relations campaign. As a result of her investigation, she challenged the inaccurate view that most black men were lynched for raping white women by arguing that, in fact, most of these liaisons were consensual. Wells wrote a column that appeared regularly in the top black newspapers, as well as in a few white newspapers. In 1889, she also became co-owner of Memphis's black newspaper, *Free Speech*. After an editorial in which she suggested the term "rape" was often used to cover up consensual interracial relations, white leaders in Memphis destroyed her newspaper and printing office. Rather than remain in Memphis, she decided to launch a national anti-lynching campaign from the North. In addition to editorials, her communication tools included news articles, pamphlets, and speaking tours, which she later expanded to Great Britain. Wells was among the first activists to communicate to an international audience the brutal treatment inflicted on blacks in the American South, a strategy later adopted by other civil rights organizations.<sup>200</sup> Although lynching continued, Ward-Johnson notes that Wells "saw her most important task as placing the

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<sup>198</sup> Margot Opdycke Lamme, "The Public Sentiment Building Society," *Journalism History* 29, no. 3 (2003): 123.

<sup>199</sup> Frances Ward-Johnson, "Ida B. Wells-Barnett and America's First Anti-Lynching Campaign," in Straughan, *Women's Use of Public Relations*, 144.

<sup>200</sup> For example, see Carol Anderson, *Eyes Off the Prize: The United Nations and the African American Struggle for Human Rights, 1944-1955* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 182-186.

facts before the American people, and eventually before the world.”<sup>201</sup> Almost 45 years later, Myrdal noted that the American people needed to be made aware of the facts of racial injustice, writing that “to get publicity is of the highest strategic importance to the Negro people.”<sup>202</sup> Wells succeeded in raising awareness, which is often a goal of public relations campaigns, and she helped clarify misperceptions of lynching. She did so using a number of public relations tools, which were later used by other civil rights organizations, such as the NAACP and CCRI.

African American women implementing public relations tools on behalf of African-American causes is also evident in the work of the National Association of Colored Women (NACW), formed in part to support Ida B. Wells, who had been vilified by the head of the Missouri Press Association because of her anti-lynching crusade. Dulcie Straughan researched the origins of the NACW and its public relations tools, including the *National Association Notes*, a newsletter to communicate with current and prospective members.<sup>203</sup> In her examination of the *Notes*, from the first issue in 1897 until women gained the right to vote in 1920, Straughan found the newsletter helped foster unity and pride among black women, while conveying the NACW’s focus on advancing the black race, strengthening the black community, and fighting social and legal wrongs, such as Jim Crow laws. The newsletter also covered women’s suffrage, temperance, and public health issues. The newsletter demonstrates an important communications objective: creating audience awareness of an organization’s issues. In this way, it helps inform this examination of how the CCRI created awareness of the kissing case.

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<sup>201</sup> Ward-Johnson, “Ida B. Wells-Barnett,” 157.

<sup>202</sup> Myrdal, *American Dilemma*, 48.

<sup>203</sup> Dulcie Murdock Straughan, “‘Lifting As We Climb’: The Role of the *National Association Notes* in Furthering the Issues Agenda of the National Association of Colored Women, 1897-1920,” in *Women’s Use of Public Relations*, 161-186.

One of the “earliest” studies of public relations and the civil rights movement was conducted by Childers Hon in 1997. She referred to the modern civil rights movement as “one of the most spectacular public relations campaigns ever waged.”<sup>204</sup> Hon argued that textbooks include other social and political movements as examples of public relations in history, but the modern civil rights movement has been excluded.<sup>205</sup> To fill this gap, she conducted research to “describe and analyze the public relations elements of the civil rights movement” from 1955 to 1968.<sup>206</sup> Specifically, Hon focused on the communication strategies of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC). Although her statement of purpose may have been broad given that SCLC was but one organization among many that worked on behalf of African American civil rights, her scholarship is valuable in that it filled a void.

Hon found that SCLC developed “strategic public relations in the form of rhetorical communication, situational use of one- and two-way models of public relations, alliance building, political advocacy, consumer boycotts, and several grassroots communication efforts.”<sup>207</sup> As an example of a rhetorical strategy, Hon cites SCLC’s stance of nonviolence. Another public relations strategy Hon identifies is building alliances with groups such as black churches and other civil rights organizations. These two strategies illustrate a criticism of Hon’s study, namely it does not define public relations. Therefore it appears that Hon labeled as public relations any action, including consumer boycotts and voter registration. Although she has not described what constitutes public relations, Hon broadly defines effective public relations as

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<sup>204</sup> Hon, “To Redeem the Soul,” 163-164.

<sup>205</sup> Ibid. Hon wrote that textbooks have cited the American Revolution as an example of historical public relations and have deemed the Boston Tea Party and the Federalist Papers as public relations strategies.

<sup>206</sup> Ibid., 165.

<sup>207</sup> Ibid., 175.

communication strategies and programs that helped the SCLC achieve its goals.<sup>208</sup> She claims, “Effective public relations clearly was a large element—if not the ultimate component—of SCLC’s overall strategy.”<sup>209</sup> In other words, SCLC’s strategy was a public relations strategy. Hon’s findings are broad in that everything appears to be public relations. Notably, public relations historians have called for a greater focus on defining the field itself.<sup>210</sup> These definitions “could lead to much needed elaboration (e.g., how to know that it was PR) and help avoid findings that are either too limiting (e.g., PR as media relations) or too broad (e.g., PR as everything).”<sup>211</sup> This critique extends to Hon’s discussion of evaluation. She concluded that the public relations program was effective because SCLC achieved its basic goal of eradicating state-supported segregation and discrimination. However without a definition, it is unclear what role public relations played in SCLC’s success.

Straughan also examined the activities of a civil rights organization, specifically how the NAACP used public relations from 1960 to 1965 in its struggle for prominence as other organizations began taking a more visible role in the fight for civil rights.<sup>212</sup> With the movement’s influx of young people, along with its increased focus on direct action, protest, and grassroots mobilization, a number of civil rights leaders viewed the NAACP’s reliance on legal means to affect change as too slow and outdated. Furthermore, audiences took note of protest

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<sup>208</sup> Ibid., 167.

<sup>209</sup> Ibid.

<sup>210</sup> Margot Opdycke Lamme, Jacquie L’Etang, and Burton St. John III, “The State of Public Relations History,” *American Journalism* 26, no. 1 (Winter 2009): 156.

<sup>211</sup> Ibid.

<sup>212</sup> Dulcie M. Straughan, “‘Lift Every Voice and Sing’: The Public Relations Efforts of the NAACP, 1960-1965,” *Public Relations Review* 30, no. 1 (2004): 49-60.

and direct action, whereas legal and political actions were often behind-the-scenes affairs. After conducting research, the NAACP launched a proactive public relations program, developed by Executive Secretary Roy Wilkins and Director of Public Relations Henry Lee Moon. According to Straughan, Wilkins attributed the NAACP's reputational problems on poor public relations. In defending himself, Moon counseled that any public relations program must reflect the organization's goals and objectives, otherwise it is meaningless or becomes simple press agency.<sup>213</sup> As a result, the public relations program focused on the NAACP's strengths, which included its legal strategy and vast political network. In addition to illustrating the strategic thinking shown by Moon, Straughan's research is valuable in that it shows the NAACP using public relations not only to fight for African American civil rights, but to fight for its reputation. At the same time, this study provides an example of how an organizational leader, faced with a rapidly changing environment be it social, political or financial, blamed his organization's problems on public relations rather than on leadership and the inability to anticipate and/or adapt to change.<sup>214</sup> This is a problem contemporary practitioners often face, and Straughan's study shows this challenge has an historical antecedent.

Kimberly Williams Moore documented the role of public relations in the early years of the NAACP. She examined the strategies of the NAACP and the Anti-Defamation League within the context of what she referred to as "the hallmarks of public relations: research, media relations, face-to-face communication and publications/literature."<sup>215</sup> Moore found that public

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<sup>213</sup> Ibid., 55.

<sup>214</sup> For example, see John Doorley and Helio Fred Garcia, *Reputation Management: The Key to Successful Public Relations and Corporate Communication* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 11-12.

<sup>215</sup> Kimberly Williams Moore, "Toward an Inclusive History of Public Relations: An Examination of the Founding of the NAACP and ADL and Their Use of Public Relations, 1909—1917," (PhD diss., University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2003).



relations was instrumental to both organizations' early successes. With the NAACP, Moore noted the organization linked research and publicity, well before Edward Bernays would document the need to do so.<sup>216</sup> In addition, she discovered that many of the tactics the NAACP practiced in the early 1900s would later be used by other groups advocating for social change. Thus the NAACP was a forerunner among civil rights organizations and moreover, a public relations pioneer.

Lamenting the exclusion of African Americans in public relations history, Marcia Taylor examined civil rights leader Bayard Rustin's role in the 1963 March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom through the lens of public relations.<sup>217</sup> Taylor explored Rustin's activities as March organizer in the context of contemporary public relations theories and practices. She argued that Rustin's work would today be labelled as public relations and therefore, Rustin should be included in the history of public relations. However, Taylor did not explore public relations practices of the 1960s. Had she done so, her study might have provided additional insights into the historical development of public relations. Furthermore, one wonders if involvement in a single event makes one a public relations practitioner, even if that event is a watershed moment in civil rights history. As the March's chief architect, Rustin was involved in a number of activities, including but certainly not limited to public relations. Rustin had a long career as a civil rights activist, but Taylor does not examine his other involvements to determine if they too could be labeled public relations. A more valuable contribution to the role of African Americans in public relations may be to study the overall public relations planning, strategies and tactics

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<sup>216</sup> Ibid., 149.

<sup>217</sup> Marcia A. Taylor, "An Examination of Public Relations Theory and Practice: A Case Study of Bayard Rustin's Role in the 1963 March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom," (PhD diss., Wilmington College, 2002).

implemented for the March on Washington. The March involved of a number of organizations, such as the NAACP, the Urban League, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), SCLC, and the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE). Each of the organizations jockeyed to communicate its role in the March, often competing for visibility.<sup>218</sup> Examining the public relations work of each of these organizations, including the important contribution of Bayard Rustin, may provide a more thorough study of how black civil rights activists communicated their organization's messages, while relaying the March's overarching call for jobs and freedom for black Americans.

As an example, although civil rights leader Julian Bond served as director of communications for SNCC, public relations historian Vanessa Murphree did not limit her study to his work. Rather, she examined in addition the ways that others involved in SNCC's communications used public relations to achieve the organization's goals.<sup>219</sup> In her study, she outlined the communication strategies SNCC employed to have its position accurately presented in the local and national press at a time when racist viewpoints were often reflected in news coverage. Among its public relations tools, SNCC relied on press releases, press conferences, newsletters, special events and fundraisers, which Murphree describes as "textbook public relations procedures."<sup>220</sup> By analyzing communications in the context of the changing civil rights movement, Murphree provides an important case study of the value of public relations in helping to foster social change. Murphree explains how SNCC's public relations tactics shifted with the

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<sup>218</sup> Interview with Julian Bond by Elizabeth Gritter, November 1 and 22, 1999 R-0345 in the Southern Oral History Program Collection #4007, Southern History Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

<sup>219</sup> Vanessa D. Murphree, "The Selling of Civil Rights: The Communication Section of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee," *Journalism History* 29, no. 1 (Spring 2003): 21-31.

<sup>220</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

organization's change in focus from nonviolent protests and community organizing to political activism and finally, to advocating black power.<sup>221</sup> Her work also adds to the limited scholarship on how public relations was used by African Americans to advance the fight for civil rights.

Although SNCC had many successes and played a key role in the modern civil rights movement, Murphree notes that it is difficult to directly measure the success of SNCC's communication efforts, but "evidence suggests that the impact was significant."<sup>222</sup> She offers that SNCC helped set the nation's agenda via public relations and the press by creating civil rights news. Thus, Murphree wrote, "Even without an accurate calculation of printed news releases and successful stories pitched, the national media of the day can be reviewed to find extensive coverage of SNCC events which were specifically designed to attract the national media and consequently the support of the national public."<sup>223</sup> This, along with Murphree's conclusion that it "may be impossible to quantify" the group's communication accomplishments, implies that the quantity of news releases and press clippings is a determinant of public relations success. Murphree acknowledged SNCC had no formal evaluation mechanism in place. However, she refers to informal success measures, such as integrated lunch counters, passage of civil rights legislation, and an increase in the number of registered black voters.<sup>224</sup> Although Murphree posits that "almost every SNCC activity was fueled to some degree by public relations," it is unclear if Murphree is labeling these activities as public relations accomplishments or general organizational successes. Her conclusions about evaluation illustrate the challenges of public

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<sup>221</sup> See also Vanessa D. Murphree, "Black Power: Public Relations and Social Change in the 1960s," *American Journalism* 21, no. 3 (2004): 13-32.

<sup>222</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

<sup>223</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>224</sup> *Ibid.*

relations measurement and show the problem is not unique to today's practice. In this dissertation, I address measurement by examining how public relations strategies and tactics helped the CCRI achieve its organizational goals.

### **Justification**

Although journalism and mass communication scholars have devoted significant attention to the African American press, scholarship on the role of African Americans in public relations has been limited. African Americans are largely absent from US public relations history, be it as practitioners or in public relations campaigns about African Americans' civil rights. This study helps close that gap by examining a public relations campaign conducted by black and white activists on behalf of an issue impacting African Americans. In addition, among the few studies of public relations history and African Americans, most have focused on larger civil rights organizations, such as the NAACP, SCLC, and SNCC, as well as on prominent individuals, such as Martin Luther King Jr. and Bayard Rustin. In contrast, this dissertation looks at how public relations was used in grassroots efforts by local activists. According to Aldon Morris, community-based civil rights work played a significant role in the origins of civil rights movement, but has been overshadowed by the work of larger organizations.<sup>225</sup> In addition, because this study also analyzes public relations outcomes, it adds to the limited scholarship on the history of public relations measurement.<sup>226</sup> Academics and practitioners have long been

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<sup>225</sup> See Morris, *Origins of the Civil Rights Movement*. See also Patrick D. Jones, "Communist Front Shouts 'Kissing Case' to the World: The Committee to Combat Racial Injustice and the Politics of Race and Gender During the Cold War" (master's thesis, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1996), 27.

<sup>226</sup> See Tom Watson, "The Evolution of Public Relations Measurement and Evaluation," *Public Relations Review* 38 (2012): 390-398.

concerned with the challenges of measuring public relations programs.<sup>227</sup> As shown in this dissertation's literature review, measurement has been a challenge for the industry. Research and discussion have explored different methods for public relations evaluation, which have run the gamut from measuring outputs, such as the number of press clippings, to evaluating outcomes, such as attitude change, action taken or awareness level.<sup>228</sup> Although the public relations profession today is becoming more focused on assessing outcomes, doing so remains difficult for a number of reasons, including the lack of standardized evaluative measures, budgetary and time constraints, the historical practice of measuring outputs, and practitioners' unfamiliarity with appropriate measures.<sup>229</sup> Despite an ongoing focus on equating public relations success with news stories, the public relations industry today has called for a move away from relying on news stories as a determinant of effective public relations.<sup>230</sup> News stories that result from public relations efforts are not outcomes; they are outputs. Therefore, while this research reviews some news stories in order to present the events of the kissing case, it is less concerned with the content and quantity of news stories and instead will focus on the opinions and actions (the

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<sup>227</sup> See Susan Grantham, Edward T. Vieira Jr., and Christina Trincherro, "Are We Practicing What We Preach? Perspectives on Public Relations Evaluation from Practitioners," *Public Relations Journal* 5, no. 3(2011): 1-19; Linda Childers Hon, "Demonstrating Effectiveness in Public Relations: Goals, Objectives, and Evaluation," *Journal of Public Relations Research* 10, no. 2 (1998): 103-135; David Michaelson and Don W. Stacks, "Standardization in Public Relations Measurement and Evaluation," *Public Relations Journal* 5, no. 2 (2011): 1-22.

<sup>228</sup> Watson, "The Evolution of Public Relations Measurement," 219.

<sup>229</sup> See Anne Gregory, "Public Relations and Evaluation: Does the Reality Match the Rhetoric?," *Journal of Marketing Communications* 7, no. 3 (2001): 171-189; Eva E. Hardy and Richard D. Waters, "Identifying the Norms of Professional Practice: Reviewing PRSA's Silver Anvil Award-Winning Campaigns," *Public Relations Review* 38, no. 5 (2012): 898-905; Juliana Raupp, "Evaluating Strategic Communication: Theoretical and Methodological Requirements," in *Public Relations Research*, ed. Ansgar Zerfass, Betteke van Ruler, and Krishnamurthy Sriramesh (Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 2008), 179-192; Watson, "The Evolution of Public Relations Measurement," 390-398.

<sup>230</sup> See the Institute of Public Relations Research's Barcelona Declaration of Measurement Principles at <http://www.instituteforpr.org/barcelona-principles-2-0-updated-2015>. See also Hardy and Waters, "Identifying the Norms of Professional Practice."

outcomes) impacted as a result of reading those news articles and being exposed to other public relations tactics (the outputs.)

This study helps fill another gap identified in the review of the literature: rather than applying framing analysis to newspaper articles, it analyzes frames in public relations materials and related public opinion. Also, this dissertation examines Governor Hodges's reaction to public opinion, thereby providing historical context and insights into what today might be called reputation management and crisis communication.

Additionally, this dissertation adds to the nascent scholarship on the development of public relations in the United States.<sup>231</sup> Some public relations historians have posited that extant literature in that subfield has been dominated by a business frame, which results in a flawed and incomplete understanding of public relations.<sup>232</sup> Specifically, an emphasis on corporate public relations creates a perception that it was a tool of big business used primarily to manipulate.<sup>233</sup> Given this focus, scholars have called for more research into other types of activities, such as reform movements, which are “conducted by the people rather than at the people.”<sup>234</sup> Karen Miller posited, “Research that has utilized other historical lenses has proven insightful.”<sup>235</sup> In its exploration of a civil rights issue, this dissertation looks at the work of activists in promoting social change. Furthermore, by examining how public relations was used by an advocacy group, this research can help broaden the view of public relations history.

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<sup>231</sup> Karla K. Gower, “Public Relations Research at the Crossroads,” *Journal of Public Relations Research* 18, no. 2(2006): 182.

<sup>232</sup> Karen S. Miller, “U.S. Public Relations History: Knowledge and Limitations,” 381.

<sup>233</sup> Coombs and Holladay, “Privileging an Activist vs. a Corporate View,” 347.

<sup>234</sup> Ibid.

<sup>235</sup> Ibid., 413.

Finally, although this study does not focus solely on Robert Williams, due to his pivotal leadership role in the kissing case it will provide additional insight to his pioneering work as a champion of civil rights. Although he has been studied by scholars such as Ronald Stephens and Timothy Tyson, his contributions have been largely overlooked in most accounts of the long civil rights movement. He advocated black power well before it became a movement, and he railed against a society in which blacks were denied full rights as US citizens. His efforts in this regard have been minimized or ignored. Moreover, mass communication scholarship about Williams has focused on his newsletter and radio work. In contrast, this study offers a different perspective by exploring Williams's work in public relations.

### **Research Questions**

This dissertation focuses on identifying and analyzing the public relations campaigns of the CCRI and Governor Hodges, as well as the public relations tactics of the NAACP and USIA during the events of the kissing case. Aside from background on the racial environment, this study covers the following time period: October 28, 1958, the day the boys were arrested, to February 13, 1959, when they were freed. Using racial formation theory and framing theory as its foundation, this proposed dissertation asks the following questions:

- Based on the 1950s-era practice of public relations described earlier in this dissertation, how was public relations used by CCRI, the NAACP, Governor Hodges, and the USIA in relation to the 1958/1959 kissing case? What strategies and tactics did the four groups employ?
- What frames did the four groups use in their public relations material in relation to the case? What frames were in the letters the public sent to Hodges, and how did the frames relate to those in the four groups' public relations material?

- How was race, as it was constructed and codified via Jim Crow practices in 1958/1959, reflected in the four groups' public relations material and the opinions expressed in the letters?
- What do the study's findings tell us about the practice of public relations historically and what can contemporary practitioners learn from the strategies and tactics used by these groups?

## Method

To answer the research questions, this dissertation employs two methods: the historical method and frame analysis, supplemented by two interviews conducted by the author. According to Louis Gottschalk, the historical method is “the process of critically examining and analyzing the records and survivals of the past.”<sup>236</sup> Stressing the importance of these records, William David Sloan posits “most of historical methodology deals with sources.”<sup>237</sup> In addition, Sloan and Michael Stamm aver that “historians must bring thoroughness and tirelessness to the effort of collecting and analyzing source material.”<sup>238</sup> Put another way, “It is with the sources that any account of the historian's work must begin.”<sup>239</sup> Therefore, I have paid particular attention to identifying relevant manuscript collections and obtaining documents from those collections about the kissing case and its public relations components, as well as on primary source material that provides context. I also consulted secondary sources for background on the racial, political and social context of 1958.

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<sup>236</sup> Louis Gottschalk, *Understanding History: A Primer of Historical Method* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1950), 48.

<sup>237</sup> William David Sloan, “Historical Methods” in *Research Methods in Communication*, ed. Shuhua Zhou and William David Sloan (Northport, AL: Vision Press, 2011), 246.

<sup>238</sup> William David Sloan and Michael Stamm, *Historical Methods in Communication*, (Northport, AL: Vision Press, 2010), xi.

<sup>239</sup> John Tosh with Sean Lang, *The Pursuit of History* (Harlow, England: Pearson Longman, 1984), 57.



With each manuscript collection, I examined and reviewed documents to identify those relevant to my research. To determine what constitutes a public relations document, I relied on the 1950s definitions of public relations outlined earlier in this proposed dissertation. Tosh posits that the historical method requires “a secure grasp of context, and in many instances, a high degree of technical knowledge.”<sup>240</sup> Given the similarity between public relations practice of the 1950s and today, my knowledge and background in public relations—which has given me significant technical knowledge—also informed my examination and evaluation.<sup>241</sup>

The archival material I reviewed includes letters, notes, press releases, reports, plans, government records, legal documents, petitions, pamphlets, speeches, flyers, news media stories, fact sheets, photographs, and postcards. Notwithstanding the news stories, I refer to these documents as public relations outputs—the material produced or the tactics to help achieve the public relations objective. These differ from the public relations outcome. Outcomes are the changes in awareness, attitude, opinion, knowledge and/or behavior as a result of the public relations program. With the kissing case, the outcomes were to create awareness of the boys’ dilemma, mobilize public opinion to their cause, and spur the public to write letters to Governor Hodges demanding the boys’ freedom. This mass pressure would then result in the ultimate outcome: the boys’ freedom. To ascertain public opinion, I reviewed the letters members of the public wrote and sent to Hodges in which they expressed their opinions about the kissing case and asked Hodges to free the boys. According to Taeku Lee, constituency mail “is a positive, proactive conception of public opinion that is especially well-suited for examining activated

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<sup>240</sup> Ibid.

<sup>241</sup> I have 32 years of experience as a public relations practitioner.

mass opinion.<sup>242</sup> Furthermore, “The content of the letters themselves offers an abundance of textual and contextual information about the correspondents’ opinions and how they choose to express them.”<sup>243</sup> Lee added, “Correspondents hold free rein not only over issue definition and issue position, but also over how to structure that position—what language to use, which frames to conjure, what other issues to link to, and the like.”<sup>244</sup>

In addition, I conducted a telephone interview with Joyce Egginton, the reporter from the *London News Chronicle* who in 1958, broke the story internationally. I conducted an email interview with civil rights leader and former SNCC public relations director Julian Bond to obtain his perspective on public relations practice of the early 1960s, as well as his recollections of the kissing case. These interviews, however, are supplementary to the manuscript collection documents, since according to historian John Tosh, the “vividness of personal recall can give an exhilarating sense of touching the ‘real’ past,” but are filtered through subsequent experience.<sup>245</sup>

To identify and examine frames in the public relations outputs and outcomes, I employ qualitative framing analysis. According to Stephen Reese, “The qualitative turn of much framing analysis helps resist the reductionistic urge to sort media texts and discourse into containers and count their size or frequency.”<sup>246</sup> Reese also posits that “the most important frame may not be the

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<sup>242</sup> Taeku Lee, *Mobilizing Public Opinion: Black Insurgency and Racial Attitudes in the Civil Rights Era* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 118. See also, Leila Sussmann, “Mass Political Letter Writing in America: The Growth of an Institution,” *Public Opinion Quarterly* 23, no. 2 (Summer 1959): 207-208.

<sup>243</sup> Lee, *Mobilizing Public Opinion*, 103.

<sup>244</sup> *Ibid.*, 104.

<sup>245</sup> Tosh, *Pursuit of History*, 310, 320 and 323.

<sup>246</sup> Stephen A. Reese, “Prologue: Framing Public Life: A Bridging Model for Media Research,” in *Framing Public Life*, 8.

most frequent.”<sup>247</sup> I read each of the documents, allowing for what sociologist Stuart Hall referred to as “a long preliminary soak, a submission by the analyst to the mass of his material.”<sup>248</sup> As I continued to read, I took notes to ascertain recurring themes. According to Hall, a researcher learns to hear the same underlying appeals, the same notes, being sounded again and again in different passages and contexts.<sup>249</sup> Furthermore, Hall adds that this analysis allows the researcher to see areas of emphasis in text by noting position, placement, treatment, tone, and stylistic intensification. I identified and analyzed these notes and areas of emphasis as frames.

Entman explained that frames can be detected by probing for particular words and visual images that consistently appear in a narrative and convey thematically consistent meanings across media and time.<sup>250</sup> Similar to Hall’s description, Entman explained, “By providing, repeating, and thereby reinforcing words and visual images that reference some ideas but not others, frames work to make some ideas more salient in the text, others less so—and others entirely invisible. But through repetition, placement, and reinforcing associations with each other, the words and images that comprise the frame render one basic interpretation more readily discernible, comprehensible, and memorable than others.”<sup>251</sup>

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<sup>247</sup> Ibid. This point is also made in James K. Hertog and Douglas M. McLeod, “A Multiperspectival Approach to Framing Analysis: A Field Guide,” in *Framing Public Life*, 152.

<sup>248</sup> Stuart Hall, “Introduction,” in *Paper Voices: The Popular Press and Social Change, 1935-1965*, ed. A. C. H. Smith, Elizabeth Immirzi, and Trevor Blackwell (London: Chatto & Windus: 1975), 1.

<sup>249</sup> Ibid.

<sup>250</sup> Robert Entman, “Framing US Coverage of International News: Contrasts in Narratives of the KAL and Iran Air Incidents,” *Journal of Communication* 41, no. 4 (1991): 7.

<sup>251</sup> Ibid.

## **Limitations**

The opinions examined in this study were those expressed by individuals and groups in letters, postcards, and petitions sent to Governor Hodges. No doubt, there were countless citizens who did not express their opinions to Hodges about the kissing case. Therefore, the opinions in the letters are not generalizable to the entire population. Also, given the qualitative nature of this analysis and the fact that this study analyzes one event that occurred over a four-month period, the conclusions drawn about public relations practice are not generalizable to all public relations practices on behalf of African American causes during the civil rights movement.

## **Chapter Outline**

The kissing case began on October 28, 1958 and was resolved on February 13, 1959. This dissertation presents the events of the kissing case chronologically; however, many of these events overlapped. The activities of the CCRI and NAACP, who worked to free the boys, will be examined in the second chapter. Chapter three will focus on Gov. Hodges's and the USIA's public relations activities. Hodges sought to justify the boys' sentencing, thereby protecting his reputation and that of North Carolina. Similarly, the USIA targeted its efforts on protecting the international reputation of the United States in the midst of the Cold War. Chapter four examines the outcome of the kissing case, while chapter five explores the public relations campaigns in relation to this dissertation's theoretical foundation, as well as key learnings for contemporary practitioners.

## **Chapter 1**

The first chapter provides an introduction and overview of the topic, background on race relations in the South in general, with information on North Carolina generally and Monroe, specifically. This chapter defines public relations of the 1950s and addresses the interplay between public relations and propaganda. In addition, this chapter includes the literature review,

comprised of the theoretical foundation and previous research on public relations and framing, and public relations and African American civil rights. The first chapter also includes the justification, research questions, and method.

## Chapter 2

The second chapter focuses on the public relations work of the CCRI and NAACP. This chapter provides additional details on the kissing case as they unfolded, the legal machinations, initial news coverage, and the formation of the CCRI on December 19, 1958, to include detail on the CCRI's goals and its public relations strategies and initial tactics. Chapter two also details the beginning of the international news coverage in mid-December, the involvement of the NAACP in late December and the continued public relations work of the CCRI.

## Chapter 3

Chapter three focuses on the public relations efforts of Gov. Hodges and the USIA. In January, publicity about the kissing case reached a crescendo, with a significant international outcry. As a result, Hodges launched his own public relations campaign, and the USIA implemented some public relations tactics. In addition, members of the public expressed their views about the case in hundreds of letters and thousands of signatures on petitions. This chapter will focus on those activities and events.

## Chapter 4

This chapter presents the outcome of the kissing case, and summarizes and analyzes the public relations activities implemented by the CCRI, the NAACP, Gov. Hodges, and the USIA on behalf of the kissing case. This chapter also provides further exploration of the NAACP's involvement in the kissing case.

## Chapter 5

Chapter five discusses the public relations campaigns, including the frames in the public relations material, in relation to racial formation theory, as well as in the context of the role of public relations in society. In addition, this chapter presents lessons that contemporary public relations practitioners can learn from the public relations campaigns implemented on behalf of the kissing case. Chapter five also suggests opportunities for further study.

## Epilogue

This chapter provides a brief summary of what later transpired in the lives of the key players involved in the kissing case.

*All persons born or naturalized in the United States, and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States and of the state wherein they reside. No state shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States; nor shall any state deprive any person of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws.*<sup>1</sup>

## **CHAPTER 2: THE NAACP and the CCRI**

Robert Williams had been advocating on behalf of Monroe's African Americans since his return from the Marines in 1955. In demanding that the city's blacks be afforded the rights to which they were entitled by the US Constitution, Williams attempted to integrate the pool, the library, and the elementary school. As a result, Monroe's white citizens viewed Williams as an agitator, whereas blacks saw him as a champion.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, it was not surprising that Williams became involved when the boys were jailed, leading to the formation of the CCRI.

This chapter examines what transpired after the boys were jailed, and describes how and why the CCRI was formed and the NAACP's role in that process. In addition, through a critical examination and analysis of historical documents, this chapter identifies and explores the public relations strategies and tactics the CCRI and NAACP implemented on the boys' behalf. Using a qualitative framing analysis, this chapter also identifies and analyzes the frames used in the CCRI's and NAACP's public relations material.

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<sup>1</sup> U.S. Const. amend XIV, § 1.

<sup>2</sup> "Petition Circulated," *Monroe Enquirer*, November 11, 1957.

## The News Spreads

After the reason for the boys' incarceration spread through Monroe, mobs of angry white citizens gathered outside the jail. On October 31, 1958, a group of police officers decided to play what they claimed was a Halloween joke by dressing in white sheets and entering the boys' cell. The frightened boys believed the KKK had broken into the jail.<sup>3</sup> Elsewhere, incensed Monroe residents fired shots into the Thompson home and burned a cross on their lawn.<sup>4</sup> The boys' mothers, Evelyn Thompson and Jennie Simpson, were fired from their jobs as domestics. Evelyn Thompson received an eviction notice from her landlord.

Robert Williams became aware of the incident on November 3 when Monroe Mayor Fred Wilson asked for assistance in getting the mothers to authorize the boys' hearing.<sup>5</sup> Williams visited with Thompson and Simpson, who had been told their sons were being held for their safety and no charges would be filed against them.<sup>6</sup> The next morning, local authorities summoned the mothers to the courthouse for the hearing, which was to be held that afternoon. The mothers asked Williams to accompany them.<sup>7</sup> Upon arriving, they discovered that Union County Juvenile Court Judge Hampton Price had already met with the girl and her parents. Price claimed it was best not to mix the races; therefore, he held "separate but equal hearings."<sup>8</sup> The boys were not offered legal counsel, and police barred Williams from the courtroom. The

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<sup>3</sup> Robert Williams to Blaine Madison, January 3, 1959, CCRI papers, box 1, folder 2.

<sup>4</sup> Tyson, *Radio Free Dixie*, 96.

<sup>5</sup> Transcript, 305, Robert Carl Cohen papers, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, box 1, folder 8 (hereafter cited as Cohen papers).

<sup>6</sup> Weissman, "The Kissing Case," *Nation*, 47.

<sup>7</sup> Transcript, 306, Cohen papers, box 1, folder 8.

<sup>8</sup> Cohen, *Black Crusader*, 112.



mothers later claimed that during the proceedings, Price referred to their sons as “niggers.”<sup>9</sup> Instead of hearing the boys’ version of events, Price summoned them to the courthouse to announce their punishment, which was determined based on Sissy Sutton’s claim that James Thompson kissed her. Price sentenced James and Fuzzy to indeterminate terms in the Morrison Training School for Negroes, a reformatory in Hoffman, North Carolina, approximately 70 miles east of Monroe.<sup>10</sup> With good behavior, they could hope to be released before age 21.<sup>11</sup>

Williams and the other local NAACP officers agreed the association should intervene. To garner support beyond the Monroe chapter, Williams called Kelly Alexander, head of the North Carolina State Conference.<sup>12</sup> Alexander declined involvement, as did national NAACP Executive Secretary Roy Wilkins. Williams surmised they did not want to get involved in a sex case, particularly one involving miscegenation.<sup>13</sup> By this time, Conrad Lynn, a New York-based African American civil rights lawyer, heard of the boys’ situation and offered his services as legal counsel.<sup>14</sup> Lynn had been a member of the Communist Party in the 1920s and 1930s, but was expelled in 1937 over disagreements about support for striking Trinidadian oil workers in their protest against their British overseers.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Tyson, *Radio Free Dixie*, 100.

<sup>10</sup> Ted Poston, “A Story of Two Little Boys in Carolina, *New York Post*, November 10, 1958.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> The NAACP referred to its state branches as state conferences.

<sup>13</sup> Cohen, *Black Crusader*, 112.

<sup>14</sup> There are conflicting accounts of how Lynn became involved in the kissing case, with Lynn writing that Williams called him on November 3. In *Negroes with Guns*, Williams wrote that he called Lynn. In a later interview, Williams said that Lynn heard of the case and called him to offer his legal services. See Conrad Lynn, *There is a Fountain: Autobiography of a Civil Rights Lawyer* (Westport, CT: Lawrence Hill, 1979), 143; Williams, *Negroes with Guns*, 59; Transcript, 307, Cohen papers, box 1, folder 8.

<sup>15</sup> Lynn, *There is a Fountain*, 68-69.

Lynn contacted George Weissman, a writer, publisher, and founding member of the Socialist Workers Party (SWP), and told him the events in Monroe might make a good magazine story. They flew to Monroe, and Lynn met with Judge Price. When Lynn asked why both boys were sentenced when only James was involved in the kissing incident, Price responded that what Fuzzy had witnessed planted certain ideas in his mind, and it would take years to rehabilitate him.<sup>16</sup> Lynn argued that the boys should have been provided legal counsel; Price advised Lynn to stop interfering in local affairs and return to New York.<sup>17</sup> Instead, Lynn visited the boys' mothers and later recalled they were nervous and frightened.<sup>18</sup> Confronted by Monroe's white power structure, the women were out of their depth. The women were housekeepers who earned about fifteen dollars per week. Mrs. Thompson, whose husband had abandoned the family years earlier, had five other children.<sup>19</sup> Mrs. Simpson was a widow with three other children who lived at home and five adult children who lived elsewhere.<sup>20</sup> Jennie Simpson had a sixth grade education; Evelyn Thompson's schooling stopped at the fifth grade.<sup>21</sup> The mothers were unfamiliar with the legal system and relied on Williams for guidance.

Lynn decided to prepare a writ of habeas corpus, a summons forcing the state to produce the boys in court.<sup>22</sup> In the meantime, Weissman interviewed Sissy Sutton's parents and others in

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<sup>16</sup> Lynn, *There is a Fountain*, 145.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Union County Department of Public Welfare Information Sheet and Case History Summary on James Hanover Grissom Thompson and David Ezzell Simpson, Governor Luther Hodges papers, State Archives of North Carolina, box 422, Segregation-Union County folder (hereafter referred to as Hodges papers).

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Lynn, *There is a Fountain*, 147.

Monroe for an article to appear in the *Nation*.<sup>23</sup> Although Lynn and Weissman had to return to New York, Lynn asked Williams to search for a North Carolina judge who would be willing to hear the writ. While Lynn continued to explore additional legal options, *New York Post* reporter Ted Poston heard about the case.<sup>24</sup> Poston was the first African American journalist to spend his career at a mainstream newspaper.<sup>25</sup> By the 1950s, Poston was “held in esteem by most journalists in New York” and had become well known among civil rights supporters for his reporting.<sup>26</sup> Poston interviewed Williams by phone to gather additional information, and the first news article about the kissing incident appeared on November 10.<sup>27</sup> As a result, African American newspapers began reporting on the boys’ situation, and Poston continued to update *Post* readers.<sup>28</sup>

Two mainstream Charlotte, North Carolina, newspapers also covered the case, one on November 11 and the other on November 14.<sup>29</sup> Williams was buoyed by the initial press

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<sup>23</sup> See George L. Weissman, “The Kissing Case,” *Nation*, January 17, 1959, 46-48.

<sup>24</sup> The historical documents do not clarify exactly how Poston heard of kissing incident. In his interviews with Robert Carl Cohen, Williams makes no mention of calling Poston. Instead, he recalled that Evelyn Thompson phoned one of her daughters, who lived in Brooklyn. The daughter called a local politician for advice, and the local politician called Ted Poston. Williams mentioned the same in a November 30 letter to Gov. Hodges, writing that “news of this incident was first released in New York by a relative of one of the victims.” See letter from Robert Williams to Gov. Hodges, November 30, 1958, Hodges papers, box 422, Segregation-Union County folder. See also Transcript, 306-307, Cohen papers, box 1, folder 8; Tyson, *Radio Free Dixie*, 108-109; and Lynn, *There is a Fountain*, 145.

<sup>25</sup> Kathleen A. Hauke, *Ted Poston: Pioneer American Journalist* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1998), xi.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> Ted Poston, “A Story of Two Little Boys in Carolina,” *New York Post*, November 10, 1958.

<sup>28</sup> For example, see “NAACP Asks Eisenhower to Look Into ‘Justice’ in N.C.,” *New York Post*, November 13, 1958; “Seek Youths Convicted in Monroe, NC,” *New York Amsterdam News*, November 15, 1958; “Justice in Monroe,” *Afro-American*, November 22, 1958; “Monroe Leader Receives 3 Threatening Letters,” *Carolina Times*, November 22, 1958; Claim Kissing Kids Railroaded, Await Ike Reply on Kissing Kids,” *Chicago Defender*, November 22, 1958.

<sup>29</sup> “Alleged Molesting, Tensions Cool Off in Racial Incident,” *Charlotte Observer*, November 11, 1958, and “Negro Boys Kissed White Girl, NAACP Protests Sentence,” *Charlotte News*, November 14, 1958.

coverage, as he had previously contacted the Associated Press (AP) and United Press International (UPI), to no avail.<sup>30</sup> Monroe's newspapers were initially silent on the issue, with the *Monroe Enquirer* later reporting that it was not local media practice to publicize juvenile court cases.<sup>31</sup>

To draw additional attention to the events in Monroe, Williams sent a telegram to President Eisenhower on November 13. Williams's message highlighted the disparity in justice for blacks and whites in the Union County courts. He asked that the "Department of Justice introduce the Fourteenth Amendment of the US Constitution to this social jungle called Dixie."<sup>32</sup>

On November 20, the Monroe press broke its silence with an article in the *Monroe Inquirer* that was less about the kissing case and more about outside attention received as a result. The article began by referencing the boys' "records of petty thievery and truancy" and later referred to the *New York Post* as a tabloid whose article was "exaggerated and distorted and typical of the fulminations of one or more persons whose apparent aim is to inflame and engender racial discord in a peaceful community."<sup>33</sup> Less than a week later, a *New York Post* editorial wryly noted that due to its November 10 story about the case, which resulted in AP and UPI coverage, "Monroe finally got the news about Monroe."<sup>34</sup> In other words, without the *New York Post* story, Monroe's papers would have remained silent about the incident.

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<sup>30</sup> Tyson, *Radio Free Dixie*, 110.

<sup>31</sup> "Incident in Monroe Gets Wide Attention," *Monroe Enquirer*, November 20, 1958.

<sup>32</sup> Ted Poston, "NAACP Asks Eisenhower to Look Into 'Justice' in N.C.," *New York Post*, November 13, 1958. See also text of telegram, Robert F. Williams to President Eisenhower, undated, CCRI papers, box 2, folder 7.

<sup>33</sup> "Incident in Monroe Gets Wide Attention," *Monroe Inquirer*, November 20, 1958.

<sup>34</sup> "How the Word Got Through," *New York Post*, November 26, 1958. This editorial seems to incorrectly report that the *Post* first wrote about the boys in a November 3 story with the headline "A Story of Two Boys in Carolina." Based on my examination of the November 3–13 issues of the *New York Post* on microfilm at the New York Public Library, the first story about the boys appeared in the *Post* on November 10, and it carried the headline "A Story of

Around the same time, Williams received a response to his White House telegram from E. Frederic Morrow, President Eisenhower's Administrative Officer for Special Projects. Morrow was the first African American to hold an executive position in the White House.<sup>35</sup> Morrow wrote that the boys' sentencing violated no federal laws, and that while the President deplored such instances, it was not the purview of the White House to intervene in such matters.<sup>36</sup> Citing state laws, Morrow encouraged Williams to seek remedy in the North Carolina courts. Morrow sent the same response to concerned citizens who wrote to President Eisenhower about the boys.<sup>37</sup> The CCRI later distributed a press release containing the text of Morrow's letter to Williams.<sup>38</sup> Although the media list for the press release is not included in the historical documents, based on media coverage and Morrow's later comments, it appears the release was sent to the black press.<sup>39</sup> The *Los Angeles Tribune* took particular issue with Morrow, writing that he was a pawn used by the White House to deal with Negro problems.<sup>40</sup> Morrow felt his

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Two Boys in Carolina." The boys were sentenced on November 3, and Poston's story would have had to appear the same day. In addition, Weissman later referenced that the first *Post* story appeared on November 10, 1958. See letter from George Weissman to Mary Evelyn Farmer, February 10, 1958, CCRI papers, box 1, folder 3.

<sup>35</sup> For more information on Morrow, see E. Frederic Morrow, *Black Man in the White House* (New York: MacFadden-Bartell, 1963).

<sup>36</sup> E. Frederic Morrow to Robert F. Williams, November, 22, 1958. CCRI papers, box 1, folder 1.

<sup>37</sup> E. Frederic Morrow to Mr. and Mrs. Henry Malcheski, January 23, 1959, CCRI papers, box 1, folder 2.

<sup>38</sup> CCRI press release "White House Deplores, But Will Not Intervene in Carolina Kissing Case," December 19, 1958, CCRI papers, box 2, folder 7.

<sup>39</sup> For example, see "E. Fred Morrow Denies Face Saving Role in Kiss Case," *Chicago Defender*, January 24, 1959, and "White House Aid, Editor in Kissing Case Feud," *New York Amsterdam News*, January 31, 1959.

<sup>40</sup> "President's Aide Morrow Nothing But an Uncle Tom," *Los Angeles Tribune*, January 1, 1959.

response was portrayed unfairly, and he wrote letters to the black press and the NAACP defending his position.<sup>41</sup>

### **The Formation of the CCRI**

On December 6, Louis E. Austin, African American publisher of the *Carolina Times*, a daily newspaper for African American North Carolinians, published an editorial lamenting the travesty of justice in the South. Specifically writing about the Dr. Perry abortion accusation, Austin argued that Perry's dilemma had been elevated to a struggle "between southern prejudice, backed by KKK influence and progressive Negro leadership."<sup>42</sup> Austin called for the "NAACP or some other organization to organize a committee for Dr. Perry's defense."<sup>43</sup> Although Austin's editorial played an important role in the formation of the CCRI, the SWP claimed full credit.

Minutes of the December 16, 1958, executive meeting of the SWP include a report on the organization of a Committee to Combat Racial Injustice.<sup>44</sup> Another report by the SWP to its North Carolina members notes that after the boys' story hit the New York press, the SWP sent two members of its Young Socialist Alliance (YSA) to Monroe to speak to Robert Williams and Harry Golden, a white, Charlotte-based writer, publisher, and civil rights advocate.<sup>45</sup> The report

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<sup>41</sup> Morrow, *Black Man in the White House*, 199. See also E. Frederic Morrow to Almena Lomax, Editor, *Los Angeles Tribune*, January 7, 1959; letter from E. Frederic Morrow to Roy Wilkins, January 7, 1959; and letter from John A. Morsell, NAACP Assistant to the Executive Secretary to E. Frederic Morrow, January 13, 1959, all letters in NAACP Papers, Part III A92, Crime-North Carolina Kissing Case folder.

<sup>42</sup> L. E. Austin, "The High Cost of Justice in the South," *Carolina Times*, December 6, 1958. Note: In the *Carolina Times*, Austin is listed as the newspaper's president by his initials and last name: L. E. Austin. Therefore, this dissertation will refer to him as L. E. Austin.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Minutes of the Club Executive, December 16, 1958, SWP records, reel 9.

<sup>45</sup> Tom Kerry, "For NC Members Only—To Be Transmitted Verbally: Committee to Combat Racial Injustice," December 19, 1958, SWP records, reel 9. See also, "16-year-old White Girls Write About Town Which Imprisoned

explains that “upon their return, the YSA comrades gave us information they had gathered which indicated the possibility of launching a movement far beyond the scope of the original perspective.”<sup>46</sup> The SWP claims it developed the idea of forming a committee and at the same time, saw Austin’s *Carolina Times* editorial and asked him to join the committee.<sup>47</sup> According to historian Patrick Jones, this version of events appears to be wishful thinking.<sup>48</sup> The SWP had been looking for an opportunity to broadly demonstrate its commitment to African American civil rights and may have therefore embellished its role in the formation of the committee.<sup>49</sup>

Furthermore, the SWP’s version of events minimizes the integral role of local leaders and “fails to recognize the power held by Robert Williams” among Monroe’s black community.<sup>50</sup> Even though he was a SWP member, George Weissman does not credit the SWP with formation of the CCRI. Weissman noted that the *Carolina Times* editorial “in large measure inspired the setting up of this committee.”<sup>51</sup> Weissman added that he, Williams and Lynn decided to meet with Austin after reading the editorial.

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Negro Boys, 8 and 9,” *Los Angeles Tribune*, December 19, 1958; and Young Socialists Editorial Board Minutes, December 14, 1958 at <http://www.marxists.org/history/etol/document/youth/ysa/1957-1960/1958-correspondence/42-dec-14-1958-YS-Editorial%20Board%20Minutes%20Meeting.pdf>

<sup>46</sup> Young Socialists Editorial Board Minutes, December 14, 1958.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Jones, “Communist Front Shouts Kissing Case,” 46.

<sup>49</sup> In the 1950s, the SWP began actively supporting African American civil rights; however, its leadership debated the relationship between the class struggle and the African American struggle. Although the SWP would ultimately not be significant player in the black freedom struggle, in 1957 it began to seek opportunities to support African Americans. See Claude DeBruce, “On the Negro Question,” SWP Discussion Bulletin, July 1956; George Breitman, “The Class Struggle Road to Negro Equality,” and Richard Kirk, “Resolution on the Negro Struggle,” SWP Discussion Bulletin, October 1957, SWP records, reel 20.

<sup>50</sup> Jones, “Communist Front Shouts Kissing Case,” 46.

<sup>51</sup> George Weissman to Rev. C. K. Steele, December 16, 1958, CCRI papers, box 1, folder 1.

We met with him in his office in Durham last Thursday and decided then to form a Committee to Combat Racial Injustice. Its aim will be to help mobilize aid for legal and other assistance in cases in the South where the NAACP or other organizations are unable to help. This is precisely the situation now in Monroe and in many other areas. Indeed, I wish there had been such a committee in existence two years ago to have helped in the Tallahassee bus protest.<sup>52</sup>

At the December 10 meeting in Austin's office, the group decided that Williams would be CCRI chairman, with Weissman as secretary and Lynn as general counsel. Austin and Perry were also CCRI founding members.<sup>53</sup> A few days later, Weissman began calling civil rights supporters to ask them to play a leadership role in the CCRI. One of the first he contacted was Reverend Charles Kenzie Steele, who went by the initials C. K. and was co-founder of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) and a friend of Martin Luther King Jr. In 1956, Steele organized a bus boycott in Tallahassee at the same time King was leading the Montgomery bus boycott.<sup>54</sup> Steele agreed to join the committee's leadership, as did Carl Braden, a white, Louisville, Kentucky-based leftist, civil rights activist, and journalist.<sup>55</sup> Braden and his wife Anne were field organizers for the Southern Conference Education Foundation (SCEF), a pro-integration organization. They were often targeted by the local white community for their support of African Americans.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> George Weissman to L. E. Austin, December 16, 1958, CCRI papers, box 1, folder 1.

<sup>54</sup> Taylor Branch, *Parting the Waters: America In the King Years 1954-63* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1988), 602.

<sup>55</sup> George Weissman to Rev. C. K. Steele, December 15, 1958, and George Weissman to Carl Braden, December 22, 1958, both in CCRI papers, box 1, folder 1.

<sup>56</sup> In 1954, the Bradens helped buy a house for an African American family in an all-white Louisville suburb. The house was later bombed, with no one injured. Although the bomber was never caught, the Bradens, who were accused of being communists, and five other whites were charged with sedition because they intended to incite community unrest with the house purchase. Carl Braden was sentenced to 15 years in prison and served seven months. Anne Braden's case did not go to trial, and Carl's conviction was later overturned. See Margalit Fox, "Anne Braden, 81, Activist in Civil Rights and Other Causes, Dies," *New York Times*, March 17, 2006.



Unfortunately for the CCRI, Edgar Daniel Nixon, known as E. D. Nixon, declined to participate, despite numerous requests. Nixon was an African American, Alabama-based civil rights activist who organized the Montgomery branch of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, co-founded the Montgomery Improvement Association, and helped lead the successful 1955 Montgomery bus boycott. By the time the CCRI contacted him, Nixon was disillusioned with aspects of the civil rights movement, as he believed Martin Luther King Jr. had been given undue credit for the Montgomery bus boycott when local activists had been organizing the protest for years.<sup>57</sup>

With Nixon's refusal, the CCRI's first letterhead listed Robert Williams as chairman, followed by L. E. Austin, Carl Braden, Dr. Albert Perry, and Rev. C. K. Steele. Weissman was listed as secretary and Conrad Lynn as general counsel. Weissman and Braden, both long-time NAACP members, were white; Steele, Williams, Perry and Austin were black. The CCRI was an interracial organization, and its leaders recognized that it needed both black and white supporters, as the fight for racial equality ultimately impacted all Americans.<sup>58</sup> In addition, although Williams and Perry were disillusioned with the NAACP, Weissman and Braden recognized that the CCRI should assist and complement the NAACP instead of competing with it.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Nixon's resentment was exacerbated by the fact that it was he who called King and asked for his involvement in the boycott. See George Weissman to E. D. Nixon, December 16, 1958; Arthur Lobman to E. D. Nixon, December 20, 1958; E. D. Nixon to Conrad Lynn, December 16, 1958; E. D. Nixon to George Weissman, December 20, 1958, all in CCRI papers, box 1, folder 1.

<sup>58</sup> Carl Braden to George Weissman, January 25, 1959, CCRI papers, box 1, folder 2.

<sup>59</sup> George Weissman to Carl Braden, December 22, 1959, and letter from Carl Braden to George Weissman, December 30, 1958, CCRI papers, box 1, folder 1.

On December 11, the *Monroe Enquirer* reported that Weissman and Lynn were back in town “investigating and checking recent happenings.”<sup>60</sup> On December 14, Joyce Egginton, a New York-based reporter for the *London News Chronicle*, arrived in Monroe. Egginton had read Ted Poston’s articles in the *New York Post*. She was intrigued by the fact that two young boys could be jailed for a child’s game and asked her editors if she could travel to Monroe to write a story for the *Chronicle*.<sup>61</sup> Before doing so, she telephoned Dr. Perry to get background on the incident. On December 15, the *Monroe Enquirer* reported that the “latest reporter in town checking on incidents is Joyce Egginton of the *London News Chronicle*. It’s the first time, we think that a European newspaper has sent a reporter to Monroe.”<sup>62</sup> Egginton spoke to Monroe Mayor Fred Wilson, who informed her that the situation had been handled, and therefore wasn’t newsworthy.<sup>63</sup> However she continued her reporting, interviewing next Sissy Sutton’s parents. Sissy’s mother told Egginton that she would have killed Hanover herself given the chance.<sup>64</sup>

Egginton wanted to interview the boys, so Williams and Perry drove her to the Morrison Training School, a two-hour car ride from Monroe. The boys’ mothers, who had not seen their sons since the November 4 sentencing and had no means to get to the reformatory, joined the trip. Williams, who had smuggled in a camera, took photos of the boys and their mothers, which he gave to Egginton. For the first time since their arrest, the boys were able to tell their side of the story. James Thompson said he and Fuzzy were walking home when some white boys asked

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<sup>60</sup> *Monroe Enquirer*, December 11, 1958.

<sup>61</sup> Joyce Egginton, interview by Denise Hill, March 9, 2014.

<sup>62</sup> *Monroe Enquirer*, December 15, 1958.

<sup>63</sup> Egginton interview.

<sup>64</sup> Joyce Egginton, “The Negro Children in Jail for a Kiss,” *London News Chronicle*, December 18, 1958 and Egginton interview.

them to play. There were three white girls with them and together, the children went into an open culvert. A kissing game ensued and the white boys kissed the white girls. One of the girls then asked Hanover for a kiss. However Hanover said he “did want to kiss her because I knew it was wrong. I knew I should never kiss a white girl.”<sup>65</sup> When Egginton asked Hanover why he was in the reformatory, he responded that he did not know but thought it was for “stealing and doing things.” Hanover said he had stolen a ham last summer because he was hungry. When Egginton asked Fuzzy why he was in the reformatory, he too said he did not know, but guessed it was because he played hooky from school. Earlier, Egginton had asked J. Hampton Price if it was “wrong to convict on the uncorroborated evidence of a seven-year-old girl.”<sup>66</sup> Price responded, “I had to believe someone, and I preferred to believe her because the boys had previous records of petty larceny. Anyway, we had to put them away for their own protection. Feeling among the white residents was running very high.”<sup>67</sup>

Egginton’s article, accompanied by Williams’s photos of the boys, appeared on the front page of the December 18 *London News Chronicle*. In addition to describing the boys’ ordeal, Egginton reported that Monroe’s white residents supported the sentencing, believing it was tempered with mercy.<sup>68</sup> At the end of her story, Egginton recounted that Monroe’s mayor said he didn’t know what the fuss was about, as “Monroe is no different from scores of other towns in the South.”<sup>69</sup> Egginton concluded, “and that is the truth and the tragedy of the whole affair.”<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

After the story appeared, other overseas newspapers reported on the boys' situation, and the kissing case was soon catapulted onto an international stage. Egginton's story played an important role in the kissing case, as it gave people in other countries a glimpse into the United States' race relations problems. Shocked by the events that had transpired in Monroe, many were compelled to write to North Carolina authorities.<sup>71</sup> These letters and the opinions expressed in them would later shape Gov. Hodges's public relations efforts.

The same day Egginton's story ran, Harry Golden sent a letter to North Carolina NAACP President Kelly Alexander, informing him that Conrad Lynn had asked for assistance in finding a judge to review the writ of habeas corpus. Although the purpose of the letter was to obtain input from Alexander before assisting Lynn, Golden also used the opportunity to comment on Robert Williams, writing that "Negro leadership in Monroe has been very bad."<sup>72</sup> Golden and Alexander were long-standing friends, and neither man liked Williams.<sup>73</sup> They thought he was too militant and brash and believed he was motivated by self-interest. Williams had little respect for Golden or Alexander, as they were aligned with the national NAACP's approach to civil rights, which Williams found stagnant and ineffective.

With increasing media coverage about the boys, the NAACP's absence in the kissing case was becoming apparent. In addition, the association was receiving letters from citizens

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> See for example Andre Regnier, Couillet, Belgium, to Gov. Hodges, January 1959, Hodges papers, box 423, folder R.

<sup>72</sup> Harry Golden to Kelly Alexander, December 18, 1958, NAACP papers, Part III A92, Crime-North Carolina 1956-63 folder.

<sup>73</sup> Harry Golden, *The Right Time: An Autobiography* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1969), 242 and 379.

asking what it was doing to help the boys.<sup>74</sup> Of all the issues being tackled by the North Carolina NAACP, the kissing case was now the most prominent. As head of the NAACP's North Carolina operations, Kelly Alexander was under pressure to demonstrate some oversight of the situation.

After Egginton's article ran, Alexander asked Williams to attend a NAACP state-level meeting on December 20. In relaying Alexander's outreach, Williams wrote to Weissman that "Kelly stated that they are interested in us here in Monroe to the extent that the whole state conference is coming to our rescue."<sup>75</sup> He added, "He has heard about the Committee and some of the local people are giving him hell. He sounded more than a Tom than ever. He also said that we do not want these people from New York coming here to upset the community." Feeling the need to defend himself to Roy Wilkins, Kelly Alexander attributed the NAACP's late involvement in the case to personality conflicts with Williams, as well as differences of opinion regarding legal strategy.<sup>76</sup> Alexander believed Williams intentionally "circumvented the State Conference, and sought newspaper publicity rather than endeavored to straighten out the matter through proper channels."<sup>77</sup> However, it was the newspaper publicity that generated awareness of the case, and this awareness forced the NAACP to become involved. Williams initially pursued the NAACP's proper channels, but was rebuffed. He therefore decided to handle the case in his

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<sup>74</sup> See for example Dr. Erwin Lubit to NAACP Assistant to the Executive Secretary John A. Morsell, November 17, 1958, NAACP papers, Part III A92, Crime-North Carolina 1956-63 folder. See also, Gloster B. Current to Mr. Wilkins, December 23, 1958, NAACP papers, Part III A92, Crime-North Carolina Kissing Case folder and Gerald D. Bullock to Roy Wilkins, NAACP papers, box C115, North Carolina State Conference 1958-59 folder.

<sup>75</sup> Robert Williams to George Weissman, December 17, 1958, CCRI papers, box 1, folder 1.

<sup>76</sup> Gloster G. Current to Roy Wilkins, December 23, 1958, and "Report Activities of Branches in Reference to the Case of David Simpson and James H. Thompson of Monroe, North Carolina" from Kelly M. Alexander to Roy Wilkins, both in NAACP papers, Part III A92, Crime-North Carolina Kissing Case folder.

<sup>77</sup> "Report Activities of Branches in Reference to the Case of David Simpson and James H. Thompson of Monroe, North Carolina" from Kelly M. Alexander to Roy Wilkins, NAACP papers, Part III A92, Crime-North Carolina Kissing Case folder.

own way, which included spreading the news beyond Monroe to rouse public opinion and action. At the end of December, Williams and Lynn were invited to a meeting with Roy Wilkins at NAACP headquarters in New York to discuss how to proceed. The three agreed that Lynn would continue as legal counsel, working with NAACP General Counsel Robert Carter. In addition, the NAACP agreed it would assume responsibility for the boys' case, including relocating the families to a new community and providing financial assistance.<sup>78</sup>

### **The NAACP and Kissing Case Public Relations**

On December 31, 1958, the NAACP's national office issued its first press release about the case, announcing it "has thrown its full weight into the drive to rescue two young Negro boys of Monroe, N.C., sentenced to the state reformatory because one of them has been kissed by a little white girl."<sup>79</sup> Referring to the national office, the press release described the association's "enlarged role in the defense of the children" and explained the NAACP had been involved through its state chapter, which had made a "preliminary inquiry into the case."<sup>80</sup> The statement was inaccurate, not only because Kelly Alexander had declined involvement of the state chapter, but because the inquiry into the case, made by the Monroe chapter, was not preliminary. The Monroe chapter planned for full involvement and, believing the state and national NAACP to be ineffective, partnered with others to form the CCRI. The press release, which does not mention the CCRI, affirms the NAACP's local involvement by including Williams's and Lynn's NAACP

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<sup>78</sup> Roy Wilkins to Conrad Lynn, December 31, 1958, NAACP Papers, Part III A92, Crime-North Carolina Kissing Case folder.

<sup>79</sup> "NAACP Seeks Release of Monroe, N.C. Youngsters," NAACP press release, December 31, 1958, NAACP papers, Part III A92, Crime-North Carolina Kissing Case folder.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

affiliations: Williams with the Monroe chapter and Lynn in Rockland County, New York.<sup>81</sup>

However Williams's and Lynn's involvement with the kissing case was through the CCRI, and in fact, both men had expressed disappointment in the NAACP's state conference and national office.<sup>82</sup>

The black press covered the involvement of the NAACP's national office and in some instances, printed the press release verbatim.<sup>83</sup> However, an editorial in the New York *Amsterdam News* focused on the national office's delay in entering the case, using the NAACP's "full weight" language. The editor wrote that the NAACP "has finally decided to throw its weight behind the fight to free two little Negro boys who are being held in jail in North Carolina because one of them was kissed by a little white girl," and "it is a pleasure to note that the NAACP is throwing its weight into their fight for freedom."<sup>84</sup> The editorial also lambasted Kelly

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<sup>81</sup> The NAACP wanted to avoid any association with the CCRI because of Weissman's and Lynn's socialist affiliations. In their ongoing attempts to thwart the civil rights movement, white supremacists and others accused black leaders and organizations of being linked to communism, which was particularly damaging during the Cold War. The NAACP often had to defend itself against such accusations. See for example, "Wilkins Cites NAACP's Anti-Communist Record," press release, May 29, 1957, NAACP papers, box A76, General Office File, Communism, Attacks on NAACP as Communistic folder. For more information see Patricia Sullivan, *Lift Every Voice and Sing: The NAACP and the Making of the Civil Rights Movement* (New York: The New Press, 2009), 370, and Gilbert Jonas, *Freedom's Sword: The NAACP and the Struggle Against Racism in America, 1909-1969* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 135-149.

<sup>82</sup> Gloster Current to Roy Wilkins, December 23, 1958; NAACP papers, Part III A92, Crime-North Carolina Kissing Case folder. In a subsequent memo, Current commented about Williams that "it would appear in his mind the Committee is more important than the NAACP for he did not deem it necessary to mention his official relationship with the NAACP." See also Gloster Current to Roy Wilkins re: Monroe, NC Case, January 13, 1959, NAACP papers, Part III A92, Crime-North Carolina Kissing Case folder and Conrad Lynn to Robert Williams, December 2, 1958; Conrad Lynn papers, Howard Gotlieb Archival Research Center, Boston University, box 25, folder 240 (hereafter referred to as Lynn papers).

<sup>83</sup> See for example, "NAACP Enlarges Fight to Free Jailed Boys, 8, 9," *Los Angeles Tribune*, January 9, 1958; "National NAACP Aids Fight of Boys in Kissing Case," *California Eagle*, January 8, 1959; "NAACP Seeks Release of Monroe, NC Youngsters," *Bronze Raven*, January 10, 1959; "NAACP Joins Campaign to Free North Carolina's Kissing Boys," *Pittsburgh Courier*, January 10, 1959.

<sup>84</sup> "About Time," *New York Amsterdam News*, January 17, 1959.

Alexander, writing of his refusal to “throw the full weight of his office behind Mr. Williams and the two boys.”<sup>85</sup>

In its ongoing attempts to free the boys via legal means, the NAACP, through Conrad Lynn’s efforts, finally managed to obtain a hearing for its writ of habeas corpus petition.<sup>86</sup> The hearing was held on January 12. NAACP Director of Branches Gloster Current, Frank Reeves, a NAACP attorney from Washington, DC, and Kenneth Lee, the NAACP’s general counsel in North Carolina, represented the national office, as General Counsel Robert Carter was unable to attend. Kelly Alexander and NAACP Field Representative Charles MacLean also attended.<sup>87</sup>

On the stand, North Carolina Attorney General Malcom Seawell questioned Williams extensively about what transpired from the time he was first informed about the boys’ incarceration to their sentencing.<sup>88</sup> Seawell then turned his attention to the CCRI, interrogating Williams about its purpose, its finances, and its membership. Seawell peppered Williams with questions about Carl Braden and his sedition conviction and prison sentence. Seawell also asked why Williams had recently traveled to New York. Williams responded, “I went to New York to solicit funds to bring justice to this social jungle called Dixie.”<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> “Kiss Hearing Slated: North Carolina Court Will Air Case of Two Negro Boys,” *New York Times*, January 10, 1959.

<sup>87</sup> George Weissman to Carl Braden, January 21, 1959, CCRI papers, box 1, folder 2. See also “NAACP Secy. in Tears at ‘Kiss’ Trial,” *New York Amsterdam News*, January 17, 1959.

<sup>88</sup> See transcript of Petition for Writ of Habeas Corpus to inquire into the detention of Hanover Thompson and David E. Simpson, CCRI papers, box 2, folder 5.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.



After additional testimony from Williams, Lynn questioned J. Hampton Price. As Lynn approached the witness box, he noted that Seawell and Price exchanged a wink.<sup>90</sup> Lynn challenged the disparity in North Carolina law that allowed white offenders to be treated as juveniles until age 20, whereas black juveniles were subject to adult criminal terms starting at age 16. Ultimately, the hearing focused more on disparaging the CCRI and its members than on the children.<sup>91</sup> After all testimonies were complete, North Carolina Superior Court Judge Walter Johnston upheld the boys' sentencing and denied the writ.<sup>92</sup> Later summarizing the proceedings, Conrad Lynn thought Williams was an outstanding witness, while national NAACP officials thought he was too militant.<sup>93</sup> Braden suspected Seawell's intent was to "split whites and Negroes working together."<sup>94</sup>

On January 15, the NAACP issued a press release announcing it planned to appeal the ruling.<sup>95</sup> The release quoted Robert Carter, despite the fact that Lynn had prepared the writ and Carter had not attended the hearing. The press release also detailed the NAACP's efforts to relocate the families and provide financial assistance. Similar language was used in a memo the NAACP sent to update its branch and youth council presidents on the kissing case. However, the

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<sup>90</sup> George Weissman to Carl Braden, January 21, 1959, CCRI papers, box 1, folder 2.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> "Judge Refuses to Upset Kissing Case Verdict," *New York World Telegram & Sun*, January 13, 1959; "NAACP Loses Plea, Court Upholds Sentencing of Boys to Reform School," *New York Times*, January 13, 1959; "Kissing Boys Remain in North Carolina Cells," *Pittsburgh Courier*, January 24, 1959.

<sup>93</sup> Memorandum from G.B. Current to Roy Wilkins, January 13, 1959, NAACP papers, Part III A92, and George Weissman to Carl Braden, January 21, 1959, CCRI papers, box 1, folder 2.

<sup>94</sup> Carl Braden to George Weissman, CCRI papers, box 1, folder 3.

<sup>95</sup> "NAACP To Seek New Hearing for Boys In North Carolina Case," NAACP press release, January 15, 1959, NAACP papers, Part IIIA92, General Office File, North Carolina Kissing Case. See also "NAACP Seeks New Hearing for N.C.'s Kissing Tots," *Chicago Defender*, January 19, 1959.

memo did not address the NAACP's delay in supporting the kissing case. Instead, it contained the same "full weight" language as the December 31 press release.<sup>96</sup> The memo concluded that the NAACP "has worked in its traditional method of seeking to combat injustice. We have retained counsel and are assisting the families in being relocated and adjusting in a new community."<sup>97</sup> The NAACP asked its branches to assist by sending funds to support the legal case and the families.

On January 16, Williams wrote to Weissman that North Carolina NAACP officials were "still dragging their feet" and "are not going to do anything worthwhile."<sup>98</sup> Williams reported that the boys' mothers believed that the NAACP officials were condescending, and "have no understanding of these people, have no sympathy for them."<sup>99</sup> Weissman's assessment was that the NAACP's involvement consisted solely of relocating the boys' families and assuming legal expenses.<sup>100</sup> Although one of the NAACP's strengths was its expertise in legal redress, the bulk of the kissing case legal work was handled by Conrad Lynn, who was more closely aligned with the CCRI rather than the NAACP. Almost a month after the December 31 meeting in Roy Wilkins's office, Lynn and NAACP General Counsel Carter still had not met, and Weissman reported that "Carter couldn't be reached."<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> Roy Wilkins to NAACP Branch and Youth Council Presidents Re: North Carolina Kissing Case, January 16, 1959, NAACP papers, Part III A92, Crime-North Carolina Kissing Case folder.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

<sup>98</sup> Robert Williams to George Weissman, January 16, 1959, CCRI papers, box 1, folder 2.

<sup>99</sup> George Weissman to Carl Braden, January 21, 1959, CCRI papers, box 1, folder 2.

<sup>100</sup> George Lavan, "The Monroe Story," undated, CCRI papers, box 2, folder, 7.

<sup>101</sup> George Weissman to Carl Braden, January 21, 1959, CCRI papers, box 1, folder 2.

The NAACP did not focus on generating additional awareness of the kissing case and as a result, it issued only two press releases. The first press release announced it had entered the case, and the second provided an update on legal matters and financial support for the boys' families. The dearth of public relations support was not because the NAACP devalued public relations. On the contrary, Henry Lee Moon had often advised NAACP leadership that providing audiences with information about the NAACP and its goals was an essential part of its overall public relations program.<sup>102</sup> Specifically, one of the purposes of the NAACP's public relations department was to "inform the public of the activities and objectives of the NAACP."<sup>103</sup> Additionally, Roy Wilkins had previously upbraided Moon over instances in which the NAACP did not receive press coverage, and Wilkins believed it should have.<sup>104</sup>

Most likely, the NAACP did not devote public relations resources to the kissing case because the association believed the best means to secure the boys' release was by improving their families' living conditions. Kelly Alexander criticized Williams for seeking newspaper publicity rather than endeavoring "to straighten out the matter through proper channels."<sup>105</sup> Furthermore, the NAACP was involved in school integration and a number of other issues. In

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<sup>102</sup> Henry Lee Moon, "Problems and Goals of NAACP Public Relations Activities," January 5, 1959, NAACP papers, box A39, Articles-Moon, Henry Lee, 1956-1965 folder.

<sup>103</sup> "Recommendations of the Department of Public Relations for the Expansion and Improvement of the Public Relations Programs and Activities of the NAACP," October, 5, 1959, Roy Wilkins papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, box, 29, Publicity folder (hereafter referred to as Wilkins papers).

<sup>104</sup> Roy Wilkins to Henry Lee Moon, January 5, 1957; Roy Wilkins to Henry Lee Moon, June 21, 1957, Wilkins papers, box 5, General Correspondence folder. See also memorandum from Roy Wilkins to Henry Lee Moon, June 3, 1957, NAACP papers, box A318, Wilkins, Roy, Public Relations Department, Problems With folder.

<sup>105</sup> Gloster Current to Roy Wilkins, December 23, 1958, NAACP papers, Part III A92, Crime-North Carolina Kissing Case folder.

comparison, it determined the kissing case was not a priority.<sup>106</sup> In the public relations department's January and February monthly reports, there are no mentions of any public relations activities on behalf of the kissing case.<sup>107</sup> The two press releases the NAACP distributed about the kissing case were not included. The kissing case was just one of many instances of racial injustice, and it was one the NAACP lent its support to reluctantly and only because public pressure dictated it do so. Otherwise, the NAACP would not likely have thrown any of its weight into the case. Indeed, a representative from the NAACP's southeast regional office visited the boys' mothers in Monroe and noted that "under other circumstances this was a case in which the Association would have had no part," as "this was a case for trained social workers in the welfare department or in some kind of social welfare organization."<sup>108</sup> In other words, the boys' situation was not a local or national civil rights problem that required the expertise and strength of the NAACP. The boys' problem did not require legal redress or government lobbying, the NAACP's strong suit. Instead, it seemed the NAACP believed it was a socioeconomic problem that could be dealt with by local agencies.

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<sup>106</sup> For a summary of NAACP activities in January and February 1959, see NAACP Report to the Board of Directors, January 1959 and February 1959, NAACP papers, box A31, Board of Directors folder. For an overview of legal issues in which the NAACP was involved in 1958, see Report of Robert L. Carter, General Counsel, January 5, 1959, NAACP papers, box A36, General Office File folder. For an overview of the NAACP's focus on school integration, see "Suggested Program for Southern Branches, 1954-1955," Kelly M. Alexander Sr. papers, J. Murray Atkins Library, University of North Carolina at Charlotte, box 9, folder 3 (hereafter cited as Alexander papers).

<sup>107</sup> NAACP Report to the Board of Directors, January 1959 and February 1959, NAACP papers, box A31, Board of Directors folder.

<sup>108</sup> Southeast Regional Office NAACP (Atlanta, GA) to Gloster B. Current, Director of Branches, February 3, 1959, NAACP papers, box A253, Legal folder. The last page of this letter, which would include the name of the author, is missing from the historical documents. The letter may have been written by Ruby Hurley, regional secretary of the NAACP's Southeast Regional Office.

### The Frame in the NAACP's Public Relations Material

Although the NAACP's public relations material was limited to two press releases and a memo, the press releases played an important role in expanding the visibility of the kissing case, specifically among black audiences. The NAACP was a prominent and trusted organization among African Americans. Henry Lee Moon quoted a 1957 *Catholic Digest* survey that found among African Americans, 94 percent of those in the North and 93 percent who reside in the South believe in the NAACP.<sup>109</sup>

Whereas some African Americans may have questioned a mailing received from the CCRI, the NAACP's involvement provided them with the assurance that the case deserved their support. Additionally, reading a story in the black press about the NAACP's role would quell any concerns about the validity of the campaign to free the boys. L. E. Austin's January 10 *Carolina Times* editorial noted as much.

Entry of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People into the Monroe "kissing" case will certainly meet the approval of Negro leaders in North Carolina, as well as other states. Although earlier efforts to rescue the two young boys were being put forth by a special committee organized outside the state for that purpose, it was handicapped by the fact the organizers were generally unknown here in North Carolina. The respect and confidence which the NAACP enjoys among Negro citizens of this state will make it much easier to raise funds to defend the boys.<sup>110</sup>

The sole frame in the NAACP's three public relations documents reflects this trust, and it highlights the association's strength and size. The key phrase associated with this trust frame is "thrown its full weight in." This language is noteworthy, as the NAACP did not merely announce it was supporting the efforts to free the boys. The words "thrown its full weight" convey the size and might of the organization. With the full weight of the NAACP behind

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<sup>109</sup> Henry Lee Moon, Problems and Goals of NAACP Public Relations Activities, January 5, 1958, NAACP papers, box A39, Articles, Henry Lee Moon, 1956-65 folder.

<sup>110</sup> Editorial, *Carolina Times*, January 10, 1959.

Hanover and Fuzzy, African Americans were assured that everything was being done to gain the boys' freedom. In addition, the focus on the full strength of the NAACP might have been intended to offset some of the criticism it received for not immediately entering the case. The press release notes that the NAACP had been previously involved through its local, Monroe chapter, and the case now had the full support of the national office. The "thrown its full weight" phrase, which conveys the NAACP as a formidable organization, is also used numerous times in the NAACP's memo to its branch and youth council presidents about the kissing case.<sup>111</sup>

Although the NAACP's second press release—stating its intent to appeal the denial of the writ—does not specifically use the word "weight," the size and strength of the organization is again reflected in the language used in the press release. The NAACP stated it had taken full responsibility for the case. It relocated the families from Monroe to Charlotte "in homes secured for them by Kelly Alexander, president of the NAACP in North Carolina," and it secured employment for the boys' mothers and supplied the families with money, new furniture, and clothing.<sup>112</sup> "We hope to do a job of complete family rehabilitation so that the state will have no excuse for not returning Hanover and Fuzzy to their families," said Alexander.<sup>113</sup> In other words, African Americans could trust that the NAACP was taking the necessary actions to help free the boys. The NAACP's particular kind of support reflected its view of the case as a socioeconomic problem rather than as an incident emblematic of ongoing racial intimidation and suppression. Furthermore, after North Carolina authorities became aware of the NAACP's plans for legal

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<sup>111</sup> Memo to Branch and Youth Council Presidents from Roy Wilkins, January 19, 1959, NAACP papers, Part IIIA92, Crime-North Carolina Kissing Case folder.

<sup>112</sup> "NAACP To Seek New Hearing for Boys In North Carolina Case," NAACP press release, January 15, 1959, NAACP papers, Part IIIA92, Crime-North Carolina Kissing Case folder.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

action to free the boys, the state's Board of Correction and Training announced the possibility of the boys' release should their home environments improve.<sup>114</sup> Although North Carolina authorities may have made this statement to mitigate possible legal action, the NAACP directed its efforts to free the boys toward improving families' living conditions.

### **The CCRI's Public Relations Campaign**

Although the NAACP did not believe public relations was instrumental to freeing the boys, the CCRI did. CCRI leaders all believed that generating awareness of the case and rallying the public would help secure the boys' freedom.<sup>115</sup> Many had used public relations on previous efforts to obtain social justice, and they recognized its value. To gain publicity for his protests in Monroe, Williams often contacted national wire services, as well as local television and radio stations.<sup>116</sup> Recalling his New York speaking engagements about the kissing case, Lynn wrote, "I worked to obtain as much publicity as possible in the hope that popular pressure would force the authorities to relent."<sup>117</sup> Braden advised, "We of course want to keep this case before the public until those boys are freed. Trouble with these things is that people forget so quickly."<sup>118</sup>

George Weissman, who would play an instrumental role in the public relations activities, brought an important combination of resources to the efforts to free the boys: time, knowledge,

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<sup>114</sup> "Two Boys to Be Freed In Kissing Incident," *New York Times*, January 3, 1959.

<sup>115</sup> Lynn, *There is a Fountain*, 147-148.

<sup>116</sup> See for example Robert Williams to Associated Press, December 20, 1958, CCRI papers, box 1, folder, 1, and "Statement issued to UPI in Raleigh, NC by R.F. Williams," January 17, 1959, CCRI papers, box 1, folder 2.

<sup>117</sup> Lynn, *There is a Fountain*, 147. Lynn spoke to a number of groups, including those at colleges, synagogues, and churches in New York and New Jersey. See also, letter from Conrad Lynn to Robert Williams, December 19, 1958, Lynn papers, box 25, folder 240.

<sup>118</sup> Carl Braden to Conrad Lynn, January 1, 1959, CCRI papers, box 1, folder 2.

and connections.<sup>119</sup> Weissman noted his previous experience “in the line of work, having run the defense committee for James Kutcher, the legless veteran fired from his government job during the witch hunt.”<sup>120</sup> Kutcher, who lost both legs in World War II, was fired from his Veterans Administration job in 1948 when his employer discovered he was a member of the Socialist Workers Party. To educate the public about Kutcher’s case and arouse public opinion in his favor, the SWP formed the Kutcher Civil Rights Committee. Weissman recalled, “the case was fought to a complete victory—he was given back his pension, his job, his housing project apartment.”<sup>121</sup> Possibly due to the success of this campaign and Weissman’s involvement, many of the public relations strategies and tactics used by the Kutcher Civil Rights Committee were later used by the CCRI.<sup>122</sup>

With civil rights battles, Weissman surmised that he knew “what can be done at the grassroots level—at union local meetings, etc., in getting resolutions passed, donations granted, etc., if the work is organized. I also think the educational effect of such activity on the northern workers and general public very worthwhile.”<sup>123</sup> Weissman pledged up to six months’ free labor on the kissing case. His network of activists and labor advocates, along with his previous leadership on social justice campaigns, would prove valuable in the efforts to free the boys.<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> Jones, “Communist Front Shouts Kissing Case,” 37.

<sup>120</sup> George Weissman to E. D. Nixon, December 16, 1958, CCRI papers, box 1, folder 1.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid.

<sup>122</sup> For information on the James Kutcher case and the Kutcher Civil Rights Committee, see James Kutcher, *The Case of the Legless Veteran* (New York: Pathfinder, 1973).

<sup>123</sup> George Weissman to E. D. Nixon, December 16, 1958, CCRI papers, box 1, folder 1.

<sup>124</sup> Jones, “Communist Front Shouts Kissing Case,” 31.



## Public Relations Objectives, Strategies, and Tactics Defined

In his 1952 book *Public Relations*, Edward Bernays provides a blueprint for a public relations plan, including objectives, strategies, public or audience, and activities or tactics.<sup>125</sup> The historical documents do not indicate the CCRI prepared such a document—a written public relations plan in which it delineated public relations objectives, audiences, strategies, and tactics. However, each of the elements of the CCRI’s campaign to free the boys can be defined as either a public relations objective, strategy, or tactic.

A week before the CCRI was formed, Conrad Lynn wrote to Williams that he had spoken to influential friends in New York who want to help and “they emphasized that only a great protest of people throughout the country can save Perry, you and the children and get justice for the woman who was raped. This is our objective at this time and we feel the less the NAACP knows about it, the better.”<sup>126</sup> Although the CCRI did not use the term “public relations objective,” it did state that its efforts on behalf of the kissing case were conducted to arouse public opinion, create mass pressure, and secure the boys’ freedom.<sup>127</sup> Specifically, the CCRI wrote that it “launched a campaign to bring the pressure of world opinion to bear on the authorities in North Carolina to return to boys to their mothers.”<sup>128</sup> These actions can be

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<sup>125</sup> Edward Bernays, “Typical Action Blueprint for Public Relations Activity,” in *Public Relations* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1952), 169-186. Bernays provides other examples of public relations strategies and activities in this book. Notwithstanding changes in technology, his proposed plans could be implemented by today’s practitioner. For additional 1950s examples of public relations objectives, strategies, and tactics, see 1959 Monthly Reports of the NAACP’s Public Relations department, NAACP papers, box A31, Board of Directors-Secretary’s Report 1959 folder and Henry Lee Moon, “Problems and Goals of NAACP Public Relations Activities,” January 5, 1959, NAACP papers, box A39, Articles, Henry Lee Moon, 1956-65 folder.

<sup>126</sup> Conrad Lynn to Robert Williams, December 2, 1959, Lynn papers, box 25, folder 240. In addition to Dr. Perry and the boys, Lynn was referring to Mary Ruth Reid, a black, pregnant women was sexually assaulted by Lewis Medlin, a white man in Monroe.

<sup>127</sup> George Weissman to Harold Goldstein, January 29, 1959, CCRI papers, box 1, folder 2.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid.

considered public relations objectives, the specific statements of what is to be accomplished. Public relations objectives should be stated in terms of desired outcomes, which for the CCRI was the boys' release. The CCRI would need to create and maintain awareness of the boys' dilemma, and they would do so by informing and educating their audiences about the kissing case, and then issuing a call to action focused on the "mass pressure" part of the objective.

To achieve its objectives, the CCRI implemented a number of strategies. Public relations strategies are broad-based actions that describe how the objectives will be achieved. Stated differently, strategies outline the approach that will be taken to fulfill the objectives. Public relations tactics are the specific, detailed actions or tasks that will help in the achievement of the objective. An example of a communication strategy is to use face-to-face communication to reach a particular target audience.<sup>129</sup> A tactic in support of this objective would be to secure speaking engagements at specific venues attended by members of the target audience. Face-to-face communication is the strategy; speaking engagements is the tactic. Another example of a strategy is to use the news media to relay messages to a target audience. Tactics could be writing and distributing press releases, holding press conferences, or calling reporters. Tactics are considered the outputs of a public relations campaign. With the examples above, speaking engagements, press releases, press conferences, and calls to reporters are outputs. These outputs may result in desired media coverage. However when evaluating a public relations campaign at its completion, counting the number of speaking engagements, press releases, and news stories, or assessing their quality, does not determine the success of a campaign. A campaign is

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<sup>129</sup> See Edward Bernays, "Typical Action Blueprint for Public Relations Activity," in *Public Relations* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1952), 169-186. For additional 1950s examples of public relations objectives, strategies, and tactics, see 1959 Monthly Reports of the NAACP's Public Relations department, NAACP papers, box A31, Board of Directors-Secretary's Report 1959 folder and Henry Lee Moon, "Problems and Goals of NAACP Public Relations Activities," January 5, 1959, NAACP papers, box A39, Articles, Henry Lee Moon, 1956-65 folder.

successful if the objective or outcome has been achieved. In short, production of outputs does not signify success; the achievement of outcomes does.

### The CCRI's Public Relations Strategies and Tactics

#### *Engaging Opinion Leaders*

One of the CCRI public relations strategies was to enlist the support of opinion leaders who were already committed to racial justice. There are two benefits to using this strategy. The first relates to the objective of the CCRI's campaign. It was not to disrupt the deep-seated attitudes of those who believed African Americans were inferior to whites. Instead, it was to free the boys by galvanizing the public to pressure Gov. Hodges to do so. For this to occur, the CCRI would need to identify those already receptive to its principles. When seeking supporters, Weissman sought "people who stand for a militant fight for civil rights."<sup>130</sup> Those already supportive of African American civil rights would not need to first be convinced of the merits of the cause. Instead, they could be immediately mobilized to take action.

By engaging opinion leaders, the CCRI could easily cascade its messages to broad audiences, which is another benefit to this strategy. The CCRI would educate opinion leaders, who would then inform their constituents.<sup>131</sup> Additionally, opinion leaders can influence their constituents, thereby creating receptivity and adding credibility to a message. This endorsement was beneficial to the CCRI, which as a new organization, had no name recognition. The CCRI sought opinion leaders from the following groups: labor unions, civil liberties organizations,

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<sup>130</sup> George Weissman to Rev. C. Kenzie Steele, January 28, 1959, CCRI papers, box 1, folder 2.

<sup>131</sup> For example, CCRI member Willard Uphaus of the World Fellowship asked for CCRI materials so that he could pass them on to others within the Fellowship. See, Willard Uphaus to George Weissman, February 19, 1959, CCRI papers, box 1, folder 3.

churches, student organizations, and universities. It also targeted prominent individuals committed to civil rights.<sup>132</sup>

Through his active involvement in the SWP, Weissman had a strong network of labor advocates, most of whom were located in Cleveland, Detroit, and New York.<sup>133</sup> The CCRI believed the labor struggle was aligned with the civil rights struggle, and it wanted to obtain the support of trade unions, particularly those in the North.<sup>134</sup> Immediately after the CCRI was formed, Weissman began calling and writing letters to educate them about the kissing case and obtain their assistance. He wrote, “the CCRI is appealing to trade unions and fraternal organizations to join in protesting this racist outrage.”<sup>135</sup> Weissman also asked for names of other labor advocates he might contact, and he wrote letters to those individuals as well. As an example, Detroit-based SWP member Berta Green provided Weissman with “names and address of trade unionists and prominent Detroiters to contact for membership on the committee,” and she organized and headed a local committee to support the efforts of the CCRI national committee.<sup>136</sup>

Weissman began his outreach in mid-December and by January 21, wrote that he was “half-way through the work—letters inviting notables to join the committee.”<sup>137</sup> His many phone calls and letters to labor had the desired cumulative effects, as unionists cascaded the message to

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<sup>132</sup> Jones, “Communist Front Shouts Kissing Case,” 50.

<sup>133</sup> George Weissman to Sam Pollock, December 23, 1958 and George Weissman to Jack Spiegel, January 7, 1959, CCRI papers, box 1, folder 1.

<sup>134</sup> Arthur Lobman to E. D. Nixon, December 20, 1958, CCRI papers, box 1, folder 1.

<sup>135</sup> George Weissman to Harold Goldstein, January 29, 1959, CCRI papers, box 1, folder 2.

<sup>136</sup> Berta Green to George Weissman, January 4, 1959, and Berta Green to George Weissman, January 16, 1959, both in CCRI papers, box 1, folder 1.

<sup>137</sup> George Weissman to Carl Braden, January 21, 1959, CCRI papers, box 1 folder 2.

their members and provided financial support. For example in a letter to Robert Williams, the president of the United Electrical, Radio and Machine Workers of America (UE) wrote that the kissing case “and other pressures being brought to bear upon the Negro people of Monroe, North Carolina have come to our attention.”<sup>138</sup> The UE made a financial contribution and pledged to “assist and participate in the efforts of your committee to bring justice and elemental and basic civil rights to the Negro community in Monroe.”<sup>139</sup>

The Amalgamated Meat Cutters (AMC) union adopted a formal resolution to support the CCRI and its work to free the boys.<sup>140</sup> Auda Romine, secretary of the Cleveland arm of the AMC, organized a local committee to support the CCRI and sent letters to labor and non-labor advocates asking for assistance.”<sup>141</sup> The text of both letters was the same with one exception. The correspondence to labor included a paragraph that noted a parallel between “the organized union movement in the North and the fight for Negro rights in the South.”<sup>142</sup> Romine added that there are no unions in Union County because employers are using race to divide workers. By avoiding unionization, Union County industry can pay substandard wages, “thus threatening the wage structure in the unionized plants of the North.”<sup>143</sup> Both letters noted that Union County blacks’ efforts to gain civil rights subjected them to intimidation, violence, and economic reprisal, and the CCRI’s purpose was to help blacks in the South obtain their democratic rights.

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<sup>138</sup> Ernest DeMaio to Robert Williams, January 16, 1959, CCRI papers, box 1, folder 2.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid.

<sup>140</sup> Auda Romine to Robert Williams, January 21, 1959, CCRI papers, box 1, folder 2.

<sup>141</sup> Form letter from Auda Romine, January 23, 1959, CCRI papers, box 1, folder 2.

<sup>142</sup> Form letter (with note: “this copy was mailed to labor”) from Auda Romine, January 23, 1959, CCRI papers, box 1, folder 2. See also George Weissman to Austin Andrews, January 7, 1959, CCRI papers, box 1, folder 2.

<sup>143</sup> Form letter (with note: “this copy was mailed to labor”) from Auda Romine, January 23, 1959, CCRI papers, box 1, folder 2.

The letter to labor included the following sentence: “It is hoped that labor will play a leading part in this effort.”<sup>144</sup>

However, the CCRI’s engagement of opinion leaders was not limited to those in unions. As a result of the committee’s work, churches passed resolutions in support of the kissing case, and local citizens formed groups to free the boys. The Metropolitan Community Methodist Church in New York adopted a resolution urging Hodges to free the boys.<sup>145</sup> The Baptist Ministers Conference of Greater New York and Vicinity, comprised of 242 churches and a congregation of 250,000, adopted a similar resolution and formed a committee to aid the quest for the boys’ freedom.<sup>146</sup> Other examples include the Nassau Committee to Secure Justice for Jimmy & David, a group of 50 residents of Long Island; the Mothers Alliance of Buffalo, an interracial group in New York; and the City Terrace Community Club of Los Angeles, where 100 members voted to protest the boys’ sentencing.<sup>147</sup>

### *Engaging Youth*

Engaging youth was another public relations strategy the CCRI implemented. The CCRI believed that young people of both races who were committed to social justice would rally to the boys’ cause. Members of the SWP’s Young Socialists Alliance formed a Youth Committee to Free Hanover Thompson and Fuzzy Simpson, which aimed its efforts at high school and college students, as well as faculty and staff. Headed by James Lambrecht, the CCRI Youth Committee

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<sup>144</sup> Ibid.

<sup>145</sup> “Church Board Protests N.C. “Kissing” Case,” *New York Amsterdam News*, January 24, 1959.

<sup>146</sup> George Weissman to Carl Braden, January 21, 1959, CCRI papers, box 1, folder 2.

<sup>147</sup> “Buffalo Mothers Meet Tonight (31) to Discuss NC Child Kissing Case,” *Buffalo (NY) Empire Star*, January 31, 1959. See also Lonnie Cross (chair, department of mathematics, Atlanta University) to George Weissman, February 18, 1959, Lynn papers, box 25, folder 240, and Charles Schwartz, City Terrace Community Club to Gov. Hodges, February 7, 1959, Hodges papers, box 423, Segregation S folder.

(YC) mirrored the work of the CCRI national committee. While Weissman was educating and soliciting support among labor, religious, academic, and social justice leaders, Lambrecht was calling and writing letters to youth groups at high schools and colleges. Working in tandem with the CCRI, the YC also targeted black and white advocates. In a form letter Lambrecht sent to colleges, he wrote of “a whole generation of Negro youth looking for a way to fight Southern reaction,” adding that this “is the major fight of our (Caucasian) generation too—Southern reaction bulwarks reaction everywhere, in all forms.”<sup>148</sup> Lambert appeared to be saying that southern resistance served as an impetus for northerners to take action to counter this opposition. He asked students to pass resolutions, write letters to Gov. Hodges, and distribute petitions.

By early February, less than a month since it began its efforts, the YC had assistance from the following college NAACP chapters: Queens College, Columbia University, City College of New York, as well as the Bronx NAACP Youth Council, and the Newark NAACP Youth Council. In addition, Lambrecht garnered support from the Forest Hills High School Discussion Club, Students for Democratic Action, and from students groups at Croton-Harmon High School and the following colleges or universities: Antioch, Brooklyn, Fordham, Oberlin, and Wellesley.<sup>149</sup> As a result of the YC’s work, articles about the kissing case began appearing in college newspapers.<sup>150</sup> The YC also planned a “picket line demonstration” on February 20 at the headquarters of the United Nations.<sup>151</sup> Prior to the demonstration, Lambrecht held a planning

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<sup>148</sup> James Lambrecht to Antioch and Oberlin colleges, January 12, 1959, CCRI papers, box 1, folder, 2.

<sup>149</sup> James Lambrecht to Oklahoma City NAACP Youth Council, February 4, 1959, CCRI papers, box 1, folder 2.

<sup>150</sup> See for example Thomas Spinner, University of Vermont, to Gov. Hodges, January 18 1959 and “The Land of the Free and the Home of the Brave,” *Vermont Cynic*, January 5, 1959, Luther Hodges papers, box 423, Segregation S folder.

<sup>151</sup> “Picket Line Demonstration, Free Hanover Thompson & Fuzzy Simpson” flyer, CCRI papers, box 1, folder 3.

meeting of all New York youth organizations that had pledged support to the kissing case, which was attended by students from the organizations and schools listed above.<sup>152</sup>

### *Call to Action*

Another public relations strategy the CCRI employed was to include a call to action in its communication materials. Specifically, the CCRI asked supporters to send a letter of protest to Gov. Hodges demanding the immediate release of the boys.<sup>153</sup> One of the ways it did so was with a postcard mailing. One of the postcards was addressed to the CCRI's New York headquarters, which used Conrad Lynn's New York office as its official mailing address. The other side of the post card read: "Dear Robert F. Williams: You may add my name to the National Committee of the Committee to Combat Racial Injustice," with a line for the date and the supporter's address.<sup>154</sup>

We appeal to you to do the following:

Send a letter or resolution of protest to governor [*sic*] Hodges, Raleigh, North Carolina, demanding the immediate release of Hanover Thompson and Fuzzy Simpson.

Send a contribution to the Committee to Combat Racial Injustice to help us in mobilizing world opinion against racial injustice in these United States.<sup>155</sup>

The CCRI mailed a second postcard, likewise addressed to its New York headquarters, that allowed supporters to check a box to send a donation and/or request additional information. A third postcard could be sent directly to Hodges. In addition to space for the sender's name, address and signature, the text read:

Honorable Sir:

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<sup>152</sup> Lambrecht to Evelyn Battle, February 7, 1959, and James Lambrecht to Sheila Winnick, February 2, 1959, both in CCRI papers, box 1, folder 3.

<sup>153</sup> George Weissman to Harold Goldstein, January 29, 1959, CCRI papers, box 1, folder 2.

<sup>154</sup> See for example signed postcard returned by C. Kenzie Steele, December 1958, CCRI papers, box 1, folder 1.

<sup>155</sup> George Weissman to Harold Goldstein, January 29, 1959, CCRI papers, box 1, folder 2.



You are respectfully urged to exercise your executive powers in the case of Negro juveniles James Thompson (10) and David Simpson (8) who have been denied rights to a fair trial and given indeterminate sentences which may keep them imprisoned until they are 21 years old. This is a gross violation of civil rights which reflects badly on your State and our Nation.<sup>156</sup>

In addition to postcards, the CCRI's petition drive was another tactic that supported the call-to-action strategy. The CCRI proclaimed the petition drive "should function as the axis for the whole campaign."<sup>157</sup> The petitions served two purposes: they created awareness of the boys' dilemma and they directly engaged supporters in protesting. Through its petitions, the CCRI collected thousands of signatures, which were then sent to Gov. Hodges. Additionally, many groups sent their signed petitions directly to Hodges. In updating Weissman, Cleveland-based CCRI organizer and local AMC union secretary Auda Romine noted, "The petitions are out in our plants," and "this weekend I expect to get them back from the churches. The petition campaign is going well."<sup>158</sup>

Lambrecht urged students to actively participate in the petition campaign, as it would help develop a "public outcry in the North."<sup>159</sup> One student informed Lambrecht that he had "petitions circulating in six Detroit high schools with about 300 signatures from already-collected petitions, including signatures from teachers."<sup>160</sup> The CCRI received a letter from students from Croton-Harmon High School in Croton, New York, who wrote that they read of the committee's efforts on behalf of the boys. The students added, "We are extremely anxious to

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<sup>156</sup> Honorable Sir postcard, Hodges, papers, box 423.

<sup>157</sup> George Weissman to Ed (last name not included), January 9, 1959, CCRI papers, box 1, folder 2.

<sup>158</sup> Auda Romine to George Weissman, February 2, 1959, CCRI papers, box 1, folder 3.

<sup>159</sup> James Lambrecht to Robert Gonzalez, January 22, 1959, CCRI papers, box 1, folder 2.

<sup>160</sup> Sid Brown to Jim Lambrecht, January 13, 1958 [*sic*], CCRI papers, box 1, folder 2.

help you correct this highly unjust situation and would like to know if you have petitions available to gain sympathy for this cause. If so, please send them to us immediately [*sic*], and if not, let us know and we will draw up our own.”<sup>161</sup> These students later sent 200 signatures to the CCRI and requested additional petitions.<sup>162</sup> Another student from the same school later requested additional petitions and information, writing “I have friends in Chicago, Boston, Baltimore etc. who are sadly uninformed but who, I’m sure, will be willing to contribute their efforts.”<sup>163</sup>

The YC continued to actively promote the petition campaign, and schools responded. A student from Columbia University requested enough petitions for 50 signatures.<sup>164</sup> A student from Elizabeth Irwin High School in New York asked for a dozen petitions.<sup>165</sup> In addition, the Wisconsin Socialist Club wrote that it had received several petitions, which are “now all but over-flowing [*sic*] with signatures” and the group requested 100 additional petitions because “a large publicity and petition-signing campaign is about to be staged on the University of Wisconsin campus.”<sup>166</sup>

Additional tactics to support the strategies described here were the written documents the CCRI prepared to inform and update current and potential advocates about the kissing case. Among the documents was a form letter, addressed to “Dear Friend,” and sent to those predisposed towards support of the CCRI’s efforts. The one-page letter provided an update on

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<sup>161</sup> Letter to CCRI from Elinor Goldstein (for the entire group), January 28, 1958 [*sic*], CCRI papers, box 1, folder 2.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid.

<sup>163</sup> Letter from Elizabeth Berliner to CCRI, January 31, 1959, CCRI papers, box 1, folder 2.

<sup>164</sup> Letter to from Allen Young addressed to Gentlemen, January 15, 1959, CCRI papers, box 1, folder 2.

<sup>165</sup> Letter from David Ames addressed to Dear Sir, undated, CCRI papers, box 1, folder 2. See also letter from James Lambrecht to David Ames, January 19, 1959.

<sup>166</sup> Letter to Youth Section, CCRI from Franklyn Peterson, February 4, 1959, CCRI papers, box 1, folder 3.

the boys' case and the reason for the formation of the CCRI, including support for Dr. Perry. The letter ends with the call to action: Send letters of protest to Governor Hodges and send a contribution to "help us defray the expense of launching a protest movement that will stay the hand of the white supremacists and win a victory for the civil rights fight in this country."<sup>167</sup>

In the letters Weissman and Lambrecht sent, they often enclosed fact sheets, reprints, or flyers. A two-page synopsis summarized the events in Monroe, including Williams's efforts to desegregate the library, pool, and school, as well as information on the KKK's reprisal and Perry's abortion accusation.<sup>168</sup> The synopsis ends with a description of the kissing case and contrasts it with the case of Lewis Medlin, the white man in Monroe who beat and attempted to rape Mary Ruth Reid, a pregnant black woman. Medlin was charged with simple assault and released on bail. A similar document, which the CCRI titled "Fact Sheet on Cases in Monroe, NC," recapped the kissing case, the Lewis Medlin trial, and Perry's case.<sup>169</sup>

The CCRI also distributed reprints of articles and news stories. It sent George Weissman's *Nation* article, editorials from the *Carolina Times*, Egginton's *London News Chronicle* article, and an article from the *Harvard Law Record* about southern courts' disparate treatment of blacks and whites.<sup>170</sup> For instances in which the CCRI was unable to obtain actual reprints, it would re-type the text of newspaper articles on its letterhead, with the heading "exact copy of article that appeared in..." For example, the CCRI disseminated the text of a *Carolina*

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<sup>167</sup> "Dear Friend," January 14, 1959, CCRI papers, box 2, folder 7.

<sup>168</sup> Synopsis of the Events in Monroe, NC, December 15, 1958, CCRI papers, box 2, folder 7.

<sup>169</sup> "Fact Sheet on Cases in Monroe, NC," Cohen papers, CCRI M92-222 folder.

<sup>170</sup> George Weissman to Carey McWilliams, January 12, 1959, and George Weissman to Carl Braden, January 21, 1959, both in CCRI papers, box 1, folder 2. George Weissman to L. E. Austin, February 19, 1959, CCRI papers, box 1, folder 3. See also "Crime of the South," *Harvard Law Record* 27, no. 3 (October 9, 1958): 2.

*Times* editorial that lauds the NAACP for finally supporting the kissing case. Although the editorial does not mention the CCRI by name, it references a special committee that had been working to free the boys. The editor commends Williams and Lynn for setting aside their differences and partnering with the NAACP to present a united front to secure the boys' release.<sup>171</sup>

### *Face-to-Face Communications*

An additional strategy the CCRI used to educate its audiences about the kissing case was face-to-face communications. In early January, the CCRI began seeking opportunities for Williams to speak to groups in the North about the events in Union County. The committee initially asked to speak to the unions that were part of Weissman's initial outreach, which led to additional speaking opportunities. For example, in a letter confirming Williams's January 13 talk to the members of the Cleveland AFL-CIO, union president Sam Pollock suggested "possibly while you are in the Cleveland area, arrangements might be made by friends for you to meet and speak with other labor groups on the injustices which are being visited on the Negro People."<sup>172</sup> Williams's speaking tour eventually included not only unions, but churches, colleges, and youth organizations. If he was unavailable to speak, Conrad Lynn or Dr. Perry substituted for him.<sup>173</sup>

Despite Williams's conflicts with the NAACP's national office, the CCRI sought speaking opportunities at local NAACP branches in Northern cities. For example, Williams

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<sup>171</sup> "Exact Copy of Editorial Appearing in the Carolina Times, January 10, 1959," CCRI papers, box 2, folder 7. Note: *Carolina Times* Editor L. E. Austin was a founding member of the CCRI, but this editorial makes no mention of that fact.

<sup>172</sup> Robert Williams to Sam Pollock, December 24, 1958 and letter from Robert Williams to Richard Tussey, Mechanics Education Society of America, December 24, 1958, both in CCRI papers, box 1, folder 1; Sam Pollock to Robert Williams from, January 2, 1959, CCRI papers, box 1, folder 2. Note: Williams's January 13 talk was later rescheduled to February.

<sup>173</sup> George Weissman to Mrs. Rae Reiter, January 20, 1958, CCRI papers, box 1, folder 2.

spoke to a group in New Rochelle, New York, arranged by the local NAACP and the Ministerial Alliance, a local religious organization.<sup>174</sup>

The Youth Committee also sought speaking engagements at high schools and colleges. James Lambrecht and a colleague addressed the Columbia University chapter of the NAACP, and they spoke at a meeting of the Baptist Ministers Conference of Greater New York and Vicinity during which it passed a resolution to aid the kissing case.<sup>175</sup> Other members of the YC spoke to various youth groups in the New York area.<sup>176</sup> On February 1, the YC held a reception in New York at which Williams and Perry spoke.<sup>177</sup> Lambrecht wrote to his contacts inviting them to the reception, and he developed a flyer to promote the event. The flyer identified Williams and Perry as leaders in the fight for civil rights, but “they are under personal attack from the KKK,” and they need help. The flyer ended with a call to action, reminding supporters that only a nationwide protest would free the boys. More than 100 people attended the reception, most of them high school and college students.<sup>178</sup>

Williams embarked on a speaking tour the week of February 9 in Cleveland and the following week in Chicago, where he spoke to students at Roosevelt College, labor and religious organizations, and local NAACP chapters. In Chicago, Williams spoke at the Negro History

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<sup>174</sup> George Weissman to Lenwood Joseph Overton, NY NAACP president, January 21, 1959, CCRI papers, box 1, folder 2. Robert Williams’s disagreements about style and approach to civil rights were with the national NAACP. Other local chapter leaders shared sentiments similar to Williams’s and believed the national NAACP’s approach to obtaining civil rights for African Americans was too cautious.

<sup>175</sup> James Lambrecht to David Ames, January 19, 1959, and James Lambrecht to Susan Goldhor, January 20, 1959, CCRI papers, box 1, folder 2, and James Lambrecht to Franklyn Peterson, February 10, 1959, CCRI papers, box 1, folder 3.

<sup>176</sup> Ibid.

<sup>177</sup> James Lambrecht to Evelyn Battle, February 7, 1959, CCRI papers, box 1, folder 3.

<sup>178</sup> James Lambrecht to Elizabeth Berliner, February 7, 1959, CCRI papers box 1, folder 3.

Week festival organized by the Afro-American Heritage Association. Alongside featured entertainer Sammy Davis, Williams was listed at the event's principal speaker.<sup>179</sup> The purpose of the speaking tour was to "inform the public of the case and to raise funds for the children's defense."<sup>180</sup> Capitalizing on his time in Cleveland, local CCRI member Auda Romine organized a press conference with Williams and distributed press releases about his speaking engagements.<sup>181</sup> As a result, he appeared on a Cleveland radio show and while in Chicago, met with reporters from *Jet* magazine, who had previously reported on events in Monroe.<sup>182</sup> Williams's visit and the kissing case were covered in the local black press, as well as Cleveland's mainstream white newspaper.<sup>183</sup> While Williams was in Cleveland and Chicago, Conrad Lynn addressed various groups in New York, noting that he had speaking engagements on February 2, 12, and 22.<sup>184</sup>

After the speaking tour, Romine reported that "Williams made a tremendous impression on many people here. While we did not have as many speaking engagements as we had expected,

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<sup>179</sup> "Sammy Davis, Kiss Case Leader Here History Week," *Chicago Defender*, February 14, 1959.

<sup>180</sup> To City Editors, for release upon receipt," press release, undated, CCRI papers, box 2, folder 7.

<sup>181</sup> "Press Conference," announcement, February 2, 1959; "CCRI Chairman to Speak on Carolina Kissing Case," February 2, 1959; "To City Editors, for release upon receipt," undated, all in CCRI papers, box 2, folder 7.

<sup>182</sup> George Weissman to Carl Braden, February 19, 1959, CCRI papers, box 1, folder 3. See for example "White Girl's Abortion Charge," *Jet*, October, 12, 1957; "Says N.C. Man Beat Her in Rape Try," *Jet*, November 27, 1958; and "Kissing Case Puts Tiny Town in World Spotlight," *Jet*, February 12, 1959.

<sup>183</sup> See "Carolina Race Case Talks Scheduled," *Cleveland Press*, February 5, 1959; "He'll Talk Here on Kissing Case," *Cleveland News*, February 5, 1959; "Funds Are Sought Here to Fight Carolina Kissing Case," *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, February 7, 1959; and "Sparks National Drive for Kissing Kids Case," *Cleveland Call and Post*, February 19, 1959.

<sup>184</sup> Conrad Lynn to George Weissman, February 1, 1959, CCRI papers, box 1, folder 3.

we feel that his visit was very much a success publicity wise.”<sup>185</sup> Romine shared some of the feedback she received:

We’ve been waiting for an organization that will fight—this is it. A member of the Unitarian Society said, “I had been thinking of resigning from the Unitarian Society, but since they have had a speaker like Williams—I think they are on the right track and I’ll stay around.” Another of our union members who came here from Georgia about two years ago said, “This is a new ‘noise’ from the South and I feel sort of proud to say I’m from the South.”

Although she was pleased with Williams’s’ speaking tour, Romine had one setback involving the local NAACP. At a February 10 luncheon meeting with Williams, local NAACP officers withdrew their support of the CCRI, “saying they would have to get in touch with the national NAACP to find out what their policy is.”<sup>186</sup> Romine informed Weissman that the officers of the chapter had faced numerous leadership problems over the years, and it was “completely tied to the national office and does nothing independently as some branches may do.”<sup>187</sup>

As a result of its enlistment of opinion leaders, the CCRI amassed a number of prominent supporters, including author Norman Mailer, syndicated cartoonist Jules Feiffer, Alabama-based civil rights activist Virginia Durr, SCLC co-founder Rev. Fred Shuttlesworth, sociologist and author E. Franklin Frazier, *National Guardian* founder James Aronson, Bishop Frank M. Reid of

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<sup>185</sup> Auda Romine to George Weissman, February 19, 1959, CCRI papers, box 1, folder 3.

<sup>186</sup> Auda Romine to George Weissman, February 19, 1959, CCRI papers, box 1, folder 2.

<sup>187</sup> Ibid. From Romine’s letter, one can infer that this local chapter received a directive from the NAACP’s national office that it should not work with Williams. Although some chapter leaders worked somewhat independently of the national office as did Williams, others did not.

the African Methodist Episcopal church, Dr. Willard Uphaus of the Interfaith World Fellowship, and Dr. Horace Kallen, professor of the New School in New York.<sup>188</sup>

Despite support from a broad range of leaders, Anne Braden lamented that there were no women being recruited to serve on the CCRI. “I am at a loss to know how you think you’re going to win any of these struggles without the women,” she wrote to Weissman.” In fact, all my experience in the integration movement has led me to the firm conviction that the most convinced and dedicated people are women; this applies to both Negro and white women.”<sup>189</sup>

Anne Braden was not suggesting she serve on the committee, as she felt “one Braden on a committee is enough.”<sup>190</sup> However, she did suggest that there were probably women of both races who would be glad to lend their support. Weissman later responded to Anne Braden that civil rights leader Ella Baker had been approached about being a CCRI founding member, but she wanted to wait to see how the CCRI progressed. Weissman also noted that Auda Romine was a CCRI member and played an active role in securing labor support in Detroit and Cleveland.<sup>191</sup>

Although there was a dearth of women recruited by the CCRI, international women’s organizations, many with socialist and labor ties, learned of the kissing case, be it through the cascade to opinion leaders, the international news coverage, or both. For example, the Women’s

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<sup>188</sup> George Weissman to L. E. Austin, February 19, 1959, and George Weissman to Carl Braden, February 8, 1959, both in CCRI papers, box 1, folder 3. Lambrecht invited entertainer Harry Belafonte to support the CCRI, but there is no acknowledgement from Belafonte in the historical documents. See James Lambrecht to Harry Belafonte, January 30, 1959, CCRI papers, box 1, folder 2.

<sup>189</sup> Anne Braden to George Weissman, February 21, 1959, CCRI papers, box 1, folder 2.

<sup>190</sup> Ibid.

<sup>191</sup> George Weissman to Anne Braden, March 2, 1959, Carl and Anne Braden papers, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, box 49, folder 3 (hereafter cited as Braden papers).



International Democratic Federation (WIDF) wrote a letter to the CCRI and enclosed the text of a telegram it had sent to Hodges demanding the boys' release. Boasting 200 million members on every continent, the WIDF indicated it would print an article on the kissing case in its magazine, which was distributed to approximately 90 countries.<sup>192</sup> In addition, the WIDF wrote, "We know that women everywhere will want to do all they can to help free the children and to join our friends in the U.S.A. who are working for an end to the practices of racial discrimination and segregation which is the root cause of so much suffering and hardship to the Negro people in your country." The WIDF sent a notice to its members outlining the facts of the kissing case and condemned it as a racist, outrageous violation of human rights. It called upon all women to protest and demand the children be returned to their parents.<sup>193</sup> The WIDF's actions provide an example of the effectiveness of the CCRI's strategies. The WIDF heeded the call to action by writing to Hodges. As an opinion-leader group, it informed its members about the kissing case and urged them to protest the boys' sentencing. One of its affiliates, the Union of Australian Women, heard of the case via the WIDF. The affiliate then informed its members about the boys, and it took action by sending a telegram to Hodges demanding the boys' freedom.<sup>194</sup>

While the CCRI was gathering supporters and executing its call-to-action strategy, Williams sent a telegram to the UPI on January 17, announcing that he planned to resign from the NAACP in the near future so that he could devote himself full time to the CCRI.<sup>195</sup> Both Weissman and Braden encouraged Williams to remain with the NAACP as well as the CCRI,

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<sup>192</sup> Carmen Zanti, General Secretary, WIDF, to CCRI, January 20, 1959, CCRI papers, box 1, folder 2.

<sup>193</sup> "Restore the Two US Boys to Their Families, Condemn Racial Injustice," Federation Democratique Internationale Des Femmes, January 21, 1959, CCRI papers, box 1, folder 2.

<sup>194</sup> Union of Australian Women to Governor Hodges, February 10, 1959, Hodges papers, box 423.

<sup>195</sup> "Statement issued to UPI in Raleigh, N.C., by R.F. Williams," January 17, 1959, CCRI papers, box 1, folder 1.

which he ultimately did. Williams's telegram was not carried by the UPI. In a letter to Braden, Weissman wrote, "Nothing has been printed up here on it and if we are lucky the UPI will for once be doing us a favor by not printing our releases."<sup>196</sup> On the same day, Williams again telegrammed President Eisenhower, informing him that the North Carolina Superior Court had upheld the boys' sentencing. As he did in his November telegram, he ended by asking President Eisenhower, "When may Negroes expect your Justice Department to introduce the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment to the U.S. Constitution to ungodly social jungle called Dixie?"<sup>197</sup>

### *News Media Strategy*

In addition to engaging opinion leaders to expand the reach of its messages, the CCRI used the news media to inform audiences about the kissing case. With this strategy, the CCRI held press conferences, wrote and called reporters, and distributed press releases with updates about the case. In contrast to the NAACP, the CCRI was proactive with its media relations.

On December 19, nine days after the CCRI was formed during the meeting in L. E. Austin's office, the CCRI issued its first two press releases. One press release described the legal steps taken and planned by Conrad Lynn on behalf of the boys and Mrs. Reid, the pregnant Monroe woman beaten by the white man, as well as Lynn's efforts to overturn Mrs. Thompson's eviction.<sup>198</sup> The second press release contained the full text of E. Frederic Morrow's response to Williams's first telegram to President Eisenhower.<sup>199</sup> The CCRI also wanted to hold a press

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<sup>196</sup> George Weissman to Carl Braden, January 21, 1959, CCRI papers, box 1, folder, 1.

<sup>197</sup> Ibid. See also text of Williams's telegram to President Eisenhower, CCRI papers, box 2, folder 7.

<sup>198</sup> "Committee Takes Steps to Free Children in Carolina Kissing Case," press release, December 19, 1958, CCRI papers, box 2, folder 7.

<sup>199</sup> "White House Deplores, But Will Not Intervene in Carolina Kissing Case," press release, December 19, 1958, CCRI papers, box 2, folder 7.

conference, but delayed it due to a New York newspaper deliverymen's strike.<sup>200</sup> By the end of the month, the strike had ended, and the CCRI held its first press conference.

On December 29, the CCRI distributed a media alert announcing the press conference, which was held December 31, 1958 at 11 a.m. at the CCRI offices.<sup>201</sup> Seven reporters attended, including Ted Poston and Joyce Egginton.<sup>202</sup> The other reporters were from the *New York Times*, the Associated Press, and three socialist newspapers. Williams and Lynn addressed reporters and, afterwards, the CCRI distributed two press releases with their remarks.<sup>203</sup> Williams's comments focused on the racism behind the kissing case and against blacks in Union County. While Lynn concentrated on the legal aspects of the case, he said the mothers were being persecuted and recommended the families be relocated, as the mothers feared for their safety should they return to Monroe.

On January 2, the CCRI issued a press release announcing that the committee and NAACP would cooperate on the kissing case, with Lynn continuing to handle legal matters.<sup>204</sup> Unlike the NAACP's "full weight" press release, the CCRI revealed that it had been handling the

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<sup>200</sup> George Weissman to L. E. Austin, December 16, 1958, CCRI papers, box 1, folder 1. For more information on the strike, see "News Strike Closes Down N.Y. Papers," *Cornell Daily Sun*, December 12, 1958.

<sup>201</sup> "Press Conference on Carolina Kissing Case," December 29, 1958, CCRI papers, box 2, folder 7. Also, it is interesting to note that the CCRI's first press conference was held the same day as the meeting with Roy Wilkins at which the CCRI and NAACP determined how to collaborate on the kissing case.

<sup>202</sup> "Present at Dec. 31 1958 press conference," CCRI papers, box 2, folder 7.

<sup>203</sup> Statement by Robert F. Williams at Dec. 31, 1958 press conference and Statement by Conrad Lynn at Dec. 31, 1958 press conference, CCRI papers, box 2, folder 7.

<sup>204</sup> "Committee and NAACP to Cooperate on the Carolina Kissing Case," January 2, 1959, CCRI papers, box 2, folder 7.

case all along. Less than a week later, the CCRI distributed a press release with the news that Conrad Lynn applied for a writ of habeas corpus in the boys' case.<sup>205</sup>

As the CCRI sought media coverage, Weissman, Braden, and Williams acknowledged that they could not rely on the mainstream press for coverage of the kissing case. Although there are no media lists among the documents used in this study, CCRI media coverage indicates the committee sent its press releases to the black press, which actively covered the kissing case.

Noting his efforts to obtain publicity for the SCEF, Braden provided the following advice:

We make it a practice never to leave it to the wire services to transmit anything. We keep a list of 325 labor, liberal, Negro, and religious publications and send them releases that they might use—utterly ignoring the wire services and the commercial press. Of course we also send the releases to the commercial papers and the wire services for their information, on the off-chance that someday they may use a paragraph or two. Also, so we can point out later that they were given due notice of our position.<sup>206</sup>

Per Braden's advice, the mainstream press was most likely included on the CCRI's media distribution list, but as expected, it gave the kissing case scant coverage. *Time* wrote two short articles about the case, and the *New York Times* provided minimal exposure and possibly only because the *New York Post* was covering it extensively.<sup>207</sup> Weissman wrote, "Unfortunately it is true that the newspapers in the U.S., with the exception of the N.Y. Post and the Negro weeklies, have not given the case very much attention. Indeed, it is abroad that the newspapers are paying most attention to it."<sup>208</sup>

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<sup>205</sup> "Attorney Asking Carolina Court to Free Negro Boys in Kissing Case," press release, January 8, 1959, CCRI papers, box 2, folder 7.

<sup>206</sup> Carl Braden to George Weissman, January 25, 1959, CCRI papers, box 1, folder 2.

<sup>207</sup> See "Segregation's Signposts Last Week," *Time*, January 26, 1959, and "The Rolling Snowball," *Time*, February 9, 1959, 22. See also "Negro Case Clarified," *New York Times*, November 27, 1958; "NAACP Loses Plea, Court Upholds Sentencing of Boys to Reform School," *New York Times*, January 13, 1959.

<sup>208</sup> George Weissman to Kepple Hall, February 11, 1959, CCRI papers, box 1, folder 3. This letter is in response to a woman who wrote that she had received the CCRI form letter about the case but otherwise had not heard of it.

With the CCRI's labor cascade extending to other countries and Joyce Egginton's *London News Chronicle* article serving as a catalyst for international news coverage, the kissing case had attracted world attention. Supporters heeded the CCRI's call to action, and hundreds of letters and thousands of signatures were sent to Gov. Hodges from across the United States, Albania, Australia, Belgium, Canada, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, the Netherlands, Spain, and the United Kingdom.<sup>209</sup> In Holland, a Catholic youth group in Rotterdam headed by Stephanus Saris organized a petition drive and letter-writing campaign on the boys' behalf. Saris had previously spearheaded a campaign to aid Hungarian refugee children. The group dubbed its efforts to help Hanover and Fuzzy "Operation Snowball" because its efforts would grow "larger and larger when rolling."<sup>210</sup> Saris first heard of the kissing case in a Dutch newspaper, which he later contacted to win publicity for Operation Snowball. Other newspapers in Rotterdam also invited Dutch citizens to sign a petition. Within one day, 4,000 signatures had been collected. Saris's group also asked that Dutch citizens write letters to President Eisenhower and within a week, Operation Snowball had collected 12,000 letters. Students from 10 high schools took the letters to the US embassy and asked that the letters be forwarded to Mamie Eisenhower.<sup>211</sup> A Dutch high school named for Franklin Roosevelt collected and sent hundreds of signatures from students, teachers, and staff to Eleanor Roosevelt, who forwarded them to the NAACP's Roy Wilkins with a note that read, "Dear Mr. Wilkins, I thought you might be interested in seeing the

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<sup>209</sup> See Luther Hodges papers, box 423.

<sup>210</sup> S.F.A. Saris to Mr. A.E. Perry, January 25, 1959, CCRI papers, box 1, folder 2.

<sup>211</sup> "The Rolling Snowball," *Time*, February 9, 1959. See also "Volstrekt Enige Reden van Straf: Rassendiscriminatie," *De Maasbode*, January 31, 1959. (translation: Racial Discrimination the Reason for Punishment)

enclosed and perhaps you could put it to good use.”<sup>212</sup> Wilkins forwarded the petitions to Hodges, with a brief cover letter explaining that they had originally been sent to Mrs. Roosevelt and “we thought you might wish to have this information.”<sup>213</sup>

This international attention was problematic to the United States, as it was another example of the contradiction between the country’s treatment of its black citizens and its expectation of how other countries should treat their citizens. As an example, after World War II, in which a segregated armed forces and US allies defeated Nazism and fascism, these same segregated soldiers were called upon to occupy, reeducate, and democratize the defeated countries. In seeing this segregation, foreigners also saw the incongruity behind the United States as an advocate of democracy. In Germany, for example, “much of the occupation coverage exposed the racism and violence that white enlisted men and officers inflicted on black soldiers in front of the very Germans they were sent to democratize.”<sup>214</sup> Gov. Hodges did not want his state to be the focus of negative international attention, and his public relations efforts centered on attempting to change public opinion so that North Carolina and the United States were viewed favorably.

#### Frames in the CCRI’s Public Relations Material

##### *Shock/Outrage*

All the CCRI’s public relations material included one or two sentences describing the facts of the kissing case. There were no adjectives or other words to illuminate the description.

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<sup>212</sup> Eleanor Roosevelt to Roy Wilkins, January 31, 1959 and Headmaster (name undiscernible), Franklin D. Roosevelt High School Rotterdam, to Eleanor Roosevelt, January 21, 1959, NAACP papers, part IIIA 92. See also Luther Hodges papers, box 423, Segregation W folder.

<sup>213</sup> Roy Wilkins to Gov. Hodges, February 11, 1959, Hodges papers, box 423, Segregation W folder.

<sup>214</sup> Maria Höhn and Martin Klimke, *A Breath of Freedom: The Civil Rights Struggle, African American GIs, and Germany* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2010), 39-40.

Instead, the reader was informed in a straightforward fashion that the CCRI was undertaking the defense of “David ‘Fuzzy’ Simpson and James Hanover Thompson, the eight and nine-year-old Negro boys of Monroe, North Carolina, committed for indefinite terms to reform school after one of them had allegedly been kissed by a seven-year-old white girl.”<sup>215</sup> The CCRI provided the reader with the names of the boys; their ages, race and domicile; the age and race of the girl; the action that transpired; and the boys’ punishment. Another example of how the facts were presented is as follows: “The case of James Hanover Thompson and David ‘Fuzzy’ Simpson, the eight and nine-year-old Negro boys of Monroe, N.C., sent to reform school after the older one had been kissed by a seven-year-old white girl.”<sup>216</sup> The CCRI believed the incident and the punishment—that an eight and nine-year-old boy could be charged with assault and molestation and sentenced to a reformatory for at least the next 12 years for a kissing game—would result in shock and moral outrage. This frame is reflected not only by what was included, but by what was omitted: CCRI opinion. Committee leaders believe the unvarnished details were adequate to provoke outrage. “The facts of the case produce a moral shock: you don’t need too much

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<sup>215</sup> “Committee Takes Steps to Free Children in Carolina Kissing Case,” press release, December 19, 1959, CCRI papers, box 2, folder 7. For additional examples, see “Press Conference on Carolina Kissing Case,” media alert, December 29 1959; “Attorney Asking Carolina Court to Free Negro Boys in Kissing Case,” press release, January 9, 1959; “CCRI Chairman to Speak on Carolina Kissing Case,” press release, February 2, 1959; Fact Sheet on Cases in Monroe, N.C., all in CCRI papers, box , folder 7. See also letters to solicit supporters in CCRI papers, box 1, folder 2.

<sup>216</sup> “Committee and NAACP to Cooperate on the Carolina Kissing Case,” press release, January 2, 1959, CCRI papers, box 2, folder 7. For additional examples of this description, see the press releases: “Committee Takes Steps to Free Children in Carolina Kissing Case,” December 19, 1958 and “Press Conference on Carolina Kissing Case,” December 29, 1958, both in CCRI papers, box 2, folder 7.

sociological explanation.”<sup>217</sup> In a letter to a supporter, James Lambrecht wrote, “There’s a certain moral shock produced just by the facts of the case.”<sup>218</sup>

### *Racism*

However, the CCRI did not let all of the facts of the case speak for themselves. It believed there was a reason that two young boys were sentenced to a reformatory for a kissing game involving a young girl: racism. Racism was the most prominent frame in the CCRI’s public relations material, and the committee often used the word “racist” to describe the motivation behind the boys’ punishment.

Robert Williams wrote of the “attempt by the officials of North Carolina to whitewash the racist reason for the imprisonment of these two boys.”<sup>219</sup> In a letter to a supporter, Lambrecht noted, “The Monroe racists have been using the case to destroy the morale of the Negro community there.”<sup>220</sup> Comparing the Lewis Medlin trial with the kissing case, the CCRI noted that one jurist remarked the defendant “was drunk and just out to have a good time,” and the judge released Medlin.<sup>221</sup> On the other hand, the children were “accused of an act which anywhere else in the world would be considered trifling,” and thus the verdict in this case was indicative of “racist dual standard of justice.”<sup>222</sup>

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<sup>217</sup> James Lambrecht to Ed (last name excluded from salutation), February 9, 1959, CCRI papers, box 1, folder 2. See also George Weissman to Harold Goldstein, January 29, 1959, CCRI papers, box 1, folder 2.

<sup>218</sup> James Lambrecht to Larry (no surname), January 12, 1959, CCRI papers, box 1, folder 2.

<sup>219</sup> Robert Williams to Blaine Madison, January 3, 1959, CCRI papers, box 1, folder 2.

<sup>220</sup> James Lambrecht to Betty Lou Burleigh, February 7, 1959, CCRI papers, box 1, folder 3.

<sup>221</sup> “Committee Takes Steps to Free Children in Carolina Kissing Case,” press release, CCRI papers, box 2, folder 7.

<sup>222</sup> Press release “Committee Takes Steps to Free Children in Carolina Kissing Case,” December 19, 1958, CCRI papers, box 2, folder 7. See also Tom Kerry, “For NC Members Only—To Be Transmitted Verbally: Committee to Combat Racial Injustice,” December 19, 1958, SWP records, Reel 9.



In the CCRI's one-page flyer announcing the February 20 demonstration at the United Nations, the term "racial injustice" is used three times, and the kissing case is referred to as "an outrageous and barbarous act of racial injustice."<sup>223</sup> One CCRI press release included a photo of the boys with the caption: "Victims of racial injustice."<sup>224</sup> The CCRI also used the words "racism" or "racist" as an adjective. For example, on the CCRI's petition, which was one of its primary public relations tactics, sending the boys to a reformatory was described as "under any circumstances barbarous but in this instance is an act of racist cruelty."<sup>225</sup>

Other language associated with the racism frame does not use the word "racist," but the charge of racism is implicit. For example, Robert Williams posed the following query at the December 31 press conference: "Simply ask yourself the question: Would this have happened if the two boys had been white instead of Negro?"<sup>226</sup> The CCRI included the same question on its petition.<sup>227</sup> On one of its flyers, the CCRI asked if the United Nations would "bow to the abominations of white supremacy."<sup>228</sup>

In some instances, the CCRI linked racism to terrorism. One document describes the "terror against the Negro community" and ask allies to "join us in protesting this racist outrage"<sup>229</sup> The flyer to announce the February 1 YC reception at which Williams and Perry

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<sup>223</sup> Picket Line Demonstration, Free Hanover Thompson & Fuzzy Simpson flyer, CCRI papers, box 1, folder 3.

<sup>224</sup> "Attorney Asking Carolina Court to Free Negro Boys in Kiss Case," January 8, 1959, CCRI papers, box 2, folder 7.

<sup>225</sup> CCRI petition, CCRI papers, box 2, folder 7. See also Hodges papers, box 422 and 423.

<sup>226</sup> "Statement by Robert F. Williams at Dec. 31, 1958 Press Conference," CCRI papers, box 2, folder 7.

<sup>227</sup> CCRI petition to Luther H. Hodges, CCRI papers, box 2, folder, 4.

<sup>228</sup> Picket Line Demonstration, Free Hanover Thompson & Fuzzy Simpson flyer, CCRI papers, box 1, folder 3

<sup>229</sup> George Weissman letter to Harold Goldstein, January 29, 1959, CCRI papers, box 1, folder 2.

spoke described “terroristic acts against the Negroes.”<sup>230</sup> The flyer also includes details of the kissing case and refers to it and KKK reprisals in Monroe as “terror in the South.”<sup>231</sup>

The CCRI also linked racism with the quest for civil rights. The CCRI described its campaign as a protest movement that will “stay the hand of the white supremacists and win a victory for the civil rights fight in this country.”<sup>232</sup> It also explained that “the Negro community in Union County, NC, has been subject to a ferocious campaign of intimidation, violence, and economic reprisal because of their determination to win their civil rights.”<sup>233</sup> Due to the racist environment in Monroe, the CCRI declared blacks have waged a “courageous fight for equal rights and dignity”<sup>234</sup>

The CCRI’s use of the racism frame was particularly effective, given that its primary audience was northerners. Had the CCRI directed a racism frame at a southern audience, its use would have been ineffective, as southerners did not necessarily see their attitudes and behavior as racist. Instead, some southerners may have believed their superiority and blacks’ inferiority was not only a reflection of biology, but a religious mandate.<sup>235</sup> The CCRI believed northerners would be more sympathetic and therefore it focused on “trying to build a movement in the North to aid Southern Negroes.”<sup>236</sup> Yet, as Gunnar Myrdal found in his research, there is “an

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<sup>230</sup> “Combat Racial Injustice, Free the Kiss Case Boys flyer, CCRI papers, box 2, folder 4.

<sup>231</sup> Ibid.

<sup>232</sup> Ibid.

<sup>233</sup> CCRI form letter addressed to Dear Friend from George Weissman, undated, CCRI papers, box 1, folder 3.

<sup>234</sup> Combat Racial Injustice, Free the Kiss Case Boys flyer, CCRI papers, box 2, folder 4.

<sup>235</sup> Hanson and Hanson, “The Blame Frame,” 427.

<sup>236</sup> James Lambrecht to Harry Belafonte, January 30, 1959, CCRI papers, box 1, folder 2.

astounding ignorance about the Negro on the part of the white public in the North.”<sup>237</sup> He added, “A great many Northerners, perhaps the majority, get shocked and shaken in their conscience when they learn the facts.”<sup>238</sup> Although the CCRI targeted those who were already receptive to its viewpoints, that audience may have been unaware of the depth of racism that blacks endured. The CCRI wanted to ensure its audiences were fully aware of the racism that permeated the South, hence the prominence of the racism frame.

In addition, highlighting racism to an obdurate audience that did not find the actions racist would have resulted in the audience justifying its actions rather than finding them wrong.<sup>239</sup> As the *London News Chronicle*’s Joyce Egginton reported, the authorities and most citizens in Monroe did not experience shock or outrage. She wrote, “There is not one white person here who does not support Mrs. Sutton’s attitude or who does not believe that [Judge] Price’s justice has been tempered with mercy.”<sup>240</sup> Societal conventions prescribed rules of behavior, and the boys violated sacrosanct tenets regarding conduct between blacks and whites. Regardless of the facts of the case, most white citizens in Monroe thought the boys had committed a serious crime, and that there was no racism involved in their sentencing.

In examining the overall public relations program for the NAACP, Henry Lee Moon described the attitudes of the white public, separating them into three groups:

An irredeemably hostile minority opposed to everything for which we stand and rejecting the Judeo-Christian concept of the brotherhood of man as well as the democratic creed of quality under law; another minority composed of persons who, out of religious faith or democratic conviction, are basically committed to our position. And then there is the

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<sup>237</sup> Myrdal, *An American Dilemma*, 48.

<sup>238</sup> Ibid.

<sup>239</sup> See Hanson and Hanson, “The Blame Frame,” 415-480.

<sup>240</sup> Joyce Egginton, “The Negro Children in Jail for a Kiss,” *London News Chronicle*, December 18, 1958.

third group, probably the vast majority, embracing millions of citizens who find the teachings of democracy and of their religion in conflict with the practices they follow. The first of these three groups is beyond our reach. The second is already in accord with our principles. It is the support of the uncommitted third group that is essential to the ultimate triumph of our cause. Our public relations program must be geared to winning this vital support.<sup>241</sup>

Unlike the NAACP, the CCRI did not direct its efforts toward an uncommitted group. Instead, it identified those predisposed to racial justice—the second group described by Moon—and reinforced that commitment. Within this group, it identified and engaged opinion leaders and youth and used them to cascade the message to a broader audience. It informed them of the facts of the kissing case, which resulted in shock and outrage, as Myrdal had observed was a possibility.<sup>242</sup> The CCRI then illuminated the racism behind the punishment, and asked these supporters to contact Hodges and demand he free the boys.

In just six weeks, word of the kissing case had spread around the world, spurred by news coverage and the CCRI's public relations campaign. During this time, the CCRI amassed the support of numerous labor advocates in the United States and internationally. In addition, the CCRI engaged religious leaders, civil rights advocates, academics, students, and other opinion leaders. Although the NAACP's public relations support was minimal, its endorsement conferred legitimacy on the campaign and generated additional publicity.

Members of the public learned of the case from a number of sources: opinion leaders, the news media, a CCRI postcard, a letter, a petition, a speech, or word of mouth. One woman in San Francisco wrote that she heard about the boys' dilemma on the radio.<sup>243</sup> Another woman in

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<sup>241</sup> Henry Lee Moon, Problems and Goals of NAACP Public Relations Activities, January 5, 1959, NAACP papers, box A39, Articles, Henry Lee Moon, 1956-65 folder.

<sup>242</sup> Myrdal, *An American Dilemma*, 48.

<sup>243</sup> Helen M. Miller to Gov. Hodges, January 14, 1959, CCRI papers, box 1, folder 2.

Detroit wrote that she read of the kissing case in the *Nation*, and she offered the support of the local chapter of the National Lawyers Guild, of which her husband was president.<sup>244</sup> Others merely wrote that the case had come to their attention, while some remarked they had been asked to sign a petition, and several attached a CCRI postcard they had received or a newspaper article.<sup>245</sup>

On February 10, two months after the CCRI was formed, Weissman summarized the committee's public relations work to date. He wrote that the CCRI has "engaged in considerable publicity work on the kissing case, including two press conferences, issuing numerous press releases, which have appeared in American and foreign newspapers, it has called for people to write letters to Governor Hodges urging release of the boys and it has circulated petitions to the same, and it has arranged speaking engagements for Mr. Williams, Dr. Perry, and Conrad Lynn."<sup>246</sup> Of Weissman's efforts, Braden wrote, "You are doing an excellent job, and I am sure you will so long as we hew to the line of combating racial injustice and keeping out the political arguments with the NAACP as well as with the Left."<sup>247</sup>

Within a very short time frame, the North Carolina governor was inundated with thousands of signatures on petitions and hundreds of letters and postcards from around the world. The public's reaction, combined with the international news coverage, reflected poorly on Hodges, North Carolina, and the United States. In response, Hodges launched his own public relations campaign. As a result, the CCRI employed additional public relations tactics to counter many of Hodges's claims, as well as those of the USIA, which stepped in to manage some of the

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<sup>244</sup> June Feiger to Robert Williams, January 15, 1959, CCRI papers, box 1, folder 2.

<sup>245</sup> See Hodges papers, box 422 and 423, Segregation folders.

<sup>246</sup> George Weissman to Ann Rogers, February 10, 1959, CCRI papers, box 1, folder 3.

<sup>247</sup> Carl Braden to George Weissman, January 25, 1959, CCRI papers, box 1, folder 2.

international outcry. The CCRI had not yet achieved its outcome and thus it could not claim success. Its public relations campaign would continue.

*We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness.<sup>1</sup>*

### **CHAPTER 3: GOVERNOR HODGES, THE USIA, AND THE CCRI**

As a result of the CCRI's public relations efforts and the publicity about the kissing case, Gov. Hodges received hundreds of letters and petitions with thousands of signatures from those who protested the boys' sentencing. This direct outreach by the public condemning North Carolina's actions caused Hodges to launch a reactive public relations campaign. Evidence suggests that the letters Hodges received, along with the news coverage of the kissing case, shaped his public relations strategies and tactics. Although Hodges did not have a written public relations plan that described strategies and tactics, they can be determined from the historical documents. This chapter addresses those public relations strategies and tactics and analyzes the frames in his public relations material. In addition, this chapter examines how the USIA addressed the international outcry, as well as how the CCRI responded to Hodges's and the USIA's public relations efforts.

#### **A Deluge of Letters: The Public Voices Its Opinion**

Although letters trickled in to Hodges's office in November and early December, the spate of letters began arriving in mid-December. Each week, Hodges received a new onslaught of letters, telegrams, postcards, and petitions, from Americans and from protesters throughout the world. By mid-January, at which time the boys had been at the reformatory for more than two

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<sup>1</sup> Declaration of Independence.

months, Hodges acknowledged that he had received approximately 200 letters.<sup>2</sup> The correspondence to Hodges coincides with the CCRI's public relations campaign, specifically its letter writing and postcard campaign, in which it urged supporters to write to Hodges demanding he free the boys. In addition, the *London News Chronicle* story about the kissing case appeared in mid-December, prompting other overseas newspapers to write about the kissing case.<sup>3</sup> Many letter writers corresponded in their native language, prompting Hodges to ask William Friday, president of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, if one of the university's language professors would translate the letters.<sup>4</sup> Friday assigned Professor of Romance Languages J.C. Lyons, who later concluded, "It is my impression that these letters came from sentimental, emotional but sincere people who are completely unaware that their kindly feelings are being exploited for an evil purpose by an unscrupulous propaganda machine. Whatever steps can be taken to set them straight as to the real facts are certainly worthwhile moves."<sup>5</sup>

Hodges was discomfited by the letters. In response to one of a few missives he received from supporters, he referred to the volume of letters he received as "intemperate."<sup>6</sup> In that same

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<sup>2</sup> Gov. Hodges to Mr. Lee Anderson, Chattanooga News Free Press, TN, January 19, 1959, Hodges papers, box 422, Segregation: Union County, A folder. Note: In the Hodges papers, the letters he received from the public are arranged alphabetically by the sender's last name, with a folder for each letter. Box 422 contains letters from senders with last names starting with A to letters with last names starting with N, as well as a separate folder for last names beginning with Mc or Mac. Box 423 contains letters from O to Z; letters X, Y, and Z are in one folder. Box 423 also includes two separate folders containing the letters written in foreign languages and petitions from foreign countries. With this explanation, subsequent citations for the letters the public sent to Hodges will exclude the folder name. To show the broad geographic reach of the letters, citations will include the sender's location. The letters Hodges exchanged with advisors and other officials are in box 422 in the Segregation: Union, County, General folder. Citations that follow for these documents will exclude this folder name.

<sup>3</sup> Egginton interview.

<sup>4</sup> Robert E. Giles to William C. Friday, February 5, 1959, Hodges papers, box 422.

<sup>5</sup> Professor J.D. Lyons to Robert E. Giles, February 28, 1959, Hodges papers, box 422.

<sup>6</sup> Mrs. Irene Drake Rodwell, Union City, MI to Gov. Hodges, December 27, 1958 and Luther H. Hodges to Mrs. Irene Drake Rowell, Union City, MI, January 7, 1959, Hodges papers, box 423. In Mrs. Rodwell's letter to Gov. Hodges, she wrote that she was a Daughter of the American Revolution originally from Winston Salem. She



correspondence, he wrote that “a great deal of misinformation has been widely publicized on this matter and I have received a large number of very critical letters from various parts of the country.”<sup>7</sup> In a letter to *Chattanooga Free Press* editor Lee Anderson, Hodges complained, “More and more evidence is being accumulated to show that this is pure propaganda, as we are still getting letters resulting from the story being re-broadcast in various parts of the country. In other words, it won’t die down—they are using it for their purposes, and it is creating ill will and misunderstanding here and abroad.”<sup>8</sup> Hodges considered the CCRI’s version of the kissing case—that two black boys were remanded to a reformatory for kissing a white girl—propaganda because it did not present the actual facts of the situation. According to Hodges, the correct version of the story was that two juveniles with sordid home environments and history of delinquency were remanded to a reformatory not only for their recent transgression, but for their previous offenses.

Hodges was concerned not only by the quantity of letters; their content also was troubling. Because the letters were sent largely due to the CCRI’s public relations campaign, the overwhelming majority of them protested North Carolina’s actions in the kissing case. Of the approximately 400 letters and postcards Hodges received, along with thousands of signatures on petitions, about five letters were from US residents who supported the actions of North Carolina authorities. There was no particular geographic distribution of the letters. In the United States,

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referenced an enclosed news clipping, which was not included in the historical documents. The clipping is most likely about the CCRI and the kissing case, and she urged Hodges to “hold the line on the awful propaganda coming from Moscow.”

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Gov. Hodges to Mr. Lee Anderson, January 19, 1959, Hodges papers, box 423. Hodges wrote this letter to thank Anderson for sending him a favorable editorial, headlined “The NAACP’s Lynch Mob,” that appeared in the January 13, 1959 *Chattanooga News Free Press*. The editorial was not included in the historical documents; Hodges included the date and headline in his letter.

they came from Alabama, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, Florida, Illinois, Indiana, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Oklahoma, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Vermont, Washington, and Wisconsin. From outside the United States, Hodges received correspondence from Albania, Australia, Belgium, Canada, England, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, and Switzerland.<sup>9</sup> Hodges's administrative aide Robert Giles noted that Hodges was "greatly distressed that there has been such complete misinformation widely publicized on this case."<sup>10</sup>

Had Hodges received more letters from those who agreed with the boys' sentencing, he might have been less concerned. However, protesters heeded the CCRI's call-to-action strategy, and they wrote to Hodges expressing their opinions about the kissing case. As a result, Hodges complained about the "terrible letters, and the effect of pure propaganda and how it has hurt North Carolina."<sup>11</sup> Therefore, it was the volume, geographic scope, and content of the letters, along with the publicity about the kissing case, that molded Hodges's public relations efforts. His public relations strategies and tactics were developed reactively and in direct response to the public outcry. The public expressed its opinion in letters; therefore; it is necessary to examine the letters and their frames before reviewing the public relations activities Hodges developed in

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<sup>9</sup> The correspondence from Italy, which included letters, postcards, and signed petitions, appears to be part of an organized letter-writing campaign, as much of the correspondence is addressed similarly. However, the historical record contains no information regarding a possible origin of this effort. The letters from Canada, Norway, and Italy are from members of women's unions affiliated with the Women's International Democratic Federation (WIDF), which further illustrates the effectiveness of the CCRI's communication strategies. The WIDF heeded the CCRI's call to action by writing to Hodges and as an opinion leader group, it informed its member organizations about the kissing case. Those organizations then informed their members, who also heeded the call to action by writing to Hodges.

<sup>10</sup> Robert E. Giles to Occupant, Lincoln Park, MI, January 5, 1959, and Robert E. Giles to Dr. Arthur Robinson, Ozone Park, NY, December 16, 1958, both in Hodges papers, box 423.

<sup>11</sup> Gov. Hodges to Bill Sharpe, January 19, 1959, Hodges papers, box 422.

response. One of the research questions this dissertation asks is: what frames were in the letters the public sent to Hodges, and how did the frames relate to the four groups' public relations material? Given that many of the letters were sent as a result of the CCRI's public relations activities, the frames in the letters also will be analyzed in terms of how they relate to the frames in the CCRI's public relations materials.

### **The Letters and Their Frames**

Using qualitative framing analysis, I read each of the letters multiple times and took notes to ascertain recurring themes. Stuart Hall posits that researchers employing qualitative framing analysis look for areas of emphasis in text and learn to hear the same underlying appeals, the same notes, being sounded again and again in different passages and contexts.<sup>12</sup> These areas of emphasis are identified as frames. Entman explained that frames can be detected by probing for particular words and visual images that consistently appear in a narrative and convey thematically consistent meanings across media and time.<sup>13</sup> To identify areas of emphasis in text, I examined sentences, word choice, position, and tone, probing for points that were reinforced and repeated. I noted words and phrases that appeared consistently, thereby reinforcing, referencing, and giving salience to some ideas.

### **Shock and Outrage**

A key frame in the CCRI's public relations material was shock; the CCRI hoped its supporters would be outraged by the kissing case. It employed this frame by what it omitted in its written materials rather than what it included. Instead of telling the public how to *feel* about the fact that two boys were sentenced to a reformatory for 12 years for a kissing game, the CCRI

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Robert Entman, "Framing US Coverage of International News: Contrasts in Narratives of the KAL and Iran Air Incidents," *Journal of Communication* 41, no. 4 (1991): 7.

provided the unadorned facts of the case. This approach worked, and most of the letters sent to Hodges expressed indignation over the situation. Although the CCRI did not use the words “shock,” and “outrage” in its public relations material, the public did so in its letters.

Members of a community club in Los Angeles wrote, “At a meeting of our organization attended by 100 citizens, we voted to protest the outrageous sentence of the two little Negro boys.”<sup>14</sup> One letter writer referred to the boys’ sentencing as “unbelievable and anti-human,” while another penned, “To say I am shocked is to put it mildly in reference to what has happened to the two Negro Boys Thompson and Simpson.”<sup>15</sup> Writing that they represented millions of women on all continents, the Women’s International Democratic Federation expressed shock and joined “outraged world public opinion demanding unconditional release” of the boys.<sup>16</sup> From Los Angeles, a woman began her letter by informing Hodges, “I was shocked and outraged to learn of the indeterminate sentences given the two small boys, Hanover Thompson and Fuzzy Simpson, in your state.”<sup>17</sup> A woman from Vermont was “very pained and shocked that this could happen in America.”<sup>18</sup> An eleven-year-old girl from London wrote, “All the members of this family would like you to know that we are absolutely disgusted with the report on the case of the

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<sup>14</sup> Los Angeles City Terrace Community Club to Governor Luther H. Hodges, February 7, 1959, Hodges papers, box 422.

<sup>15</sup> Mathilda Seliger, San Francisco, CA to Gov. Hodges January 14, 1959, and Joseph Balfior, New York to Gov. Hodges, November 23, 1958, Hodges papers, box 423 and 422, respectively.

<sup>16</sup> Women’s International Democratic Federation telegram to Gov. Hodges, January 21, 1959, Hodges papers, box 423.

<sup>17</sup> Naomi Brickman, Los Angeles, CA to Gov. Hodges, November 27, 1958, Hodges papers, box 422.

<sup>18</sup> Robert and Ann Stowell, Cabot, VT to Gov. Hodges, December 17, 1958, Hodges papers, box 423.

two small negro boys who were sentenced to a reformatory school for kissing a white girl in your State.”<sup>19</sup>

### Disbelief

After expressing their outrage, the letters writers elaborated on the specific reasons for their anger. The public was astonished that the boys’ action was considered a crime, and that it resulted in a harsh punishment. “It seems incredible that such a severe punishment should be given for such a minor offense,” wrote a California resident.<sup>20</sup> Similarly, a Texan exclaimed, “How utterly absurd for such a sentence to be given on the basis of little children’s harmless play!”<sup>21</sup> Public opinion focused on the belief that the children had engaged in innocent play, not molestation. “It would seem that boys of pre-pubertal age are really ‘getting the works’ on such a charge, and I hope you will use your high office to send the little children home,” wrote Charles Schwartz of Los Angeles, California.<sup>22</sup>

Letter writers were perplexed by the notion that child’s play could rise to the level of criminal behavior. “It is the feeling of this group that those boys are only children and that the treatment and punishment are all out of proportion to the deed committed. We feel that they are in no sense of the word criminals.”<sup>23</sup> A writer from Salerno, Italy, asked, “The motive, one of the

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<sup>19</sup> Pamela Apter, London, UK, to Gov. Hodges, letter undated but received in the Governor’s office December 22, 1959, box 422.

<sup>20</sup> David Mallen, Sepulveda, CA, to Gov. Hodges, February 11, 1959, Hodges papers, box 422.

<sup>21</sup> Gayle Spann, Dallas, TX, to Gov. Hodges, January 25, 1959, Hodges papers, box 423.

<sup>22</sup> Charles Schwartz, Los Angeles, CA, to Gov. Hodges, November 25, 1958, box 423.

<sup>23</sup> Ruth Duff, Los Angeles, CA, to Gov. Hodges, February 9, 1959, Hodges papers, box 422.

most stupid. They were only playing with a little white girl, and what harm is there for children to play together?”<sup>24</sup>

The Congress of Canadian Women expressed the following opinion:

We understand the crime consisted in demanding a kiss from a small white girl, eight years of age, as a price for releasing her from a ditch. As a rule, this sort of childish teasing is punished either by the children’s parents or the school principal. Never in the annals of human history have infants been committed to state reformatory institutions for this sort of mischievous prank.<sup>25</sup>

The letter writers believed the boys had been unjustly charged, as children’s games should not warrant criminal sentences.

### Racism

The most prominent frame in the CCRI’s public relations material focused on racism, specifically that the boys’ treatment and sentencing was motivated by racial prejudice. The CCRI wanted to draw attention to the racism in the South, and it presented the kissing case as an act of racial injustice, impressing upon the public that it was one of many such acts perpetrated on blacks in the region. CCRI public relations material used liberally the words “racism” or some version of “racial injustice.” This racism frame was also prevalent in the letters from the public. In speculating on the reasons for the boys’ sentencing and punishment, most letter writers believed it was racially motivated. Addressing Hodges, one man penned, “The reason for this travesty of justice is well known to you, and any civilized conscience will condemn the people of North Carolina for permitting this vicious racial bigotry.”<sup>26</sup> A woman from California began, “The Committee to Combat Racial Injustice informs us of the incredible arrest and holding of

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<sup>24</sup> (Sender’s name excluded from translation), Salerno, Italy, to President of the Supreme Court of Justice Raleigh, January 27, 1959, Hodges papers, box 423.

<sup>25</sup> Congress of Canadian Women to Gov. Hodges, January 29, 1959, Hodges papers, box 422.

<sup>26</sup> D.L. Broughton, Cornwall, England, to Gov. Hodges, December 18, 1958, Hodges papers, box 422.

two small boys for the “crime” of kissing two white girls.”<sup>27</sup> She continued, “As you are no doubt aware, these arrests have attracted worldwide attention, and, as you must further be aware, we, the whites are a distinct minority, internationally speaking. So that in the court of world opinion, the feelings of people like Judge J. Hampton Price, are regarded as backward and bigoted, to put it kindly.”<sup>28</sup>

A letter writer from England asked Hodges, “If these were two small white boys, would they have been sent to a reform school for kissing a girl?”<sup>29</sup> Another person from England, who wrote that she was “one of many thousands horrified by this inhumanity,” sent a cartoon from her local newspaper. It showed a drawing of two children, one black and one white, touching hands, with mistletoe above their heads. The caption read: “Peace on Earth and Goodwill to Children Everywhere—Even in North Carolina.”<sup>30</sup>

One North Carolinian shared with Hodges what he had read about the boys’ hearing:

The juvenile court judge used the word “nigger” twice, a small thing, perhaps, but something which might indicate the possibility of prejudice. The unpleasant publicity is certainly, as you have noticed, very damaging to our State, but even more distressing is the thought that these young boys may have been the victims of racial tensions, a possibility which, in my mind, is not excluded.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Frances Turner Troy, Maywood, CA, to Gov. Hodges, February 5, 1959, Hodges papers, box 423.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Pauline Bowry, Southend-on-the Sea, Essex, England, to Gov. Hodges, December 18, 1958, Hodges papers, box 422.

<sup>30</sup> J.O. Weir, Kent, England, to Gov. Hodges, January 8, 1959, Hodges papers, box 423.

<sup>31</sup> Oscar K. Rice, Chapel Hill, NC, to Gov. Hodges, January 22, 1959, Hodges papers, box 423. Italics in original document.

A letter writer from Colorado remarked, “We fully realize that all states, including the northern ones, are not free from racial discrimination, but it was most difficult to believe that the imprisonment of such young children could happen anywhere in our country.”<sup>32</sup>

A man from Italy noted, “We are very happy that in these days we are not American citizens so that we will not be forced to teach our five children to look with distaste on the color of skin of their playmates.”<sup>33</sup> Another letter writer from Italy wrote, “The absurd sentence, which is one of the most cruel manifestations of racism, is an insult to all children, makes them lose their confidence in men and pushes them along the road to hatred of races and peoples.”<sup>34</sup> The writers did not merely point out the prejudice behind the case; they vehemently expressed their anger about it.

A Canadian wrote,

This is so unbelievable an act of viciousness meted out to mere children because they are black that it stinks to high heaven. The Hitlerites thought they were a super race, [*sic*] you white southerners seem to be contaminated with the same form of insanity. No wonder the world has come to hate you superior Americans.”<sup>35</sup>

A woman from Cambridge, Massachusetts, shared the following opinion with Hodges:

Their real crime? Being Negroes, while their little playmate was white. You know, and I know, and the whole world knows that had these small boys been white the incident would have been a joke. For the guilt of having black skins in North Carolina these 8 and 9 year old children are branded as criminals and subjected to the terror of being torn from

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<sup>32</sup> Mildred Mowe, Denver, CO, to Gov. Hodges, January 26, 1959, Hodges papers, box 422.

<sup>33</sup> Paolo e Silvia Moruzzi, Bolzano, Italy to President of the Supreme Court of Justice Raleigh, January 22, 1959, Hodges papers, box 422. The letters from Italy appear to be part of a letter-writing campaign, although the origins of this campaign are not indicated in the historical documents. The Italian letters are all addressed to some variation of the “Supreme Court of Raleigh.” These letters were all in the Hodges papers.

<sup>34</sup> Translated letter from Rome, Italy (name excluded from translation) to Chief Justice Supreme Court of Raleigh, January 24, 1959, Hodges papers, box 423.

<sup>35</sup> H. Bardal, Vancouver, BC to Gov. Hodges, letter undated but received in Governor’s office December 9, 1958, Hodges papers, box 422.



their parents and locked up in an institution of punishment, with their whole future lives poisoned and jeopardized.<sup>36</sup>

In addition to highlighting the racism behind the boys' treatment, the letter writers also believed such action was typical of the South. A woman from Texas wrote, "It is all too obvious that this shameful ruling on the part of Judge Price is but a part of the pattern of racial pride and prejudice that still has all too strong a grip on some areas of the South."<sup>37</sup>

In their correspondence to Hodges, most letter writers did not identify their race and those few who did were white. A woman from Massachusetts wrote, "Lest you think that only Negroes are shocked at this case, I am white though sometimes I am given reason to be ashamed of it."<sup>38</sup> If Hodges thought most of the letter writers were black, he may have dismissed their protests. Although the historical documents do not indicate if Hodges considered the race of the letter writers, he developed a public relations campaign in response to the letters, which suggests he most likely recognized that the letters were probably being sent from black and white Americans. The fact that the letters were sent from various parts of the United States may also have indicated that blacks and whites protested North Carolina's actions in the kissing case.

### Reputation

Another key frame in the letters and one that caused great consternation to Hodges was concern related to the reputation of North Carolina and the United States. The public clearly believed that North Carolina had brought embarrassment to itself and to the country. For a

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<sup>36</sup> Florence Liscomb, Cambridge, MA, to Gov. Luther H. Hodges, December 2, 1958, Hodges papers, box 422.

<sup>37</sup> Gayle Spann, Dallas, TX, to Gov. Hodges, January 25, 1959, Hodges papers, box 423. See also Muriel Haynes, NY to Gov. Hodges, November 26, 1959; Valeda Bryant, Palo Alto, CA, to Gov. Hodges, December 2, 1958; Herman Katzen, Elmhurst, NY, to Gov. Hodges, (no date but received in Hodges's office January 21, 1959); and Florence Liscomb, Cambridge, MA, to Gov. Hodges, January 27 1959, all in Hodges papers, box 422.

<sup>38</sup> Florence Liscomb, Cambridge, MA, to Gov. Luther H. Hodges, December 2, 1958, Hodges papers, box 422.

politician who had been working tirelessly to improve economic conditions in his state, the negative public sentiment and stinging, direct comments were troubling, especially since they came from both Northerners and Southerners.<sup>39</sup> A man from New York wrote, “If North Carolina is to regain national respect it must assure constitutional rights for all citizens.”<sup>40</sup> Hodges received the following opinion from an Alabama woman.

If the little boys had been white not matter how bad the reputation of their families, no matter how bad their stealing had been had been, this would not have been regarded as an offense against the State of North Carolina. To have made it an offense against the State of North Carolina and to have punished the little boys for it, makes a laughingstock of us all here in the South. You and the State of North Carolina have shamed us and I am afraid this is a mark of shame that will not easily be erased.<sup>41</sup>

Going beyond North Carolina’s reputation, the public believed the kissing case was an opprobrium that made a mockery of the United States’ standing as a worldwide arbiter of freedom. Communism, in which citizens were not afforded personal and political liberties, posed a threat to this freedom and hence, to world peace.<sup>42</sup> Therefore, after the defeat of Nazism in World War II, US foreign policy focused on containing Communism. During the Cold War, the United States “sought to draw into stark terms the differences between American democracy and Soviet terror.”<sup>43</sup> However, the hypocrisy perpetuated by America’s espousal of freedom and its contradictory treatment of its black citizens was noted by its enemies, and the Soviet Union was

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<sup>39</sup> See Hodges response letters, Hodges papers, boxes 422 and 423.

<sup>40</sup> Irving Beinin, Jackson Heights, NY, to Gov. Hodges, January 4, 1959, Hodges papers, box 422.

<sup>41</sup> Hannah Johnston, Montgomery AL, to Gov. Hodges, February 9, 1959, Hodges papers, box 422.

<sup>42</sup> Mary Dudziak, “Desegregation as a Cold War Imperative,” *Stanford Law Review* 41, no. 1 (1988), 73.

<sup>43</sup> Carol Anderson, *Eyes Off The Prize*, 71.

quick to report on racial incidents in the United States.<sup>44</sup> Newspapers throughout the world carried stories about discrimination against non-white foreign dignitaries who visited the United States, as well as against American blacks.<sup>45</sup> At a time when the focus of US foreign policy was to promote democracy and contain communism, the international press attention on America's racial problems was troublesome to US political leaders.<sup>46</sup>

To help mold its image, the US government, through the USIA, presented its racial issues as an example of peaceful social transformation through democracy.<sup>47</sup> The USIA used the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, in which the Supreme Court declared state laws allowing segregated schools unconstitutional, as an example of such a change and communicated it extensively overseas, to positive feedback.<sup>48</sup> The *Brown* decision, at least temporarily, had quieted foreign critics.<sup>49</sup> This gain was to be short-lived, however; the Little Rock school integration crisis dominated national and international headlines in September 1957. The Soviet Union and other US enemies, as well as its allies, reported extensively on Little Rock, to negative reactions.<sup>50</sup> Not only had the crisis impacted international opinion, US officials believed

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<sup>44</sup> Richard Lentz and Karla K. Gower, *The Opinions of Mankind: Racial issues, Press, and Propaganda in the Cold War* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2010): 1. See also "Communist Propaganda: A Fact Book, 1957-1958," Office of Research and Intelligence, United States Information Agency, Record Group 0306, container 13, folder S-23-58, and "Racial Prejudice Mars the American Image," Research Report R-112-62 (C), Research and Reference Service, United States Information Agency, October 17, 1962, Record Group 0301, container 10, folder R-112-62, both in Records of the United States Information Agency, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD (hereafter referred to as USIA records).

<sup>45</sup> Dudziak, "Desegregation as a Cold War Imperative," 62.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 73.

<sup>47</sup> Mary L. Dudziak, "The Little Rock Crisis and Foreign Affairs," 1650.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 1657.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>50</sup> See USIS reports on press coverage of Little Rock crisis, USIA records, Record Group 306, container 11, Desegregation September 1957 folder.

it adversely impacted diplomatic efforts. US Ambassador to the United Nations Henry Cabot Lodge suspected that the United States lost several votes “on the Chinese communist item because of Little Rock.”<sup>51</sup>

A little more than a year later, the kissing case again reminded the public of the inconsistency between the values that the United States government promoted in official communication and in its actions. As the letters poured in, Hodges was concerned that North Carolina was receiving such negative attention. One letter writer linked Hodges with Gov. Orval Faubus, which had to be especially upsetting to Hodges given that school desegregation in North Carolina had proceeded without incident, unlike the crisis Faubus caused in Arkansas.<sup>52</sup> “It is high time that men like yourself and Governor Faubus of Arkansas recognize the tremendous harm done the United States in the eyes of the world and especially the uncommitted, colored races, by such exhibitions of injustice as practiced in your state.”<sup>53</sup>

Hodges received the following from a professor of sociology at Western Reserve University: “The state of North Carolina has, through this arbitrary act, shocked the civilized world and tremendously increased the difficulties of our diplomatic agents abroad. At this juncture of human events we cannot afford to announce to the world that we have one standard of justice for whites and another for the Negroes.”<sup>54</sup> A man from Oregon sent a letter to President Eisenhower, with a copy to Hodges, asking, “Is this possible in America? We have spent billions

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<sup>51</sup> Dudziak, “The Little Rock Crisis and Foreign Affairs,” 1694.

<sup>52</sup> *The Race Beat*, 173.

<sup>53</sup> Peter Jacoby, New York, to Gov. Hodges, January 13, 1959, Hodges papers, box 422.

<sup>54</sup> R. A. Schemerhorn, Cleveland, OH. to Gov. Hodges, February 9, 1959, Hodges papers, box 423.

to promote democracy and cannot protect two little colored children!”<sup>55</sup> A woman in Brooklyn admonished Hodges, “Everywhere in our country or abroad where this becomes known, your state and your administration will be considered to be run by idiots or viciously prejudiced grown-ups.”<sup>56</sup>

Twelve members of the 280<sup>th</sup> Army Security Agency stationed in West Berlin wrote Hodges that publicity over the case undermined efforts to cultivate allies abroad.

Are you aware that the billions of dollars and time and efforts of thousands of Americans abroad are wasted when those we are trying to make our allies in the worldwide battle against atheistic communism read about such instances of our ‘democracy in action’? We are left completely without defense when we are asked to account for our treatment of Negroes.<sup>57</sup>

Public sentiment was that North Carolina’s actions had negatively impacted the reputation of the state, and that of the entire United States. Compounding this problem was the fact that the letters were coming from citizens around the globe. A woman from Switzerland referred to the boys’ treatment as “shameful for the United States,” while a man from Italy wrote that it was “an insult to humanity and a disgrace to the United States of America.”<sup>58</sup> An English woman cautioned, “We will never have peace in this world when you Americans make such a mockery of standing for peace and freedom for all,” while another British citizen wrote,

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<sup>55</sup> Howard D. Willits, Portland, OR, to President Eisenhower, January 22, 1959, Hodges papers, box 423. Emphasis in original document.

<sup>56</sup> Mrs. Samuel Kaman, New York, to Gov. Hodges, November 28, 1958, Hodges papers, box 422.

<sup>57</sup> 280<sup>th</sup> Army Security Agency to Gov. Hodges, January 14, 1959, Hodges papers, box 422.

<sup>58</sup> Helen Comensoli, Zurich, Switzerland, to Supreme Court of Justice Raleigh, January 28, 1959, and Professor Ambrogio Donini, Rome, Italy, to Gov. Hodges, , January 17, 1959, both in Hodges papers, box 422.

We are ashamed that so called free Americans can consign two children to banishment just because they are colored. Well might Russia laugh when America talks of its Statue of Liberty and goes through the hypocritical performance of saluting its flag of liberty.<sup>59</sup>

With the negative attention directed toward North Carolina, Hodges needed to take action to help manage the state's reputation.

### **Hodges Reacts**

After the public learned of the kissing case, be it via the news media or a CCRI letter, postcard, or petition, members of the public wrote to Hodges to express their opinions in language that was clear and direct. Although the historical documents do not specify when Hodges first became aware of the kissing case, one of the first letters he received was on November 17 from an electronics consultant in Chicago, who referenced an item about the case in his local paper.<sup>60</sup> In a November 19 memo to the governor, his administrative aide Robert Giles noted that Hodges had recently seen newspaper stories about the case.<sup>61</sup> To gain a better understanding of the situation, Giles contacted Blaine Madison, commissioner of the North Carolina Board of Correction and Training. Madison responded that Union County Juvenile Court Judge J. Hampton Price had informed him the boys were on probation; they molested the girl and therefore had been committed to the reformatory for their own safety. Although Hodges received only a few letters in November and the publicity about the case had not yet reached its apex, he nevertheless was compelled to address it in one of his weekly press conferences. In preparation, Giles requested a statement from Judge Price.

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<sup>59</sup> Mrs. K. Cayden, York, England, to Gov. Hodges, December 20, 1958, Hodges papers, box 423. Ernest Green, Sussex, UK, to Gov. Hodges, December 22, 1958, both in Hodges papers, box 423 and 422, respectively.

<sup>60</sup> Jerome Tannenbaum, Chicago, IL, to Gov. Hodges, November 17, 1959, Hodges papers, box 422.

<sup>61</sup> Robert Giles to Gov. Hodges, November 19, 1958, Hodges papers, box 422.

Price's account first reaffirmed that North Carolina's juvenile courts did not as a rule publish the names and crimes of juvenile offenders. However due to the widespread publicity generated by "disinterested parties who do not know the facts" and "slanted the facts in order to gain sympathy for the juveniles and gain publicity for themselves, and create strife in their home community," Price reversed North Carolina's policy and released the boys' names.<sup>62</sup> In a letter to a woman from Illinois who had written to Hodges protesting the boys' sentencing, Giles was later more specific about why the boys' records were made public, explaining that "the detailed information on these juvenile cases is not ordinarily made public, but since a studied effort was evidently made by some irresponsible Negro people in this particular case to exploit the matter, an exception has been made."<sup>63</sup> In his statement, Price outlined the boys' offenses: They had on separate occasions stolen a lawn mower, a ham, and a bicycle. They roamed the streets and as a result, "many complaints were coming in from various parts of the city."<sup>64</sup> Price laid blame with their working mothers, noting they could not control their sons. He wrote, "They are not at home in the daytime [*sic*], they keep no proper supervision over their children."<sup>65</sup>

During a press conference, Hodges echoed the points in Price's statement, with particular emphasis on the boys' records and their families' living conditions.<sup>66</sup> In response to news stories that the boys were denied counsel, Hodges countered by saying the mothers did not request counsel. Hodges's comments were carried by the mainstream white press and the black press,

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<sup>62</sup> Statement from J. Hampton Price, Judge of the Juvenile Court, Union County, North Carolina to the Honorable Luther H. Hodges, Governor of North Carolina, via Western Union, November 26, 1958, Hodges papers, box 422.

<sup>63</sup> Robert E. Giles to Georgianne Bonita, Rockford, IL, December 3, 1959, Hodges papers, box 422.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> "At Press Conference: Hodges Gives Facts on Juvenile Story," *Monroe Journal*, November 28, 1958.

which prompted Robert Williams to write to Hodges to refute some of Price's statements.<sup>67</sup>

Williams wrote, "My dear Governor, while parroting the words of one Mr. J. Hampton Price, you stated that the two little Negro boys involved in the Carolina kissing incident did not request counsel. No, Mr. Hodges, they did not, because their parents were informed there were no charges against them."<sup>68</sup>

In addition, Williams deflected blame leveled at Jennie Simpson and Evelyn Thompson and directed it instead at social policy.

Yes, Mr. Hodges I agree that children should not be left to roam the streets fatherless while their poor mothers shift for the bare necessities of life. Have you stopped to ask yourself what the local Welfare Department should have done Governor? Sure the boys had a juvenile record but is that any excuse to deny them equal protection under the law? We are not trying to white wash their records Governor, we ask only that they not be swallowed up as victims of the maelstrom of white supremacy. We merely ask that you seek the truth by events of fact rather than through prejudice and hearsay.<sup>69</sup>

Mrs. Simpson was a widow and Mrs. Thompson's husband had deserted the family. On the fifteen dollars a week they earned as domestics, Simpson was responsible for four children who lived at home, whereas Thompson had six children at home. In 1959, 18.9 percent of non-white families in Monroe had incomes under \$1,000 per year, versus 7.4 percent for white families.<sup>70</sup> Despite their economic circumstances, the mothers had been denied welfare. Williams believed welfare decisions in Monroe were determined by race, and given that there were a

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<sup>67</sup> See for example "Negro Case Clarified: North Carolina Says 2 Boys Are in Training School," *New York Times*, November 27, 1958, and "Letters Protest Kissing Life Terms for 2 Boys," *Atlanta Daily World*, November 28, 1958.

<sup>68</sup> Robert Williams to Gov. Hodges, November 30, 1958, Hodges papers, box 422.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Virginia A.S. Kendrick, *Looking Back at Monroe's History* (Charlotte: Delmar, 1995), 19.



number of economically needy families in Monroe, a white family in Monroe would receive welfare before a black family would.<sup>71</sup>

Giles forwarded a copy of Williams's letter to Price, asking "whether or not you think the Governor should make some reply to it."<sup>72</sup> Price responded that Williams craved publicity and a reply would only fuel his efforts to seek attention.

#### Reverend Canon Collins

Hodges was disturbed by all of the letters he received in response to the kissing case, but correspondence he received from the Rev. Canon John Collins of St. Paul's Cathedral in London caused him particular consternation. Collins wrote,

Urge you quash the sentence passed upon the two Negro boys Fuzzy Simpson and Hanover Thompson and let them return to their homes. Millions the world over will be deeply shocked by what has happened. Such inhumanity and such injustice surely belie profession of belief in liberal and Christian values and in the charter of human rights and make a mockery of the claims of the west to stand for freedom and justice for all regardless of creed, race or color.<sup>73</sup>

Collins had also sent his telegram to the press.<sup>74</sup> Hodges replied, "Ordinarily I do not undertake to correspond with individuals through the medium of the newspapers. I do so in this instance because of the prominence of your position and on the assumption that you may have an interest in considering a few facts in this case which I will endeavor to relate to you."<sup>75</sup> Hodges then proceeded to make his arguments and correct Collins's characterization of the incident. He attached a report from Juvenile Court Judge Hampton Price, noting that he had "absolutely no

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<sup>71</sup> Robert Williams to Gov. Hodges, November 30, 1958, Hodges papers, box 422

<sup>72</sup> Robert E. Giles to Honorable J. Hampton Price, Hodges papers, box 422.

<sup>73</sup> Telegram from Rev. Canon L. John Collins to Gov. Hodges, December 19, 1958, Hodges papers, box 422.

<sup>74</sup> See "N.C. Governor Gets Kissing Case Protest" *Richmond News Leader*, December 23, 1959.

<sup>75</sup> Gov. Hodges to Rev. Canon L. John Collins, January 2, 1959, Hodges papers, box 422.

reason to doubt the integrity of this official.”<sup>76</sup> He then explained that the boys were neither sentenced to life imprisonment, nor were they convicted of a crime. “Under North Carolina law, a juvenile is not convicted of a criminal offense but the Court is authorized to commit the juvenile to a training school. This applies in all cases, regardless of race.” Hodges’s next point centered on the boys’ home environment, claiming it “leaves a lot to be desired” and “unbelievable as it may seem to you, the circumstances and surroundings at the Morrison Training School to which these young boys were committed are usually far superior and more conducive to good conduct than the homes from which those committed come.”<sup>77</sup> In addition, Hodges added that the head and staff of the training school are “Negro and are well qualified by experience and education for their positions.” After inviting Collins to North Carolina to see for himself “what is actually going on in our State relating to juvenile offenses and racial relations in general,” Hodges recounted newspapers stories he read of race-related riots in Notting Hill, London.<sup>78</sup> He claimed those riots were more violent than anything that occurred in North Carolina, adding that he would not be so presumptuous to hold London officials responsible, nor would he judge all of England based on newspaper stories of the riots.<sup>79</sup>

In response to an editorial supporting Hodges in the Danville, Virginia *Bee* that described Canon Collins as meddlesome, Hodges wrote, “I do not know which of my friends there wrote the editorial in your Friday, December 26, issue entitled ‘Meddlesome Canons.’ I would like to

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

say it is a good one.”<sup>80</sup> Hodges enclosed a copy of a letter he had recently sent to Collins and planned to release at a January 8 press conference.

In his January 22 response to Hodges, Collins agreed that he was interested in publicity because he believed that acts of racial discrimination, regardless of where they occurred, should be publicized worldwide.<sup>81</sup> He then reiterated his reasons for protesting: the fact that a black boy kissing a white girl resulted in court proceedings against the boy, and his belief that if the boys had been white and in a similar circumstance, they would not have been charged and sentenced. In concluding, Collins wrote that he suspected the events transpired as they did due to racial discrimination.

After receiving Collins’s second letter, Hodges penned another two-page response, which he began with the following sentence: “I have your letter of January 22, and in all candor, I must say that your zeal for publicity seems still to outstrip your desire for factual information.”<sup>82</sup> Hodges then urged Collins to re-read Judge Price’s report. Next, he argued that regardless of location, be it London or North Carolina, if “a man forced a woman to be confined in a given place until she consented, against her will, to kiss him, that would clearly constitute assault and battery.”<sup>83</sup> In making this point, Hodges disregarded that the kiss in this case was exchanged between children, not adults. However, equating a child’s kiss with that of an adult may be less

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<sup>80</sup> Gov. Hodges to Editorial Department, Register Publishing Company, January 6, 1959, Hodges papers, box 423. See also “Meddlesome Canons,” *Danville (VA) Bee*, December 26, 1958.

<sup>81</sup> Rev. Canon L. John Collins to Gov. Hodges, January 22, 1959, Hodges papers, box 422. For examples of news coverage about Collins’s correspondence with Hodges, see “N.C. Governor Gets Kissing Case Protest From London,” *Savannah Tribune*, January 10, 1959 and “Kiddie Kissing Case Draws Fire Of An English Cathedral Canon,” *Westchester (NY) County Press*, January 17, 1959.

<sup>82</sup> Gov. Hodges to Canon L. John Collins, February 2, 1959, Hodges papers, box 422.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*

an act of forgetfulness than a reflection of southern racial norms. In the South, a nine-year-old black boy supposedly forcing a seven-year-old white girl to kiss him is a fissure in the region's most inviolable law regarding race relations. An act of miscegenation, particularly when it involves a black male and white female, had to be punished, regardless of the age of the offender.

Further, in his response to Collins, Hodges did not clarify that in the South, when a man confines a woman and forces her to kiss him against her will, such behavior is always considered assault and battery when the man is black and the woman is white. On the other hand, when the man is white and the woman is black, that behavior may be excused for any number of reasons, such as merely engaging in drunken fun by the man, as in Lewis Medlin's case.<sup>84</sup>

Without mentioning its name, Hodges referred to "the Negro organization which has been exploiting this case," presumably indicating the NAACP or CCRI.<sup>85</sup> By this time, Hodges was clearly irritated with Canon Collins. In an exchange with the *State's* Bill Sharpe, both men refer to Collins derisively as "reverunt" Collins.<sup>86</sup>

### **Hodges's Public Relations Strategies, Tactics, and Frames**

As was the case with the CCRI, Hodges did not have a written public relations plan for the kissing case in which he articulated strategies and tactics. However, Hodges knew the value of public relations.<sup>87</sup> As news of the kissing case spread and letters began to suggest the negative

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<sup>84</sup> Transcript, 326-327, Cohen papers, box 1, folder 8. Lewis Medlin was a white man accused of sexually assaulting Mary Ruth Reid, a pregnant black woman.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> Gov. Hodges to Bill Sharpe, January 19, 1959, Hodges papers, box 423.

<sup>87</sup> Among the public relations tactics Hodges employed in his administration were weekly press conferences. For more information on his press conferences, see Hodges papers, box 421, January 1-June 30, 1959 folder. Also, Hodges later penned an article about the importance of public relations for government for the *Public Relations*

impact of the case on his reputation and the state's, he launched a reactive public relations program. Hodges's strategies, tactics, and the frames in his public relations material were intertwined, and he employed them simultaneously. This section examines his strategies, tactics, and frames, as well as how the CCRI responded to Hodges's public relations efforts.

### Engage Protesters and Correct Misperceptions

One of Hodges's strategies was to engage directly with protesters. Protesters expressed their dissent via letters, and Hodges used the same medium to engage with them. His tactic was to respond individually to each letter he received, and he noted that he had "taken particular pains to write each one of them, especially abroad."<sup>88</sup> This strategy and tactic are linked with Hodges's next strategy, which was to correct what he considered were misrepresentations about the case. Hodges believed that if the public had the correct information, they would find the state's handling of the case reasonable. Based on his tactics, he believed the best way to communicate the correct facts about the case was by relaying them directly to those who voiced a dissenting opinion. With this personal appeal, Hodges hoped to change their opinions.

In implementing the tactics supporting this strategy, Hodges identified what he thought were the key falsehoods about the case, and he developed an argument with what he claimed was the correct information. First, Hodges sought to correct reports that the boys had been sentenced for life or sent to prison. For example in one response, he wrote,

This is a school for young juvenile delinquents. It is not a prison. It so happens that the Superintendent of the School is a Negro and is well qualified by experience and education for the position. Under the laws of this State, a juvenile is committed to a training school by the Court, and it is up to the school officials as to how long he will

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*Journal*, the organ of the Public Relations Society of America. See Governor Luther H. Hodges, "Public Relations—A Must for Good Government," *Public Relations Journal* 16, no. 4 (April 1960): 6-12.

<sup>88</sup> Luther H. Hodges to Mr. Lee Anderson, January 19, 1959, Hodges papers, box 422.

remain. It is the accepted policy of the institutions involved to release the children to their families as soon as it appears the family is able and willing to give some care and guidance to the child. These same laws apply to all such cases whether white or Negro children are involved.<sup>89</sup>

Hodges or Giles penned a different response to each letter they received, depending on the issues raised by the sender. In another response, they addressed the same issue of the boys' incarceration, albeit with different language.

These boys have never been "sentenced to prison." They were not even convicted of a "crime." They were brought into juvenile Court and upon proper findings that they were delinquent were then committed to the Morrison Training School at Hoffman, North Carolina. The Morrison Training School is a school and not a prison.<sup>90</sup>

That fact that the Morrison Training School was not a prison was true, but juveniles committed to it were unable to leave of their own accord. At the time of the kissing case, if juvenile delinquents were sentenced and sent to a facility for rehabilitation, that facility was referred to as a reformatory. Hodges approached the issue of a prison versus a reformatory as one of word choice—a miscalculation, since the public was incensed that the boys were sentenced at all, and that they were sentenced to a facility they were not free to leave for at least 12 years. Hodges ignored this concern by attempting to present the facility to which the boys had been sent as being preferential to a prison. However, as *London News Chronicle* reporter Joyce Egginton had discovered, Morrison Training School was little more than "an old-fashioned building with few comforts."<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> Luther H. Hodges to Miss Jessica Pearlman, Maplewood, NJ, December 10, 1958, Hodges papers, box 423. For a similar response, see Dr. Arthur Robinson, Ozone Park, NY to the Gov. Hodges, December 7, 1958, and Robert E. Giles to Dr. Arthur Robinson, December 16, 1958, both in Hodges papers, box 423.

<sup>90</sup> Robert E. Giles to Cecelia Paula, NY, January 5, 1959, Hodges papers, box 423.

<sup>91</sup> Joyce Egginton, "The Negro Children in Jail for a Kiss," *London News Chronicle*, December 15, 1958.

If Hodges was irritated by the letters, his aide Robert Giles, who responded to some of the letters on the Governor's behalf, was equally so. Much of the correspondence from Giles is brusque and makes no attempt to hide his irascibility. He seems particularly vexed that anyone would take the time to write to the Governor to protest the boys' sentencing. To the author of one letter who expressed shock at the kissing case, Giles wrote, "You state that you are 'shocked' at what has happened to these two young boys."<sup>92</sup> He enclosed two reports prepared by Price and Madison, respectively, and implored the letter's author to read them. "The Governor has been 'shocked' that there has been such widespread misinformation publicized on this matter. It appears that such has been done by people who are interested in publicity as such, with probably little real personal interest in the boys themselves and apparently no interest whatever in the actual truth of these matters."<sup>93</sup>

An exasperated Giles wrote to another correspondent, "Although the tone of your letter does not hold out much hope that you are particularly interested in considering the basic facts of the case involving the two young Negro boys, I would nevertheless like to make an attempt to give them to you."<sup>94</sup> Giles blamed the media for the misrepresentation. "The plain fact of the situation is these young boys have not been grossly mistreated as reported by the papers, nor were they snatched away from the loving arms of good mothers who were giving them good homes."<sup>95</sup> This letter writer, who hailed from Amsterdam, had enclosed two dollars and asked that the money be given to the boys. Giles replied, "The two \$1.00 bills which you enclosed with

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<sup>92</sup> Robert Giles to Cecelia Paula, NY, January 5, 1959. Quotation marks around "shocked" included in original letter.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> Robert E. Giles to Craig Walton, Vallejo, CA, February 5, 1959, Hodges papers, box 423.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

your letter are returned herewith, with the suggestion, if you desire, that you make any money contribution directly to the families involved rather than to State officials.”<sup>96</sup> Giles often concluded his replies by urging the letter writer to come to North Carolina to see how the state was handling race relations.

You are welcome to visit North Carolina and the Morrison Training School at any time to see for yourself what this State is endeavoring to do to help these young people. If you could see at firsthand what is actually being done relating to juvenile offenses, you may not agree with everything but I believe you would have a greatly different concept of this particular State. We are hardly as barbaric and uncivilized as we have been painted in some lurid newspaper accounts recently.<sup>97</sup>

Although Giles and Hodges often refer to newspapers as the source of disinformation, they do not cite specific papers. With the exception of local black newspapers such as the *Carolina Times*, stories about the kissing case in the North Carolina press supported the state’s actions, as did articles in other southern newspapers.<sup>98</sup> Hodges and Giles were most likely referring to Ted Poston’s stories in the *New York Post*, which were supportive of the boys.<sup>99</sup> The *New York Times* was the only metropolitan daily that covered the kissing case regularly, albeit not extensively, and its coverage was neutral.<sup>100</sup> In addition, Hodges began receiving correspondence from England after the *London News Chronicle* article ran.<sup>101</sup> Many of the English letter writers referenced the article, which was supportive of the boys; some enclosed a

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<sup>96</sup> Robert Giles to G. Vink, Amsterdam, Netherlands, February 16, 1959, Hodges papers, box 423.

<sup>97</sup> Robert E. Giles to Barbara Easton, NY, January 6, 1959, Hodges papers, box 422.

<sup>98</sup> For example, see “Governor Says NAACP Making Propaganda Out of Monroe Case,” *Raleigh News & Observer*, January 16, 1959.

<sup>99</sup> For example, see “NAACP Asks Eisenhower to Look Into ‘Justice’ in N.C.,” *New York Post*, November 13, 1958.

<sup>100</sup> For example, see “Negro Case Clarified,” *New York Times*, November 27, 1958; “NAACP Loses Plea, Court Upholds Sentencing of Boys to Reform School,” *New York Times*, January 13, 1959.

<sup>101</sup> See Joyce Egginton, “The Negro Children in Jail for a Kiss,” *London News Chronicle*, December 18, 1958.



copy of the article with their correspondence to Hodges. Therefore, Hodges and Giles probably included that story in their account of newspaper propaganda.

### Enlist Expert Opinion

Another strategy Hodges employed was to enlist expert opinion. To verify his points and present what he thought were the correct facts of the case, Hodges called upon North Carolina authorities who oversaw departments involved in the kissing case. In addition to using Price's statement in his November press conference, Hodges incorporated elements of it in his correspondence with the public. He often included the following paragraph to introduce the judge's declaration:

Much to my distress a great deal of patently false information and half-truths have been widely publicized in connection with this case. I am taking the liberty of sending you a report on this matter from the Judge of the Juvenile Court involved, and also a recent statement of facts concerning the family situation of both these young boys issued by the Commissioner of our training schools.<sup>102</sup>

In one of the earliest letters he received, Hodges was asked by a man from Chicago if the boys had been denied counsel and a chance to confront their accuser and whether the boys would have received the same treatment had they been white.<sup>103</sup> In his reply, Giles did not address either issue, which resulted in a second letter from the Chicagoan, in which he thanked Giles for the information but noted that his questions had not been answered. Giles's second letter included J. Hampton Price's report. He noted, "The Governor requested this report last week because of the widespread misinformation about this case."<sup>104</sup> Giles explained that as stated in the official report, the mothers did not request counsel and if they had, the court would have

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<sup>102</sup> Gov. Hodges to J.O. Weir, Kent, England, January 8, 1959, Hodges papers, box 423.

<sup>103</sup> Jerome Tannenbaum, Chicago to Gov. Hodges, November 17, 1958, Hodges papers, box 423.

<sup>104</sup> Robert Giles to Jerome Tannenbaum, December 5, 1958, Hodges papers, box 423.

appointed them representation.<sup>105</sup> Giles claimed he was unable to address whether or not the boys were able to confront their accuser because the official report did not indicate if the witnesses were present at the hearing.

In addition to Judge Price's statement explaining the boys' sentencing, Hodges asked North Carolina Board of Correction and Training Commissioner Blaine Madison to prepare a statement in response to the CCRI's and NAACP's legal actions to free the boys. Madison's four-page statement first addressed the alleged misperception that the boys had been sent to prison.

Contrary to erroneous newspaper accounts carried in many out-of-state papers these boys were not convicted of a criminal offense and "sentenced to prison for life" or sentenced to prison for an "indeterminate period, etc." Rather, they were made wards of the State and were committed to the Training School on the occasion for such time as is determined by school officials would be in the best interests of the children. It is significant that both of these children were already on probation with the juvenile court for previous delinquency.<sup>106</sup>

One of the ways to achieve receptivity to a message is to ensure it is being delivered from a credible, trustworthy source. As the governor of North Carolina, Hodges could be perceived as credible. In addition, he obtained statements from two authorities who oversaw two departments involved in the boys' sentencing: the North Carolina Department of Correction and Training and the Union County Juvenile Court. Protesters received information from three credible sources and could therefore be assured of the accuracy of the information and the authority and expertise behind the decisions made. However in this instance, it is possible protesters could view Hodges and his experts differently. While protesters may not doubt their credibility and expertise, they

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<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

<sup>106</sup> Statement by Blaine M. Madison, Commissioner, Board of Correction and Training, January 2, 1959, Hodges papers, box 422

may doubt their objectivity. In other words, while they may be seen as reliable sources, they are also viewed as biased ones. Hodges and his two experts represent North Carolina, so predictably they would defend the state's actions. The fact that the protesters may have viewed them as biased was reinforced when Hodges removed culpability from North Carolina authorities and assigned it to Hanover and Fuzzy.

### The Blame Frame

The points Madison made reflect the most prominent frame used in Hodges's public relations material: the blame frame, in which Hodges blamed the boys and their mothers for their circumstances. This frame served two purposes: it attempted to dampen any sympathy the public may have about the boys, and it shifted blame from North Carolina authorities to the boys and their families.

As Hanson and Hanson posited, racists often blame the victim to rationalize racial injustice. In this instance, Hodges and other North Carolina authorities blamed the mothers by presenting calumnies about their characters and criticizing their home environments. In his statement, Madison added, "While the training school is never an acceptable substitute for a good home, it is definitely better for the children than a poor home, with irresponsible, and often immoral parents."<sup>107</sup> Madison wrote that Hanover Thompson's mother "claims her husband deserted her and one child in 1941 and since then she has, admittedly, lived with a succession of men. Birth records show that 10 children have been born to Evelyn Nicholson Thompson. She has a poor reputation in the community."<sup>108</sup> In describing David "Fuzzy" Simpson's home,

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<sup>107</sup> Ibid. Emphasis in original document.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

Madison claimed that Fuzzy's family members were in constant trouble, and that some of his siblings had criminal records.<sup>109</sup>

The blame frame was also directed at the boys. They were described as juvenile delinquents whose recent actions in the kissing case were an extension of their previous behavior. They had been on probation for theft and were thus responsible for their current conditions. Madison added that the boys were unsupervised and frequently roamed the streets. The mothers did not encourage the children to attend school and failed to provide adequate care and guidance.

It is obvious, therefore, that on the basis of their home situation before coming to the Morrison Training School, there are serious questions as to what sort of home conditions James Hanover Thompson and David Simpson can expect when released to their families. The Training School will continue to receive reports on these matters, and will hope that their family conditions will improve to the extent that release can be granted as soon as possible.<sup>110</sup>

Madison's statement appears to be based on a referral report for each boy to the Morrison Training School; the referral agency is listed as the Union County Juvenile Court. The documents, prepared by a caseworker for the Union County Department of Public Welfare, include background information on the boys and their families, including the names and ages of each member of the household, siblings, relatives, family income, a description of their home environments, and the boys' school records. James Thompson's mother is described as having "a poor reputation, particularly among her own race—a reputation for using her children and young girls as prostitutes."<sup>111</sup> However later in the document, the family is said to "appear happy, well-fed and nicely dressed on the numerous occasions when they have been observed

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<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid. Word underlined in original document.

<sup>111</sup> James Hanover Grissom Thompson information sheet, Hodges papers, box 422.

parading on the streets, especially on Sundays.”<sup>112</sup> Mrs. Thompson is pronounced as loving and “proud of her children, but her pattern of living and her immorality have been their only examples for living.”<sup>113</sup> The report does not specify how and when the caseworker obtained this information. When interviewed years later, Robert Williams refuted the allegation of prostitution.<sup>114</sup>

The report on the Simpson family terms their home as “sub-standard” and their neighborhood as a “trouble spot,” with frequent “bootlegging, prostitution, and fighting.”<sup>115</sup> The report also questions Fuzzy’s legitimacy, noting that he was born “exactly nine months to the day from the death” of his father Rufe Simpson, who died of tuberculosis.<sup>116</sup>

Once the Governor received Madison’s statement, Giles began including it, along with the previously-prepared statement by Judge Price, in his replies to letters the governor received about the case. He added a cover letter that noted the person had recently written to Hodges and had received a reply “with such information as was available at that time. “For your further information, the Governor has asked me to send you the enclosed recent statement by the Commissioner of the North Carolina Board of Correction and Training.”<sup>117</sup>

Hodges and his team developed messaging they believed would convince protesters that North Carolina authorities had made sound decisions regarding the boys. Foundational to this messaging was that North Carolina was right, therefore the boys were wrong. Rather than

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<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

<sup>114</sup> Transcript, 308, Cohen papers, box 1, folder 7.

<sup>115</sup> David Ezzell Simpson information sheet, Hodges papers, box 422.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

<sup>117</sup> Form letter from Robert E. Giles, January 6, 1959, Hodges papers, box 422.

recognizing the families' penury and being sympathetic to their plight, Hodges used it to pillory them. Each of the facts he presented about the boys and their mothers was couched in terms of blame and responsibility and victim and non-victim. The boys and their mothers were responsible for their circumstances, and North Carolina authorities were the actual victims in the kissing case, as they had been unfairly subjected to a propaganda campaign. Hodges was so assured of these viewpoints and he believed protesters could be swayed, too.

### The CCRI Responds

In reply to Blaine Madison's statement, the CCRI prepared a rejoinder, sent over Robert Williams's signature. The CCRI focused on the racial issue, which was absent from Hodges's material, arguing that North Carolina officials attempted to "whitewash the racist reason for the imprisonment of these two boys and to obscure and distort the facts."<sup>118</sup> The CCRI's four-page rebuttal letter also questioned the charges against the boys, asking if they were sentenced for their lack of a proper home atmosphere. Furthermore, the letter explained that the boys, like most black children in North Carolina, lived in poverty. Both mothers had been denied welfare, and their salaries as domestics did little to attenuate the families' impecuniosity. "It is not the fault of the parents but of the system of discrimination which keeps Negroes from fair employment opportunities and forces widowed mothers out of the home to work long hours for \$15 a week."<sup>119</sup> The letter admonished Madison for claiming the boys were committed because they are delinquents with long criminal records and poor home environments, when they were "sent to reform school because of their color."<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> Robert F. Williams to Blaine M. Madison, January 3, 1959, CCRI papers, box 1, folder 2.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

In addition to replying directly to Madison, the CCRI developed and distributed a press release that included the full text of Williams's reply.<sup>121</sup> In its response, the CCRI used a racism frame, thereby attempting to replace Hodges's blame frame with a racism frame. This approach also pointed out that racism was the reason Hodges used the blame frame. Of the CCRI's rebuttal letter, Braden commented that it was the "best reply to the hash dished up by the North Carolina Board of Correction and Training." He added, "You might send it to those who are disturbed by this typically racist propaganda. I don't have to point out to you that this is a classic example of the Southern pattern—depress, suppress, and oppress the Negro and then give him hell and knock him around for being such a depressed, suppressed, and oppressed victim of suppression and oppression."<sup>122</sup>

A few days after Giles began sending Madison's statement, Hodges received a confidential letter from North Carolina Attorney General Malcolm Seawell. Hodges had asked if Seawell had any advice for further handling the kissing case on the state level. Seawell first updated Hodges on the eviction proceedings against Mrs. Thompson, which Conrad Lynn had been able to halt temporarily because the eviction papers had been improperly drawn.<sup>123</sup> Seawell then surmised that the juvenile court heard the boys' case, found them delinquent, and sent them to a training school. Seawell also noted that these actions were all taken "in a legal way" and that the governor had little recourse in the matter.<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> "North Carolina Negro Leader Charges That Officials Try to Whitewash Kissing Case," press release, January 5, 1959, CCRI papers, box 2, folder 7. For an example of how the press release was used by the press, see "Sees Attempted Whitewash in Kissing Case: Says Race was the Real Issue," *Kansas City Call*, January 16, 1959.

<sup>122</sup> Carl Braden to George Weissman, January 25, 1959, CCRI papers, box 1, folder 2.

<sup>123</sup> Malcolm Seawell to Honorable Luther H. Hodges, January 8, 1959, Hodges papers, box 423.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*

As governor, you do not have the power to commute or to pardon either or both of the boys, since they had not been convicted of a crime but have been detained because they have been declared delinquent and in need of the protection of the court. The record in the case convinces me that no successful effort can be made to release either of the boys from correctional detention.<sup>125</sup>

Seawell added that he had information to be released to the press “if things are stirred up by the NAACP or others.” Seawell was referring to information he had obtained on the CCRI’s founding members. He described Conrad Lynn as having “no ability as an attorney,” and he branded Carl Braden a communist. Seawell then provided detail about Dr. Perry’s abortion conviction and the Braden’s sedition charges. To gather additional information on the CCRI leaders, Seawell planned to have the State Bureau of Investigation examine their backgrounds. As part of his preliminary inquiry, Seawell discovered Braden had previously been in North Carolina soliciting funds for the SCEF. Seawell assured Hodges that he would place Braden under surveillance should he return to the state.

Hodges was obviously disturbed by the negative attention. Recognizing the potential for additional adverse publicity, he urged Union County authorities to consider delaying the eviction proceedings that Thompson’s landlord had begun after learning of the kissing incident. One letter writer from England commented on the eviction proceedings: “As a fair-minded Englishman I consider that your recent treatment of the small Negro boy who was sent to a reformatory for kissing a white girl was a despicable and inhuman act; and that the follow up action in endeavoring to evict his mother (Mrs. Evelyn Thompson) from her humble home indicates a sad decline in your assessment of human values.”<sup>126</sup> Seeking advice from Seawell, Hodges wrote:

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<sup>125</sup> Ibid.

<sup>126</sup> (Name illegible), Buckinghamshire, England, to Governor of North Carolina, December 11, 1958, Hodges papers, box 423.



If it is true as has been reported that the white landlord has refused to accept rent and is trying to evict the Thompson woman, I think that is rather unfortunate. Regardless of the legal rights of the landlord to refuse to continue to rent to this person, it does have the effect at this time of simply stirring up the matter and adding fuel to the propaganda which has been greatly exploited in this whole case. If you do talk with Mr. Price, it might be possible for you to suggest this consideration to him.<sup>127</sup>

After receiving Hodges's letter, Seawell phoned J. Hampton Price regarding the eviction notice.<sup>128</sup> Price spoke to the landlord and discovered Mrs. Thompson was already planning to move from the premises but if she did not, the landlord agreed to consult with Price before taking any actions. Hodges believed further eviction proceedings against Mrs. Thompson would exacerbate the negative publicity. To avoid further press coverage on the matter, Hodges took action, albeit indirectly, by suggesting that eviction proceeding be delayed.

#### The Blame Frame and the Saviors

In addition to blaming the victims for creating their own circumstances and thereby relieving the perpetrator of responsibility, Hodges's blame frame also presented North Carolina authorities as saviors. They believed the boys' circumstances in the reformatory were better than those in their homes, therefore they had "rescued" James and Fuzzy from abhorrent living conditions. North Carolina authorities cast themselves as acting in the boys' best interests, which was yet another reason the state was not to be reproached for its actions in the kissing case. Urging a letter writer to read Price's and Madison's reports, Giles asked, "Will you please read carefully both of these statements, and give particular consideration to the home situation which both of these young boys had, and which was undoubtedly directly responsible for their

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<sup>127</sup> Gov. Hodges to Malcom B. Seawell, January 7, 1959, Hodges papers, box 422.

<sup>128</sup> Malcolm Seawell to Gov. Hodges, January 8, 1959, Hodges papers, box 422.

delinquency.”<sup>129</sup> Additional examples of how Hodges incorporated these aspects of the blame frame in his replies are below:

Incredible as it may seem to you, there is every indication that Hanover Thompson and David Simpson have a far better “home” at this time at the Morrison Training School than they ever had or ever will have with their own families.<sup>130</sup>

But the plain fact of the situation is these young boys have not been grossly mistreated as reported by the papers, nor were they snatched away from the loving arms of good mothers who were giving them good homes.<sup>131</sup>

The blame frame was also used by the North Carolina news media. In an article in the *Union Mail*, the reporter believed that Monroe was the victim in the kissing case, as the city has been subjected to unwanted and undeserved publicity that damaged its reputation, especially given that “racial relations in this county have always been of the best.”<sup>132</sup> The boys’ situation was a natural consequence of their behavior, since “incorrigibles have to be punished.”<sup>133</sup> The reporter wrote that white boys in North Carolina were also sent to reform schools, which was proof that racism was not a factor in Hanover’s and Fuzzy’s sentencing. “Now is the time for us to let the world know—if the world is interested—that Union County feels no antipathy toward the Negro race. We have always thought of them as being an important part of our community life.”<sup>134</sup> This article illustrates that those who harbored racist attitudes were often unaware that they did so. For example, blacks in Monroe would probably have disagreed with this reporter’s

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<sup>129</sup> Robert E. Giles to Fred Rinaldo, Sherman Oaks, CA, February 2, 1959, Hodges papers, box 423.

<sup>130</sup> Robert E. Giles to Occupant, Lincoln Park, MI, January 5, 1959, Hodges papers, box 423.

<sup>131</sup> Gov. Hodges to Craig Walton, Vallejo, CA, February 5, 1959, Hodges papers, box 423.

<sup>132</sup> Margaret Baucom, “Why Did It Happen to Us,” *Union Mail*, January 16, 1959.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid.

assertion about how Monroe whites felt about blacks.<sup>135</sup> Furthermore, her view of blacks being “an important part of our community” sounds as if they were tolerated guests versus citizens with equal rights. There were numerous instances of racial injustice in Monroe, hence the need for a Committee to Combat Racial Injustice. Despite mistreatment of its black citizens, whites in Monroe thought its race relations were good, possibly because they did not view these occurrences as acts of racial injustice.<sup>136</sup> Instead, they represented the racialized social structures of the South in which whites commanded dominion.

### News Media Strategy

For his public relations campaign, Hodges received guidance from a network of advisors, including publishers and advertising executives. Bill Sharpe, publisher of the *State* and a former publicist, suggested Hodges exploit the socialist connections of some of the CCRI leaders. “I know you have already done something to counteract this bad publicity, but by hitting directly at the Communist connection we might convince some people of the insincerity of these protests.”<sup>137</sup> This red-baiting, in which individuals or groups were accused of communism, was often used by opponents of black civil rights to thwart the movement.<sup>138</sup> Taking Sharpe’s recommendation, Hodges combined it with another public relations strategy: he used the press as another channel to reach his audiences, with a focus on using a communism frame in those stories. Although coverage of the kissing case in the North Carolina press was favorable to

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<sup>135</sup> See interview with Mabel R. Williams by David C. Cecelski, August 20, 1999 K-0266, in the Southern Oral History Program Collection #4007, Southern History Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid.

<sup>137</sup> Bill Sharpe to the Honorable Luther H. Hodges, February 12, 1959, Hodges papers, box 423.

<sup>138</sup> See Dowd Hall, “The Long Civil Rights Movement and the Political Uses of the Past,” 1250, and Manfred Berg, “Black Civil Rights and Liberal Anticommunism: The NAACP in the Early Cold War,” *Journal of American History* 94, no. 1 (2007): 88.

Hodges with the exception of North Carolina's two black newspapers, he enlisted the support of Chester S. Davis, a reporter for the *Winston-Salem Journal-Sentinel*, to ensure Shape's suggestion was fully manifested in a news story.<sup>139</sup> Davis penned two news articles that appeared in the same issue of the paper, one with the headline "Communist Front Shouts Kissing Case to the World" and the other headlined "Press in North Gives Distorted Versions."<sup>140</sup> In the former article, Davis adopted the communism frame to discredit the CCRI and its founding members. He reported that Conrad Lynn was identified with a number of organizations believed to be communist fronts. Davis labeled Carl Braden as "a dedicated Communist" and reported his sedition conviction. He referred to L. E. Austin and C. K. Steele as leaders in the fight for Negro equal rights. Davis described Dr. Perry by writing of his ongoing abortion trial for allegedly performing an abortion on a white woman. Regarding Williams, Davis claimed that other black leaders dubbed Williams as overly aggressive, extreme, and "inclined to think of himself as a martyr."<sup>141</sup> In explaining how the news of the kissing case was first reported, Davis described Ted Poston's *New York Post* article as a "sob-sister sort of report that emphasized the kissing incident and overlooked the record of previous delinquency and the home background of the boys."<sup>142</sup>

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<sup>139</sup> Tyson, *Radio Free Dixie*, 132. For an example of how North Carolina press stories about the kissing case were favorable to Hodges, see "Reds Splash Kissing Case," and "Governor Says NAACP Making Propaganda Out of Monroe Case," both in *Raleigh News & Observer*, January 16, 1959; "Probe Case Is Scored by Hodges, Kissing Incident Seen Propaganda," *Greensboro Daily News*, January 16, 1959; Heath Thomas "Were Scales of Justice Balanced in Union's Famous Kissing Case?," *Salisbury Post*, January 25, 1959; Guy Munger, "Uproar Over Monroe 'Kissing Case'—Misinformation or Martyrdom?," *Greensboro Daily News*, January 25, 1959;

<sup>140</sup> Chester S. Davis, "Communist Front Shouts Kissing Case to the World," and "Press in North Gives Distorted Versions," *Winston-Salem Journal-Sentinel*, February 8, 1959.

<sup>141</sup> Davis, "Communist Front Shouts Kissing Case to the World."

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.* Davis was referencing sob-sister journalism, which originated in the early 1900s when editors assigned female reporters to cover topics of a sentimental nature. Editors believed that women could provide better emotional, heart-rending, and tear-producing reportage than could men. In using this term, Davis attempted to

In addition, Davis incorrectly reported that the CCRI had, “on the strength of its skillful blending of truth, half-truth and deliberate lies,” raised “substantial amounts of money” for the boys, with no accounting for the funds.<sup>143</sup> Davis argued the money was used to “finance a propaganda campaign designed to discredit North Carolina in the eyes of the world.”<sup>144</sup> Yet the CCRI’s campaign was not focused on fundraising; it was centered on generating awareness of the boys’ dilemma and urging the public to contact Hodges demanding that he release the boys.

Furthermore, to report the story Davis did not contact the CCRI’s leaders, nor had he spoken to the boys, their mothers, or the superintendent of the Morrison Training School. Davis’s articles, which were news stories and not opinion pieces, were biased towards Hodges’s position, and he focused on attacking the CCRI, its leaders, and its financial integrity. It appears Davis relied on a single source—Hodges, whom he portrayed as an unfairly persecuted champion of a beleaguered state.

Gov. Luther Hodges, deluged by mail berating him for tolerating this imprisonment of two children because of a prank, has patiently tried to answer the charges made against North Carolina on a letter-by-letter basis. But, judging by his file—which continues to grow without letup and which took five hours of this reporter’s time just to leaf through—his patience gains little reward. He is in the position of a man trying to combat a propaganda story which the world press somehow wants to believe.<sup>145</sup>

Incorporating the blame frame, Davis bemoaned his assertion that North Carolina’s reputation for “liberal race relations” and for “simple human decency” had been smeared by a

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portray Poston’s article as a mawkish report that included what Davis believed were salient facts. See Phyllis Leslie Abramson, *Sob Sister Journalism* 23 (New York: Greenwood, 1990), 2.

<sup>143</sup> Davis, “Communist Front Shouts Kissing Case to the World.” For information on the CCRI’s financial records, see “Financial Statement, CCRI, From Start of Committee (Dec. 10, 1958) thru Feb. 15, 1959,” CCRI papers, box 2, folder 7.

<sup>144</sup> Davis, “Communist Front Shouts Kissing Case to the World.”

<sup>145</sup> Ibid.

propaganda attack. He surmised that blame would ultimately rest with the NAACP because it allowed two of its officers to be used by a communist front organization.

In Davis's accompanying article, "Press in North Gives Distorted Versions," he attacked the "Communist and race press" for consistently reporting the kissing case "as if it involved nothing more than a nine-year-old Negro boy extracting a kiss from a seven-year-old white girl."<sup>146</sup> As a result of that coverage, readers around the world had mistakenly "concluded that racial tensions in North Carolina have reached the point where stealing a simple kiss from a white girl is enough to put two Negro youngsters into jail for life imprisonment." Davis wrote that such a reaction as "incredible when you take the time to consider the actual facts of the case."<sup>147</sup> In the remainder of the article, he provides background information on the kissing incident, the hearing, and each instance of the boys' previous delinquencies. Furthermore, he vilified the mothers and the home environments they created. Relying on the referral reports prepared by the Union County Department of Welfare, Davis described the families' neighborhood as "a trouble spot for fighting, bootlegging, and prostitution."<sup>148</sup> To validate this claim, Davis quoted the NAACP's Kelly Alexander, who apparently referred to the neighborhood as "a Negro ghetto of the worst possible sort."<sup>149</sup> Yet there is no indication in the historical documents that Davis interviewed Alexander or that Alexander previously made this statement.

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<sup>146</sup> Chester Davis, "Press in North Gives Distorted Versions," *Winston-Salem Journal and Sentinel*, February 8, 1959.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid.

<sup>149</sup> Davis, "Press in North Gives Distorted Versions."

In addition to the communism frame, Davis used the blame frame liberally throughout both articles. The mothers were to blame for the boys' poor living conditions, and the boys were to blame because they had a history of bad behavior. Repeating information in the Union County Welfare Department report, Davis wrote that Thompson had more children than she could adequately care for. He also cited the report's claim that Thompson used her daughters in prostitution, and he reported that some of Fuzzy's siblings were also juvenile delinquents. The welfare reports were prepared after the boys were jailed and right before their hearings, therefore; it is unclear if these were mendacious claims about the mothers that were developed to support North Carolina's actions.<sup>150</sup> Additionally, Davis wrote that Hanover's and Fuzzy's scholastic performance was characterized by truancy and poor grades.

Again, it appears Davis made no attempt to verify the information he reported, beyond relying on material Hodges gave him. There is no information in the historical documents to indicate he went to Monroe, nor that he interviewed or attempted to interview the boys, their mothers, or the CCRI members. Towards the end of the article, Davis raised the question as to whether the same outcome would have occurred had the boys been white, possibly because that same question had been posed by many of those who wrote to Hodges. Davis surmised that the answer to that question was debatable, as "the argument is one of technique, not the propriety of the end result."<sup>151</sup> Davis may have been referring to how the boys were held and sentenced: jailed incommunicado for six days and denied an opportunity to confront their accuser or consult legal counsel. But in any case, Davis circumvented the question. Hodges never answered the question in his correspondence. How could he, without disclosing that the boys' treatment was

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<sup>150</sup> James Hanover Grissom Thompson and David Ezzell Simpson information sheets, Hodges papers, box 422.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid.

related to race? In a similar incident that occurred in a North Carolina town about 50 miles northwest of Monroe, two white men in their late twenties assaulted a fifteen-year-old white delinquent girl while she was in jail.<sup>152</sup> A local court convicted the men of contributing to the delinquency of a minor, but the judge overturned the conviction. “If this court holds that a boy can’t kiss a pretty girl, I don’t know what will happen to this country,” the judge said.<sup>153</sup>

Davis found it surprising that protesters believed that racial tensions in North Carolina had escalated to the point where two black boys could be charged with assault and molestation for engaging in a kiss with a white girl. However, it was less a problem of racial tensions and more an issue of racial structures that contributed to the boys’ sentencing. Hanover and Fuzzy had not been charged for any of their other offenses, but this particular act, because it involved miscegenation, resulted in at least 10 years in a reformatory. As a supporter of the Southern racial norms, Davis was unable to see a viewpoint other than his own. To him, race and miscegenation were not factors in the boys’ sentencing. Since Hodges appeared to be Davis’s primary source, the information in his reporting mirrors the points in Hodges’s letters to the public. The difference is that news articles may provide a third-party endorsement, meaning that information conveyed through a media filter may be perceived by consumers as more fact-based and credible and less-biased than information provided in a paid advertisement or other information prepared and distributed by a self-interested party.<sup>154</sup> However in this instance, Davis was not an objective, self-interested party, and the public was unaware of his relationship

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<sup>152</sup> Tyson, *Radio Free Dixie*, 102.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid.

<sup>154</sup> Pauline A. Howes and Lynne M. Sallot, “Does Media Coverage Matter? Perspectives of Public Relations Practitioners and Business Professionals on the Value of News Coverage,” *Public Relations Journal* 8, no. 4 (2014): 2 - 3.



with Hodges. Therefore, Hodges's public relations material provided source credibility in two ways: some documents were penned from the governor, who afforded credibility due to his position, and Davis's articles offered third-party credibility from a news source.<sup>155</sup>

Although Davis's article noted that overcrowding was the only reason the boys had not been sent to the reformatory months before for their earlier offenses, this conclusion is incorrect. For their earlier offenses, Judge Price did not charge them; he merely placed them on probation and did not sentence them. The boys were jailed on October 28 for the kissing game, and on October 30 Hampton Price wrote to North Carolina Board of Correction and Training Commissioner Blaine Madison, "I realize that you are crowded, but please make room for these boys, it will be deeply appreciated."<sup>156</sup> Price added that he had no choice but to keep them in jail because of physical threats of violence and "this is a case of emergency, and the worst I have had during my long tenure of public office."<sup>157</sup> At the time of the kissing incident, the Morrison Training School had no room for the boys because of overcrowding. After they were sentenced on November 4, they were sent to the reformatory, despite its overcrowding. Had the boys stolen another ham on October 28 instead of playing a kissing game with a white girl, they might have been placed on probation again. However, the kiss with a white girl was deemed a severe-enough act that it warranted a charge, a sentence, and a term in a reform school.

In all likelihood, Davis had determined his story's tone and content long before he set to writing it. He would present the CCRI as a communist organization, denigrate its members, expose its apparent lies, and shift blame from North Carolina to the boys and their mothers. In

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<sup>155</sup> See for example Dulcie Straughan, Glen L. Bleske, and Xinshu Zhao, "Modeling Format and Source Effects of an Advocacy Message," *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* 73, no. 1 (1996): 135-146.

<sup>156</sup> J. Hampton Price to Blaine M. Madison, October 30, 1959, Hodges papers, box 422.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid.

doing so, Hodges would have a supposedly objective third party—a reporter—support and verify the points made by Judge Price and Blaine Madison. However, rather than objective reporting, the article was a public relations tactic used by Hodges to present his position.

Hodges was extremely pleased with Davis’s news articles. In a letter to *Winston-Salem Journal-Sentinel* Executive Editor Reed Sarratt, Hodges described the articles as “the most complete and accurate newspaper account of this case that anyone has had, and I am personally grateful to Chester for the careful attention he gave to it.”<sup>158</sup> Sarratt responded, “I’m so glad you’ve been able to make good use of Chester’s pieces. I felt that he did an excellent job and hoped that it would be a significant contribution to better public understanding of the true facts.”<sup>159</sup>

The *Journal-Sentinel* provided Hodges with reprints of the articles, which he included in his replies to correspondence he received. Hodges also sent Davis’s articles to all major newspapers in the United States and England.<sup>160</sup> He later developed a cover letter for the reprint in which he surmised, “A considered effort has been made to make this case a cause celebre. Although the pattern was slow in developing, this has become increasingly apparent during the past several weeks.” Hodges was disingenuous about the origin of Davis’s coverage, claiming that Davis was prompted to explore the case after reading about the boys’ situation in the *Nation*. Hodges included Davis’s bona fides, noting he was a Harvard University Law School graduate, a

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<sup>158</sup> Gov. Hodges to Reed Sarratt, February 12, 1959, Hodges papers, box 423.

<sup>159</sup> Reed Sarratt to Gov. Hodges, February 18, 1959, Hodges papers, box 423.

<sup>160</sup> Gov. Hodges to Bill Sharpe, February 19, 1959, Hodges papers, box 423.

former FBI special agent and “one of North Carolina’s most distinguished newspaperman, and is unusually qualified to make an independent study and report on this story of subject.”<sup>161</sup>

Those who corresponded with the governor now received hefty documentation in return: a cover letter from Hodges, a copy of Madison’s and Price’s statements, and a reprint of the two *Winston-Salem Journal-Sentinel* articles. The messaging was consistent throughout the material and highlighted two key points: the boys were juvenile delinquents with many previous offenses and sordid home environments; and, the state acted appropriately and in the boys’ best interests in sentencing them. Although Hodges’s material does not directly address race, by focusing on these key points it conveys that race was not a factor North Carolina’s actions.

The *State* Publisher Bill Sharpe continued to advise Hodges, to whom he sent some suggestions from a Pennsylvania-based advertising executive, John Briggs. Briggs, who praised the Chester Davis article and wrote that the Monroe authorities were merely “trying to protect the young hoodlums,” recommended that Hodges send his documents to *US News & World Report* due to its willingness to present both sides of an issue, as well as to “key editors and executives of the New York dailies, newsmagazines, columnists, radio-TV news commentators, wire services, etc.—the point being to advertise the smear within the trade.”<sup>162</sup> Briggs believed that Hodges’s material was “such wonderful ammunition that I wish someone would hit the NAACP over the head with it—hard.” Briggs added that an “opportunity to give the NAACP a taste of its own medicine does not come along very day. Pour it on; you will place the whole

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<sup>161</sup> Cover letter from Luther H. Hodges, February 12, 1959, Hodges papers, box 422.

<sup>162</sup> John Briggs to Bill Sharpe, undated, Hodges papers, box 423. *U.S. News & World Report* did not report on the kissing case.

Confederacy in your debt.”<sup>163</sup> Although there is no record that Hodges sent material to *US News & World Report*, and the magazine did not report on the kissing case, he later commented that Briggs’s suggestions were good and had already been followed.<sup>164</sup>

Once the CCRI became aware of the Davis article, it pondered how to respond. Ultimately, it determined the best course of action was to remain silent, as a response would only draw additional attention to the invidious claims in the article. Braden advised, “This sort of trash is not going to influence anybody who is inclined to be on our side anyway. In fact, it might convince some fence-sitters that we’re right. I can see no reason to bother about it.”<sup>165</sup>

While Hodges provided information to the news media in his press conferences and the southern press was favorable to him, he had no direct control regarding which aspects of his statements and press releases a reporter would choose to cover, if it was covered at all. Therefore, part of his media strategy involved taking a more direct approach—one that would assure not only coverage, but one in which Hodges determined the messages and the tone. Although the Chester Davis article appeared to be written independently by an objective reporter, it was not, although Hodges presented and used it as if it had been. The article was another way to present Hodges’s facts and would hopefully convince protesters to see that North Carolina authorities had taken the right actions.

#### The Public’s Response to Hodges’s Public Relations Strategies and Tactics

Hodges believed those who wrote to him to protest the kissing case did so because they had been given misinformation. If they had the facts, surely they would understand and accept as

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<sup>163</sup> Ibid.

<sup>164</sup> Gov. Hodges to Bill Sharpe, February 19, 1959, Hodges papers, box 423.

<sup>165</sup> Carl Braden to George Weissman, March 13, 1959, CCRI papers, box 1, folder 4.

reasonable the boys' sentencing and punishment. He was wrong. His use of facts attempted to justify the boys' sentencing, thereby masking the racism behind it. However, those who wrote to him remained unconvinced that North Carolina authorities acted in the boys' best interests.

In some instances, correspondents sent the governor a second letter after they received his public relations material, thanking him for providing clarification.

The reports enclosed give a very different picture of the case to that given in the newspapers, and one which indicates that the action taken was fully justified. If I may say so without offence, it is unfortunate that they had to be sent away on this particular charge. I think that if this had been done on an earlier charge of stealing there would probably not have been any fuss. I will give your reports as much publicity as I can though I admit frankly that I am not in sympathy with the policy of your Southern States on the question of white and coloured education and sincerely hope that they will arrive at some just solution of the problem.<sup>166</sup>

Perhaps these missives buoyed Hodges. He wrote, "Where I have reached them, I find that a lot of good is done as the answers indicate that they had been misled by the newspaper stories or by other things they had heard."<sup>167</sup> More often, however, correspondents thanked Hodges and renewed their protest against the boys' sentencing. A New York physician refuted Hodges's arguments.

Careful reading of all the detailed information which you have sent me has not lessened my distress at the severe action of the North Carolina courts which apparently does not seem to distress you at all. It is evident that these boys have not had the opportunities or the stimulus of a good home environment which the average child should expect, but the fact undeniably remains that these boys were sent to a reform school for an indeterminate sentence for an action, which, I believe, your conscience would find it difficult to call criminal in any sense of the world.<sup>168</sup>

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<sup>166</sup> J.O. Weir, Kent, UK, to Gov. Hodges, January 17, 1959, Hodges papers, box 423.

<sup>167</sup> Gov. Hodges to Mr. Lee Anderson, *Chattanooga News Free Press*, January 19, 1959, Hodges papers, box 422.

<sup>168</sup> Dr. Clark T. Case, Utica, NY to Gov. Hodges, February 18, 1959, Hodges papers, box 422. This letter writer also asked, "How can the dignified state of North Carolina call an 8-year-old boy kissing a 7-year-old girl assault of a female by a male? This makes legal nonsense. Certainly these boys have a string of minor offenses of nuisance value, but how can you call Clerk J. Hampton Price anything but arbitrary in labeling these boys major juvenile delinquents worthy of long terms at a reform school because they finally committed such a serious offense as kissing a girl. Is kissing a girl any worse offense than for hungry boys to break into a cracker machine or steal a ham?"

Hodges's emphasis on what he claimed were the boys' dreadful living conditions backfired, with some protesters suggesting the state was obliged to find better homes for them. One North Carolinian wrote, "Certainly the offense committed is not something for which two little boys should be sent to reform school, and if it is really true that their homes are such that they should not be sent home, some better way should be found to take care of them."<sup>169</sup> An editorial in the *Charlotte Observer* echoed this point, proclaiming that the Morrison Training School is a school, not a home, and a foster home may have been an alternative. While concurring that "something had to be done" and the Morrison reformatory serves a purpose, the editorial argued that "the Monroe affair called for something better."<sup>170</sup>

From Italy, a writer thanked Hodges for sending the material, but said that he regretted the publicity given to the "very disgraceful" articles by Chester Davis. The letter writer, who was a Harvard graduate as was Davis, was surprised that Davis "could have come from the same distinguished institution."<sup>171</sup> The president of the Interdenominational Ministers' Alliance challenged Hodges's account with a series of questions.

Why are all who disagree with deep seated [*sic*] prejudices smeared as communists? With salaries of \$15 to \$20 per week, how could the parents of these boys live in any place other than a slum? Why are Negro children treated in such a way that they may never recover from the psychological injury inflicted upon them?<sup>172</sup>

One letter writer, a public relations practitioner from New York, criticized Hodges's public relations efforts. He wrote, "As a public relations counsel who has for forty years practised [*sic*] the art of influencing opinion, I think I am qualified to give you some sound

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<sup>169</sup> Oscar K. Rice, Chapel Hill, NC, to Gov. Hodges, January 22, 1959, Hodges papers, box 423.

<sup>170</sup> "Reform Schools No Answer to the Problem in Monroe," *Charlotte Observer*, January 15, 1959.

<sup>171</sup> Ambrogio Donini, Rome, Italy, to Gov. Hodges, March 16, 1959, Hodges papers, box 423.

<sup>172</sup> C.M. Long, New Rochelle, NY, to Gov. Hodges, April 22, 1959, Hodges papers, box 422.

advice in this controversy over the two Negro boys.”<sup>173</sup> He urged Hodges to “get a new (and better) public relations policy and counsel,” but assured him, “I don’t want the job.”<sup>174</sup> In addition, he informed Hodges that, “Everybody knows the NAACP isn’t Communist (as your first publicity release tried to say),” and he referred to Hodges’s strategy in this regard as “medieval thinking that activates the South in its vain attempt to maintain the feudal status of the region.”<sup>175</sup> Concluding his correspondence, he again urged Hodges to “get yourself a new PR man; and have him get a new theme. If he has the brains of a gnat, he’ll know that calling your adversary a Communist no longer goes.”<sup>176</sup> Thus, the author agreed that a public relations strategy was in order, but the current one wasn’t working.

Hodges did not sway members of the public as he had hoped by presenting them with his version of the facts of the case. The boys had previous offenses, as noted in Hodges’s public relations material. However, Judge Price had never jailed them for those previous offenses. Instead, he placed them on probation for the first offense and kept them on probation with each subsequent misdemeanor. However, the nature of their most recent transgression, that involving miscegenation, was so severe that it warranted a punishment.

The public’s sympathy was with the children; the fact that Hodges attempted to blame them for their circumstances probably only worsened the public’s viewpoint of the harshness of North Carolina’s actions. Hodges and other North Carolina authorities took none of the blame; doing so would be to admit they might have erred in their actions, and it would have excused miscegenation. Neither Hodges’s blame frame, nor his communism frame, was changing the

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<sup>173</sup> Charles Pemberton to Gov. Hodges, February 16, 1959, Hodges papers, box 422.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid. Parentheses included in original.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid.

<sup>176</sup> Ibid.

protesters' perceptions about the kissing case. With the communism frame, Hodges accused the CCRI and NAACP of communist ties. Ironically, the protesters believed North Carolina's actions had provided fodder for the communists. But again, Hodges and his advisors were entrenched in the southern milieu, where blaming blacks for their circumstances was commonplace, as was branding all civil rights organizations as communist.

Another reason Hodges's public relations efforts were ineffective was because they were not focused at stopping the letters from protesters and engaging supporters. His campaign was focused on persuading those who wrote to him; he did not direct any public relations efforts at potential letter writers in an attempt to persuade them before they voiced their protests. Therefore, the letters continued to arrive, as the CCRI continued with its speaking tours, letter-writing and petition campaigns, and its outreach to the media. As fast as Hodges responded to the letters he received, each week a new onslaught of letters arrived. Hodges was in a quandary. His public relations efforts seemed focused on maintaining the status quo and defending the South's racial hierarchy. However, the burgeoning civil rights movement and international attention on US racism were beginning to challenge the white power structure. As he had with his oversight of school integration in North Carolina, Hodges may have believed that any challenges to the Southern way of life could be easily managed.<sup>177</sup> He did not consider the possibility these societal changes factored into the opinions expressed in the letters he received. In his short-sighted view, he presumed that protesters wrote to him because they had received false information from the CCRI or had read a newspaper story, and he thought he could easily change

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<sup>177</sup> North Carolina granted decision-making authority to local school boards, which permitted voluntary desegregation but allowed a district to close its schools if desegregation occurred; white students in those districts would be given state tuition aid to attend private schools. This approach allowed North Carolina to comply with the Supreme Court's ruling, while still promoting an anti-integration policy.



their opinions about the kissing case. Therefore, he thought the problem was limited to those who wrote to him, and he targeted his public relations efforts on each member of that audience.

## **The USIA**

Through its Research and Reference Service, the USIA continually monitored world opinion about the United States. Based on its extensive public opinion polling of citizens around the world and monitoring of worldwide media coverage, the USIA had evidence of how the United States was perceived regarding its race relations. For example, results of its opinion surveys conducted from 1955 to 1961 of citizens of Great Britain, France, West Germany, Italy, Belgium, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Finland, Greece, India, Japan, and Mexico indicated that racial prejudice and discrimination against blacks was the most disliked characteristic about the United States.<sup>178</sup> In another example, during the 1957 Little Rock school integration crisis, each of the USIS offices provided a detailed report of media coverage, which was all negative and reflected poorly on the United States.<sup>179</sup> In an article about the work of the USIA in the *Public Relations Journal*, the magazine of the Public Relations Society of America, the author writes that the United States has the “best of all products to sell: democracy, freedom, human dignity, peace. And as all public relations men know, the ultimate success of a campaign hinges on the real worth of the product.”<sup>180</sup> However, the USIA encountered difficulty in selling

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<sup>178</sup> “Racial Prejudice Mars the American Image,” Research Report R-112-62 (C), Research and Reference Service, United States Information Agency, October 17, 1962, USIA records, Record Group 0301, container 10, folder R-112-62.

<sup>179</sup> USIS is the acronym for United States Information Service, the name given to overseas offices of the United States Information Agency. Also, see for example telegrams from USIS posts in Vienna, Phnom Penh, Kuala Lumpur, Tokyo, Saigon, Brussels, Paris, Bonn, Reykjavik, London, Bogota, Ankara, Beirut, Caracas, and Oslo to USIA, September 16-24, USIA records, Record Group 306, box 11, Segregation-September 1957 folder.

<sup>180</sup> Richard G. Cushing, “USIA: A Hybrid of Public Relations and Diplomacy,” *Public Relations Journal* 14, no. 5, May 1958. This article is a reprint, and the pages not numbered. USIA records, Record Group 306, box 6, Public Relations with Public 1958-1959 folder.

these products overseas. During the Cold War, the United States was attempting to “win the allegiance of the newly independent nations of Asia and Africa and claim leadership of a ‘free world’ competition with the Soviet Union.”<sup>181</sup> With this visible position on the world stage, foreigners paid greater attention to the United States than they had before World War II. Through news accounts, foreigners realized that the United States did not give its black citizens the freedoms it demanded of other countries.

To help manage the country’s reputation, ensure consistent messaging, and provide its overseas offices with background and direction on communicating about various issues impacting the United States, the USIA prepared a series of guidance and planning papers. Topics covered included labor, science and technology, culture, the Soviet bloc, and communism.<sup>182</sup> The USIA also prepared a guidance paper on minorities. In it, the agency noted its aim was not to deny America’s race relations problems, but to keep them in perspective and focus attention on progress made.<sup>183</sup> The agency advised that the media, especially visual media, should be used to relay the story of advances in American race relations. Its primary target audiences were intellectuals, students, labor groups, editors, and commentators.

Highlighting the gains and progress made by African Americans is a communications strategy, as is the USIA’s directive to “be affirmative and objective in tone, confident of continuing progress but realistic in indicating the problems involved.”<sup>184</sup> The USIA counseled its

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<sup>181</sup> Dowd Hall, “The Long Civil Rights Movement and the Political Uses of the Past,” 1249.

<sup>182</sup> See Guidance and Planning Papers-1958, USIA records, Record Group 306, box 5, Guidance and Planning Papers-1958 folder.

<sup>183</sup> “Basic Guidance and Planning Paper No. 5, Basic Planning Paper on Minorities” December 4, 1958, USIA records, Record Group 306, box 5, Guidance and Planning Papers-1958 folder.

<sup>184</sup> Ibid.

offices to explain that America's racial problems were not only emotional or social, but were rooted in economic and educational "maladjustments" which were being overcome.<sup>185</sup> To relay this information, the USIA urged its offices to have personal discussions with editors and commentators and to arrange interviews with recent Institute of Education Sciences grantees or Fulbright students who have witnessed racial progress first hand. In addition, it provided more detailed guidance, such as using the word "Negro" instead of "colored" when referring to progress in integration, and showing segregated situations "only when the evidence of progress clearly outweighs any adverse impact on segregation." Local offices were encouraged to "identify, but without too much obviousness, each newsworthy instance of achievement by Negro Americans, or by members of any other minority race or of any group of foreign born or of foreign parentage."<sup>186</sup> Although one of the USIA's strategies regarding the United States' racial problems was to highlight progress, communicating African American achievements was not one of the agency's priorities in 1958. In his *New York Age* column, African American journalist Chuck Stone denounced the USIA for this lack of focus on blacks. Stone reported that in the USIA's list of seven priority topics to communicate to global audiences, African Americans were absent from the list.<sup>187</sup> He agreed with the agency's strategy of reporting African Americans' accomplishments. He suggested the USIA produce a weekly digest of "how successful we colored folks are, how many judicial appointments we're getting, how many homes were buying, and how many Cadillacs are in our garages."<sup>188</sup> However part of the

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<sup>185</sup> Ibid.

<sup>186</sup> Ibid.

<sup>187</sup> Chuck Stone, "USIA-For White Folks Only," *New York Age*, October 11, 1958.

<sup>188</sup> Ibid.

agency's problem, Stone argued, was that a number of its overseas officials were "white southerners and bigoted white officials" and that there were no African Americans on any of the agency's advisory committees.

The communist press was always quick to report on instances of racial injustice in the United States, using them to illustrate that the United States did not offer its own citizens the freedoms it demanded of other countries. With the kissing case, both China's Hsinhua News Agency and the Soviet Tass News Agency reported on the "fantastic persecution of two Negro children in the United States."<sup>189</sup> In addition, the USIA noted the kissing case had "caused an eruption in the Dutch press and a wave of protest."<sup>190</sup> Much of this protest may have been the result of Operation Snowball, the letter-writing and petition campaign organized by the head of a youth group in Holland. In addition, the USIA reported the letters and petitions it had received together totaled approximately 200, with an estimated 11,000 to 12,000 signatures.<sup>191</sup> The USIA also summarized all Dutch press coverage, concluding that it was critical of how the case had been handled. The agency surmised that the coverage was negative because initial stories reported the boys had been sentenced to life imprisonment, committed without proper legal proceedings, and were victims of racial prejudice. In response, the USIA in Washington prepared a three-page fact sheet, for discretionary use by USIS posts.<sup>192</sup> The USIS post in The Hague did

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<sup>189</sup> Hsinhua News Agency report, January 19, 1959, CCRI papers, box 1, folder 4.

<sup>190</sup> John J. Shure, Public Affairs Officer, USIA Foreign Service Dispatch—Reaction in the Netherlands to North Carolina 'Kissing Case,' The Hague, January 29, 1959, Basil Lee Whitener Papers, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Duke University, box 168, folder 11, (hereafter cited as Whitener papers).

<sup>191</sup> John Shure, Memorandum Regarding North Carolina "Kissing Case," undated but received in Gov. Hodges's office March 3, 1959, Hodges papers, box 423.

<sup>192</sup> "For your information—Facts On Racism Charge of U.S. Kissing Incident," United States Information Service, The Hague, January 20, 1959, Whitener papers, box 168, folder 11. USIA posts overseas were referred to as United States Information Services posts. Those posts were part of the USIA, which was headquartered in Washington, DC.

not distribute the fact sheet “in quantity until the snowball proportions of the petitioning activity became more and more apparent.”<sup>193</sup>

By January 21, the USIS noted that the case was receiving such widespread attention that Dutch Queen Juliana expressed her concern to Philip Young, US Ambassador to the Netherlands. The next day, the USIS released the fact sheet to Dutch newspapers. In addition, the USIS gave the fact sheet to petitioners who protested outside the US Embassy, and it was mailed to those who had sent letters to the Embassy. Noting that it was impossible to mail a fact sheet to every school child who had signed a petition, the USIA instead mailed the fact sheet to teachers at schools from where the petitions had come. Furthermore, the USIA invited students from six of those schools to its auditorium to watch films “which indicate integration progress in the United States.”<sup>194</sup>

In the fact sheet, much of the content mirrored the information distributed by Hodges. With a Monroe, NC, dateline, the document began, “stripped of its emotionalism, distortion and heated charges, this city’s highly publicized ‘kissing incident’ essentially becomes a question of the rehabilitation of two problem children and their families.”<sup>195</sup> As with Hodges’s material, the document described the boys’ previous offenses and claimed the boys were sent to a “state training school” not as a result of the kissing incident, but due to the lack of care, guidance and parental attention they received at home. To correct the misperception that the boys had been jailed, the fact sheet described the Morrison Training School as “neither a reformatory nor jail, but as part of an enlightened and progressive system to train boys to become useful citizens in

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<sup>193</sup> John J. Shure, Public Affairs Officer, USIA Foreign Service Dispatch—Reaction in the Netherlands to North Carolina ‘Kissing Case,’ The Hague, January 29, 1959, Whitener papers, box 168, folder 11.

<sup>194</sup> Ibid.

<sup>195</sup> “For your information—Facts on Racism Charge of U.S. Kissing Incident,” United States Information Service, The Hague, January 20, 1959, Whitener papers, box 168, folder 11.

cases where their homes are incapable of providing such training.” Because the USIA was focused on managing the charges of racism, the fact sheet’s penultimate paragraph claimed, “The kissing case hardly shapes up as a local racial incident, according to Monroe officials, although the racial aspects may have affected the manner and speed in which the case was handled.” The document ended with a statement attributed to Dr. Perry, in which he posited “that he is not certain that the training school is not the best place for the boys.” As a member of the CCRI, Perry was working to free the boys, and thus it seemed more likely the remark was misunderstood, if Perry uttered it at all.

After receiving the fact sheet, Stephanus Saris, the head of Operation Snowball in Rotterdam, sent Perry a letter, informing him that Dutch news stories were now reporting that the boys were thieves, and that there was no racial discrimination involved in the kissing case. Saris thought the USIS released the information to the press to stop Operation Snowball. He informed Perry that “comments of USIS have stopped our action for a moment,” and his organization would await Perry’s response before proceeding.<sup>196</sup>

#### CCRI Rebuttal to the USIA’s No-Racism Claim

As soon the CCRI became aware of the USIS’s fact sheet, it immediately dispatched a telegram to the USIS post in The Hague with a sharp rebuttal. In the telegram, the CCRI strongly protested the statements the USIS distributed to the Dutch press. It argued that the boys were in “reform school precisely because racial prejudice, not delinquency as you are telling Dutch

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<sup>196</sup> S.F.A. Saris to A.E. Perry, January 25, 1959, CCRI papers, box 1, folder 2.

people. Whitewash and falsifications about case may serve Carolina authorities but not American people as whole nor Dutch people nor truth.”<sup>197</sup>

In addition, George Weissman wrote to Secretary of State John Foster Dulles, protesting the USIS’s statements. Weissman demanded that the misstatements cease immediately. He noted that the CCRI, the NAACP and other individuals had issued numerous statements detailing the flagrant racism surrounding the case, and these statements were carried by the black press, as well as overseas newspapers. And yet, the USIA “chooses to accept, endorse and officially proclaim only the self-serving statements of North Carolina officials.” Weissman insisted the boys had not been sent to a reform school for their previous offenses, which consisted of “larceny of potato chips” and similar acts, and Judge Price had found those misdemeanors too trifling at the time to charge the boys. However for a kiss, they were sent to a reform school for the next 10 years or more. Weissman also asked how the executive branch of the government, via the State Department, could tell people of other countries that no racism was involved in the case when the executive branch had previously declared, in a letter from E. Frederic Morrow, that it was not within its purview to become involved. In other words, the US government would not get involved to help free the boys, but it would get involved to refute a racism charge.

Weissman ended with the directive:

This committee demands that you immediately silence the U.S. Embassy in the Netherlands on this case, and any other U.S. embassies which may be issuing similar misstatements. Following that, there should be an investigation to determine how and why such biased “information” came to be given official currency.<sup>198</sup>

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<sup>197</sup> “Committee Combat Racial Injustice Strongly Protest Statements,” telegram, January 27, 1959, Whitener papers, box 168, folder 11.

<sup>198</sup> George Weissman to John Foster Dulles, January 27, 1959, CCRI papers, box 1, folder 2.

The next day, the CCRI wrote and distributed a press release that outlined the steps it had taken to refute the USIS's claim that racism was not a factor in the kissing case.<sup>199</sup> The five-page press release included the text of the letter to John Foster Dulles, as well as the text of telegrams received from Stephanus Saris and from the Women's International Democratic Federation, which condemned the kissing case as racist. To further illustrate the racism in Monroe, the press release included other acts of racism that had been perpetrated on Monroe's black citizens over the past year.<sup>200</sup> In addition, the CCRI sent a telegram to Stephanus Saris informing him that racism was definitely involved in the kissing case. In response, Saris sent a telegram that Operation Snowball would continue.<sup>201</sup>

The CCRI received a response to its objections from Bernard Wiesman, USIA's advisor on labor and minorities affairs. Wiesman explained the statement was based on US news stories. He added that the backgrounder was originally distributed only to inform USIS posts and when it was released to the press, the first paragraph should have been described "as editorial in character."<sup>202</sup> To correct the problem, the USIS informed all its overseas information officers that should they make further use of the information, the first paragraph should be deleted and replaced with the following: "The now widely publicized 'kissing incident' in Monroe, North

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<sup>199</sup> "Asks Investigation of U.S. Embassies' Statements on Carolina Kissing Case," press release, January 28, 1959, CCRI papers, box 2, folder 7.

<sup>200</sup> Ibid. See also "Ask Investigation of U.S. Embassies' Statement on Carolina Kissing Case," *Atlanta Daily World*, January 30, 1959 and "Blast U.S. Embassy Head on Kissing Case: Anti-Bias Body Calls for Probe," *Chicago Defender*, February 7, 1959.

<sup>201</sup> "Actie voor de Negerjochies," *Utrechts Nieuwsblad*, January 27, 1959. (translation: Action for the Negro Boys)

<sup>202</sup> Bernard Wiesman to George Weissman, February 9, 1959, CCRI papers, box 1, folder 2. Note: The first paragraph of the fact sheet consists of one sentence: "Stripped of its emotionalism, distortion and heated charges, this city's highly publicized 'kissing incident' essentially becomes a question of the rehabilitation of two problem children and their families." See "For your information—Facts on Racism Charge of U.S. Kissing Incident," United States Information Service, The Hague, January 20, 1959, Whitener papers, box 168, folder 11.



Carolina, involves more than a question of race relations. Local officials assert that action was taken to rehabilitate two boys who had been on probation after Juvenile Court hearings on alleged stealing, truancy, and unsuitable home conditions.”<sup>203</sup> In its correction, the USIA did not directly state that racism was involved in the kissing case, nor did it deflect from its previous focus on the blame frame. Therefore, its revised first paragraph is less a correction and more a restatement of its previous sentence.

To further counter the false information distributed by the USIA that there was no racism involved in the kissing case and to address related inquiries it received, the CCRI held a press conference for United Nations press correspondents in New York on February 5. Williams and Perry, who both happened to be in New York at the time, participated.<sup>204</sup> Reporters from papers in the Netherlands, Sweden, Brazil, Canada, the Soviet Union, Switzerland, and Germany attended.<sup>205</sup> Weissman reported that French newspaper *Le Figaro* was unable to attend, but it requested that the CCRI send material to its New York office by messenger.<sup>206</sup>

Within two months, Hodges had received hundreds of letters and thousands of signatures from angry protesters. They expressed outrage, balked at the sentencing, demanded he free the boys, accused him and other North Carolina authorities of racism, and said his state’s actions embarrassed the United States and provided ammunition for the communists to use against America.

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<sup>203</sup> Ibid.

<sup>204</sup> George Weissman to Carl Braden, February 8, 1959, CCRI papers, box 1, folder 2.

<sup>205</sup> Ibid. See also untitled, undated, document with headings for correspondent’s name, paper, and country. This document appears to be a sign-in sheet for a press conference, and the correspondents who signed were from Brazil, Switzerland, Amsterdam, USSR, and Canada. CCRI papers, box 2, folder 7.

<sup>206</sup> George Weissman to Carl Braden, February 8, 1959, CCRI papers, box 1, folder 2.

One of Hodges's public relations strategies was to engage directly with protesters by responding to each letter he received. He hoped to convince protesters, one by one if need be, that North Carolina's actions were justified. In an effort to attenuate the public's reaction, he disparaged the boys and their mothers. His public relations efforts centered on the blame frame; he used it in his responses to the public and to the news media. He thought the blame frame would address the frames in protesters' letters by ameliorating their concerns; however, it did not.

Another problem with Hodges's public relations efforts was that the public viewed the boys as the children they were; North Carolina authorities treated the kissing game as adult behavior. To Southerners, they had committed an adult act – assault and molestation. They violated a tenet of southern race relations: maintaining the purity of the white race by avoiding race mixing. As members of a culture in which codes of race relations had long been mandated by written and unwritten rules, Hodges and his advisors were unable to grasp the public's vehemence about the racism frame. As such, Hodges was unable to respond to the public in a way that adequately addressed their concerns.

Although the racism frame was prevalent in the letters Hodges received, he never engaged with it explicitly, instead referring the letter writer to Judge Price's report, as well Commissioner Madison's statement that described the boys' family situations. "Incredible as it may seem, the actual facts of the case simply present a completely different picture from that painted by the rather lurid newspaper accounts. I regret to say that the propaganda on this case appears to have been scattered far and wide in an effort to stir up and exploit the racial issue," Hodges wrote to one correspondent.<sup>207</sup> Hodges's attempts to explain and justify were couched in

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<sup>207</sup> Gov. Hodges to Richard Schuckman, Fair Lawn, NJ, January 8, 1959, Hodges papers, box 423.

what he presented as the actual facts. However, the public believed another set of facts, one that confirmed the injustices of the South's racial system. Furthermore, Hodges was so focused on rationalizing North Carolina's actions that he was unable to consider the possibility that Union County authorities may have erred in how they responded to the kissing incident. He may never have asked Union County officials why the boys had been remanded to a reformatory for a kissing game but not for stealing a bicycle.

Although the kissing case received worldwide press coverage, which the USIA monitored, the incident had not been elevated overseas to the magnitude of the 1957 Little Rock crisis. Therefore, the USIA's public relations efforts in relation to the kissing case consisted of implementing two tactics: it prepared a fact sheet and distributed it to its posts, the press, and to some students and teachers. In addition, it invited Dutch students to view a film showing examples of what it deemed to be positive race relations in the United States. These tactics relate to the USIA's broader public relations strategy of presenting progress versus highlighting problems. It did not deny that there were racial problems, but instead focused its efforts on showing improvements. However with the kissing case, the USIA deflected the racial aspects of the kissing case. It had not investigated the facts and instead parroted the points made by Hodges. In doing so, the agency denied that racism was involved, in contrast to its public relations strategy.

Hodges was evidently discomfited by the volume and content of the letters. He believed members of the public reacted as they did because they had been given misinformation. If they had the true facts of the case, they would understand and support the sentencing.

I can truthfully say that never in my experience has any incident been propagandized to the detriment of our State so effectively and so widespread as this particular case. This case, unfortunately, possesses all the simple ingredients which can be manipulated, and

with half-truths and exaggerations, arouse the sentiment and disgust of uninformed persons, not only against the officials in Union County but against our whole State.<sup>208</sup>

However Hodges, a product of the South and its racial mores, was unable to see things another way. His obdurate viewpoint was reflected in an article in the *Union Mail* that referred to the kissing case as an incident that has “no significance whatever, except insofar as they have been warped and misrepresented entirely out of focus by the obvious supporters of communistic campaigns to divide and break the South.”<sup>209</sup> Nevertheless, the public continued to express its shock and outrage to Hodges.

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<sup>208</sup> Gov. Hodges to Oscar K. Rice, Chapel Hill, NC, February 5, 1959, Hodges papers, box 423, Segregation R folder.

<sup>209</sup> “Monroe Taunters Continue Campaign,” *Union Mail*, January 1, 1959.

*Freedom is never given; it is won.*<sup>1</sup>

## **CHAPTER 4: THE OUTCOME OF THE KISSING CASE**

As a result of the initial media coverage in the *New York Post* and the *London News Chronicle* and the CCRI's public relations campaign, which resulted in additional media coverage, Hodges received letters and petitions admonishing North Carolina authorities for their actions in the kissing case. In defense, Hodges launched a public relations campaign, but he was unable to convince correspondents that the state's actions were justified. Despite the remonstrance, Hodges stood fast in his refusal to release Hanover and Fuzzy. The CCRI vowed to continue its work until the boys were freed.

Chapter four examines the outcome of the CCRI's public relations efforts. In addition, it summarizes the four groups' public relations strategies and tactics and reviews their effectiveness. In addition, this chapter explores reasons for the NAACP's minimal involvement in the kissing case.

### **The Outcome**

On February 10, the boys' families moved to a housing project in a black neighborhood in Charlotte, where the NAACP had secured four-room apartments for them and provided basic

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<sup>1</sup> A. Philip Randolph, "The Crisis of the Negro and the Constitution," (keynote speech, Second National Negro Congress, Philadelphia, 1937) in *Black Protest Thought in the Twentieth Century*, ed. August Meier, Elliott Rudwick, and Francis Broderick (Indianapolis, IN: Bobbs-Merrill, 1971), 206.

necessities.<sup>2</sup> They had previously been in temporary housing in Charlotte until the NAACP could find better accommodations. On February 13, Evelyn Thompson opened the door to her apartment and unexpectedly saw P.R. Brown, superintendent of the Morrison Training School, along with Hanover and two social workers. The same scene was repeated at Jennie Simpson's apartment. To their mothers' astonishment, both boys had been freed.<sup>3</sup> The boys also were surprised. At Morrison, their days comprised attending classes and working. They were working in a field when they received word they would be released after almost 15 weeks in the reformatory.<sup>4</sup>

The same day, Blaine Madison, director of the North Carolina Department of Correction and Training, issued a statement announcing the boys' release. He described the conditions required for discharge from the training school: the finding by school officials that a child's behavior, attitude, and conduct has improved, and a determination by the local welfare department that the child's home and family situation provided enough stability to justify release.<sup>5</sup> The boys were discharged conditionally, meaning that if they did not receive proper care and guidance from their mothers, the local welfare department would "recommend that appropriate action be taken in their interest."<sup>6</sup> The *Fredericksburg Free Lance-Star* reported that

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<sup>2</sup> Albert Perry to Conrad Lynn, February 10, 1959, CCRI papers, box 1, folder 2.

<sup>3</sup> "Conditional Release of Negro Boys in Carolina Kissing Case Hailed, But Committee Will Fight to Make it Conditional," Press Release, February 14, 1959, CCRI papers, box 2, folder 7.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Statement by Blaine M. Madison, February 13, 1959, CCRI papers, box 2, folder 4. Also in Hodges papers, box 422.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid. See also "Negro Boys Free in 'Kiss' Incident," *New York Times*, February 14, 1959.

the boys had been “released...for good behavior,” and that “their mothers say the lads won’t get into trouble again.”<sup>7</sup>

Even with the boys’ improved home environments and their mothers’ guarantees, the release of Hanover and Fuzzy might have been precipitous. Their mothers had been in their new homes for only three days and may not have had a chance to get settled. Evelyn Thompson and Jennie Simpson were unemployed at the time; they were receiving temporary financial assistance from the NAACP while the organization sought jobs for them.<sup>8</sup> On February 12, the day before the boys were released, Hodges began distributing his cover letter with Chester Davis’s *Winston-Salem Journal-Sentinel* article, which ran only five days before the boys were freed. If Hodges had planned to release the boys on February 13, he may not have needed to mail the Davis article and cover letter a day earlier, although he may have done so to justify his actions, excoriate press coverage and discredit the CCRI and the boys’ mothers. The historical documents do not reveal why the boys were discharged suddenly. Regardless, their release represented a significant victory to those who had been working diligently to free them, and it was the culmination to a case that illuminated US racism and caused embarrassment to North Carolina authorities. For these reasons, many rushed to claim credit for the boys’ freedom.

### Taking Credit

CCRI Attorney Conrad Lynn attributed the boys’ release to Eleanor Roosevelt’s efforts; Lynn claimed he asked her to intervene. According to Lynn’s account, she agreed and called

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<sup>7</sup> “Two Negroes at Home After Kissing Case,” *Fredericksburg (VA) Free-Lance Star*, February 16, 1959.

<sup>8</sup> Memo from Roy Wilkins to Branches, Youth Councils and College Chapters Re: North Carolina Kissing Case, February 28, 1958, NAACP papers, Part IIIA92, North Carolina Kissing Case folder.

President Eisenhower, who contacted Hodges and asked him to free the boys.<sup>9</sup> Although Lynn and Roosevelt were acquainted and had exchanged correspondence over the years, there is nothing more to indicate she intervened in the kissing case. Although she often wrote about civil rights in her syndicated newspaper column, “My Day,” she did not write about the kissing case.<sup>10</sup> Historical documents indicate she was aware of the case, but did not take direct action. For example, when she received a letter protesting the boys’ sentencing from the headmaster of the Franklin D. Roosevelt High School in Rotterdam, which included 407 signatures from students and teachers, she forwarded the letters and signatures to Roy Wilkins with a note: “I thought you might be interested in seeing the enclosed and perhaps you could put it to good use.”<sup>11</sup> Wilkins then forwarded the headmaster’s letter and signatures to Hodges.<sup>12</sup>

In Lynn’s recollections, which are included in his 1979 biography, he wrote that he arranged to have the students in Rotterdam send the petitions, with 15,000 signatures, to Mrs. Roosevelt on the occasion of Lincoln’s birthday.<sup>13</sup> However, the petitions appear to have been sent independently, without any provocation from Lynn. Moreover, they contain 407 signatures,

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<sup>9</sup> Lynn, *There is a Fountain*, 156. See also Allida M. Black, *Casting Her Own Shadow: Eleanor Roosevelt and the Shaping of Postwar Liberalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 123-124.

<sup>10</sup> “My Day,” November-December 31, 1958, January-February 1959, March-April 1959 folders, Papers of Eleanor Roosevelt, Franklin D. Roosevelt Library, Hyde Park, New York. In addition, although there was correspondence between Eleanor Roosevelt and Conrad Lynn in Roosevelt’s and Lynn’s papers, there was no correspondence between the two about the kissing case. See Eleanor Roosevelt papers, 1957-1962 Luv to Ly folder, and Lynn papers, box 25, folder 240.

<sup>11</sup> Eleanor Roosevelt to Roy Wilkins, January 31, 1959, NAACP papers, Part III A92, North Carolina Kissing Case folder.

<sup>12</sup> Roy Wilkins to Honorable Luther H. Hodges, February 11, 1959, NAACP papers, Part III A92, North Carolina Kissing Case folder. Hodges responded to Wilkins on February 16 and copied Eleanor Roosevelt and USIA Director George Allen on his response, in which he urged Wilkins to concern himself with the thousands of dollars raised by the CCRI. Hodges included Judge Price’s and Blaine Madison’s reports, as well as the Chester Davis articles. See Hodges papers, box 423.

<sup>13</sup> Lynn, *There is a Fountain*, 156.



not 15,000, and the letter from the Dutch headmaster is dated January 21, 1959.<sup>14</sup> Abraham Lincoln was born on February 12. Roosevelt forwarded the petitions to Roy Wilkins on January 31.<sup>15</sup> Although Lynn was actively involved in the legal aspects of the kissing case, his recollections suggest braggadocio or memory lapses at play.

Harry Golden, the Charlotte-based publisher of the *Carolina Israelite* and an occasional advisor to Hodges on civil rights issues, may have played a role in the boys' release. Golden had received a letter from a New Yorker about the kissing case and on February 3, he forwarded that letter to Hodges. Golden also wrote a confidential letter to Hodges in which he commented on the "unwise Negro leadership in Monroe," indirectly referring to Robert Williams. Golden ended his letter to Hodges with the following suggestion: "There are interested people in Charlotte who would like to do anything possible to resolve this matter."<sup>16</sup> Without being specific, Golden was informing Hodges about the desire to resolve the kissing case, although he doesn't hint as to what that resolution might be.

In his 1969 autobiography, Golden took credit for the boys' release. He alleged that he talked to Hodges about the kissing case, saying he did so at the request of Kelly Alexander, head of the NAACP in North Carolina. Specifically, Golden said he called Hodges and told him that Robert Williams had recently collected \$10,000 at a speaking tour in Cleveland and was due in Detroit the next night, where he would collect another \$10,000.<sup>17</sup> Golden's assertion about the

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<sup>14</sup> Headmaster (name illegible), Franklin D. Roosevelt High School, Rotterdam to Mrs. Roosevelt, January 21, 1959, NAACP papers, part III A92, North Carolina Kissing Case folder.

<sup>15</sup> Eleanor Roosevelt to Roy Wilkins, January 31, 1959, NAACP papers, Part III A92, North Carolina Kissing Case folder.

<sup>16</sup> Harry Golden to Gov. Hodges, February 3, 1959, Harry Golden Papers, J. Murray Atkins Library, University of North Carolina at Charlotte, box 4, folder 44.

<sup>17</sup> Golden, *The Right Time*, 380-381.

money collected is inaccurate.<sup>18</sup> With the NAACP's agreement to provide financial support for the boys' families and to assume legal fees, the CCRI decided not to direct attention to fundraising and instead focused on raising awareness and arousing public opinion. Golden's allegation about the money raised was more likely related to animosity towards Williams rather than it was a statement of fact. Believing that Williams was being paid for his speaking engagements about the kissing case, Golden told Hodges that Williams should not receive monetary benefit because the boys had been imprisoned, "So let's get them out of jail."<sup>19</sup> Golden claimed that Hodges wanted the boys released, but did not know how to tell his constituents that the courts had been wrong in sentencing Hanover and Fuzzy. Golden suggested improving the boys' home environments, which would allow Hodges to tell his constituents that the situation had changed, and the children were being returned to improved, decent homes. Golden wrote, "That afternoon Kelly got the mothers jobs, rented two apartments, paying a month's rent on each, and in the morning Luther Hodges was as good as his word and sent Hanover and Fuzzy home."<sup>20</sup> The dates Golden outlines are imprecise; the mothers moved into their apartments on February 10 and the boys were released on February 13. Although the North Carolina Department of Correction and Training announced that the boys had been released because their home environments had improved, there is nothing in the historical records to corroborate Golden's recollection that he and Hodges spoke about using the home environments as a reason

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<sup>18</sup> For detailed information on the CCRI finances, see "Financial Statement, Committee to Combat Racial Injustice, From Start of Committee (Dec. 10, 1958) thru Feb. 15, 1959," CCRI papers, box 2, folder 7.

<sup>19</sup> Golden, *The Right Time*, 380-381. It is interesting to note that 10 years after the kissing case, Golden used the word "jail" when North Carolina authorities had insisted the boys were in a training school, not a jail.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

to release the boys. Nevertheless, Hodges and Golden met for breakfast on February 12, and certainly they might have discussed the kissing case.<sup>21</sup>

A social worker from the Mecklenburg County Department of Public Welfare visited the families in their new apartments on February 11, the day after they moved in. In his report, the social worker commented on the families' improved living conditions, even though they were still getting settled.<sup>22</sup> It is unclear why the social worker visited the families so soon after they moved in instead of waiting for them to get established; there may have been an urgent need to report on how the families were faring in their new residences. The suddenness of the social worker's visit and the suddenness of the boys' release appear to be related. Once Hodges had made the decision to free the boys, the conditions for their release needed to be in place.

With the announcement of the boys' discharge from the training school, Hodges appeared to distance himself from the decision, as if he had no involvement in or advance knowledge of it. "I have been informed today by Mr. Madison that the two boys have been returned to their mothers who have now established new homes since moving from Monroe to Charlotte," Hodges said in response to a media inquiry. "I am glad, of course, that the home situations have improved to the extent that the boys can be given a conditional release. I hope that the mothers of these two boys will meet their responsibilities as bothers [*sic*]."<sup>23</sup> Hodges's statement contains only three sentences, but in each sentence he refers to the home environments, reiterating the state's reason for releasing the boys. This emphasis underscores the position that the boys were released because their mothers' improved their living conditions, not because North Carolina

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<sup>21</sup> Tyson, *Radio Free Dixie*, 135.

<sup>22</sup> Wallace Kuralt to Blaine Madison re: Jennie Burns Simpson, February 12, 1959, and Wallace Kuralt to Blaine Madison re: Evelyn Nickelson Thompson, February 12, 1959, Hodges papers, box 422.

<sup>23</sup> "Two Kissing Case Negro Boys Released From Training School," *Monroe Enquirer*, February 16, 1959.

authorities erred in sentencing them. Reflecting a blame frame, Hodges's statement removes any admission of wrongdoing from state and local authorities and assigns responsibility for the boys' release to the mothers, thereby conveying that the mothers also were responsible for the boys' delinquency and hence, for their sentencing.

Robert Williams was on a speaking tour in Chicago the day the boys were released.<sup>24</sup> At 7 p.m. on February 12, he received a telephone call from New York with the news.<sup>25</sup> Delighted that the boys had been returned to their mothers, Williams said the release was a great moral victory attributable to the mass pressure that worldwide protest had placed on Hodges and the US State Department.<sup>26</sup> In his autobiography, Golden claimed that Williams felt differently about the boys' release. Golden contended that because Hodges freed the boys, "We had usurped Robert Williams [*sic*] cause. He was mad about it."<sup>27</sup> The implication is that Williams would have preferred a longer incarceration so that he could glean maximum benefits as part of a successful public relations campaign. Yet there is no indication Williams felt as Golden claimed. The CCRI did not take direct credit for the boys' freedom, instead stating it offered "palpable proof of the power of aroused public opinion."<sup>28</sup> In a letter to a Californian, Weissman wrote, "It was precisely such pressure on a national and international scale that forced the North Carolina

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<sup>24</sup> "Financial Statement for Williams Tour-Chicago, February 13 to February 19, 1959," February 26, 1959, CCRI papers, box 1, folder 2.

<sup>25</sup> Letter (recipient not designated) from Auda Romine, February 26, 1959, NAACP papers, Part III A92, North Carolina Kissing Case folder.

<sup>26</sup> Tyson, *Radio Free Dixie*, 135-136.

<sup>27</sup> Golden, *The Right Time*, 380-381.

<sup>28</sup> George Weissman to Elizabeth Berliner, Croton-on-Hudson, NY, February 27, 1959, CCRI papers, box 1, folder 2.

authorities to release the boys.”<sup>29</sup> In a letter to a Texan, Weissman wrote, “It was the sending of such letters by thousands of people that forced the release of the two little boys.”<sup>30</sup>

The day after the boys were returned to their families, the CCRI distributed a three-page press release announcing the news, writing that the sudden liberation of Hanover and Fuzzy was due to the mounting volume of protests at home and abroad.<sup>31</sup> One of the first groups the CCRI notified was Operation Snowball in Holland; Weissman thanked the Dutch children for their support.<sup>32</sup> In a follow-up letter, Weissman wrote, “You must realize that your activity in Holland greatly stirred the conscience of America and as a result, many trade unions, religious groups and individuals raised their voices for freeing the two boys. It was this, more than our court actions, which brought about their release.”<sup>33</sup>

Of those who took credit for the boys’ release, the NAACP’s overstatement of its role was most surprising. In informing its branches, youth councils, and college chapters of the case’s outcome, the NAACP wrote, “As you know, this case has attracted wide attention primarily because of NAACP action and because of publicity in the foreign and domestic press. There is no question that the release was effected because of these pressures.”<sup>34</sup> Despite the fact that it had done little to create and maintain awareness of the case, the NAACP acknowledged the role that public opinion and mass pressure played in the boys’ release. In its departmental report to its

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<sup>29</sup> George Weissman to Wenonah Drasnin, Oakland, CA, February 27, 1959, CCRI papers, box 1, folder 2.

<sup>30</sup> George Weissman to Dr. Frank D. Peto, Houston, TX, February 27, 1959, CCRI papers, box 1, folder 2.

<sup>31</sup> “Conditional Release of Negro Boys in Carolina Kissing Case Hailed, But Committee Will Fight to Make it Conditional,” Press Release, February 14, 1959, CCRI papers, box 2, folder 7.

<sup>32</sup> George Weissman to Actie Sneeuwbal, February 13, 1959, CCRI papers, box 1, folder 2.

<sup>33</sup> George Weissman to S.F.R. Saris, February 18, 1959, CCRI papers, box 1, folder 2.

<sup>34</sup> Roy Wilkins to Branches, Youth Councils and College Chapters, February 26, 1959, NAACP papers, Part III A92, North Carolina Kissing Case folder.

board of directors, the summary of the association's work on the kissing case includes relocating the families and providing them with financial assistance.<sup>35</sup> The report makes no mention of any publicity, because the NAACP's work in this regard was limited to sending two press releases. The NAACP reluctantly supported the kissing case and initially did not want to do so. However, its eventual involvement in the case provided an important endorsement by an organization that was trusted by African Americans. The NAACP relocated the families, and North Carolina authorities claimed the improved home environments were the reason the boys were released. A NAACP summary of its work, distributed to chapters across the nation, was congratulatory.

In handling this case, we have worked in our usual manner and have thus succeeded in freeing the boys from an institution to which they should have never been sent. The NAACP, through its National Office and State Conference, assumed full responsibility for the case, including legal fees and costs and assistance to the families, including relocation in a new community. As a result of our continued activity and support, the families are now in a better position to become self-supporting.<sup>36</sup>

After Hanover's and Fuzzy's return to their mothers, the NAACP considered the case closed and notified its branches.

With the release of the boys to their mothers and the subsequent adjustment of the families in a new environment, we see no good purpose to be served in further carrying on a publicity campaign or using the case in any way which could be construed as exploitation of the children. We are not working with any other group or groups in the promotion of mass meetings and fund-raising around this issue, for, with the release of the children, we consider the public phase of the case to be ended.<sup>37</sup>

With this statement, the NAACP stressed its autonomy, likely an effort to distance the organization from the CCRI and its public relations efforts on behalf of the kissing case. Given

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<sup>35</sup> NAACP Report to the Board of Directors for the month of February 1959, March 9, 1959, Alexander papers, box 9, folder 18.

<sup>36</sup> Roy Wilkins to Branches, Youth Councils and College Chapters, February 26, 1959, NAACP papers, Part III A92, North Carolina Kissing Case folder.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

the proclivity of racists to attempt to link civil rights organizations with communism, the NAACP wanted to continue to avoid association with the CCRI due to the socialist backgrounds of two founding members of the CCRI.

On March 8, the North Carolina NAACP issued a press release announcing the boys were enrolled in public school and were “on the way to a good life.”<sup>38</sup> The press release referred to the NAACP’s legal defense of the boys, as well as the association’s work in relocating the families. In addition, the press release noted the worldwide protest, creating the impression that it was the result of the NAACP’s efforts when it was not. The boys’ release in this high-profile case represented a triumph for those who worked on their behalf. Under the circumstances, it is not surprising that the NAACP embellished its role.

After the boys were released, Harry Golden penned a column in his newspaper, *Carolina Israelite*, in which he surmised that “North Carolina did not make a judicial mistake in retaining the boys, nor did it make a ‘humanitarian’ mistake. It did make a mistake in public relations and for this some of the local authorities in Monroe must take responsibility.”<sup>39</sup> Golden does not describe this public relations mistake, but instead writes that the boys were returned to their parents as soon as their mothers’ living conditions improved, which “happened in thousands of cases in North Carolina, although none of these cases had any attendant publicity.”<sup>40</sup> He added, “Neither the State nor the boys deserved to have the affair exploited. Exploitation solved nothing about the great problem which confronts us—the end of racial discrimination in the public

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<sup>38</sup> “Monroe Boys Adjusted to New Home Environment,” Press Release, March 5, 1959, and Roy Wilkins to Branches, Youth Councils and College Chapters, February 26, 1959, both in NAACP papers, Part III A92, North Carolina Kissing Case folder. See also “Monroe Boys in New Home,” *Crisis*, April 1959, and “Boys Released From Reform School In Kissing Case Are Making Normal Adjustment,” *Raleigh News and Observer*, February 2, 1959.

<sup>39</sup> Harry Golden, “Monroe, North Carolina and the Kissing Case,” *Carolina Israelite*, January-February, 1959.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

schools.”<sup>41</sup> According to Golden, the CCRI public relations effort drew attention to a matter that was trivial in light of broader racial problems. Although he does not mention Hodges by name, Golden’s editorial seems to be defending the governor. Golden places blame on Monroe authorities, thereby removing it from Hodges. But again, Golden did not describe the mistake that he alleged Monroe authorities made in the kissing case. Golden may have been referring to that fact that Monroe authorities remanded the boys to a reformatory instead of seeking alternative arrangements. Based on Golden’s thinking, if Monroe authorities had secured these other living arrangements, there would have been no kissing case and therefore, no adverse publicity.

In a letter to George Weissman, Carl Braden offered a possible motivation behind Golden’s column was an effort to curry favor with the governor.

First, let me dispose of Harry—poor, scared soul. All you have to do is read the lead article on Page 2 of the Jan.-Feb. issue of *The Carolina Israelite* about the Kissing Case. I guess Harry had to make peace with the Carolina bosses because it is becoming generally known that he tipped off the *New York Post* about the story in the first place. He never thought somebody with nerve and verve would take hold of the situation and do something.<sup>42</sup>

Braden’s assertion about Harry Golden and the *New York Post* conflicts with other claims that the *Post* was first informed of the kissing case by a New York community leader, who heard of the situation from one of the boys’ New York-based sisters. Braden does not clarify how it was known that Golden alerted the *New York Post*, and the historical documents contain no further information on this aspect of the kissing case. Therefore, exactly how the *Post* heard of the kissing case cannot be definitively determined.

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Carl Braden to George Weissman, March 5, 1959, CCRI papers, box 1, folder 4.



In his *Carolina Israelite* editorial, Golden also asked “whether anyone has ever heard of a Southern governor or a Northern governor who has been ‘forced’ into a decision by worldwide protest?”<sup>43</sup> His question seems intended to undermine the CCRI’s assertion that worldwide protest and mass pressure—orchestrated by the CCRI—resulted in Hodges’s freeing the boys. In response to a college newspaper editor who had read Golden’s editorial, Williams provided two examples of the power of protest.<sup>44</sup> He concluded,

But in any event what is the alternative to petition and protest when one sees an injustice being done? Certainly here in Union County there is little difference of opinion about why the boys were released. It is ascribed to the efforts of the NAACP, the Committee to Combat Racial Injustice and, most of all, to the world-wide protest. Negroes here are greatly encouraged over it, the white supremacists bemoan and curse it, but all agree as to its power.<sup>45</sup>

Although the historical record does not provide the definitive reasons Hodges released the boys, they likely would not have come to his attention had it not been for the mass protest. Authorities and the majority of white citizens in Monroe believed the boys’ situation had been effectively handled and did not warrant outside attention. Local activists formed the CCRI, which developed a public relations campaign that created awareness of the kissing case well beyond Monroe. As a result, proponents of racial equality expressed in continuous and

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<sup>43</sup> Harry Golden, “Monroe, North Carolina and the Kissing Case,” *Carolina Israelite*, January-February, 1959.

<sup>44</sup> Robert Williams to Editor, *Antioch College Record*, April 22, 1958, CCRI papers, box 1, folder 4. Williams wrote, “I think the world-wide protest against the execution of Jimmy Wilson in Alabama for a \$1.95 theft was primarily responsible for Governor Folsom’s commutation of his sentence last year. I think that world-wide protest saved Mooney and Billings from execution in California.” Jimmy Wilson was an Alabama laborer who was convicted in 1958 by an all-white jury and sentenced to death for stealing \$1.95 from a 74 year-old white woman. After a worldwide protest, his sentence was commuted to a life sentence. See Mary L. Dudziak, “The Case of ‘Death for a Dollar Ninety-Five’: Miscarriages of Justice and Constructions of American Identity,” in *When Law Fails: Making Sense of Miscarriages of Justice*, ed. Austin Sarat and Charles Ogletree, Jr. (New York University Press, 2009), 25-49. Thomas Mooney and Warren Billings were white socialists convicted of a bombing in San Francisco in 1916. For more information see, Rebecca Roiphe, “Lawyering at the Extremes: The Representation of Tom Mooney, 1916-1939,” *Fordham Law Review* 77, no. 4 (2009): 1731-1762.

<sup>45</sup> Robert Williams to Editor, *Antioch College Record*, April 22, 1958, CCRI papers, box 1, folder 4.

voluminous letters their shock, outrage, and concern to Hodges, demanding he free the boys. If the CCRI had not advocated on the boys' behalf, Hanover's and Fuzzy's story would not have been thrust onto the world stage. Although Golden wrote to Hodges about the need to resolve the kissing case, had there been no worldwide attention directed to the boys' dilemma, there would have been no need to resolve the case. In other words, the boys' situation would not have been a case. It was the press coverage and the public relations campaign that turned the events into the kissing case.

### **Summary and Analysis of Public Relations Strategies and Tactics**

This dissertation asked how the CCRI, NAACP, USIA, and North Carolina Gov. Hodges used public relations in regards to the kissing case, specifically asking what strategies and tactics the groups employed. This dissertation also asked what frames the four groups used in their public relations material, and how these frames were reflected in the letters members of the public sent to Hodges.

Based on this study's findings, of the four groups, the CCRI developed the most comprehensive public relations campaign. Part of the reason for its success was that before it began its public relations efforts, the CCRI developed a clearly articulated goal regarding the kissing case: it would create awareness of the boys' situation in order to mobilize public opinion, as a means to pressure Hodges into freeing the boys. CCRI leaders knew exactly what they wanted to accomplish, and their desired outcome was the boys' freedom. To achieve its goal, the CCRI did not focus on attitude change. The committee did not target those who were opposed to racial equality, nor did it focus on those who questioned racial inequality but had not taken a

stance about it.<sup>46</sup> In other words, it was neither attempting to change the beliefs of those who were opponents of racial equality, nor was it trying to convince those who were noncommittal. Instead, the CCRI identified and engaged audiences who were already receptive to its mission to combat racial injustice. By doing so, it did not need to persuade this audience of the merits of civil rights and could instead focus its efforts on mobilizing them to apply pressure on Hodges to free the boys.

As part of its public relations campaign, the CCRI simultaneously employed five strategies. One strategy involved engaging opinion leaders and using those individuals to cascade its messages. With this strategy, the CCRI identified religious, academic, civil rights, and labor leaders who were civil rights supporters. After informing this audience of the kissing case, it asked these leaders to communicate the message to their constituents, which allowed the committee to reach a broader audience. Another strategy involved engaging youth, specifically high school and college students, which further expanded the CCRI's outreach and network of supporters. Using the news media as a channel to reach its audiences was another strategy the CCRI used. Tactically, the committee distributed press releases, held press conferences, and distributed reprints of news articles. It complemented its news media strategy with another strategy: the use of face-to-face communication to relay its messages. Robert Williams, Conrad Lynn, and Albert Perry spoke to groups of supporters at labor rallies, community meetings, and church gatherings. These strategies were supplemented by print material the CCRI produced about the case, including fact sheets, brochures, flyers, and posters.

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<sup>46</sup> For its overall public relations program, the NAACP also used this audience segmentation, focusing its efforts on this uncommitted group. For more information, see Henry Lee Moon, "Problems and Goals of NAACP Public Relations Activities: Report of the Department of Public Relations," 49<sup>th</sup> NAACP Annual Meeting, January 5, 1959, Group III, Box A36, NAACP Papers.

One of the CCRI's most important and effective strategies was its call to action, in which it urged supporters to sign a petition, send a postcard, or write a letter to Hodges demanding that he free the boys. Instead of merely creating awareness of the kissing case, which was accomplished by the CCRI's other strategies, the call-to-action strategy focused on asking the public to place pressure on Hodges. As a result, Hodges received a deluge letters in which the public expressed its opinion. The volume and content of these letters caused Hodges particular consternation.

Objectives in a public relations campaign can be broadly placed within one or more of these three categories: to know, to do, to feel. An organization wants its target audience(s) to know something, to do something, or to feel something. Often, public relations objectives are focused on all three categories. One of the reasons the CCRI's public relations campaign was effective was its clear articulation, via its strategies and tactics, of these three categories. It wanted its audiences to know about the kissing case and the racism behind it; it wanted them to sign a petition or write to Hodges demanding that he free the boys, and it wanted them to feel empathy for the boys and their families, and outrage over the sentencing. The CCRI's strategies were all focused on these three categories, which related to the most prominent frame in its public relations material—a racism frame. This racism frame reflected the CCRI's ultimate mission of combating racial injustice.

The CCRI was formed to illuminate incidents of racial injustice and help those who had suffered from it. With the kissing case, it wanted the public to be aware of the racism behind the case, hence its focus on the racism frame. The letters from the public to Hodges reflect this frame. After expressing their shock and disbelief, protesters believed that racism was the only reason for the boys' treatment. In addition, the protesters expressed concern about the reputation

of the United States and the contradiction between its demand for global freedom and its treatment of its black citizens.

In examining Hodges's public relations, his campaign was clear on what it wanted its audiences to know, namely what Hodges believed were the facts of the case. However, his campaign was focused on attitude change with an audience whose attitudes about the kissing case were in opposition to Hodges's attitudes. Hodges was fixated on presenting his facts and was unable to see an alternative position. He was attempting to justify racism to an audience committed to combatting the racial injustice that undergirded the kissing case, although he most likely did not realize he was doing so. He was so focused on preserving the prevailing power structure and so steadfast in his beliefs that he was unable to understand the public's vehement response to the boys' sentencing. It was this lack of understanding that shaped Hodges public relations efforts in the kissing case. One of his strategies was to engage directly with protesters and attempt to convince them of his position. To do so, he wrote to each person who wrote to him. In his correspondence, he did not ask that the protesters pass his facts on to other protesters. Instead, he sent what he thought was the correct information about the kissing case, believing that this information would result in protesters agreeing with or understanding the actions of North Carolina authorities.

Hodges's other strategies included enlisting expert opinion and using the news media, while incorporating a blame frame in which he vilified the boys and their mothers. Rather than convincing or persuading protesters, this strategy reinforced the racism behind the kissing case, which only served to increase protesters' demands that he free the boys. Therefore, Hodges's public relations strategies and tactics did not change protesters' attitudes and cause them to support the boys' sentencing. Had Hodges not freed the boys when he did, the CCRI presumably

would have continued its campaign, resulting in continued public protest. News coverage in the black and international press likely would have remained unfavorable to Hodges and to North Carolina.

After he freed the boys, Hodges responded to a letter he received from Reverend Theodore Webb of the Universalist-Unitarian Church in Massachusetts, who asked Hodges if the boys had been sent to the reformatory because they “were Negroes or because they were delinquent.”<sup>47</sup> Hodges responded, “The only answer I can give to you is that both these boys are Negroes and it is an established fact that they were delinquent.”<sup>48</sup> Hodges added that Judge Price acted in good faith based on what he thought were the best interests of the boys.

In retrospect, reasonable men can now question the advisability of the commitment to the training school and can express the view that it would have been better if the boys could have been placed in a foster home or continued on probation. In my own view, the main “wrong” in the commitment to the training school was the fact that it was subject to misunderstanding as to motive.<sup>49</sup>

Surprisingly, Hodges admitted that remanding the boys to the reformatory may not have been the best solution. Although he conceded the decision in hindsight, he still did not yield his position because he couched the decision in terms of misunderstanding as to motive. In other words, Hodges believed the problem was not that the boys were sentenced to a reformatory; the problem was the reason protesters thought the boys were sentenced—for child’s play. Actually, the problem is both. The protesters did not view a kiss exchanged between children of different races as a crime. But in the South, miscegenation was a crime and southerners believed its outcome was the elimination of the white race. This viewpoint was so ingrained that Hodges and

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<sup>47</sup> Gov. Hodges to Reverend Theodore A. Webb, February 16, 1959, Hodges papers, box 423.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid. Quotation marks in original.

other southerners were unable to comprehend the outsized penalty levied for a misdemeanor offense. The interracial peck crossed racial boundaries and was illegal, regardless of the ages of the supposed perpetrators. In his responses to the public, Hodges never acknowledged the southern proscriptions regarding interracial romantic or sexual interactions, possibly because he did not see them as such and instead merely viewed them as a way of life or the natural order of things. Furthermore, Hodges would not want to risk alienating his constituents, most of whom likely supported North Carolina's actions in the kissing case. Despite conceding that it would have been better had the boys been placed in foster care, Hodge nevertheless ended his response to Rev. Webb by referring him to the Chester Davis article "so that you will better understand the case." Ultimately, Hodges still believed in his position.

In later reflecting on Hodges's public relations strategies, Weissman wrote:

The state officials tried to cover up the scandal by causing a report to be issued stating that the boys had not been sent to reform school because of the kissing incident but because they were incorrigible juvenile delinquents with long records. Williams and the CCRI blasted this shabby evasion by showing that the alleged incidents involved such matters as stealing a ride on another boys' bicycle and taking some ham. Moreover, these alleged examples of the depravity of the eight and none [*sic*] year old children had never been entered on juvenile court records until after the campaign for the boys' release had begun.<sup>50</sup>

The only frame Hodges employed that related to one of the public's frames was that of communism. The public believed the kissing case besmirched the reputation of the United States, which could be used by communists to point out US hypocrisy regarding its standing as a pillar of democracy and its treatment of its black citizens. In contrast, as shown in the Chester Davis article, Hodges painted the CCRI as a communist front, hoping to discredit its work. Ironically,

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<sup>50</sup> George Lavan, "The Monroe Story," undated, CCRI papers, box 2, folder 7.

Hodges was unable see that while he was falsely denigrating the CCRI as a communist organization, the actions of North Carolina authorities had provided fodder to the Communists.

After the boys were freed, Carl Braden urged Davis to revisit the allegations he had made and “present a more balanced version of this situation.”<sup>51</sup> Davis responded that he had received a similar request from Robert Williams.

I made no apologies to him and I’ll make none to you because I am convinced that the central theme of my piece was valid. You people, either unwittingly or deliberately, come to North Carolina and interjected the issue of Communism in our already tense racial situation. You managed to do that in a manner that could not help but hurt the NAACP in this state. I don’t care how idealistic your motives are. The fact is that your Committee To Combat Racial Injustice served no purpose other than that of a propaganda tub. It contributed nothing except to raise confusion regarding the one organization which has truly stood up and fought for the rights of colored people.

The tone of Davis’s response to Braden reflects his hostility towards the CCRI, although it does not appear that he engaged in outright subreption. Instead, Davis believed that North Carolina authorities were fully justified in their actions. In another letter to Braden, Davis admitted, “I recognize that as a soutgern [*sic*] newspaperman I am going to be confronted with instances where, in reporting Communist infiltration in the race movement, I may be guilty of witch hunting.”<sup>52</sup> In that sentence, Davis seemed to acknowledge that he may have been red baiting. The CCRI did not inject the issue of communism in the South’s racial problems. Its communications were focused on raising awareness of the kissing case and encouraging the public to write to Hodges. Instead, it was Davis who sought an opportunity to use communism to disparage the CCRI’s work by falsely accusing Braden of being a communist. When Braden sent Davis proof he was not a communist, Davis rebuffed his claim.

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<sup>51</sup> Carl Braden to Chester S. Davis, March 11, 1959, Braden papers, box 47, folder 3.

<sup>52</sup> Chester Davis to Carl Braden, March 28, 1959, Braden papers, box 47, folder 3.



I appreciated the temperate tone of your letter and you must forgive me if I falter somewhat on that score. My reaction to the letter and its enclosures was about like that of the farmer who watched his prize bull attempt to derail an express train. He said he couldn't give the bull much credit for judgment but he had to admire his courage.<sup>53</sup>

Hodges enlisted Davis and used his articles as tactics in his public relations campaign, although they did not convince protesters that the state's treatment of Hanover Thompson and Fuzzy Simpson was justified. Still, USIA Director George Allen wrote in 1959 that he was impressed by the Davis articles.<sup>54</sup> He informed Hodges that the articles, along with Hodges's cover letter, had been sent to USIA overseas posts "to give our Information Officers material with which to set inquirers straight."<sup>55</sup> He also commended Hodges on handling the case with "remarkable restraint, patience, and good judgment."<sup>56</sup> Allen's comments reflect the USIA's public relations tactics.

The USIA had a significant reputational issue to manage abroad: The United States did not provide many of its citizens with the equality and freedom it was championing around the world. As a result, the US faced criticism from other countries over the mistreatment of its black citizens. To help manage this problem, one of the USIA's public relations strategies was to present progress in race relations rather than highlight difficulties. The kissing case illuminated a racial problem; therefore, the agency readily accepted the material Hodges provided and denied the boys' sentencing was motivated by racism. It even issued a statement that racism was not involved in the boys' sentencing. Upon learning of the USIA's claim, the CCRI informed the USIA that its information was inaccurate—that the case was racially motivated. The CCRI

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<sup>53</sup> Chester Davis to Carl Braden, March 16, 1959, Braden papers, box 47, folder 3.

<sup>54</sup> George Allen to Gov. Luther Hodges, February 25, 1959, Hodges papers, box 423.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

demanded the USIA distribute a revised statement, and it communicated in a press release what it believed was the USIA's error and its demand for a correction. As a result, the USIA distributed a revised version of its statement to its USIS posts. The USIA did not want to draw additional attention to yet another racial incident, therefore its public relations activities were limited to informing its overseas posts of the incident, issuing a statement to the Dutch media that included Hodges's justifications, and monitoring media coverage.

The NAACP implemented few public relations tactics, despite claiming success for the worldwide protests. At the time of the kissing case, the organization was heavily involved in the national issue of school integration, and the case in Monroe seemed a local problem best dealt with by social workers. Nevertheless, the NAACP issued two press releases, one announcing that it had thrown its "full weight" behind the kissing case.<sup>57</sup> Such a statement constituted an important endorsement to African American audiences. As a new organization, the CCRI did not enjoy the same name recognition. The NAACP's second press release announced it planned to seek a new hearing in the boys' legal case.<sup>58</sup> Therefore, the NAACP's key contribution—which was not a public relations tactic—was moving the families to a new home and providing them with financial support. In doing so, it assumed a role similar to that of a social services agency, taking action on behalf of the families that the Union County Department of Welfare had not.<sup>59</sup> With the move and appearance of financial stability, Hodges was able to attribute the boys'

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<sup>57</sup> "NAACP Seeks Release of Monroe, N.C. Youngsters," NAACP press release, December 31, 1958, NAACP papers, Part III A92, Crime-North Carolina Kissing Case folder.

<sup>58</sup> "NAACP To Seek New Hearing for Boys In North Carolina Case," NAACP press release, January 15, 1959, NAACP papers, Part IIIA92, General Office File, North Carolina Kissing Case.

<sup>59</sup> Supplementary report on the relocation of Mrs. Thompson and Mrs. Simpson and a report on the release of James Thompson and David Simpson, defendants in the kissing case," March 11, 1959, NAACP papers, Part III A92, North Carolina Kissing Case folder.

release to the families' improved living conditions rather than admit a misjudgment or mistake had been made.

The NAACP's lack of involvement in the kissing case warrants further exploration, as it illustrates challenges the NAACP faced from leftist organizations that supported African American civil rights, and it reflects the association's position in the evolving civil rights movement.

#### NAACP Reticence About the Kissing Case

This study's findings show that the overwhelming bulk of the public relations work to free the boys was implemented by the CCRI. Although the CCRI and the NAACP both wanted the boys' freedom, they had different approaches to obtaining it. The NAACP's lack of involvement in the kissing case illustrates how its organizational structure limited its ability to adapt to changes in the civil rights movement, allowing other organizations to form and tackle issues it was unable or unwilling to handle. In addition, the organization's previous experience with Communist-affiliated organizations, as well as its earlier work on miscegenation laws, also played a role in its reticence to support the kissing case. One such case was that of the Scottsboro boys.

In 1931, nine African American teenagers, later referred to as the Scottsboro boys, were accused of raping two white women on a train in Alabama. The boys were convicted by an all-white jury and sentenced to death. As with the kissing case 27 years later, the NAACP was slow to lend its support to the Scottsboro boys. The Communist Party USA (CPUSA) heard of the Scottsboro boys and began actively protesting their sentence. The CPUSA believed African Americans were an oppressed class, and it therefore added US race relations to its agenda.

While the CPUSA immediately immersed itself in the Scottsboro case, the NAACP “failed initially to see clear-cut evidence that the boys’ constitutional rights were being abused.”<sup>60</sup> The NAACP’s cautious approach left a void that the International Labor Defense (ILD), a communist-affiliated legal advocacy organization, eagerly filled by providing legal representation. When the NAACP later decided it wanted to handle the case, the ILD refused to step aside, resulting in name calling and ill will between the two organizations. The CPUSA and ILD accused the NAACP of ignoring black workers and focusing instead on the “Negro bourgeoisie.”<sup>61</sup> The CPUSA believed America’s race problems reflected a class and labor struggle to be solved by revolution and unity between black and white laborers. On the other hand, the NAACP, “associated with a tradition of abolition and democracy consonant with the founding traditions of the nation—acted out of the belief that what black people wanted was equal rights and equal access to American society, not a revolution to topple it.”<sup>62</sup> The two organizations had underlying differences in their principles. “The NAACP worked within the framework of the Constitution with the goal of having constitutional guarantees enforced, while the Communists challenged the entire American system.”<sup>63</sup>

During subsequent trials, the Scottsboro boys’ death sentence was upheld, despite medical evidence that the boys had not committed the rape. After an appeal to the US Supreme Court followed by additional trials, four of the boys were released in 1937. The last defendant was released in 1950 and in 1977 the state of Alabama acknowledged their innocence with an

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<sup>60</sup> Dray, *At the Hands of Persons Unknown*, 309.

<sup>61</sup> Walter T. Howard, *Black Communists Speak on Scottsboro: A Documentary History* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2008), 61.

<sup>62</sup> Dray, *At the Hands of Persons Unknown*, 311.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 310.

official pardon, despite the fact that only one of the boys was still alive to hear of his vindication.<sup>64</sup> Despite disappointment that the NAACP did not act sooner and therefore did not handle the Scottsboro case, “most civil rights supporters came to feel that the ILD did perform heroically in making the boys’ plight an international cause.”<sup>65</sup>

By the time two boys were accused of molesting a white girl in a culvert in North Carolina, the NAACP and CPUSA were opponents, despite wanting similar outcomes in cases of racial injustice. Although none of the CCRI’s founders were members of the CPUSA in 1958, Conrad Lynn had been a member in the 1920s and 1930s, and George Weissman was a member of the Socialist Workers Party. The NAACP wanted to avoid association with organizations linked in fact or by rumor to communism. Because white supremacists tried to discredit the civil rights movement as a Communist conspiracy, the NAACP had to continually defend itself against charges that it was infiltrated and led by Communists. These allegations increased during the red scare following World War II.<sup>66</sup> As part of its defense, the NAACP “distanced itself from all groups and individuals suspected of Communist affiliations.”<sup>67</sup> For example in the late 1940s and early 1950s, the NAACP refused to work with the Civil Rights Congress (CRC), a successor organization to the ILD and the National Negro Congress. Recalling the criticism leveled by the ILD during the Scottsboro case, the NAACP declined offers from the CRC to cooperate on various cases.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 315.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 311.

<sup>66</sup> Berg, “Black Civil Rights and Liberal Anticommunism,” 88.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 76.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 93.

Another reason for the NAACP's cautious approach and dearth of involvement in the kissing case relates to the structure of the association. The NAACP "did not emerge within the black community, nor were the black masses involved in shaping the organization at the outset."<sup>69</sup> Instead, it was founded by black and white intellectuals. It was a bureaucratic organization, with centralized decision making emanating from its New York headquarters.<sup>70</sup> The association's leadership established policies and procedures that guided the activities of the headquarters, as well as the branches. Also, despite being the preeminent black civil rights organization, the NAACP was not a mass membership organization, and its ranks "seldom included more than two percent of the black population."<sup>71</sup> The NAACP sought reform primarily through legal action and political reform. This approach did not foster individual involvement, which was often "limited to making financial contributions and reporting incidents of racial injustice and discrimination to the local branch."<sup>72</sup>

Reginald Hawkins, a civil rights activist who worked with Kelly Alexander in the Charlotte chapter of the NAACP, later explained that the NAACP was an organization for the bourgeoisie that "did not want to deal with the underclass."<sup>73</sup> This focus on the middle class may have been another reason the association was not eager to support two boys from impoverished families.

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<sup>69</sup> Morris, *Origins of the Civil Rights Movement*, 13.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Tyson, *Radio Free Dixie*, 109.

The NAACP's bureaucracy also impacted the type of protest tactics it implemented. According to Aldon Morris, bureaucratic organizations are usually unable to "accommodate mass grassroots insurgency and the attendant uncertainty and experimentation."<sup>74</sup> Instead of pursuing alternative tactics such as those involving mass protest, bureaucratic organizations avoid uncertainty and operate within the status quo. With its focus on legal redress, the NAACP believed it needed to operate within the prevailing legal and political system. Therefore when Union County officials claimed they would consider freeing the boys if their home environments improved, the NAACP worked within the parameters outlined by authorities and directed its efforts to making those improvements. It did not get involved in the mass protest campaign to free the boys.

Additionally, after World War II, the fight for black civil rights was marked by frustration at the slow pace of progress and a corresponding assertiveness in affecting change.<sup>75</sup> During the war, black soldiers overseas had experienced better treatment by foreigners than by US citizens. They had demonstrated their willingness to die for their country and believed their sacrifice afforded them equal citizenship. Many black Americans also had rallied around the Double V campaign, which sought victory in the war overseas and against racism and inequality at home. Moreover, Americans were becoming aware that after the war, the United States did not afford all its black citizens the freedoms it demanded other countries offer their citizens. As a result, "blacks began to understand their collective predicament as well as their collective strength."<sup>76</sup> As blacks' level of consciousness increased, some local NAACP leaders, such as Robert

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<sup>74</sup> Morris, *Origins of the Civil Rights Movement*, 35.

<sup>75</sup> August Meier, "Negro Protest Movements and Organizations," *Journal of Negro Education* 32, no. 4 (1963): 437.

<sup>76</sup> Morris, *Origins of the Civil Rights Movement*, 4.

Williams, wanted to take a more aggressive approach than did the national NAACP office, which continued to rely on the legal approach it had used since its founding.

During the 1950s, the NAACP's chief concerns were voter registration and attacking segregation, primarily in the schools, and it did so through its usual means. Also during this time, the white power structure in a number of southern states was attempting to put the NAACP out of business, and the association was actively defending itself from these attacks.<sup>77</sup> For the NAACP's national leaders, the kissing case was unrelated to its larger initiatives. It was not an organization that was committed to fighting small, local problems, unless they were linked to the organization's more immediate objectives. The kissing case was an example of a particular local problem, which is why NAACP national and regional leaders dismissed it as a concern for social workers, not for civil rights leaders. It wasn't until the case became a larger problem that the NAACP got involved, albeit reluctantly.

Still another reason for the NAACP's cautious approach to the kissing case relates to its history with miscegenation law. From 1913 to 1929, the NAACP's efforts helped defeat such laws in a number of northern states and the District of Columbia.<sup>78</sup> However by the late 1930s, the NAACP's legal team targeted its efforts at ending segregation, and it won a number of cases involving voting rights and equal housing. The association then began devoting significant attention to ending segregation in education. Although NAACP leaders did not agree with miscegenation laws, they thought asserting that these laws "were unconstitutional would bring down a firestorm of criticism and possibly intimidate the Court or some of its justices."<sup>79</sup> In other

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 30-35.

<sup>78</sup> Pascoe, *What Comes Naturally: Miscegenation Law and the Making of Race in America*, 172.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 203.



words, addressing interracial marriage laws would impede the progress the NAACP was beginning to see in its efforts against segregation. This focus on ending segregation would lead to one of the NAACP's most important legal victories, the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision. However, the *Brown* decision did not result in an immediate integration of schools. Therefore, at the time of the kissing case, the NAACP was still fighting its school integration battles.

The CCRI developed and implemented a public relations campaign to free the boys, which involved creating awareness of their situation and fomenting public protest to demand their release. However, the initial publicity surrounding the kissing case drew attention to the NAACP's dearth of support, which forced the association to become involved when it would otherwise not have done so. The NAACP's organizational structure, as well as its history with miscegenation law and with communist organizations in a climate in which civil rights organizations were frequently red baited, all contributed to its reluctance to champion the boys' cause. When it was finally forced to get involved, it did not draw significant attention to its involvement with an extensive public relations campaign, and its public relations efforts were minimal. Instead, it concentrated on relocating the families to better homes and providing them financial support. Hodges chose to free the boys, citing the improved living conditions. Ultimately, it may have been the significant attention paid to the kissing case due to the CCRI's work, as well as the families' new homes provided by the NAACP, that together contributed to Hodges's decision. Whatever the combination of factors, the CCRI had achieved its outcome.

*Superiority? Inferiority?  
Why not simply try to  
touch the other,  
feel the other,  
discover each other?*<sup>1</sup>

## **CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

Using racial formation theory as a foundation, this dissertation asked how race, as it was socially constructed and codified via 1950s-era Jim Crow practices, was reflected in the groups' public relations material and in the opinions the public expressed in letters to Hodges. Despite Hodges's and the USIA's assertions to the contrary, race played a role in the kissing case. The CCRI wanted to ensure that its audiences were aware of the racism that undergirded the case, and it did so in its public relations material. When examined through the lens of Omi and Winant's racial formation theory, the CCRI's focus on illuminating racism and Hodges's avoidance of it reflect significant shifts that were occurring in racial meanings at the time.

Chapter five discusses the kissing case and its public relations, including the frames in the public relations material, in relation to racial formation theory. It also discusses the public relations implemented on behalf of the kissing case in the context of the role of public relations in society. In addition, this chapter presents what contemporary public relations practitioners can learn from the kissing case public relations campaigns. Finally, this chapter presents opportunities for further study.

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<sup>1</sup> Franz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (New York: Grove Press, 1952), 206.

## Racial Formation Theory, the Kissing Case, and Public Relations

Omi and Winant's theory defines "racial formation" as "the process by which social, economic, and political forces determine the content and importance of racial categories, and by which they are in turn shaped by racial meanings."<sup>2</sup> They posit that race is not a biological manifestation, but instead is a social construct subject to historical changes. Stated another way, race must be understood "as something more than skin color or biophysical essence, but precisely as those historic repertoires and cultural and spatial, and signifying systems that stigmatize and depreciate one form of humanity for the purposes of another's health, development, safety, profit and pleasure."<sup>3</sup> Race is a fluid concept shaped by societal systems and interactions, and it is "neither an essence nor an illusion, but rather an ongoing, contradictory, self-reinforcing process subject to the macro forces of social and political struggle and the micro effects of daily decisions."<sup>4</sup>

The notion of black as a race was developed "by dominant groups, socially reproduced over generations, and remains embedded within the institutions, culture, and social consciousness of American society."<sup>5</sup> However, this representation of race relied on biology, including skin color, to develop a "eugenic assumption that race is genetic, unchangeable and determinative of the superiority of the white race."<sup>6</sup> From this belief, whites developed a two-

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<sup>2</sup> Omi and Winant, *Racial Formation*, 61.

<sup>3</sup> Nikhil Pal Singh, *Black is a Country: Race and the Unfinished Struggle for Democracy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 223.

<sup>4</sup> Ian F. Haney Lopez, "Social Construction of Race: Some Observations on Illusion, Fabrication, and Choice," *Harvard Civil Rights-Civil Liberties Law Review* 29, no. 1 (1994): 7.

<sup>5</sup> David L. Brunsma and Kerry Ann Rockquemore, "What Does 'Black' Mean? Exploring the Epistemological Stranglehold of Racial Categorization," *Critical Sociology* 28, no. 1-2 (2002): 105.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 106.

tiered racial hierarchy. This classification determined that blacks' position in society would be one of inferiority, with a concomitant limitation or denial of resources. The focus on the physical, genetic, and biological aspects of a racial caste necessitated that the dominant group define "white" and "black," and they did so legally and culturally with the one-drop rule, which mandated that anyone with one drop of blood was placed in the black caste. White supremacy was contingent on white purity; therefore, in addition to the one-drop rule, miscegenation laws were developed to maintain the racial order. The laws were written to prohibit whites from marrying blacks, Asians, and Indians, but not to prohibit blacks, Asians and Indians from marrying each other.<sup>7</sup> Although the list of races named in the law varied from state to state, blacks and whites were always barred from marrying, reflecting the black/white binary.<sup>8</sup> In the United States, "anti-miscegenation laws were more extensive than either legalized segregation or slavery, existing in 41 of the 50 states at one point or other. They also outlasted the *de jure* end of Jim Crow in the Supreme Court's *Brown* decision by more than a decade, and extended not simply in the Deep South, but across regional divides, paralleling the western expansion of American territory."<sup>9</sup>

The one-drop decree and laws prohibiting black/white unions served as the foundation for white supremacy, and they rested on the popular notion that "race actually existed, that it was a thing that could be measured, determined, gotten to the truth of."<sup>10</sup> Because white racial supremacy also "provided an epistemological template for the order of things," the one-drop

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<sup>7</sup> Pascoe, *What Comes Naturally: Miscegenation Law and the Making of Race in America*, 8.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Debra Thompson, "Racial Ideas and Gendered Intimacies: The Regulation of Interracial Relationships in North America," *Social & Legal Studies* 18, no. 3 (2009): 359.

<sup>10</sup> Pascoe, *What Comes Naturally: Miscegenation Law and the Making of Race in America*, 8.

ideology provided structure when this order was challenged. A mixed-race person disturbed the order, but the one-drop rule provided “specific mechanisms for bringing deviations back into the explanatory framework of racial classification.”<sup>11</sup> Thus, the mulatto, quadroon or person with any amount of black blood is placed at the bottom of the hierarchy, as are their descendants.

Even in states where black/white unions were legal, those who crossed the color line were often castigated. Such an outcome occurred in 1955 when four assembly line workers at a Detroit auto factory, two white women and two men—one black and one white—decided to give each other a peck on the cheek during a Christmas party at work.<sup>12</sup> The four, who had long been friendly, worked in a department that had seen an influx of black men and white women, disrupting a labor market that had been a bastion for white men. Of the foursome, a 35 year-old African American man kissed his 32 year-old white female co-worker. Two white male employees later harangued the women for allowing the buss. As a result, she filed a complaint against her black co-worker, saying she had been kissed unwillingly. Despite appeals, the African American man was fired, and the other white woman involved, who had suggested the kiss and had a long-standing friendship with the black man, received a disciplinary layoff but was later allowed to return to work. The white men’s action reflects the struggle to maintain power in the midst of shifts in economics, politics, and culture.<sup>13</sup> Three years later in Monroe, North Carolina, there would be a similar struggle, for similar reasons.

The prohibition against sexual relations and intermarriage between blacks and whites was another form of Jim Crow, yet it did more than mandate physical separation and regulate social

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<sup>11</sup> Brunsma and Rockquemore, “What Does Black Mean?,” 106.

<sup>12</sup> Kevin Boyle, “The Kiss: Racial and Gender Conflict in a 1950s Automobile Factory,” *Journal of American History* 84, no. 2 (1997): 496-497.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

relationships. It provided a way to signify racial meaning. In other words, miscegenation law presented another means to equate black with being subordinate and unworthy. At the same time, it reinforced white as its opposite: superordinate, and worthy. Despite laws and rules defining blackness, race mixing also presented the possibility of redefining whiteness. Had there not been strict rules and laws, adding a drop of black blood to white could have changed the definition of white based on shades and variations in skin color.<sup>14</sup> Miscegenation law provided a social boundary and racial boundary; it was a means to maintain the racial order.<sup>15</sup> From a macro perspective, “dominant groups maintain and police racial boundaries through social closure and violence—symbolic or otherwise—to maintain status and power.”<sup>16</sup> Regulating intimate relationships served as a form of boundary making for the dominant group, which impacted personal interactions which were at the micro level.

The kissing case involved more than a peck between children during a game. Hanover and Fuzzy had previously stolen a ham; they were on probation for similar delinquencies but had never been charged for those transgressions. However, they were charged with molesting a white girl. This act violated laws and threatened the caste system. This dissertation’s finding show the kissing case is ultimately about miscegenation, despite the ages of the children involved. As such, it is about power. In jailing Hanover and Fuzzy, the dominant group asserted its power and in response, the subordinate group demanded justice it had long been denied. As miscegenation law provided a way to codify race socially and to maintain white dominion, the kissing case represents a struggle over the meaning of race, which in the end, is a struggle over hegemony. As

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<sup>14</sup> See for example Mala Htun, "From 'Racial Democracy' to Affirmative Action: Changing State Policy on Race in Brazil," *Latin American Research Review* 39, no. 1 (2004): 60-89.

<sup>15</sup> Aliya Saperstein, Andrew M. Penner, and Ryan Light, “Racial Formation in Perspective: Connecting Individuals, Institutions, and Power Relations,” *Annual Review of Sociology* 39, no. 1 (2013): 364.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

Omi and Winant proffered, race is “an unstable and decentered complex of social meanings constantly being transformed by political struggle.”<sup>17</sup> Had North Carolina authorities not taken action against the boys, they would have condoned race mixing, which would upend the race binary. Allowing black/white unions would move blacks to a more equal position in the hierarchy in that their personal relationships would not be regulated by dominant whites, and they would be seen as worthy of entering into unions with whites. The boys’ action was a threat to white supremacy, as was the demand for their freedom. This demand reflected blacks’ intolerance of the inferior social position and their motivation to take action to get the political, legal, economic, and social resources they had been denied.

Central to Omi’s and Winant’s theory is the “racial project,” which they define as “simultaneously an interpretation, representation, or explanation of racial dynamics and an effort to organize and distribute resources along racial lines.” The modern civil rights movement is a racial project; however, racial projects can be large or small and can come from any point on the political spectrum.<sup>18</sup> Racial projects ultimately involve contests over hegemony, with a subordinate group contesting its status and pressing a claim for political, economic, and social equality. As such, the kissing case was a racial project. In racial projects, the dominant group may concede some of its power, or it may fight to maintain its position.

The kissing case tackled race at the level of social structure, which includes social stratification, institutional arrangements, political systems, and laws. It also challenged what Winant refers to as social signification, or the production of meanings, which is how race is culturally configured and how it is a descriptor of group or individual identity, social issues and

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<sup>17</sup> Omi and Winant, *Racial Formation*, 68.

<sup>18</sup> Laura E. Gomez, "Race Mattered: Racial Formation and the Politics of Crime in Territorial New Mexico," *UCLA Law Review* 49, no. 5 (2002): 1395.

experience.<sup>19</sup> Most southern whites “could not envision a society in which blacks had rights—in which blacks were treated as human.”<sup>20</sup> Giving blacks equal rights would create a different society, one without a two-tiered racial hierarchy in which whites would occupy the top position. In addressing this power struggle, historian John Stauffer stated of whites, “They assumed that black supremacy would replace white supremacy. It would be one or the other, and that fueled their desire to do anything to prevent that from happening.”<sup>21</sup> The CCRI demanded the boys not be viewed as subordinate actors in a milieu of white dominion. The boys had been denied their rights because they were black, reflecting a racist society in which black was constructed as unworthy of receiving civil rights. The CCRI insisted that Hanover and Fuzzy not be treated differently because they were black. With this demand, CCRI leaders were attempting to change the social meaning of what it was to be black. In other words, it asked that they be treated as if they were white, thereby skewing racial significations. With subordinate group challenges to existing racial schemes, racial meanings and categories are subject to change, reflecting their instability. Thus, notions of race are a form capital in political struggles, as subordinate groups challenge racialized social systems.

### Racial Projects and Communication

Social movements involving race can be considered racial projects, and social movements do not happen without communication. Racial projects “connect what race means in a particular discursive practice and the ways in which both social structures and everyday

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<sup>19</sup> Howard Winant, “Racism Today: Continuity and Change in Post-Civil Rights Era,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 21, no. 4 (July 1998), 755-766.

<sup>20</sup> John Stauffer, “Into the Fire, 1861-1896,” Henry Louis Gates, *The African Americans: Many Rivers to Cross*, episode 3 (Arlington, VA: PBS Distribution, 2014).

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.



experiences are racially organized, based upon that meaning.”<sup>22</sup> With social movements, discursive processes “refer to the talk and conversations—the speech acts—and written communications of movement members that occur primarily in the context of, or in relation to, movement activities.”<sup>23</sup> These speech acts and written communications often manifest as public relations strategies or tactics. Therefore, public relations can be essential to fostering the discourse necessary for racial meanings to change in racial projects.

The success of social movements necessitates attracting the attention of people, arousing interest in a cause, winning audiences’ consent to consider messages, and stimulating audiences to desired action. These practices comprise a definition of public relations.<sup>24</sup> One of the challenges marginalized groups face is creating awareness of their dilemma and its possible solutions to those outside their collective group. In the Jim Crow South, segregationist mandates impacted all areas of blacks’ lives, including communication and “although the pressures from the dominant white majority have not been successful in molding Negro opinions, they have been successful in inducing many Negroes to refrain from expressing those opinions—or even to express contrary opinions—in contacts with local whites.”<sup>25</sup> This reticence to communicate and the resulting silence contributed to whites’ belief that blacks were content with their subservience. As a result, “the pattern of communication in the South leaves the superordinate group as a whole less informed about the other race’s aspirations, while permitting them greater

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<sup>22</sup> Robert D. Benford and David A. Snow, “Framing Processes and Social Movements: An Overview and Assessment,” *Annual Review of Sociology* 26, no. 1 (2000): 623.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Harlow, *Social Science in Public Relations*, 60.

<sup>25</sup> Donald R. Matthews and James W. Prothro, “Southern Racial Attitudes: Conflict, Awareness, and Political Change,” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 344, no. 1 (1962): 112.

freedom to project their own views to others.”<sup>26</sup> This resulted in a “great inaccuracy of whites in estimating the views of Negroes,” and “inaccurate information about the views of the subordinate group may be viewed as one of the prices the superordinate group must pay for a repressive social system.”<sup>27</sup> Stated another way, the communication process permitted the dominant group the luxury of ignorance about the wishes of those who were dominated. As an example, although most whites thought that blacks agreed with segregation, research conducted by Matthews and Prothro in the early 1960s found that the opposite was true. Blacks “support integration as solidly as whites support segregation. The percentage of Negroes who favor integration actually exceeds the percentage of white who favor strict segregation.”<sup>28</sup> Based on their findings, the researchers concluded that “the prospects for change in white racial attitudes seem to be fairly good only if one takes a very long-run view.”<sup>29</sup> But blacks were growing increasingly frustrated by the slow pace of progress, and to expedite change “within a viable democratic system would appear to depend on a change in white perceptions of the nature of Negro demands.”<sup>30</sup> This change in perceptions could not occur without communication. Addressing the importance of communication, Matthews and Prothro suggest that “even if the dominant group does not agree with the demands of a sizable faction in its midst, its members

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 111.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 112.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 117.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

may respond to those demands *if they know what they are*.”<sup>31</sup> In addition, “even whites who are appalled at Negro demands may be forced at least to recognize that the demands exist.”<sup>32</sup>

Communication within marginalized groups helps shape collective identity, shared goals, and direction. But to affect change, the subordinate group also must find a way to communicate externally in order to share its plight and desires to both detractors and supporters in the dominant group. With social movements, this communication is often delivered via public relations strategies and tactics. By employing public relations strategies and tactics, the CCRI brought news of the boys’ dilemma to an audience well beyond Monroe, North Carolina. Rather than remaining one of countless episodes of racial injustice that would remain hidden within the confines of the Southern town in which it occurred, public relations helped create worldwide awareness of racial marginalization and it made the dominant group aware of blacks’ thoughts and demands. Through written and verbal discourse, the CCRI questioned the prevailing social structure and fought for a new meaning of black—one that sought to associate it with worthiness and equality.

#### Framing Race in the Kissing Case Public Relations Materials

One of the ways that actors in racial projects or social movements shape discursive practices is with framing. In developing frames, “movement actors are viewed as signifying agents actively engaged in the production and maintenance of meaning for constituents, antagonists, and bystanders or observers.”<sup>33</sup> When used in social movements, framing “calls attention to the grievance, names it as unjust and intolerable, attributes blame and responsibility,

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid. Emphasis in original.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 119.

<sup>33</sup> Benford and Snow, “Framing Processes and Social Movements,” 613.

and suggests how best to ameliorate the situation.”<sup>34</sup> These frames are referred to as collective action frames, and they perform an interpretive function by simplifying and condensing aspects of “the world out there,” in ways that are “intended to mobilize potential adherents and constituents, to garner bystander support, and to demobilize antagonists. Thus, collective action frames are action-oriented sets of beliefs and meanings that inspire and legitimate the activities and campaigns of social movement organizations.”<sup>35</sup>

This dissertation examined the frames in the groups’ public relations material, and its findings show that the CCRI’s most prominent frame—race and racism—was used to focus the audiences’ attention on the injustices blacks experienced in order to mobilize supporters to help eliminate these injustices, drawing attention to the crux of the problem. By employing the racism frame, the CCRI linked the meaning of black with equal rights, democracy, and freedom. The public coalesced around this frame and repeated it in correspondence to North Carolina Gov. Hodges. In contrast, Hodges avoided the race frame, but in doing so, he drew attention to its absence. Many letter writers who corresponded to Hodges questioned why he did not answer their questions about the racism behind the case. Focused on maintaining the status quo, Hodges engaged in counterframing, resulting in a framing contest with the CCRI. This framing contest also was indicative of the struggle over racial meaning. Hodges sought to reverse any damage caused by the CCRI’s frames. His frames focused on retaining the prevailing definition of “black” and the existing social system, hence his emphasis on the inferiority of the boys and their mothers. Hodges’s framing contest with the CCRI was part of the discursive struggle in the kissing case racial project. The discursive contest mirrored the broader struggle over the

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<sup>34</sup> Steve Valocchi, “The Emergence of the Integrationist Ideology in the Civil Rights Movement,” *Social Problems* 43, no 1 (1996): 119.

<sup>35</sup> Benford and Snow, “Framing Processes and Social Movements,” 614.

subaltern group's demand that whites concede some of their power in order to create a society in which all citizens were treated equally.

One of the reasons the CCRI's public relations campaign was successful was that it targeted adherents of racial justice. The fact that the CCRI's key frame—racism—was also one of the frames in the letters members of the public sent to Hodges indicates that the CCRI chose targets whose beliefs were aligned with the committee's mission. "Given that one of the key factors affecting whether or not a proffered frame resonates with potential constituents has to do with the extent to which the frame taps into existing cultural values, beliefs, narratives, folk wisdom, and the like, it is not surprising to find that most movements seek to amplify extant beliefs and values."<sup>36</sup> In writing about social movements, Klandermans argues that "the public can be persuaded if one of the three following conditions prevails: the public adheres to the collective belief system of the persuading agent; the persuading agent can, in one way or another, anchor its arguments in the collective beliefs of the public; or the persuading agent succeeds in transforming the collective beliefs of the public."<sup>37</sup> In addition, "the more central or salient the espoused beliefs, ideas, and values of a movement to the targets of mobilization, the greater the probability of their mobilization."<sup>38</sup> Hodges did not direct his communications to an audience that shared his beliefs. Instead, he communicated with the audience the CCRI had mobilized. Therefore, Hodges's key frame—blame—caused dissonance among this audience. He was unable to persuade those with whom he corresponded and thus, his public relations campaign was ultimately ineffective. Hodges relied on the strength of his beliefs. When the Southern racial

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 624.

<sup>37</sup> Bert Klandermans, "The Social Construction of Protest and Multiorganizational Fields," in *Frontiers in Social Movement Theory*, ed. Aldon Morris and Carol McClurg Mueller (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1992), 84-85.

<sup>38</sup> Benford and Snow, "Framing Processes and Social Movements," 621.

ethos was threatened, Hodges tried to use public relations to preserve it, thinking he could persuade those who questioned his racial ideology.

### **The Kissing Case and the Role of Public Relations in Society**

To help change its status, a subordinate group must communicate its oppression to a broader audience. Thus, it was not the kissing case itself, but the national and global attention paid to the kissing case that caused a fissure in the South's social structure. As this dissertation's findings have shown, public relations played a significant role in creating awareness of the kissing case and mobilizing action. The relationship between awareness, action, and political struggle reflects one of the roles public relations plays in society. In describing the societal role of public relations, Robert Heath posited:

Public relations is one of the many instances of social influence by which entities (corporate and individual) vie to cocreate shared social meaning, negotiate relationships, influence and yield to influence, create and resolve conflict, distribute resources, manage power resources, exert and yield to control, manage risks, shape and respond to preferences, work to resolve uncertainty, foster trust, engage in support and opposition, distribute rewards and costs, foster interdependency, and make enlightened choices.<sup>39</sup>

Public relations fosters dialogue and facilitates two-way relationships between organizations and their publics. With a cocreational view of public relations, "publics are not just a means to an end. Publics are not instrumentalized but instead are partners in the meaning-making process."<sup>40</sup> Therefore, public relations goes beyond merely disseminating information in order to help an organization achieve its goals. The kissing case illustrates the co-creational role of public relations, which "uses communication to help groups to negotiate meaning and build

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<sup>39</sup>Robert L. Heath, "Onward Into More Fog: Thoughts on Public Relations' Research Directions," *Journal of Public Relations Research* 18, no. 2 (2006): 98.

<sup>40</sup>Carl H. Botan and Maureen Taylor, "Public Relations: State of the Field," *Journal of Communication* 54, no. 4 (2004): 652.

relationships.”<sup>41</sup> Instead of one-way communication in which the superordinate white group communicated its power position to blacks, public relations provided a means for blacks to communicate their rights and insistence for an equal position in the hierarchy. However, “relationships are not inherently positive,” and “as dialogue, they arise from and help shape shared meaning, enactable narratives, which is not always a path to harmony.”<sup>42</sup>

Writing in 1952 about the role of public relations in society, Edward Bernays proffered that “public relations is a vital tool of adjustment, interpretation, and integration between individuals, groups, and society.”<sup>43</sup> Noting the two-way aspect of public relations, Bernays added that “public relations counteracts the tyranny of the majority and helps re-establish the inherent pluralism of America. Majority ideas often begin as minority ideas. Both are important.”<sup>44</sup> Addressing social change that had been effected by public relations, Bernays wrote that “progressive laws regarding child labor, working hours, wages, and women suffrage were brought about by effective public relations activities, which won the support of people who were passive or opposed to such laws. Small groups have worked effectively for the social interest by application of public relations research, strategy, and tactics.”<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Maureen Taylor, “Public Relations in the Enactment of Civil Society,” in *Sage Handbook of Public Relations*, ed. Robert L. Heath (Los Angeles: Sage Publications, 2010), 6.

<sup>42</sup> Robert L. Heath, “The Journey to Understand and Champion OPR Takes Many Roads, Some Not Yet Well Traveled,” *Public Relations Review* 39, no. 4 (2013): 426

<sup>43</sup> Bernays, *Public Relations*, 7.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

Democracy requires an informed public, and it requires language that co-manages meanings as social construction without privileging one interest at the disadvantage of another.<sup>46</sup> According to Bernays, “to citizens in general, public relations is important because it helps them to understand the society of which we are all a part, to know and evaluate the viewpoints of others, to exert leadership in modifying conditions that affect us, to evaluate efforts being made by others, and to persuade or suggest courses of action.”<sup>47</sup> Rather than societal discourse being solely the purview of elites, public relations can provide dissenting voices and marginalized groups an opportunity to be heard, contributing to an informed citizenry, robust public discourse, and enlightened choice. “Public relations as a public advocacy function is essential to generate the necessary publicity for individual and organizational participation in public dialogues that eventuate in public opinion. Public relations is necessary to ensure the existence of competing interests in the public sphere, as these interests ensure the fair debate of public issues.”<sup>48</sup> Public relations helps groups “create shared meaning, voice collective opinion, and build relationships.”<sup>49</sup> Although the groups involved in the kissing case had competing goals involving different racial ideologies, public relations provided the means for their discursive negotiations. With this particular negotiation, Hodges conceded, although he most likely did not view it as such. On other hand, the CCRI viewed the outcome of the kissing case as a victory for racial

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<sup>46</sup> Robert L. Heath, Damion Waymer, and Michael J. Palenchar, “Is the Universe of Democracy, Rhetoric, and Public Relations Whole Cloth or Three Separate Galaxies?,” *Public Relations Review* 39, No. 4 (2013): 272.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>48</sup> Erich J. Sommerfeldt, “The Civility of Social Capital: Public Relations in the Public Sphere, Civil Society, and Democracy,” *Public Relations Review* 39, no. 4 (2013): 281.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 287.



justice. As part of a long civil rights movement, it was one of many such negotiations indicative of political struggle focused on toppling social structures that subjugated black citizens.

## **The Kissing Case and Lessons for Contemporary Public Relations Practice**

### The Kissing Case as a Case Study

The CCRI's work on behalf of the kissing case can be viewed as a case study of a successful public relations campaign, as it contains the key elements of a public relations plan: goals, objectives, audiences, strategies, tactics, key messages, and evaluation. The strategies and tactics used by the CCRI, Gov. Hodges, the NAACP, and the USIA are still being used by practitioners today.<sup>50</sup> Therefore, notwithstanding changes in media technology, many of the CCRI's strategies and tactics would be recognizable to contemporaneous public relations practitioners. In addition, the CCRI implemented a very effective public relations campaign that achieved its outcome.

The kissing case provides lessons on choosing the right audiences, and then developing strategies and tactics that align with goals and objectives that resonate with the audiences. Additionally, for those who may have difficulty differentiating between strategies and tactics, this case allows one to see and differentiate those activities that were strategies and those that were tactics. Also, it demonstrates that campaigns can be effective without an overreliance on publicity-seeking efforts.<sup>51</sup> In addition, there are further aspects of the kissing case that provide lessons in crisis communication, reputation management, government relations, media relations, and campaign measurement and evaluation.

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<sup>50</sup> See for example Hardy and Waters, "Identifying the Norms of Professional Practice," 898-905.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 904.

## Crisis Communication and Reputation Management

Another lesson of the kissing case public relations relates to crisis communication and reputation management, which fall within the scope of public relations. Although these terms were not in use in the late 1950s, aspects of the kissing case and the corresponding actions taken would today be given those labels. Specifically, the kissing case illuminated America's racial problems, and Gov. Hodges, North Carolina and the United States were seen in a negative light by citizens in other countries. This sentiment was echoed in many of the letters received from concerned citizens, who wrote that the kissing case besmirched the reputation of North Carolina and the United States, as well as that of Hodges himself.

Hodges and his aides admitted they were overwhelmed by the number of letters received from outraged citizens around the world. The governor had a crisis on his hands. However rather than attempt to understand the reasons for the outrage, Hodges was so entrenched in the Southern ethos that he was unable to see an alternative viewpoint. The public believed the boys' crime did not fit the punishment, and they therefore wanted to know why the boys' were given such a harsh sentence. Hodges thought the public outcry was based on inadequate facts about the boys' situation. However Hodges's attempts to explain and justify using supposed facts was a strategy that backfired because the public believed the actual facts of the case highlighted the injustices of the South's racial system. Hodges did not attempt to understand his audience. Instead, he blamed the victim for his circumstances, and blamed the negative attention on communists. Interestingly, one of the many letters Hodges received was from a public relations practitioner in New York, who wrote that Hodges should get himself a better public relations team. The letter writer told Hodges that using the communist angle was a poor strategy, and highlighting the boys' impoverished living conditions did not justify their being sentenced to more than 10 years in a reformatory.

Hodges's response to the crisis and attempts at reputation management presents communication scholars and practitioners with a clear lesson in what not to do, although some of Hodges's actions were shaped by the racism of the 1950s and must therefore be examined within that context. Hodges took a defensive position and in doing so, he was not only defending the actions of North Carolina authorities, he was defending the southern racial hierarchy. Therefore, he was unable to fathom the possibility that authorities may have made a mistake in their treatment and sentencing of the boys. It was not until after the boys had been freed that Hodges acknowledged as much, reluctantly admitting in hindsight that Monroe authorities should have sought an alternative to the reformatory.

#### Government Relations

Another lesson to scholars and practitioners concerns government relations. One of the key learnings is that the CCRI was very targeted in its communication with government officials.<sup>52</sup> For example, George Weissman corresponded with USIA officials and in his capacity as CCRI chairman, Robert Williams wrote letters to Union County Superior Court Judge J. Hampton Price, to Gov. Hodges, and to the White House. Williams's letter to President Eisenhower was answered by E. Frederic Morrow, administrative officer for special projects and the first African American to hold a White House executive position. Morrow responded that the kissing case was not a federal matter and could only be resolved in the North Carolina courts. Williams accused Morrow of being a White House pawn, and he communicated his views to the press. As a result, the black press ran a number of stories conveying Williams's position and Morrow's subsequent defense. Despite Morrow's protest to the contrary, readers of the black press were ultimately left with a reinforcement of Williams's viewpoint: The federal government

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<sup>52</sup> The NAACP did not engage any government officials on behalf of the boys, despite the fact that the organization prided itself on its government contacts and lobbying.

once again was unconcerned and unsupportive of black citizens' civil rights. Correspondence by Williams and other CCRI members helped ensure government officials were not only aware of the case, but aware of the strong opposition to the boys' sentencing.

In addition, as an elected official, Hodges needed to ensure that his public relations efforts aligned with the needs and expectations of North Carolina voters. For example, with the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, Hodges complied with the ruling while allowing his constituents to maintain segregated schools. In the kissing case, conceding that North Carolina officials may have made mistakes would likely not have resonated with the majority of white North Carolinians, who viewed blacks as subordinate to whites. Hodges was an astute politician, and as he sought to manage North Carolina's reputation by defending its actions, he considered white voters' viewpoints about race relations.

### Media Relations

The kissing case also affords lessons to contemporary practitioners about media relations. Each of the four groups used the media to varying degrees to communicate its messages. Hodges enlisted a reporter for the *Winston-Salem Journal-Sentinel* to write a story that vilified the boys and the CCRI, while upholding Hodges's reputation and that of North Carolina. With the *Journal-Sentinel* article, which Hodges distributed to other media outlets and those who wrote to him, the CCRI made a strategic decision not to directly refute the allegations in the article. It recognized that only incontrovertible segregationists would accept the claims in the article. Rather than draw more attention to the false assertions, the CCRI believed that others readers would see the bias in the article. Instead, it decided to continue its focus on communicating its messages. However in other instances, the CCRI corrected what it believed was misinformation. When the USIA, in an attempt at reputation management, distributed a media statement asserting that racism was not involved in the kissing case, George Weissman sent a telegram refuting that

charge and demanding the USIA correct the misinformation, which it did. The USIA's media relations efforts also focused on monitoring international media coverage about the case and sending reports to its international field offices, as it did with other racial incidents in the United States.

### Measurement/Evaluation

Another lesson for today's communication scholars and public relations practitioners is in the area of public relations measurement, primarily because campaign evaluation is a growing area of scholarship and a significant concern among today's practitioners. In addition, the kissing case public relations campaign provides an example of how a campaign can be evaluated. For contemporary public relations practitioners, guidelines for public relations measurement are outlined in the Barcelona Principles, first developed in 2010 by five communication organizations, and updated in 2015.<sup>53</sup> The organizations identified seven principles of public relations measurement: goal setting and measurement is foundational to public relations and communications; measuring outcomes is recommended versus only measuring outputs; the effect on organizational performance can and should be measured where possible; measurement and evaluation require both quantitative and qualitative methods; advertising value equivalencies are not the value of public relations; social media can and should be measured consistently with other channels; and measurement and evaluation should be transparent, consistent, and valid.<sup>54</sup> Two principles of measurement, goal setting and the focus on outcomes, can be seen in the CCRI's public relations work and are explored below.

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<sup>53</sup> See the Barcelona Principles at <http://www.instituteforpr.org/barcelona-principles-2-0-updated-2015/>

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

One of the first steps in public relations campaign development is establishing clear goals or measurable communication objectives. The Barcelona Principles of 2010 and 2015 recommend doing something that the CCRI did in 1958: set goals. The CCRI established a clear goal: to arouse public opinion, thereby creating mass pressure that would be exerted on public officials to free the boys. The ultimate goal, which the CCRI stated as an outcome, was to secure the boys' freedom. After creating awareness of the kissing case, one of the public relations campaign strategies was to ask the public to taken an action: write Governor Hodges demanding the boys' freedom. This strategy was effective, and Hodges was inundated with letters and petitions from angry citizens.

Importantly, these letters provide a clear example of opinions expressed by a segment of the population, as the letter writers were direct in communicating their feelings about the case. In many public relations campaigns of the past and present, public opinion has not been evaluated because it has not been captured.<sup>55</sup> Instead, practitioners have relied on measuring outputs, such as media coverage or material produced. In contrast, the kissing case provides an example of public opinion related to a public relations campaign. In this case, the public voiced its opinions in the form of letters and petitions. The letters are not the outcome; the opinions conveyed by the public demanding the boys' freedom are an outcome. The final outcome of this case is the boys' freedom. The volume of letters and the opinions expressed may have played a role in Hodges's decision to release the boys.

In evaluating the effectiveness of this campaign, a public relations practitioner would first determine if the goals and objectives were met. Was public opinion aroused on behalf of the boys? Yes, as evidenced by the hundreds of letters and thousands of signatures sent to Hodges.

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<sup>55</sup> See Hardy and Waters, "Identifying the Norms of Professional Practice," 898-905.

What opinions did the public express in these letters? As seen in the frames in the letters, the public expressed shock and outrage; concern that the boys' punishment exceeded the severity of their offense; concern that the case had besmirched the reputation of the United States; and the racism behind the boys' sentencing. In addition, there is a relationship between the CCRI's public relations material and the outcome. Specifically, the frames in the CCRI's public relations material—shock, outrage, and racism—are reflected in the frames in the letters. In other words, the CCRI's frames are reflected in the opinions expressed by the letter writers. This relationship speaks to the salience and effectiveness of the CCRI's frames and its public relations strategies and tactics.

Finally, the public had been spurred to action: they demanded Hodges free the boys. What was the outcome? Hodges ultimately and suddenly freed the boys, less than four months after the kissing game. Although Conrad Lynn claimed that Eleanor Roosevelt urged Hodges to free the boys and Harry Golden claimed that his urgings caused Hodges to free them, the historical record does not verify these claims. Even if Hodges was persuaded by Roosevelt or Golden, it appears from this dissertation's findings that the worldwide awareness of the case, the public outcry, and mass pressure contributed to his decision to release Hanover and Fuzzy. The CCRI attributed the outcome to the letters and the mass pressure. Without the public relations efforts and the corresponding public reaction, the boys' might have remained incarcerated and their dilemma might have remained hidden, as were so many other instances of racial injustice perpetrated on black citizens in the South.

As a historical study, the fact that the letters remain offers an advantage because they can be analyzed to see if the letter writers were in favor of the boys' freedom or their sentencing. As such, they offer a way to ascertain the public's opinions, or at least the opinions of those who

corresponded to Hodges. Given his concern over the letters, they may have been a significant factor in his deciding to free the boys. Therefore, the opinions expressed in the letters should be analyzed. The letters offer a way to determine and measure an outcome: the opinions of their authors and in some cases, the beliefs on which those opinions were based. The CCRI did not see most of the letters sent to Hodges, although some correspondents sent a carbon copy to the CCRI. However, the organization was aware of the volume of letters, and it attributed its success to the letters, petitions and the opinions expressed in them. The letters and petitions were tangible evidence that the CCRI had aroused public opinion and created a mass protest. The committee did not count press clippings and gauge its success on the quantity and quality of media coverage, as was common practice in the 1950s and continues to be used today by some practitioners as a measurement of campaign results.<sup>56</sup> The lesson to today's practitioner is to seek a method that will allow for the measurement of outcomes, thereby not relying solely on measuring outputs. Yesterday's letters may be today's social media comments, for example, and a practitioner can seek methods such as surveys and focus groups to measure outcomes.

The public relations campaigns in response to the kissing case provide lessons for contemporary practitioners in a number of areas including: a look at how public relations was practiced in the late 1950s; a comparison of public relations practice and definitions then and now; similarities in 1950s strategies and tactics and today's practice; insight into how public relations was used to help foster social change in the United States; an example of how public relations was used by and for marginalized groups; how frames can be used in public relations material; and lessons in crisis communications, reputation management, government relations, media relations, public relations campaign development and implementation, and evaluation. In

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<sup>56</sup> Watson, "The Evolution of Public Relations Measurement and Evaluation," 392 and 396.



addition to these lessons, the public relations implemented on behalf of the kissing case provides insights into the historical development of public relations.

### Public Relations Models and the Historical Timeline

In 1984, scholars James E. Grunig and Todd Hunt developed and introduced four models of public relations.<sup>57</sup> In the press agency/publicity model, they proposed that propaganda is the primary purpose of communication, and the nature of communication is one-way. With the public information model, the authors posited that one-way communication focuses primarily on the dissemination of information. With these two models, Grunig and Hunt stated that communication is focused on telling, not listening. With the two-way asymmetric model, Grunig and Hunt suggested that the purpose of communication is scientific persuasion, and the effects of public relations are imbalanced in favor of the organization. The scholars proffered that instead of changing as a result of public relations, the organization attempted to change the public's attitudes and behavior. In contrast, the two-way symmetric model included a dialogue rather than a monologue, with both the organization and its publics mutually persuading and changing each other, with a focus on mutual adjustment rather than controlling how others think and behave.

Grunig and Hunt examined public relations historically to develop their four models, positing that the press agency/publicity model was prevalent from 1850 to 1900, followed by the public-information model, which they say began in about 1900 and continued until the 1920s. They proposed that the two-way asymmetric model followed, developing in the 1920s, and the more advanced and ethical two-way symmetric model emerged in the 1960s and 1970s. Grunig and Hunt classified Edward Bernays "not only as the leading historical example of the two-way

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<sup>57</sup> James E. Grunig and Todd Hunt, *Managing Public Relations* (Fort Worth, TX: Harcourt, Brace Janovich, 1984), 221-223.

asymmetric model of PR, but also as one of the thinkers who helped to develop the two-way symmetric model.”<sup>58</sup> These models suggest that public relations practice of the mid- to late-1800s was less sophisticated than practice in later years, and that there was a linear progression of improvement. This model presumes that public relations practice of the 1970s to today is better than public relations practiced in the 1940s or 1950s, as public relations has advanced over time. In challenging these models in relation to understanding public relations history, public relations historians Margot Opdycke Lamme and Karen Miller Russell referred to a “misleading dependence on linear interpretations of the field’s past,” and they wrote that “scholars have tended to organize public relations and its antecedents into time periods that present a progressive evolution from unsophisticated and unethical early roots to planned, strategic, and ethical campaigns of the current day.”<sup>59</sup> Other scholars also have outlined the limitations of examining public relations history via this timeline approach.<sup>60</sup> This dissertation’s findings offer further support of the limitations of the timeline approach. The models developed by Grunig and Hunt imply that contemporary public relations practice today is more advanced and effective than public relations practice of the 1950s. However the CCRI’s 1958 public relations campaign was no less advanced than a contemporary campaign. Its effective public relations campaign had a clearly defined goal; it identified the audiences that would help achieve this goal, and it developed effective strategies and tactics targeted to its audiences, using two-way

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Margot Opdycke Lamme and Karen Miller Russell, “Removing the Spin: Toward a New Theory of Public Relations History,” *Journalism and Communication Monographs* 11, no. 4 (Winter 2010): 281-362.

<sup>60</sup> See R.E. Brown, “St. Paul as a Public Relations Practitioner: A Metatheoretical Speculation on Messianic Communication and Symmetry,” *Public Relations Review* 29, no. 1 (2003): 1-12; Peggy Hoy, Oliver Raaz and Stefan Wehmeier, “From Facts to Stories or From Stories to Facts? Analyzing Public Relations History in Public Relations Textbooks,” *Public Relations Review* 33, no. 2 (2007):191-200; and Margot Opdycke Lamme, “The Brewers and Public Relations History, 1909-1919,” *Journal of Public Relations Research* 21, no. 4 (2009):455-477.

communication that helped achieve its desired outcome. This dissertation's findings show that the public relations strategies and tactics used by the four groups in the 1950s in relation to the kissing case are also used by contemporary practitioners. Thus, the kissing case public relations provides another example of how this evolutionary viewpoint of public relations history is flawed. By examining and comparing public relations definitions and practice of the 1950s and today, and analyzing the public relations components of the kissing case, this study's findings add to the scholarship that disproves Grunig's and Hunt's position, while providing an example of how public relations was used effectively by a marginalized group to advocate for social change.

### **Opportunities for Future Inquiry**

This study opens a number of avenues for further inquiry. African Americans have been largely absent from public relations history, be it as practitioners or as the focus of public relations campaigns. Further research in this area would help to close that gap. In addition, examining public relations and social movements that focused on arousing mass protest and pressure provides an additional opportunity for future research. Related to this, given that members of the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) developed a number of successful campaigns that focused on arousing public opinion and action, further inquiry may center on how the SWP used public relations to further its causes and how it may have used public relations to manage its reputation. Opportunities also may exist to examine how leftist organizations supported the civil rights movement in a time when red baiting was often used to discredit organizations that championed African America civil rights.

Through letters sent to Hodges, this dissertation was able to examine public opinion and its role in the outcome of the public relations campaign. The letters provide a means to ascertain public opinion, evaluate the outcome, and determine success. Additional areas of inquiry concern

the evaluation and measurement of public relations programs, including how public relations has historically been measured, beyond relying on outputs. Measurement continues to be a challenge to practitioners, and scholarship in this area is limited.<sup>61</sup> Therefore, additional research focused on this topic would contribute to the public relations industry's evolving guidelines on measurement and would assist those who practice public relations.

Examining the role of public relations in grassroots, civil rights activities provides another area of inquiry. Aldon Morris has highlighted the important role of local movements, and the work on the kissing case is an example of such an initiative. Much of this grassroots work and those who supported it have been overlooked. Instead, the focus has been on key events in the modern civil rights movement and on prominent figures, such as Martin Luther King Jr. In addition to contributing to public relations historical scholarship, further research into this area would show the breadth and depth of the civil rights movement, and would illustrate the many ways that ordinary citizens championed in their communities equal rights for African Americans.<sup>62</sup> Additionally, many of those citizens may have been women and minorities, demonstrating that public relations was not practiced solely by white males, contrary to what is reflected in public relations textbooks. Also, further inquiry could explore how public relations campaigns of the past that focused on social change relate to contemporary social change and social justice public relations campaigns.

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<sup>61</sup> See Watson, "The Evolution of Public Relations Measurement and Evaluation," 390-398. See also Grantham, Vieira Jr., and Trincherro, "Are We Practicing What We Preach?," 1-19; Childers Hon, "Demonstrating Effectiveness in Public Relations," 103-135; Michaelson and Stacks, "Standardization in Public Relations Measurement and Evaluation," 1-22.

<sup>62</sup> See Morris, *Origins of the Civil Rights Movement*. See also Jones, "Communist Front Shouts Kissing Case," 27.

## Conclusion

Before Robert Williams began to demand equality, the majority of whites in Monroe believed race relations were as they should be, with blacks occupying their position at the bottom of the social and racial hierarchy. The southern system, which used social, political, legal, and economic means to ensure that blacks remained as the subordinate caste, forced blacks to accept white dominion. Most southern whites thought that segregation was the natural order of things, and that blacks also believed in the separation of the races. However in communities across the south, local activism had been fomenting, led by individuals such as Williams, or citizens who converged to form groups such as the Montgomery Improvement Association, or through established organizations such as black churches.<sup>63</sup>

The kissing case occurred between pivotal events in the classical phase of the long civil rights movement—the 1954 *Brown* decision, the 1955 murder of Emmett Till, the Montgomery bus boycott of 1955 and 1956, the 1957 Little Rock crisis, and the apex of the sit-in movement in 1960. The CCRI was formed partially out of Williams’s frustration with the NAACP’s national office, which continued to focus on traditional methods while the civil rights movement was moving from “legalism to direct action.”<sup>64</sup> The association’s reliance on its usual means of operating paved the way for other organizations to take a key position in securing black civil rights. Although it had a short tenure, the CCRI was one such organization. It employed a more direct and confrontational style that had begun to be used more often in the mid-1950s and would soon be used by other civil rights organizations in the 1960s. A precursor to the CCRI’s use of direct action and mass pressure can be seen in the bus boycott in Montgomery, Alabama, in

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<sup>63</sup> For more on indigenous civil rights activities, see Morris, *Origins of the Civil Rights Movement*.

<sup>64</sup> Meier, “Negro Protest Movements and Organizations,” 437.

which members of the black community protested segregated buses by refusing to ride them, thereby demonstrating the power of a collective, mobilized community. Before the boycott, “most blacks were unfamiliar with the techniques and principles of nonviolent direct action.”<sup>65</sup> Unlike the NAACP’s initiatives, the boycott allowed blacks to become directly involved as social change agents, and it showed them that results can be achieved by mass protest. The boycott also had “a wide emotional appeal that the NAACP’s carefully managed programs lacked.”<sup>66</sup> In addition, the results of the bus boycott were more immediate and visible than the NAACP’s legal victories. However, the Montgomery bus boycott was ultimately successful due to mass protest and the NAACP’s legal challenge, in which the US Supreme Court upheld that bus segregation was unconstitutional. It was the court order that forced Montgomery city commissioners to desegregate the buses.<sup>67</sup> Despite this significant contribution, the NAACP’s role in the Montgomery bus boycott was overshadowed by the more visible elements of the protest. The NAACP continued to be criticized as being conservative, bureaucratic, and out of touch with the majority of the black community.<sup>68</sup> Nevertheless, the association maintained its focus on legal redress and political action versus embracing the mass protest and direct action that would characterize civil rights activities of the 1960s. When the NAACP finally became involved in the kissing case after the public questioned its absence, it did so within its customary approach and provided legal and financial support.

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<sup>65</sup> Morris, *Origins of the Civil Rights Movement*, 62.

<sup>66</sup> Denton L. Watson, "Assessing the Role of the NAACP in the Civil Rights Movement," *Historian* 55, no. 3 (1993): 458.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 459.

<sup>68</sup> August Meier and John H. Bracey Jr., “The NAACP as a Reform Movement, 1909-1965: To Reach the Conscience of America,” *Journal of Southern History* 59, no. 1 (1993): 27.

Robert Williams's leadership in attacking segregation in Monroe was another early example of direct action at the grassroots level, as was his refusal to retreat when white supremacists, angered at his insurgency, attempted to remind him of his position in the hierarchy. Williams not only believed he deserved his Fourteenth Amendment rights, he fought to get them. The battles in Monroe, from efforts to integrate the swimming pool, to Dr. Perry's abortion trial, to the kissing case, represented a struggle over racial signification. Finally, the kissing case gave Williams greater visibility beyond Monroe and demonstrated to him that his assertive approach to obtaining civil rights could result in success. It also showed him the power of creating broad awareness of a cause, arousing public opinion, and mobilizing groups to action.

Unlike the NAACP, the CCRI was unafraid to tackle cases that targeted the core of white supremacy—those involving interracial sex, which included Dr. Perry's abortion trial, the trial of the white man accused of sexually assaulting a pregnant black woman, and its most prominent work—the kissing case. In addition, the kissing case provides an example of how black leaders and white leftists worked together to support civil rights, despite white detractors who capitalized on Cold War fears and used communism as another way to discredit the civil rights movement. The CCRI refused to be swayed by efforts to impugn its work. Instead, by highlighting the racism behind the case, it illustrated the contradiction between the United States' fight against communism and its mistreatment of black Americans. The CCRI's work also demonstrated the power of proactive public relations, which would later play a role in the success of organizations such as SNCC and the Congress of Racial Equality.

What actually transpired in a culvert in Monroe, North Carolina between Hanover Thompson, Fuzzy Simpson, and Sissy Sutton in October 1958 during the course of the kissing game will never be known, just as what made Hodges suddenly release the boys cannot be

definitively determined. Nevertheless, he did release them, and the negative attention that was directed at North Carolina, along with the deluge of letters and petitions, appear to have played a role. The CCRI's public relations campaign raised awareness of the boys' plight, drew attention to the racial injustice, and mobilized the public to take action, thereby challenging a hegemonic system of oppression. In addition, international media coverage of the case illuminated America's racial problems at a time when the country was espousing global democracy.

If the press and the CCRI had not created awareness of the boys' dilemma, public opinion would not have been aroused on their behalf and they might have lingered in the reformatory. As one southern newspaper averred, the boys' situation had "no significance."<sup>69</sup> In the Jim Crow South, any act of miscegenation in which a black male made a romantic or sexual overture to a white woman warranted punishment. The laws and penalties for their violation were part of the natural order of things in the South, hence the belief that the kissing case was insignificant. Without the publicity, the public relations, and the corresponding protest, it would have remained as such.

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<sup>69</sup> "Monroe Taunters Continue Campaign," *Union Mail*, January 1, 1959.



*The past has been a mint  
Of blood and sorrow.  
That must not be  
True of tomorrow.<sup>1</sup>*

## EPILOGUE

This dissertation has focused on public relations in regards to the kissing case. However, the events that transpired in 1958 and 1959 in Monroe became part of the life experience of the individuals involved. This epilogue completes the story of the kissing case by providing a brief recap of what happened to the major players after the case was concluded, focusing on the CCRI, its active founding members, Gov. Hodges, and the children involved in the kissing case.

In May 1959, Lewis Medlin was acquitted of assaulting the pregnant Mary Ruth Reid. In a statement to reporters, a frustrated and angry **Robert Williams** said it was time for blacks to meet violence with violence.<sup>2</sup> His remarks, which were carried by the white mainstream press as well as the black press, caused significant controversy and led to his eventual suspension by the NAACP.<sup>3</sup> In July 1959, Williams published the first issue of a newsletter, the *Crusader*, which focused on racial injustice.<sup>4</sup> He also continued his efforts to integrate Monroe's public facilities

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<sup>1</sup> Langston Hughes, *The Panther & The Lash: Poems of Our Times* (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 1974), 69.

<sup>2</sup> Tyson, *Radio Free Dixie*, 149.

<sup>3</sup> For example, see "N.A.A.C.P. Leader Urges Violence, North Carolina Aide Makes Statement—Association Quickly Suspends Him," *New York Times*, May 7, 1959, and James Booker, "We Must Fight Back, NAACP Members Take Sides on Violence," *New York Amsterdam News*, May 16, 1959.

<sup>4</sup> Williams, *Negroes With Guns*, 73, and Tyson, *Radio Free Dixie*, 193.

through sit-ins and picketing. Williams and his fellow protesters were harassed by Monroe's whites, and the KKK continued its night riding and shooting into black homes.<sup>5</sup> In 1961, Monroe's racial tensions caught the attention of SNCC, which sent Freedom Riders to Monroe to assist at Williams's request.<sup>6</sup> Mobs attacked the demonstrators, and when Williams sheltered a white couple who had driven into the black neighborhood, he was accused of kidnapping them.<sup>7</sup> Recognizing that blacks received no justice from the legal system, Williams and his family fled to Cuba, where they lived for four years before moving to China. While in Cuba, Williams produced a radio program, *Radio Free Dixie*. It featured music, interviews and commentary, and its objective was to "create a better understanding of the Afro-American problem in the USA, and to expose the true nature of U.S. racism."<sup>8</sup> While overseas, Williams also traveled to Africa and Vietnam. Williams and his family returned to the United States in 1969, settling in Michigan.<sup>9</sup> Although Williams never again lived in Monroe, he made summer visits to see friends and family.<sup>10</sup> Williams died of cancer in 1996 at age 71. He is interred in Monroe.

In October 1959, the US Supreme Court refused to hear **Dr. Albert E. Perry's** abortion case and he was convicted of performing an abortion on a white woman, despite his adamant

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<sup>5</sup> Marcellus Barksdale, "Robert F. Williams and the Indigenous Civil Rights Movement in Monroe, North Carolina, 1961," *Journal of Negro History* 69, no. 2 (1984): 76.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 78.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 84-85.

<sup>8</sup> Robert F. Williams, Press Release (no headline), Havana Cuba, July 20, 1962, CCRI papers, box 1, folder 5.

<sup>9</sup> For more information on Williams's years in Michigan, see Ronald J. Stephens, "Narrating Acts of Resistance: Explorations of Untold Heroic and Horrific Battle Stories Surrounding Robert Franklin Williams's Residence in Lake County, Michigan," *Journal of Black Studies* 33, no. 5 (2003): 675-703.

<sup>10</sup> Tyson, *Radio Free Dixie*, 306.

denials. He was given a two- to three-year prison sentence.<sup>11</sup> He served six months in Central Prison in Raleigh.<sup>12</sup> The conditions of his parole forbade him from entering Union County.<sup>13</sup> After his parole period, he was granted a limited license to practice medicine in Mecklenburg County, where he opened an office in Charlotte. Dr. Perry died in a car accident, believed to have resulted from a heart attack, in 1972 at age 51.<sup>14</sup> He is interred in Monroe.

**Conrad Lynn** represented Williams when he contested his NAACP suspension and provided legal counsel to him when he was in exile. During the 1960s, Lynn represented a number of Vietnam War draft resisters, as well as prominent Black Panthers, including H. Rap Brown. Lynn died in 1995 at age 87. He practiced law until a few months before his death.<sup>15</sup>

**George Weissman** remained an active member of the SWP, continuing as editor of its publishing arm Pathfinder Press, later serving as editor of its newsletter the *Militant*, and writing for a number of other party publications.<sup>16</sup> He also served as East Coast organizer for the Fair Play for Cuba Committee, an activist group that supported the Cuban Revolution. In the early 1980s, Weissman was among 100 SWP members expelled over differences in ideology. They formed a splinter organization, the Fourth International Tendency. Weissman died of a heart attack in 1985 at age 69.

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<sup>11</sup> "Abortion Conviction Upheld," *Jet*, November 5, 1959, 12-15.

<sup>12</sup> "Dismiss Abortion Charge Against N.C. Doctor," *Jet*, July 16, 1964, 52. See also Robert Williams to George Weissman, November 6, 1959, CCRI papers, box 1, folder 4.

<sup>13</sup> "Convicted N.C. Doctor Regains Practice Permit," *Jet*, August 3, 1961, 50.

<sup>14</sup> "Dr. Albert E. Perry," *Monroe Enquirer-Journal*, May 22, 1972.

<sup>15</sup> Garry Pierre-Pierre, "Conrad J. Lynn, a Veteran Civil-Rights Lawyer, Is Dead at 87," *New York Times*, November 18, 1995.

<sup>16</sup> "George Lavan Weissman (1916-85), 49 Years in the Struggle for Socialism," <https://www.marxists.org/history/etol/document/fit/viitoix.htm#section5>

In 1959, **Carl Braden** refused to testify before the House Un-American Activities Committee and was sentenced to a year in prison. He was released in 1962 after serving nine months. Carl and Anne Braden remained active in the fight for civil rights and other causes. In 1967, the Bradens were charged with sedition for organizing “a protest against strip mining in Kentucky.”<sup>17</sup> The charge was dismissed the same year when a Kentucky federal court declared the state’s anti-sedition law unconstitutional. Carl Braden died in 1975 at age 60.

The *Carolina Times* continued to report on the African American quest for civil rights.<sup>18</sup> At the time of his death in 1971 at age 73, **L. E. Austin** had been the newspaper’s publisher for more than 50 years. The *Carolina Times* is published today by Austin’s grandson.

**Luther H. Hodges’s** term as governor ended in 1961. He served as United States Secretary of Commerce from 1961 to 1965. He then served as chairman of Research Triangle Park, a research and development center, which was established under his governorship.<sup>19</sup> He also later served as president of Rotary International. He died in 1974 at age 76.

Shortly after the boys were released, the **CCRI** issued a press release to refute the claims in Chester Davis’s article that it had misused funds.<sup>20</sup> With the successful outcome of the kissing case, the CCRI’s founders considered what to do next. While they did so, the committee continued its work in support of Mary Ruth Reid, the pregnant black woman sexually assaulted by a white man, as well as the case of the black hotel chambermaid who had been kicked down a

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<sup>17</sup> Margalit Fox, “Anne Braden, 81, Activist in Civil Rights and Other Causes, Dies,” *New York Times*, March 17, 2006.

<sup>18</sup> Darin T. Steele, “Louis Austin and the Political Struggles of African Americans in North Carolina, 1945-1971,” unpublished master’s thesis, North Carolina Central University, 2014.

<sup>19</sup> National Governors Association, [http://www.nga.org/cms/home/governors/past-governors-bios/page\\_north\\_carolina/col2-content/main-content-list/title\\_hodges\\_luther.default.html](http://www.nga.org/cms/home/governors/past-governors-bios/page_north_carolina/col2-content/main-content-list/title_hodges_luther.default.html)

<sup>20</sup> “Committee on Carolina Kissing Case Answers Gov. Hodges’ Smear that it misused funds and is Communist-Front,” press release, February 24, 1959, CCRI papers, box 2, folder 7.

flight of stairs by a white patron. When the CCRI was formed, Weissman, who had implemented the majority of the CCRI's public relations tactics, pledged six months free labor to the committee. Pondering the CCRI's direction, he wrote,

Up till now the CCRI has been identified solely with Union County cases. There is more to do there and undoubtedly there will be a continuing number of cases that will keep us involved there. However, we think that it is important to establish in the public mind the fact that it is a committee not exclusively for Union County but to combat racial injustice. On the other hand as yet we are not financially able to take on the responsibility of any new cases where the financial burden would be solely on us unless the case were of the type in which enough funds could be quickly raised to assure the defendant of a successful defense.<sup>21</sup>

Braden also expressed reservations, albeit for different reasons. He responded to Weissman,

After the boys were freed, I had serious doubts as to whether the CCRI should continue to be active. I thought it might proclaim the victory and go into a state of suspended animation until the next atrocity came along. It could say that it was suspending operations until it might be needed to fight a case that nobody else would take. I believe that part of this feeling stemmed from the idea that we might become an organization competing with NAACP for support and funds; that the CCRI might in fact become a dual organization. You will recall that I had a discussion with some people in New York who were reluctant to join CCRI because they felt it was a dual organization.<sup>22</sup>

In this same letter, Braden offered the following advice: "The decision lies with the Southern Negro leadership and not with white Southerners such as I or with anybody in the North. If the Negro militants in the South feel that they need an organization to do what the CCRI has done in the Monroe case, that that's that."<sup>23</sup> However black leadership in Monroe had differing viewpoints on how to proceed. Williams began to operate more independently, causing a rift between him and Dr. Perry. When Williams announced his candidacy for mayor of Monroe

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<sup>21</sup> George Weissman to Carl Braden, February 19, 1959, CCRI papers, box 1, folder 2.

<sup>22</sup> Carl Braden to George Weissman, February 22, 1959, CCRI papers, box 1, folder 2.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

without alerting anyone of his plans, Perry was concerned that Williams had not involved the CCRI or local NAACP in his decision.<sup>24</sup> Of Williams's actions, Perry wrote, "My objection is based on what I am afraid will or may happen or be done with out [*sic*] my knowledge."<sup>25</sup> Just a few weeks after the boys were released, a disappointed Perry resigned from the CCRI on February 28.<sup>26</sup> Although the two men later seemed to resolve their differences, with Perry writing in April that "Robert is seemingly himself again and I look forward to working with him wherever there is opportunity to do so," Williams felt differently.<sup>27</sup> He expressed the following to Weissman: "There is no personal ill-feeling between Doc and I. He just never showed any great desire to help the masses. We still get together and talk, but I just don't intend to allow a feeling of personal frustration to frustrate the militant action of a people who show a willingness to fight."<sup>28</sup> Williams added, "Because he lacks insights into the problems facing us and displays no foresight whatsoever and waivers in the face of odds, I cannot allow him deter [*sic*] progress."<sup>29</sup>

In addition, interactions with Williams and North Carolina's NAACP leadership continued to deteriorate, as both Williams and Perry believed Kelly Alexander had cooperated with Chester Davis on the articles in the *Winston-Salem Journal-Sentinel*.<sup>30</sup> In its short existence,

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<sup>24</sup> George Weissman to Albert Perry, March 4, 1959, CCRI papers, box 1, folder 4. See also Robert Williams to George Weissman, April 8, 1959, CCRI papers, box 1, folder 4.

<sup>25</sup> Albert Perry to George Weissman, February 28, 1959, CCRI papers, box 1, folder 3.

<sup>26</sup> Albert Perry to George Weissman, February 28, 1959, CCRI papers, box 1, folder 3. See also George Weissman to Albert Perry, March 4, 1959, CCRI papers, box 1, folder 4.

<sup>27</sup> Albert Perry to George Weissman, April 5, 1959, CCRI papers, box 1, folder 4.

<sup>28</sup> Robert Williams to George Weissman, April 8, 1959, CCRI papers, box 1, folder 4.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> George Weissman to L. E. Austin, February 19, 1959, CCRI papers, box 1, folder 3.

one of the CCRI's challenges had been determining its role in relationship to that of the NAACP. In addition to deciding its next steps, the CCRI would also need to resolve if and how to work with the NAACP.

During the extensive publicity given to Williams's remarks about using violence and his NAACP suspension, the CCRI "waited for the dust to settle."<sup>31</sup> Williams's position was divisive, not only between him and the NAACP's national leaders, but among the CCRI leadership. Braden wrote that he was more inclined to the position of nonviolence espoused by Martin Luther King Jr. than Williams's stance.<sup>32</sup> The CCRI's leadership was fractured and while its mission remained combating racial injustice, it was unclear of its next steps. Williams, Braden, and Weissman also contemplated "continuing to let the organization lie dormant pending some development which would make its revival desirable."<sup>33</sup> By this time, it had been a year since the CCRI had championed a specific cause and without a directive, it had lost its *raison d'être*. As a result, the CCRI leaders decided to dissolve the organization. In his last act as CCRI secretary, Weissman sent the CCRI's remaining funds—\$204.28—to the Monroe NAACP, asking that it be used to help Williams, who had been charged in a Monroe lunch counter sit-in. Weissman ended his correspondence "with best wishes and with confidence in the victory of your battle against racial discrimination and segregation."<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> George Weissman to Carl Braden, October 20, 1959, CCRI papers, box 1, folder 4. See also Carl Braden to George Weissman, October 30, 1959.

<sup>32</sup> Carl Braden to George Weissman, October 20, 1959, CCRI papers, box 1, folder 4.

<sup>33</sup> George Weissman to Carl Braden, March 29, 1960, CCRI papers, box 1, folder 4.

<sup>34</sup> George Weissman to NAACP Union County Branch, April 8, 1960, CCRI papers, box 1, folder 5. For more on the dissolution of the CCRI, see Jones, "Communist Front Shouts Kissing Case," 109-149.

After they were freed, **James Hanover Thompson** and **David “Fuzzy” Simpson** lived with their families in Charlotte. They were required to meet weekly with a psychologist, who Thompson recalled said the boys should have been castrated or sterilized.<sup>35</sup> In April 1960, James Hanover Thompson, age 11, was with a 15-year-old companion who was charged with rape “on a minor Negro girl.” As a result, Thompson was again committed to a training school.<sup>36</sup>

James Hanover Thompson and David Simpson have spent most of their adult lives in and out of prison.<sup>37</sup> In a 1993 interview about the kissing case, Thompson said, “I have been incarcerated and been in the system,” adding that the stigma of the kissing case “has followed us ever since.” David Simpson said similarly, “It has followed me quite a lot, because I could not never [*sic*] get out of the system.”<sup>38</sup> Speaking about the case in 2011, Thompson said, “It has just destroyed our life.”<sup>39</sup>

**Sissy Sutton** has refused requests to be interviewed over the years.<sup>40</sup> When asked about Sissy Sutton, Simpson remarked that children are taught “only what parents feed them. If you feed them hatred or racism, they grow up like that.”<sup>41</sup> Concurring, Thompson said, “I don’t think it was her fault because kids do innocent things. We were just innocent children.”

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<sup>35</sup> “The Kissing Case and the Lives it Shattered,” StoryCorps interview, National Public Radio, April 29, 2011. <http://www.npr.org/2011/04/29/135815465/the-kissing-case-and-the-lives-it-shattered>

<sup>36</sup> Memo from Blaine Madison, Subject: James Hanover Thompson, May 11, 1960, CCRI papers, box 1, folder 4. See also John York, “Boy, 12, Charged in Rape,” *Charlotte Observer*, April 10, 1960.

<sup>37</sup> “The Kissing Case and the Lives it Shattered.”

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> James Thompson and David Simpson, interview by Oprah Winfrey, “Pride and Shame in the Martin Luther King Era,” *Oprah Winfrey Show*, Harpo Productions, April 2, 1993, <http://global.factiva.com/hp/printsavews.aspx?pp=Save&hc=Publication>

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

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U.S. Const. amend XIV, § 1.