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Deference and Violence in the Postbellum Urban South: Manners and Massacres in Danville, Virginia

By JANE DAILEY

WILLIAM ALEXANDER PERCY—PLANTER, WRITER, AND (AS HE SUPPOSED) racial liberal and “friend of the Negro”—was concerned. As he finished his autobiographical *Lanterns on the Levee: Recollections of a Planter's Son*, Percy fretted over the increasingly acrimonious state of race relations in the South. Published in 1941, just before the southern legal and cultural edifice of racial segregation and official white supremacy began to dissolve under the ideological strain of the Second World War, *Lanterns on the Levee* included “A Note on Racial Relations” in which Percy worried about the erosion of black manners. Referring to white violence, Percy “noted that the Negro is losing his most valuable weapon of defense—his good manners.” He continued: “When a Negro now speaks of a ‘man’ he means a Negro; when he speaks of a ‘lady’ he means a Negress; when he speaks of a ‘woman’ he means a white woman. Such manners are not only bad, they are not safe, and the frame of mind that breeds them is not safe. Covert insolence is not safe for anybody, anywhere, at any time.”¹

Identifying and interpreting “covert insolence” among the subjugated has become something of a cottage industry in the academy since

¹ William Alexander Percy, *Lanterns on the Levee: Recollections of a Planter's Son* (New York, 1941; Baton Rouge, 1990), 307. In *The Negro: The Southerner's Problem* (New York, 1904), Thomas Nelson Page made similar veiled threats regarding (the lack of) black deference and the potential for white violence. See especially pp. 203–4.

For their stimulating and insightful comments I thank the five anonymous readers and the editor and associate editor of the *Journal of Southern History*. I am in addition indebted to the Virginia Historical Society, whose Mellon Grant supported my research; to Richard Hamm, who fed me documents at the VHS; and to David Nirenberg, Edward Ayers, Fitz Brundage, Carl Caldwell, Glenda Gilmore, James McPherson, Nell Painter, Christine Stansell, Peter Wallenstein, Sean Wilentz, and Richard Wolin, all of whose sharp commentary helped me to see what was at stake on the streets of Danville.

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Percy condemned its deployment by black southerners. Inspired by the work of social historians such as Eric J. Hobsbawm and E. P. Thompson, the search for what the anthropologist James C. Scott called the “hidden transcript” of resistance has become a central pursuit of scholars interested in questions of domination and resistance. The uncovering of what Scott dubbed “infrapolitics” and what the Czech philosopher Václav Benda called “the parallel polis” has focused scholarly attention on the political subtext of acts of resistance that stop short of open rebellion. The definition of *politics* has been broadened to include the breach of manners so vexing to Will Percy.²

Historians of the American South have profited in particular from the insights gained by uncovering and deciphering the hidden transcript. Several scholars whose work preceded Scott’s formulations—Herbert Aptheker, Eugene D. Genovese, Lawrence W. Levine, Albert J. Raboteau, and Gilbert Osofsky—applied the concept of underground resistance to relations between masters and slaves in the antebellum South.³ More recently historians have explicitly used Scott’s approach to analyze black-white relations under Jim Crow. Robin D. G. Kelley, for example, has employed Scott’s notion of infrapolitics to draw attention to African Americans’ broad repertoire of acts of everyday resistance in the segregated twentieth-century South in order to show “how seemingly innocuous, individualistic acts of survival and opposition shaped southern urban politics, workplace struggles, and the social

² E[ric] J. Hobsbawm, *Primitive Rebels: Studies in Archaic Forms of Social Movement in the 19th and 20th Centuries* (New York, 1963; originally published as *Social Bandits and Primitive Rebels* [Glencoe, Ill., 1959]); Edward P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (New York, 1963); Thompson, “The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century,” *Past and Present*, No. 50 (February 1971), 76–136; James C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven and London, 1985); Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven and London, 1990); Václav Benda, “The Parallel Polis,” in *Palach Press Bulletin* (London, 1979). Without referring to a “hidden transcript,” Václav Havel makes a similar point in “The Power of the Powerless” in John Keane, ed., *The Power of the Powerless: Citizens Against the State in Central-Eastern Europe* (London and other cities, 1985). There Havel refers to the attempts of the oppressed “to live within the truth” as subversive of the official version of life and defines attempts to live within the truth as “any means by which a person or a group revolts against manipulation . . .” Havel also notes that “the regime prosecutes, almost as a reflex action preventively, even the most modest attempts to live within the truth” (pp. 42–43).

³ Herbert Aptheker, *American Negro Slave Revolts* (New York, 1943); Eugene D. Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (New York, 1974); Lawrence W. Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness: Afro-American Folk Thought from Slavery to Freedom* (New York, 1977); Albert J. Raboteau, *Slave Religion: The “Invisible Institution” in the Antebellum South* (New York, 1978); and Gilbert Osofsky, ed., *Puttin’ on Ole Massa: The Slave Narratives of Henry Bibb, William Wells Brown, and Solomon Northup* (New York, 1969). See also Raymond A. Bauer and Alice H. Bauer, “Day to Day Resistance to Slavery,” *Journal of Negro History*, XXVII (October 1942), 388–419; and Sterling Stuckey, “Through the Prism of Folklore: The Black Ethos in Slavery,” *Massachusetts Review*, IX (Summer 1968), 417–37.

order generally.”⁴ While documenting and fully appreciating the importance of urban black working-class opposition at home, in the community, and in the workplace, Kelley urges historians to focus on black resistance to white domination in public space and “to rethink the meaning of public space as a terrain of class, race, and gender conflict.” It was, Kelley argues, urban public space—a city’s parks, its streets, and particularly its public transportation system—that provided most of the opportunities for acts of resistance and simultaneously embodied “the most repressive, violent aspects of race and gender oppression”⁵

What had been the hidden “weapons of the weak” in urban public spaces of the antebellum South—the “accidental” jostling of whites on the sidewalk or on a city trolley, the profanities and depredations muttered under one’s breath—would later become acts of covert resistance during the rigid days of the Jim Crow era. But during the crucial transition between slavery and Jim Crow, these same acts emerged as the open and public acts of an enfranchised, and to a limited degree, empowered people. In the years after emancipation and before the codification of the white supremacist South (completed in 1908 with the passage of Georgia’s referendum on black disfranchisement), African Americans devised a series of strategies for resisting white definitions of black rights, opportunities, and sociability. Not unexpectedly, conflicts arose between black and white southerners over what was proper, acceptable, or demeaning mutual behavior in public arenas. The forms of black behavior now recognized as covert resistance in the antebellum and Jim Crow eras—such as a refusal to yield to whites on the sidewalk and the reservation of appellations of gentility for themselves—were precisely those through which black men and women asserted in public their claims to citizenship and equal civil and political rights with whites. Such assertion by blacks risked violence by whites, either individually or in groups, and urban spaces during the New South era frequently became battlegrounds over public behavior. Eventually, segregation regulated both public space and civil behavior by dividing each according to race, along phantasmagoric “separate but equal” lines. As Howard N. Rabinowitz demonstrated twenty years ago, the postwar South’s urban spaces were the first settings for the rationalized system

⁴ Robin D. G. Kelley, “‘We Are Not What We Seem’: Rethinking Black Working-Class Opposition in the Jim Crow South,” *Journal of American History*, LXXX (June 1993), 75–112 (quotation on p. 78). Eugene Genovese makes a similar point in *Roll, Jordan, Roll*, where he writes (p. 598) that “Such apparently innocuous and apolitical measures as a preacher’s sermon on love and dignity or the mutual support offered by husbands and wives played . . . an indispensable part in providing the groundwork for the most obviously political action [insurrection and running away], for they contributed to the cohesion and strength of a social class threatened by disintegration and demoralization.”

⁵ Kelley, “‘We Are Not What We Seem,’” 109–10.

of racial segregation that by World War I characterized the region as a whole.⁶ But even segregation could not solve fully—to the satisfaction of whites—the issue of black behavior in public space. As the work of historians of the twentieth century shows, African Americans continued to assert their claim to civility, and to dignity, in public.⁷

The story of what historians know as the Danville Riot illuminates the ways that disagreements over civil behavior between white and black urban southerners intersected with other social and political developments. In 1883 a dispute over street etiquette in the burgeoning industrial town of Danville, Virginia, escalated into a massacre when a white mob shot into a crowd of unarmed black men, women, and children. White Democrats then took control of the city and spread rumors of black insurrection throughout the state. Coming three days before an important Virginia state election, the violence in Danville and Democratic stories about it contributed to the downfall of the Readjuster party, a biracial third party that had governed Virginia since 1879. As occurred more notoriously in Wilmington, North Carolina, in

⁶ Howard N. Rabinowitz, *Race Relations in the Urban South, 1865–1890* (New York, 1978); and Rabinowitz, “From Exclusion to Segregation: Southern Race Relations, 1865–1890,” *Journal of American History*, LXIII (September 1976), 325–50. On segregation see C. Vann Woodward, *The Strange Career of Jim Crow* (New York, 1955); Richard C. Wade, *Slavery in the Cities: The South, 1820–1860* (New York, 1964); John W. Cell, *The Highest Stage of White Supremacy: The Origins of Segregation in South Africa and the American South* (Cambridge, Eng., and other cities, 1982); and LaWanda Cox, “From Emancipation to Segregation: National Policy and Southern Blacks,” in John B. Boles and Evelyn Thomas Nolen, eds., *Interpreting Southern History: Historiographical Essays in Honor of Sanford W. Higginbotham* (Baton Rouge and London, 1987), 199–253. On the Woodward thesis and its critics see C. Vann Woodward, “The Strange Career of a Historical Controversy,” in *American Counterpoint: Slavery and Racism in the North-South Dialogue* (Boston and Toronto, 1964), 234–60; Howard N. Rabinowitz, “More Than the Woodward Thesis: Assessing *The Strange Career of Jim Crow*,” and C. Vann Woodward, “*Strange Career* Critics: Long May They Persevere,” *Journal of American History*, LXXV (December 1988), 842–56 and 857–68, respectively. On patterns of urban residential segregation in the South see John W. Blassingame, “Before the Ghetto: The Making of the Black Community in Savannah, Georgia, 1865–1880,” *Journal of Social History*, VI (Summer 1973), 463–88; Blassingame, *Black New Orleans, 1860–1880* (Chicago and London, 1973); John Kellogg, “Negro Urban Clusters in the Postbellum South,” *Geographical Review*, LXVII (July 1977), 310–21; Kellogg, “The Formation of Black Residential Areas in Lexington, Kentucky, 1865–1887,” *Journal of Southern History*, XLVIII (February 1982), 21–52; Paul A. Groves and Edward K. Muller, “The Evolution of Black Residential Areas in Late Nineteenth-Century Cities,” *Journal of Historical Geography*, I (April 1975), 169–91; and Michael B. Chesson, *Richmond After the War, 1865–1890* (Richmond, 1981), Chap. 5. As a rule, the newer the city, the greater the residential segregation.

⁷ Kelley, “‘We Are Not What We Seem,’” 101–2. As Kelley points out, many of these day-to-day struggles for black dignity under Jim Crow were fought out in public spaces, especially on public transportation. In the nineteenth century, African Americans protested civic attempts to segregate streetcars. See Roger A. Fischer, “A Pioneer Protest: The New Orleans Street-Car Controversy of 1867,” *Journal of Negro History*, LIII (July 1968), 219–33; August Meier and Elliott Rudwick, “The Boycott Movement against Jim Crow Streetcars in the South, 1900–1906,” in Meier and Rudwick, eds., *Along the Color Line: Explorations in the Black Experience* (Urbana, Chicago, and London, 1976), 267–89; Neil R. McMillen, *Dark Journey: Black Mississippians in the Age of Jim Crow* (Urbana and Chicago, 1989), 291–95; and John Dittmer, *Black Georgia in the Progressive Era, 1900–1920* (Urbana, Chicago, and London, 1977), 16–19.

1898, white men in Danville usurped the power of the state through violence and overthrew a democratically elected biracial government.⁸

While this article will explore the whys and hows of the violence in Danville, its broader aim is to reveal the links between civility and civil rights and between manners and massacres. It will examine both how black men and women in the New South enunciated their claim to civic equality through their behavior in urban public spaces and how whites, determined to maintain their social, political, and economic control, responded to such black behavior. The sequence of events that led to gunfire in Danville began with a confrontation over sidewalk space between a white man and a black man. Central to this analysis is the idea that, particularly for people (such as women and racial and religious minorities) whose identities have traditionally been defined spatially, as “place,” the act of appropriating public space—whether on a New South city sidewalk or on a Jim Crow streetcar—is a political and subversive

A number of scholars stress the quest for dignity in black's attempts to undermine the Jim Crow system, e.g., William H. Chafe, *Civilities and Civil Rights: Greensboro, North Carolina, and the Black Struggle for Freedom* (New York and Oxford, 1980); Earl Lewis, *In Their Own Interests: Race, Class, and Power in Twentieth-Century Norfolk, Virginia* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and Oxford, 1991); George Lipsitz, *A Life in the Struggle: Ivory Perry and the Culture of Opposition* (Philadelphia, 1988); Robin D. G. Kelley, *Hammer and Hoe: Alabama Communists During the Great Depression* (Chapel Hill and London, 1990); Michael K. Honey, *Southern Labor and Black Civil Rights: Organizing Memphis Workers* (Urbana and Chicago, 1993); and Adam Fairclough, *Race and Democracy: The Civil Rights Struggle in Louisiana, 1915–1972* (Athens, Ga., and London, 1995).

⁸ On the Readjuster movement and black political power and participation in postbellum Virginia see Charles Chilton Pearson, *The Readjuster Movement in Virginia* (New Haven, London, and Oxford, 1917); Richard L. Morton, *The Negro in Virginia Politics, 1865–1902* (Charlottesville, 1919); Alruthus Ambush Taylor, *The Negro in the Reconstruction of Virginia* (New York, 1926; rpt., 1969); James Hugo Johnston, “The Participation of Negroes in the Government of Virginia from 1877 to 1888,” *Journal of Negro History*, XIV (July 1929), 251–71; Nelson Morehouse Blake, *William Mahone of Virginia: Soldier and Political Insurgent* (Richmond, 1935); Luther Porter Jackson, *Negro Office-Holders in Virginia, 1865–1895* (Norfolk, Virginia, 1945); Charles E. Wynes, *Race Relations in Virginia, 1870–1902* (Charlottesville, 1961); Raymond H. Pulley, *Old Virginia Restored: An Interpretation of the Progressive Impulse, 1870–1930* (Charlottesville, 1968); Allen W. Moger, *Virginia: Bourbonism to Byrd, 1870–1925* (Charlottesville, 1968); Jack P. Maddex Jr., *The Virginia Conservatives, 1867–1879: A Study in Reconstruction Politics* (Chapel Hill, 1970); Carl N. Degler, “Black and White Together: Bi-Racial Politics in the South,” *Virginia Quarterly Review*, XLVII (Summer 1971), 421–44; Degler, *The Other South: Southern Dissenters in the Nineteenth Century* (New York, 1974); James Tice Moore, *Two Paths to the New South: The Virginia Debt Controversy, 1870–1883* (Lexington, 1974); Moore, “Black Militancy in Readjuster Virginia, 1879–1883,” *Journal of Southern History*, XLI (May 1975), 167–86; Brooks Miles Barnes, “Triumph of the New South: Independent Movements in Post-Reconstruction Politics” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Virginia, 1991); Lawrence L. Hartzell, “The Exploration of Freedom in Black Petersburg, Virginia, 1865–1902,” in Edward L. Ayers and John C. Willis, eds., *The Edge of the South: Life in Nineteenth-Century Virginia* (Charlottesville and London, 1991); and Jane E. Dailey, “Race, Sex, and Citizenship: Biracial Democracy in Readjuster Virginia, 1879–1883” (Ph.D. dissertation, Princeton University, 1995). Harold S. Forsythe is currently completing a dissertation at the University of California, San Diego, on African American politics in Southside Virginia, 1863–1902, including the Readjusters.

act. The appropriation of public space was an important way for African Americans in this period to assert their humanity, demonstrate their political rights, and stake their claim to equal citizenship. When black men and women stood their ground on the streets of Danville insisting on the impartial rule of law, white men responded violently and reclaimed the streets, and ultimately the political arena, for themselves.

The struggle for black equality in the New South was fought on many fronts. Exercising the right to vote and to make contracts were two of the most obvious means by which African Americans proclaimed their new civil status. Appropriating public space was another. Although the racial politics of Congress and the state legislatures is better documented, the streets of the urban South had a politics of their own. It was here, in the everyday pushing and shoving of white and black southerners, that broader questions of political, economic, and sexual competition were enacted and represented daily.

By the time of the automobile, black "place" was so firmly defined by the racial code of Jim Crow that southern cities found nothing odd in barring black motorists from the public streets.⁹ By the 1930s the inner side of the sidewalk was designated in custom if not in law as "the 'white man's right of way'."¹⁰ But this was not yet the case in the 1880s or even on the eve of the twentieth century in areas of the South where black political influence survived or was resurrected.¹¹ In such places, in the absence of either a rigid system of racial hierarchy or mutually agreed upon conventions for public conduct between the races, questions of honor, hierarchy, and deference arose in every encounter in public. Broad questions of racial domination and subordination were frequently

⁹ McMillen, *Dark Journey*, 11. In 1930 Robert Russa Moton, the president of Tuskegee Institute, recalled that "in the early days of the automobile . . . Negroes driving their own cars were dragged out and whipped, and their cars wrecked, for their imputed arrogance and impertinence in presuming to enjoy privileges to which whites alone were entitled." Moton, *What the Negro Thinks* (Garden City, N.Y., 1930), 213. On race-based rules of the road in Mississippi in the 1930s see also Hortense Powdermaker, *After Freedom: A Cultural Study in the Deep South* (New York, 1939), 49–50.

¹⁰ Bertram Wilbur Doyle, *The Etiquette of Race Relations in the South: A Study in Social Control* (Chicago, 1937), 168. On racial etiquette in the South see Ray Stannard Baker, *Following the Color Line: An Account of Negro Citizenship in the American Democracy* (New York, 1908); John Dollard, *Caste and Class in a Southern Town* (New York, 1937), Chaps. 5, 7, 8, and 12; and J. William Harris, "Etiquette, Lynching, and Racial Boundaries in Southern History: A Mississippi Example," *American Historical Review*, C (April 1995), 387–410.

¹¹ As J. Morgan Kousser and others have argued, post-Reconstruction southern politics was extremely volatile, largely because of the tenacity of black political power. See Kousser, *The Shaping of Southern Politics: Suffrage Restriction and the Establishment of the One-Party South, 1880–1910* (New Haven and London, 1974). See also C. Vann Woodward, *Origins of the New South, 1877–1913* (Baton Rouge, 1951); Joseph H. Cartwright, *The Triumph of Jim Crow: Tennessee Race Relations in the 1880s* (Knoxville, 1976); Gordon B. McKinney, *Southern Mountain Republicans, 1865–1900: Politics and the Appalachian Community* (Chapel Hill, 1978); and George C. Wright, *Life Behind a Veil: Blacks in Louisville, Kentucky, 1865–1930* (Baton Rouge, 1985), Chap. 7.

distilled in public interactions on the streets of the urban South, and negotiation over the rules of common courtesy became a principal venue for the ongoing contest between blacks determined to assert their identity as civic actors and whites intent on denying blacks that power.

In a column published in January 1884 entitled "Manners," Orra Langhorne, a white woman who regularly contributed to the Hampton Institute's monthly news publication, the *Southern Workman*, decried the public behavior of the new generation of black southerners, those born in freedom. "It is a common thing in the towns of Virginia," she charged, "for several Negro boys to lock their arms together and parade the streets, rudely jostling passers by, for whom they refuse to make way, and terrifying ladies and children." Langhorne herself had recently been knocked off the sidewalk in this way by a group of young black men that included the son of one of her tenants, "good old Uncle Ben." She reported to him his son's behavior, and the son was sent to apologize. He was not, he explained, drunk (as Langhorne supposed) but "was only pro-jeckin'." Langhorne did not favor such projecting. Rather, she urged Virginia blacks to recall "the amiable and gentle manners which once distinguished the southern slaves" and recommended the advice "old aunt Hester" gave to a young African American man excited about the passage of the Civil Rights Bill: "Don't you mine so much 'bout Civil Rights—Civil Rights is very good in dere place, but you try civil manners an' behavior an' you'll git along wid white folks."¹²

It was a commonplace among postwar white southerners that black civil rights had eroded black civility, especially on the public streets. Countless white diarists and political commentators left behind stories of black rudeness in public. Planter Henry W. Ravenel's impression of postwar Charleston is typical of contemporary accounts: "It is impossible to describe the condition of the city—It is so unlike anything we could imagine—Negroes shoving white persons off the walk—Negro women drest in the most outré style, all with veils and parasols for which they have an especial fancy—riding on horseback with negro soldiers and in carriages"¹³ Georgia Bryan Conrad, a young white woman, first

¹² *Southern Workman*, XIII (January 1884), 2. Orra Langhorne was a white southern liberal who could, in the same breath, denounce the Bourbons, defend black civil rights, and promote educational qualifications for the suffrage, as in her October 1883 column published in volume XII of the *Southern Workman*. For a cross-section of Langhorne's writings see Charles E. Wynes, ed., *Southern Sketches from Virginia, 1881–1901* (Charlottesville, 1964). In October 1883 the Supreme Court declared unconstitutional the Civil Rights Act of 1875, which sought to give all persons equal access to restaurants, theaters, etc. under the Fourteenth Amendment's denial of discrimination along lines of race, color, or previous condition of servitude. The court ruled that the federal government could not apply the Fourteenth Amendment's prohibitions to protect individuals from the discriminatory acts of *other individuals*, but only from state governments.

¹³ Henry W. Ravenel (1865), quoted in Leon F. Litwack, *Been in the Storm So Long: The Aftermath of Slavery* (New York, 1979), 259. Myrta Lockett Avary concurred with Ravenel: "The new manners of the blacks were painful, revolting, absurd. . . . Southerners had taken great pains

realized the magnitude of the postwar transformation of southern social life when “a huge Negro soldier” compelled her “to take to the gutter, to escape coming in contact with him,” and her father did nothing. Complaining of similar behavior in postwar Memphis, Elizabeth Avery Meriwether remarked that “Any stranger, seeing those negroes, would have supposed the Blacks not the Whites, were masters in the South.”¹⁴

These images are familiar because twentieth-century authors and filmmakers used them to represent the social and political inversions of Reconstruction. Margaret Mitchell made “niggers pushin’ white folks off the sidewalks” a defining feature of Republican-ruled Atlanta.¹⁵ In his 1915 film *The Birth of a Nation*, D. W. Griffith used disputes between whites and blacks over sidewalk space as a synecdoche for the decline of black deference toward whites and the corresponding loss of white power and prestige. As Griffith has the mulatto carpetbagger Silas Lynch explain to one white protagonist, “The side walk belongs to us as much as it does to you, Colonel Cameron.”¹⁶ And in his 1941 magnum opus *The Mind of the South*, W. J. Cash deplored in blacks “the dangerous manners learned in carpetbag days—to pour into the towns on Saturday afternoon and swagger along the street in guffawing gangs which somehow managed to take up the whole breadth of the sidewalk . . .”¹⁷

If the existence of prohibitory legislation is a legitimate indicator of the occurrence of the forbidden, even antebellum southern cities found it difficult to regulate black behavior on the streets. Slaves exulted in the relative liberty of the city; as Frederick Douglass put it, “a city slave is almost a freeman . . .”¹⁸ Richmond’s 1857 “Ordinance concerning Negroes” addressed itself specifically to the behavior of free blacks and slaves in public. Regarding street etiquette, the ordinance specified that “Negroes shall not at any time stand on a sidewalk to the inconvenience of [white] persons passing by. A negro meeting or overtaking, or being overtaken by a white person . . . shall pass on the outside; and if it be necessary to enable such white person to pass, shall immediately get off the sidewalk.” As for insolent and threatening

and pride in teaching their negroes good manners . . . It was with keen regret that their old preceptors saw them throw all their fine schooling in etiquette to the winds.” Avery, *Dixie After the War* . . . (New York, 1906), 194. On the adoption of “disrespectful” (to whites) forms of dress by freedwomen, see Jacqueline Jones, *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow: Black Women, Work, and the Family from Slavery to the Present* (New York, 1985), 69–70.

¹⁴ Georgia Bryan Conrad, “Reminiscences of a Southern Woman,” *Southern Workman*, XXX (July 1901), 410; and Elizabeth Avery Meriwether, *Recollections of 92 Years, 1824–1916* (Nashville, 1958), 167.

¹⁵ Margaret Mitchell, *Gone with the Wind* (New York, 1936), 510.

¹⁶ David Wark Griffith’s *The Birth of a Nation* (1915).

¹⁷ W. J. Cash, *The Mind of the South* (New York, 1941), 227.

¹⁸ Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* . . . [Originally published in 1845], edited by Benjamin Quarles (Cambridge, Mass., 1960), 60.

behavior by blacks, Richmond's law provided thirty-nine lashes for any colored person who used "provoking language" or made "insolent or menacing gestures to a white person, or [spoke] aloud any blasphemous or indecent word . . . in any streets or other public place."¹⁹

Richmond was not unusual in its attempt to establish public decorum. By the mid-nineteenth century, cities as far afield as New York and San Francisco had turned to legislation to coerce proper urban behavior. According to historian Mary P. Ryan, the majority of arrests in nineteenth-century American cities were prompted by violations of street etiquette—such as being drunk or boisterous in public.²⁰ But there is a difference between the generalized rules of public engagement—e.g., the prohibition of spitting—which are symmetrical (applicable to all), and rules that are explicitly hierarchical (applicable only to members of a prescribed group and useful in establishing and maintaining asymmetries of power).²¹ Richmond's requirement that blacks yield sidewalk right-of-way to whites is, of course, an example of the latter, as is sumptuary legislation restricting slave dress. In 1822 Charleston residents petitioned the legislature to prohibit African Americans from wearing "silks, satins, crapes, lace[,] muslins, and such costly stuffs, as are looked upon and considered the luxury of dress." The purpose of such an appeal was to impress upon blacks of every legal status the slave society's determination to maintain "every distinction . . . between the whites and the negroes, calculated to make the latter feel the superiority of the former."²² Such asymmetrical rules typify societies dominated by an ethos of honor. Fundamentally opposed to "a universal and formal morality which

¹⁹ Richmond ordinance quoted in Wade, *Slavery in the Cities*, 108. According to Wade (p. 109), every southern city had such a code as this by the 1850s when, as the issue of slavery reached a boiling point, the politics of street space became more insistent. In an August 10, 1852, letter to the *American Beacon*, "Discipline" complained about the behavior of Norfolk blacks who wore "Silks or Satins, broadcloth or bonnets," and who walked three or four abreast on the sidewalk, forcing whites into the street. "Discipline" proposed that African Americans be forced to walk single file. Quoted in Philip S. Foner and Josephine F. Pacheco, *Three Who Dared: Prudence Crandall, Margaret Douglass, Myrtila Miner: Champions of Antebellum Black Education* (Westport, Conn., 1984), 85. Petersburg whites passed a similar law requiring free blacks to yield the sidewalk to whites. See Suzanne Lebsock, *The Free Women of Petersburg: Status and Culture in a Southern Town, 1784–1860* (New York and London, 1984), 94.

²⁰ Mary P. Ryan, *Women in Public: Between Banners and Ballots, 1825–1880* (Baltimore and London, 1990), 62. For a study of the transformation of etiquette in the nineteenth-century urban North see John F. Kasson, *Rudeness and Civility: Manners in Nineteenth-Century Urban America* (New York, 1990).

²¹ Erving Goffman distinguishes between symmetrical and asymmetrical rules of conduct in "The Nature of Deference and Demeanor," *American Anthropologist*, LVIII (June 1956), 473–502, especially p. 476.

²² "Memorial of the Citizens of Charleston to the Senate and House of Representatives of the State of South Carolina [Charleston, 1822]," quoted in Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household: Black and White Women of the Old South* (Chapel Hill and London, 1988), 307.

affirms the equality in dignity of all men and consequently the equality of their rights and duties," the honor-based society establishes "two opposing sets of rules of conduct"—one that governs relations between equals and another for relations between dominant and subordinate.²³

The hierarchical precepts of southern honor were fundamentally at odds with the premise of biracial masculine equality that underlay the Reconstruction amendments to the Constitution. Nevertheless, racial inequality was used by white southerners to reinstitutionalize hierarchy and to rerank society in the postwar South. While African American men stressed equality and focused on affirming black manliness in order to claim the rights of American males, white southerners reasserted racial difference in an attempt to shore up white honor and to deny black men their civil rights.²⁴ White southerners fought to circumscribe universal manhood suffrage and attempted to limit African Americans' right to contract. In a variety of ways whites tried to deny blacks "the dignity of citizenship," as Henry Ward Beecher put it in 1870.²⁵ Yet, despite white resistance, black southerners simultaneously created and asserted their identity as citizens and individuals

²³ Pierre Bourdieu, "The Sentiment of Honour in Kabyle Society," in J. G. Peristiany, ed., *Honour and Shame: The Values of Mediterranean Society* (Chicago and London, 1966), 191–241 (quotations on p. 228). On honor in the nineteenth-century South see John Hope Franklin, *The Militant South, 1800–1861* (Cambridge, Mass., 1956); Clement Eaton, "The Role of Honor in Southern Society," *Southern Humanities Review*, X (Special Bicentennial Issue, 1976), 47–58; Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South* (New York and Oxford, 1982); Edward L. Ayers, *Vengeance and Justice: Crime and Punishment in the 19th-Century American South* (New York and Oxford, 1984); Elliott J. Gorn, "'Gouge and Bite, Pull Hair and Scratch': The Social Significance of Fighting in the Southern Backcountry," *American Historical Review*, XC (February 1985), 18–43; Steven M. Stowe, *Intimacy and Power in the Old South: Ritual in the Lives of the Planters* (Baltimore and London, 1987); and Kenneth S. Greenberg, *Honor and Slavery: Lies, Duels, Noses, Masks, Dressing as a Woman, Gifts, Strangers, Humanitarianism, Death, Slave Rebellions, The Proslavery Argument, Baseball, Hunting, and Gambling in the Old South* (Princeton, 1996).

²⁴ A growing body of scholarship stresses the propensity of African American men to justify their participation in the Civil War and, later, their fitness for citizenship, in terms of their manhood. W. E. B. Du Bois, for instance, framed his response to Booker T. Washington's 1895 Atlanta Compromise in terms of black manliness, arguing "that manly self-respect is worth more than lands and houses" and that "voting is necessary to modern manhood . . ." Du Bois, "Of Mr. Booker T. Washington and Others," in *The Souls of Black Folk* (Greenwich, Conn., 1961), 48 and 51. For secondary works that stress black assertion of manhood and its prerogatives see Jim Cullen, "'I's a Man Now': Gender and African American Men," in Catherine Clinton and Nina Silber, eds., *Divided Houses: Gender and the Civil War* (New York and Oxford, 1992), 76–91; Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow: Women and the Politics of White Supremacy in North Carolina, 1896–1920* (Chapel Hill and London, 1996), Chap. 3; Laura F. Edwards, "Sexual Violence, Gender, Reconstruction, and the Extension of Patriarchy in Granville County, North Carolina," *North Carolina Historical Review*, LXVIII (July 1991), 237–60; Edwards, *Gendered Strife and Confusion: The Political Culture of Reconstruction* (Urbana, Chicago, and London, 1997); and Dailey, "Race, Sex, and Citizenship," esp. Chaps. 5 and 6.

²⁵ "The Tendencies of American Progress," in *The Original Plymouth Pulpit: Sermons of Henry Ward Beecher*. Volume V (Boston and Chicago, 1871), 206.

through the vote and the right to contract, and they sought to enter civil society on an equal basis with whites.²⁶

Blacks' casting a ballot and signing—or refusing to sign—a contract signified the attainment of at least a degree of agency and independence. But there were other, more quotidian, ways in which black men and women reminded southern whites that African Americans, were autonomous people. Chief among these was the behavior of black southerners in public, in particular their physical actions and presence, and their speech and forms of address. It is no coincidence that white southerners frequently coupled complaints about the behavior of black men and women on the streets and sidewalks of the urban South with objections to black forms of address. Both speaking and walking are acts of appropriation that assert and confirm selfhood.²⁷ Refusing to yield the sidewalk to a white man or woman and referring to oneself as a “gentleman” and to a white man as a “man” were acts of self-definition for African Americans, acts that were intimately bound up with the freedmen's emerging identity as citizens.²⁸ As important as the discursive public sphere may be, public space *as space* is essential to the definition of citizenship because, along with suffrage and contract, it is a primary location for the establishment of the autonomous individual.²⁹

²⁶ In “Conjugal Bonds and Wage Labor: Rights of Contract in the Age of Emancipation,” *Journal of American History*, LXXV (September 1988), 471–500, Amy Dru Stanley argues that in post-Civil War America the right to contract was increasingly viewed as the key to individual freedom and was incorporated via the Civil Rights Act of 1866 into a sovereign right of citizenship. For the history of contract and the equation between freedom and the right of contract see C. B. McPherson, *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism: Hobbes to Locke* (Oxford, 1962); James Willard Hurst, *Law and the Conditions of Freedom in the Nineteenth-Century United States* (Madison, 1956); Patrick S. Atiyah, *The Rise and Fall of Freedom of Contract* (Oxford, 1979); Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, “Property and Patriarchy in Classical Bourgeois Political Theory,” *Radical History Review*, IV (Spring-Summer 1977), 36–59. On the definition of the individual through contract and the importance of contract for civil society see Adam B. Seligman, *The Idea of Civil Society* (New York and other cities, 1992), 16, 28, and 33.

²⁷ In *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London, 1984, Steven F. Rendall, trans.), Michel de Certeau defines walking in a city as a “pedestrian speech act” that has a “triple ‘enunciative’ function: it is a process of *appropriation* of the topographical system on the part of the pedestrian (just as the speaker appropriates and takes on the language); it is a spatial acting-out of the place (just as the speech act is an acoustic acting-out of language); and it implies *relations* among differentiated positions, that is, among pragmatic ‘contracts’ in the form of movements (just as verbal enunciation is an ‘allocation,’ ‘posits another opposite’ the speaker and puts contracts between interlocutors into action)” (pp. 97–98). Breaking accepted social rules can also be a way of asserting selfhood. As Erving Goffman explains, “An act that is subject to a rule of conduct is, then, a communication, for it represents a way in which selves are confirmed An act that is subject to rules of conduct but does not conform to them is also a communication—often even more so—for infractions make news and often in such a way as to disconfirm the selves of the participants.” Goffman, “Nature of Deference and Demeanor,” 475.

²⁸ Michael Walzer, “The Civil Society Argument,” in Ronald Beiner, ed., *Theorizing Citizenship* (Albany, N.Y., 1995), 153–74, especially p. 154.

²⁹ As Henri Lefebvre puts it in *The Production of Space* (Paris, 1974; Oxford, Eng., and Cambridge, Mass., 1991; Donald Nicholson-Smith, trans.), “groups, classes or fractions of

While attempts by whites to circumscribe the basis of black equality by limiting the rights of African Americans to vote and contract were clearly part of an overall goal of restratifying southern society, it is in efforts by whites to undercut claims by blacks to public space that notions of honor most clearly inserted themselves into the process of redefining black “place.”

When black southerners appropriated “lady” and “gentleman” and expected white men and women to step aside on public streets, they did more than assert themselves—they demanded whites’ *affirmation* of African Americans’ civil equality. This was a demand that few white southerners were prepared to grant. In the context of the profound and simultaneous social, political, and economic transitions that made the New South new—urbanization, industrialization, emancipation—it is not surprising that people became uncertain about the rules of social conduct.³⁰ As the German political scientist Norbert Elias reflected from personal experience in 1939, during transition periods “the social situation itself makes ‘conduct’ an acute problem.”³¹ In such circumstances, as the postbellum historian of the South, Philip Alexander Bruce, put it, the “fear of being misunderstood” was marked.³²

classes cannot constitute themselves, or recognize one another, as ‘subjects’ unless they generate (or produce) a space” (p. 416). According to Lefebvre, the transformation of everyday life (especially the transformation of the political) can proceed only with the radical transformation of space because they are interconnected. As he wrote in *The Survival of Capitalism* (London, 1973), 72, “To ‘change society,’ to ‘change life’ means nothing if there is not production of an appropriated space. . . . for new social relations there must be new space and vice versa.” Quoted in M. Gottdiener, *The Social Production of Urban Space* (Austin, Texas, 1985), 153.

³⁰ Although the New South remained overwhelmingly rural (even in 1900, only one in six southerners lived in cities), its rate of urbanization and industrialization in the period between the end of the Civil War and World War I outpaced that of the rest of the nation. In 1860 the South was home to only 51 of America’s nearly 400 urban places (defined rather loosely as having 2,500 or more inhabitants). But by 1910 the number of southern towns and cities had jumped to 396, or almost 18 percent of America’s urban areas. On southern urbanization see Don H. Doyle, *New Men, New Cities, New South: Atlanta, Nashville, Charleston, Mobile, 1860–1910* (Chapel Hill and London, 1990); David R. Goldfield, *Cotton Fields and Skyscrapers: Southern City and Region, 1607–1980* (Baton Rouge and London, 1982); Howard N. Rabinowitz, “Continuity and Change: Southern Urban Development, 1860–1900,” in Blaine A. Brownell and David R. Goldfield, eds., *The City in Southern History: The Growth of Urban Civilization in the South* (Port Washington, N. Y., and London, 1977), 92–122; Lawrence H. Larsen, *The Rise of the Urban South* (Lexington, 1985); and Zane L. Miller, “Urban Blacks in the South, 1865–1920: The Richmond, Savannah, New Orleans, Louisville, and Birmingham Experience,” in Leo F. Schnore, ed., *The New Urban History: Quantitative Explorations by American Historians* (Princeton, 1975), 184–204. Statistics cited from Doyle, *New Men*, 1 and 11.

³¹ Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process*. Vol. II: *Power and Civility* (New York, 1982, translated by Edmund Jephcott; [original German-language edition published Basel, 1939]), 325. Elias himself, of course, was living through a nightmare “[period] of transition”; although he managed to escape Nazi Germany for England, his parents died within two years at Breslau and Auschwitz. *Ibid.*, vii.

³² Philip A. Bruce, *The Plantation Negro as a Freeman* (New York and London, 1889), 46.

Orra Langhorne's 1884 column on manners was itself composed in the context of a crisis of conduct. Three months before the editorial appeared, a dispute over street etiquette involving a black man and a white man in the Southside Virginia town of Danville had turned into a massacre of black citizens by a white mob. Langhorne clearly considered manners related to massacres. Although concerned in general with the behavior of young black men on the streets, Langhorne disapproved of the white crowd's action in Danville; she accepted the black version of the violence and called the white action cowardly. Just as she criticized white men as imperious, she recognized the combustible combination of white pride and black assertion. "It is this coarse and rude conduct of the colored youth, with the fierce and arrogant behavior of the young white men, that in times of political excitement culminate in tragedies" such as the one in Danville, she argued.³³

Orra Langhorne's awareness of her own "times of political excitement" and her association of personal conduct and politics, anticipated Elias's "periods of transition" in which everyday conduct becomes a social problem. Since 1879 Orra Langhorne's Virginia had been governed by the state's most successful biracial political alliance, the Readjuster party. By 1883 the Readjusters, an independent coalition of white and black Republicans and white Democrats, had elected Virginia's governor, both United States senators, six of the state's ten congressmen, and controlled the General Assembly and the courts. In championing black political power and asserting African American legal rights, the Readjuster party struck at white privilege and posed the first substantial threat to a white monopoly on social and political power in Virginia.³⁴ Readjuster reforms validated African American male equality in the political arena and frequently encouraged black activism in other walks of life. The power of the biracial coalition to legitimize, even promote, a renegotiation of power relations between the races was most apparent in the cities, where blacks and whites met frequently in public situations.

Complicating this social renegotiation was the definition of public space itself. Public buildings such as the courthouse could easily be seen to fall within the domain of the state. The public streets, including the sidewalks, were communal space. But where did a post office located in the front room of a private home—a fairly common situation—belong? Did African Americans have the right to sit in the orchestra of the Richmond Theater when the colored gallery was closed, as Richard G. L. Paige, a black assemblyman, insisted?³⁵ And

³³ *Southern Workman*, XIII (January 1884), 2.

³⁴ Virginia was the only Confederate state that did not experience Radical Reconstruction, but instead passed directly from federal military control to government by Conservative Democrats.

³⁵ Peter J. Rachleff, *Black Labor in Richmond, 1865–1890* (Urbana and Chicago, 1989), 93.

what rules governed a privately held factory? When William P. Graves, a white tobacco merchant and factory owner in Danville, struck a black employee in 1883 for bumping into him with a basket of tobacco, the worker complained to the authorities, and Graves was arrested and later fined.³⁶ From the black point of view, the fate of William Graves was an admirable example of the rule of law and the impartial workings of justice. From Graves's angle, however, his ability to enforce within his own factory a private sense of race-based honor—his social autonomy as a white man—had been usurped by the Readjuster state.

In Readjuster Virginia the amplified political power of black men altered the behavioral status quo. The new status of black people was reflected in white anxiety over what whites considered to be assertive black behavior, such as that of Assemblyman Paige. It was also apparent in the novel consequences of long-accepted white behavior toward blacks, as William Graves discovered to his cost. In these ways, disputes over protocol were also political contests. For the first time since military Reconstruction in Virginia, black men asserted their rights as citizens and political actors. In this context, public behavior between members of different races became more consequential. Events in Danville provide a particularly dramatic example of just how consequential such encounters could be.

Like so many other towns in the rapidly urbanizing postwar South, Danville boomed in the 1870s and 1880s, more than doubling its prewar population. Located just north of the Virginia–North Carolina border, in Pittsylvania County, Virginia's largest, Danville had a United States government building (where the U.S. Court for the Western District of Virginia sat) and an armory. As in many other southern towns, there were two militias—the white Danville Grays and the black Douglass Guards. Tobacco factories continued to be the principal employer of industrial labor in Danville, but some entrepreneurs hoped to harness the power of the Dan River and replace the tobacco factories and their black workers with textile mills and a white workforce. The hilly downtown was dominated by the Opera House and the Arlington Hotel, but nestled in their shadows were ramshackle bars and a few “Houses of Ill Favor.” The streets of Danville were increasingly crowded, especially on court and market days.³⁷

³⁶ Senate Reports, 48 Cong., 1 Sess., No. 579: U. S. Senate Committee on Privileges and Elections, Report on the Danville Riot (Serial 2178, Washington, 1884) (hereinafter cited as Senate Report), 213.

³⁷ On Danville see Edward Pollock, *Illustrated Sketch Book of Danville, Virginia; Its Manufactures and Commerce* (Petersburg, 1885); Nannie May Tilley, *The Bright-Leaf Tobacco Industry, 1860–1929* (Chapel Hill, 1948); L. Beatrice W. Hairston, *A Brief History of Danville, Virginia, 1728–1954* (Richmond, 1955); and Frederick F. Siegel, *The Roots of Southern Distinctiveness: Tobacco and Society in Danville, Virginia, 1780–1865* (Chapel Hill and London,

This was the setting for the local Readjuster victory in 1882. In the spring of that year the Readjuster-controlled Virginia General Assembly passed legislation dividing Danville into three wards, two of which had a black majority.³⁸ This resulted in the election that summer of a Readjuster majority to the Danville Common Council, which thereafter consisted of four white Democrats, four white Readjusters, and four black Readjusters. The most visible and immediate effect of Readjuster rule in Danville was the election of the African American councilmen, Julius W. Payne, Henry W. Swann, D. F. Balls, and R. A. Arrington, and the selection by the council of a black policeman, Walter S. Withers.³⁹

Prior to the Readjuster victory, Danville's Common Council was principally occupied with tasks common to a growing late-nineteenth-century city: establishing sewer and telephone systems; paving city streets and sidewalks; running the public schools, poorhouse, cemeteries, and jail; and keeping the peace amid the uproar. After the

1987). Other information has been obtained from the Manuscript Census Returns, Tenth Census of the United States, 1880, Pittsylvania County, Virginia (National Archives Microfilm Series T-9, Virginia, Reel 107); the 1881–1882 Danville city directory (Danville Public Library); Common Law Order Book E, April 12, 1883–January 1, 1885 (Danville Circuit Court); Proceedings of the Danville Common Council, 1881–1884 (Library of Virginia) (hereinafter cited as Proceedings); and the Senate Report. The only reports from local newspapers for late-nineteenth-century Danville are a few clippings and back copies in private collections and research libraries. The offices of one of the city's newspapers, the *Danville Register*, burned at the turn of the century, destroying the newspaper's run of its own nineteenth-century back copies. William R. Perkins Library at Duke University has a few issues of the *Register*. Located in other research libraries and private collections are a very few, scattered clippings and copies of the pre-1883 *Danville Times*, which was published from 1865 until 1894, and of the *Danville News* (daily and weekly), published between 1874 and 1880.

³⁸ *House Journal, 1881–1882*, p. 331. See also Proceedings, April 7, 1882. The Readjusters did not expand the city's borders to achieve this: Danville was already a black-majority city. U. S. census information reveals the following population statistics for Danville: in 1870, the total population stood at 3,463 (1,398 white; 2,065 black, or 59.6% black); in 1880, the total was 7,526 (3,129 white and 4,397 black, or 58.4% black); and in 1890 the total was 10,305 (4,764 white, 5,538 black, and 3 Chinese, or 53.7% black). Census data for 1870 and 1880 from *Statistics of the Population of the United States at the Tenth Census . . .* Vol. I: *Population*, (Washington, 1883), Table VI, page 425. Census data for 1890 from *Compendium of the Eleventh Census: 1890 . . .* (3 vols.; Washington, 1892–1897), I, Table 17, p. 577. The Danville Common Council reported in April 1884 a total population of 8,471, of which 4,890 were black and 3,581 were white. This is the closest estimate for the town's population in November 1883. Danville was 58.4% black in 1880; by May 1882 the black majority had dropped somewhat, to 56.25% (the white population stood at 3,500, and the black at 4,500). In 1885 Danville's population was reported to be over 13,000 (though this estimate may be too large, judging from the population figure of 10,305 for 1890 given in the compendium of the census cited above), which represents a 73% increase from 1880. For 1882 figures see Report of the Health Officer, May 2, 1882, in Proceedings, 1881–1883. For 1884 statistic see Proceedings, April 1, 1884. For the 1885 statistic, see Pollock, *Illustrated Sketch Book of Danville*, 6.

³⁹ Proceedings, July 1, 1882. Withers was one of eight regularly elected policemen. See also J. D. Raulston testimony, Senate Report, 465, which reported that the common council "elected one colored policeman only out of nine . . ."; John D. Blackwell testimony, Senate Report, 359; and W. P. Robinson testimony, Senate Report, 390–410.

Readjusters won a majority on the council, it continued to be concerned with these matters, but there was a shift of emphasis toward serving the city's black population. The long-promised house for the sexton of the colored cemetery was finally built. Streets were paved and sidewalks constructed in black neighborhoods. Schools for both black and white students were expanded and improved, and discrepancies in funding between them, while not eliminated, were narrowed.⁴⁰

As in any city, there was violence, and arrests for felonies kept pace with population growth. More commonly, the men of Danville found themselves behind bars for one or more of three misdemeanor crimes: carrying a concealed weapon, selling intoxicating liquors without a license, and engaging in unlawful gaming.⁴¹ Considering the arguments that would be made later regarding Readjuster rule in Danville, it is important to note that the crime level—measured by arrest rates—fell consistently under the Readjusters.⁴² If crime is a reliable index of social stability, then Readjuster Danville was a model city. But, ominously, even as the overall number of arrests declined between the summer of 1882 and the fall of 1883, the number of men arrested for violation of the concealed weapons law rose, skyrocketing in October 1883 as the political campaign intensified and the state election approached.⁴³

Around the first of October 1883, the city's Democratic leadership published a pamphlet entitled *Coalition Rule in Danville*, known

⁴⁰ On the African American cemetery see Proceedings, October 11 and December 8, 1882. On streets see Proceedings, October 11, 1882, and January 3, 1883. On schools see clipping, "Public School Report," from the Danville *Daily Register*, August 5, 1882, in Proceedings; and see also Proceedings for September 1 and October 3, 1882, and May 14, August 7, and October 2, 1883. On taxes see Proceedings, March 24, 1882, and February 23, 1883.

⁴¹ State law imposed a fine of between fifteen and fifty dollars on any person convicted of carrying a concealed weapon. During the summer of 1883 nearly a hundred indictments were filed in Danville against people for carrying arms contrary to law. While the majority of these were white men, prominent black Readjusters, such as Squire Taliaferro, were arrested repeatedly for this offense. Majority Report, Senate Report, xxvi; R. J. Adams testimony, Senate Report, 242; W. H. Barksdale testimony, Senate Report, 278. See also Report of the Mayor, Proceedings, November 21, 1883; and Common Law Order Book E (April 12, 1883–January 1, 1885). For the city's response to illegal gaming see *ibid.*, p. 43 (June 5, 1883). For a contemporary argument in favor of strengthening the laws against carrying concealed weapon, see H. V. Redfield, *Homicide, North and South* (Philadelphia, 1880), 193–207.

⁴² Crime statistics compiled from Proceedings, January 1882 through December 1884. Despite the growth of the city, arrests fell under the Readjusters from a high of 163 arrests in September 1882 to 126 in May 1883 to 78 in September 1883. The vast majority of these arrests were for misdemeanors.

⁴³ Common Law Order Book E, pp. 108–9, 114, 116, and 117 (October 2, 1883). The list of those indicted in October for violating the concealed weapons law reads like a Who's Who of Danville politics. This is because men who were politically opposed reported each other carrying concealed weapons; e.g., W. H. McCormick, a white Democrat, reported Squire Taliaferro; Readjuster W. H. Luck, who was himself indicted for this offense in May, turned in Democrat J. W. Hall in October; the same week, Hall turned in eight Readjusters, including three police officers (who were presumably off-duty at the time). *Ibid.*, pp. 127–28 (October 5, 1883).

popularly as the Danville Circular. Addressed to the residents of the southwestern part of the state and the Valley of Virginia, the circular was designed to lay before that rural white, predominantly Readjuster population “a few facts from which you can form some idea of the injustice and humiliation to which our white people have been subjected and are daily undergoing by the domination and misrule of the Radical or negro party, now in absolute power in our town” The circular claimed to enumerate the many grievances of Danville’s white population and ended with a fraternal plea that their “fellow-citizens” to the west deliver the whites of Danville “from this awful state of *humiliation and wretchedness* by voting for the Conservative-Democratic candidates for the legislature, for *unless they are elected we are doomed*.”⁴⁴

The Danville Circular was a partisan attempt to persuade Readjuster voters in Virginia’s white majority counties to vote for Democratic candidates. As such, it cannot be considered uncritically as accurate testimony about life in Danville under the Readjusters. Rather, the value of the circular lies in its representation of everyday life in Readjuster Danville and its connection of politics to civility and the articulation of urban social relationships. The heart of the circular concerns the control of public spaces in Danville and focuses on three interrelated issues: the appointment of African Americans to public offices; their prominence in the public market; and the behavior of black men and women on the public streets and in the homes and offices of white employers.

The first item in the circular’s “litany of shame” was the appointment of African American police officers in Danville. Black postmasters and legislators were grudgingly tolerated by whites in the South, but black men representing the law—armed and with the authority to arrest and detain white men and women—were bitterly resented.⁴⁵ Danville’s Readjuster government had appointed black policemen, and these appointments were emphasized and their number exaggerated in the circular. The circular charged that four out of nine policemen were black. In fact, of nine regular policemen serving in October 1883, only two were black.⁴⁶ In addition, there was an African American

⁴⁴ *Coalition Rule in Danville: To the Citizens of the Southwest and Valley of Virginia* (n.d. [1883]). Emphasis in the original. Numerous original copies exist, and the pamphlet was reprinted in the Senate Report, vii–ix (quotations on pp. vii and ix).

⁴⁵ See Rabinowitz, *Race Relations in the Urban South*, 41–43, 47, 266, 278, 296, 329, and 350.

⁴⁶ Police officers were selected by the common council to serve six-month terms. In 1882 the council chose one black officer, Walter S. Withers. In 1883 they added a second black officer, Robert J. Adams. See Proceedings, July 6, 1882, and August 7, 1883. See also J. D. Raulston (president of common council) testimony, Senate Report, 458; J. D. Blair (Democrat) testimony, in *Danville Riot, November 3, 1883. Report of Committee of Forty with Sworn Testimony of Thirty-seven Witnesses* (Richmond, 1883), 39–40; Mayor J. H. Johnston (Readjuster), “Address to the People” [November 1883], Box 216, William Mahone Papers (William H. Perkins Library, Duke University, Durham, N.C.).

weighmaster of the public scales, Benton T. Fields.⁴⁷ The town health officer was a white Democrat, Dr. Paulus Irving, but the sanitary policeman, who was empowered to enforce city sanitary regulations, was black Readjuster leader Squire Taliaferro.⁴⁸ As far as the circular's charge that African American policemen were sent to arrest white men, it seems that black officers preferred not to and generally did not serve warrants on whites.⁴⁹

Democrats were also aggrieved at the election of African Americans as magistrates to the police court. The police court was composed of a total of five persons: the mayor, the president of the common council, and three magistrates, all elected popularly. Of the five members of the police court, one was black. According to John D. Blackwell, himself a judge in Danville, the African American magistrate, surnamed Jones, was "the best of the lot," and the chief complaint against him (other than Democratic tirades about his color) came from members of the black community, who insisted that his judgments against them were more severe than those he issued against whites. Perhaps because of this, postulated another magistrate, white people in Danville preferred to have their cases heard before Justice Jones.⁵⁰

Whatever the numbers, both blacks and whites took the political involvement of African American men to mean that Danville blacks had influence under the Readjusters. In addition to the redistribution of patronage represented by the employment of African American men, their presence in public and official settings served as a constant reminder of the political participation of black men and may have, as whites charged, encouraged other forms of African American assertion and outspokenness.

⁴⁷ J. H. Johnston, "Address to the People." See also J. D. Raulston testimony, Senate Report, 458; J. D. Blair testimony, *Danville Riot . . . Committee of Forty*, 39–40; and Raulston deposition, December 1883, Box 192, Mahone Papers.

⁴⁸ For the health officer see Proceedings, July 6, 1882; J. H. Johnston, "Address to the People"; and J. D. Raulston testimony, Senate Report, 455 and 458. For the sanitary policeman see Proceedings, July 6, 1882. See also J. D. Blair testimony, *Danville Riot . . . Committee of Forty*, 39–40; and John D. Blackwell testimony, Senate Report, 359. The sanitary policeman was a high-ranking city official who performed the duties of a scavenger but also enforced city regulations regarding sewerage, such as keeping ditches clear and gutters clean and removing obstructions to the streams. In this latter capacity the sanitary policeman came in contact with many businesses whose refuse accumulated. While there is no evidence that Squire Taliaferro harassed particular businessmen, one of the white city council members made repeated attempts to block Taliaferro's reappointment as sanitary policeman and opposed Readjusters' attempts to extend his term. See Proceedings, July 6 and October 10, 1882, and April 4, 1883.

⁴⁹ J.D. Raulston testimony, Senate Report, 462.

⁵⁰ John D. Blackwell testimony, Senate Report, 367; and J. D. Raulston testimony, Senate Report, 462. W. P. Robinson, who was himself a magistrate, concurred with Blackwell, noting that Jones "understood the law very well, and seemed to be a very well educated negro . . . I have seen him try white cases, and white men preferred to have him try them . . ." W. P. Robinson testimony, Senate Report, 396.

Close on the heels of the circular's allegations regarding the employment of African American police officers was the assertion that black hucksters were controlling the public market and pushing out white sellers. "Out of the 24 stalls and stands at the market place, 20 are *rented out by the council to the negroes*," said the circular. In addition, the authors of the circular chafed at what they portrayed as the degradation of manners in public commercial space. The market, the circular charged, which was previously "occupied in all its stalls by polite white gentlemen, with their clean white aprons, and the most enticing meats and vegetables upon their boards, is now the scene of filth, stench, crowds of loitering and idle negroes, drunkenness, obscene language, and petit thieves." Testimony taken after the violence refutes the idealized description of the market before the Readjuster period but verifies the presence of significant numbers of African American sellers. There were twenty-nine stalls in the market, which the city rented each year in a competitive auction. Fifteen of these were rented to black merchants who sold oysters, fish, and fowl, while the remaining fourteen stalls were divided between white butchers and hawkers. Standing in front of the stalls were tables belonging to African American vegetable sellers. All of this made for an extremely cramped market, a place where, regardless of race, people were liable to be jostled and crowded.⁵¹

There is an obvious economic theme in the circular's complaints about African American public officials and conditions in the city market: good jobs, with regular salaries and social prestige, were going to African Americans; and black sellers were competing successfully in the marketplace. Indeed, the circular was not the first formal white complaint about Readjuster administration of the market. The previous January, a group of whites who rented stalls and stands used "disrespectful language" in a complaint to the common council over rents and bidding practices and made unsubstantiated charges that the council's committee on the market had artificially run up the price of stalls during the annual auction.⁵² There is also another concern, which lies below the surface of the circular's protests against black police officers, hucksters, and loiterers but emerges clearly in the circular's

⁵¹ *Coalition Rule in Danville*, as printed in Senate Report, vii; W. P. Robinson deposition, December 1883, Box 192, Mahone Papers; W. P. Robinson testimony, Senate Report, 392-93; J. D. Raulston testimony, Senate Report, 459; John D. Blackwell testimony, Senate Report, 360-61; Mahone handwritten speech #2, Box 192, Mahone Papers. Even the Democrats admitted that the picture of the market under Democratic rule was overdrawn, noting that "[W]e never did have a good market in Danville . . . we didn't have any of the 'enticing meats' that these gentlemen speak of—at least I never got any of them." W. N. Ruffin testimony, Senate Report, 1006.

⁵² The council established a special committee to investigate the charges but found no evidence to support the complaint. Proceedings, January 2, 1883.

central attack on black behavior on the city streets. This is a lack of what whites considered good manners and due deference from blacks in public situations.

In words akin to those chosen later by Orra Langhorne, the Danville Circular complained of "squads" of black vagabonds "who impede the travel of [white] ladies and gentlemen, very frequently forcing them from the sidewalk into the street." According to the circular, this behavior was not limited to black men: "*Negro women* have been known to *force ladies* from the pavement, and remind them that they will '*learn to step aside the next time*'." The authors of the circular also charged that black women in Danville were intent on ascribing to themselves gentle status in words as well as action: "It is a very common practice for the negroes who are employed about our houses to allude to white ladies and gentlemen as *men* and *women*, and to negroes as *ladies* and *gentlemen*. This is a practice almost without exception with the negro women."⁵³

The use or denial of honorific appellations such as "sir" and "Mrs." and the granting or assertion of right-of-way are ancient markers of status and submission. White children in the New South were taught to omit honorific titles when addressing black people.⁵⁴ As for the public right-of-way, competition over street space seems to be a fact of urban life. Nevertheless, encounters on the street that telegraph power relations among social groups have far-reaching consequences. In his dramatization of the life of Sigmund Freud, Jean-Paul Sartre links Freud's drive and self-identity to an incident in which Freud's father was forced from the sidewalk by an anti-Semite ("Not on the sidewalk, Jew!") and suggests that Freud's revulsion at what he considered cowardice on the part of his father triggered his articulation of the oedipal complex.⁵⁵ Closer to home, in 1863 Confederate soldiers outside of

⁵³ *Coalition Rule in Danville*, as printed in Senate Report, viii. For more white accounts of black appropriation of the language of gentility see Edward L. Ayers, *The Promise of the New South: Life After Reconstruction* (New York and Oxford, 1992), 133–34.

⁵⁴ In Hollinger F. Barnard, ed., *Outside the Magic Circle: The Autobiography of Virginia Foster Durr* (Tuscaloosa, Ala., 1985), 19, Virginia Durr recalled of the early twentieth century that "I was taught by the environment and by my mother that you can't call a black woman a lady. You can't say, 'A lady's here'; you have to say, 'A woman's here.'" Katharine Du Pre Lumpkin recounted a crisis within her local YWCA in late 1915 over whether or not the white members would receive and address a black speaker as "Miss" Arthur. *The Making of a Southerner* (New York, 1947; Athens, Ga., 1981), 189–93. On the other hand, blacks had ingenious methods of circumventing the prejudices of whites. Hortense Powdermaker tells the story of an African American family in Mississippi in the 1930s who had their baby christened "Misjulia," thereby ensuring that whites would give her an honorific. *After Freedom*, 343.

⁵⁵ Jean-Paul Sartre, *The Freud Scenario*, translated by Quintin Hoare, (Chicago, 1985), 284–88 (quotation on p. 285) and 321. See also J. Strachey, A. Freud, A. Strachey, and A. Tyson, eds. and trans., *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* (24 vols.; London, 1953–1974), IV, 196–97 and 212; and Carl E. Schorske, *Fin-de-Siècle Vienna: Politics and Culture* (New York, 1980), 191.

Jackson, Mississippi, spread the rumor that the Jackson city council had come within three votes of passing an ordinance “forbidding *soldiers the use of the pavement and sidewalks* and forcing them to walk in the middle of the streets.”⁵⁶ It is unclear whether the citizens of Jackson ever contemplated such an action, or why they would have. What is important for the present purpose is that Confederate soldiers anxious about their position and role in southern life should cast their concerns in terms of the right to walk the public streets on an equal basis with the rest of the white southern community.

In Danville, disagreement between the races over sidewalk protocol often turned city strolls into wrestling matches. William P. Graves, the tobacco merchant who was elected mayor in 1884, described walking on Danville streets in territorial terms, as a personal battle for space: “Frequently, in walking the streets I have encountered negroes, more particularly negro women; I have generally turned to the right, and I have very frequently come in contact with them. I first gave the way, but I found if I continued to do it they would press me off the sidewalk altogether, and I generally [walk] straight along on the right hand, and if I come in contact with any one, why, they generally give the way; I [don’t] strike her with my fist or anything of that kind; I generally strike them with my shoulder, and pass on; I have had frequent occurrences of that sort.”⁵⁷

Historians of the American South have, in recent years, argued that African American appropriation of Victorian gender roles and the refusal of whites to validate such black gender differentiation were part of a broader struggle over the legitimization of black manhood and citizenship and over economic and sexual control of black women.⁵⁸ Self-confident or aggressive behavior by African American women—whether on the streets or in the kitchen—bothered whites not only because of what it said about black women but also because it simultaneously reflected black men’s new identities as patriarchs and citizens, capable of protecting and exploiting black women through

⁵⁶ For Jackson story, see Reid Mitchell, *Civil War Soldiers: Their Expectations and Their Experiences* (New York, 1988), 66.

⁵⁷ William P. Graves testimony, Senate Report, 213 (quotation) and 212; and Pollock, *Illustrated Sketch Book of Danville*, 120–21.

⁵⁸ See, in particular, Jones, *Labor of Love*; Catherine Clinton, “Reconstructing Freedwomen,” in Clinton and Silber, eds., *Divided Houses*, 306–19; Clinton, “Bloody Terrain: Freedwomen, Sexuality, and Violence During Reconstruction,” in Clinton, ed., *Half Sisters of History: Southern Women and the American Past* (Durham, N.C., and London, 1994), 136–53; Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow*; Edwards, “Sexual Violence, Gender, Reconstruction, and the Extension of Patriarchy in Granville County, North Carolina,” and “Politics of Manhood and Womanhood”; and Leslie Ann Schwalm, “The Meaning of Freedom: African American Women and Their Transition from Slavery to Freedom in Lowcountry South Carolina” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1991).

individual action or the law. This explains in great measure the tendency of both whites and blacks in Danville to interpret sidewalk shoving matches as political statements. When “leading white men” in Danville later recalled witnessing altercations between the races on the sidewalks, they associated the disputes with Readjuster rule. William N. Ruffin, a real estate agent, insisted that black-white relations had not always been so highly charged and asserted that only since Danville’s black population had been “under Readjuster dictation or training” had such incidents occurred.⁵⁹ Black narratives of public altercations in Danville also linked them with politics but put the blame on white shoulders. Walter Gay, a black Danville resident, reported being shoved off the sidewalk by white Democrats.⁶⁰

It is impossible to say whether public interactions between white and black citizens in Danville were more acrimonious under the Readjusters than in the 1870s or in the immediate postwar years, or whether the origins of the black-white tension of the 1879–1883 period lay in that earlier era. The local newspaper is the likeliest source of stories about black-white relations, but a fire at the turn of the century destroyed the office of the *Danville Register*, taking with it the nineteenth-century back copies. Furthermore, unless an arrest is made, street altercations of the sort documented for the Readjuster era are unlikely to surface in existing police records. Only the records of the U.S. Senate’s investigation of the causes of the Danville Riot permit a partial reconstruction of life on the streets under the Readjusters and an educated guess as to what degree Readjuster rule, through its legitimization of black political power, resulted in a recalibration of social relationships in Danville.

What can be said with assurance is that Readjuster rule put black-white relationships in a new light and opened up new interpretative strategies for altercations across the color line. In both very real and figurative senses, black and white people in Readjuster Danville jostled for position every time they faced each other in public, and whites and blacks in Danville associated what they considered aggressive behavior with opposing political allegiances. This conflation of the social and political effects of biracial rule was manifest in the *Lynchburg Democratic Campaign*’s complaint that “[w]hite women are rudely shoved off the pavements by dirty buck Negroes and encouraged to do it by the truculent Negro policemen appointed by the Mahone ring.”⁶¹

⁵⁹ W. N. Ruffin testimony, Senate Report, 999–1000 (quotation on p. 1000). See also J. R. Pleasants testimony, Senate Report, 1041; and B. F. Wheatley testimony, Senate Report, 1109.

⁶⁰ Walter Gay deposition [December 1883], handwritten depositions, Box 192, Mahone Papers.

⁶¹ *Lynchburg Democratic Campaign*, October 29, 1883, quoted in Walter T. Calhoun, “The Danville Riot and Its Repercussions on the Virginia Election of 1883,” in Calhoun, *Studies in the*

These redefined social relationships were themselves political insofar as they seemed to have come about as the result of a political revolution and were perceived to be, as the circular suggests, susceptible to reversal through politics.

On Saturday, November 3, 1883, white men in Danville repossessed the town—politically and physically—through violence. In a dramatic affirmation of the power of the white minority population to negate the rights of Danville's African American majority, the city's white men reinscribed the boundaries of black "place" in a bloody confrontation on Main Street.

The multiple, contradictory, and fundamentally incompatible versions of the riot produced by its participants and interpreters underscore the inability of Danville's white and black residents to agree about what happened there. The contemporary disagreement about the riot centered on disputes over manners, honor, and status, and questions about who controlled public space. These issues led to the riot, and no consensus between white and black could be reached after the fact—as an early historian of Danville acknowledged. "The Danville Riot . . . was nothing more nor less than a street fight between whites and blacks," wrote Beverley Munford in 1905. "The immediate occasion . . . was an inconsiderate jostling of a white man by a colored man, or vice versa, on the sidewalk."⁶²

It is possible to say more than Munford did about the violence in Danville, though his brevity is instructive. The event that resulted in an armed revolt by Danville's white anti-Readjuster minority began as a dispute over street etiquette.⁶³ Around lunch time on Saturday, Charles D. Noel, a young white clerk, was walking up Main Street when he stumbled over the foot of one of two young black men going in the opposite direction.⁶⁴ According to Noel, he turned to the black man whose foot he had stumbled over, Hense Lawson, a waiter, "and asked him what did he do that for. His reply was, in a very insolent manner: 'I was getting

History of the South, 1875–1922 (Greenville, S.C., 1966), 25–51 and 36–37. The reference to "Mahone" is to William Mahone, Confederate general, railroad entrepreneur, Readjuster party leader, and U.S. senator.

⁶² Beverley B. Munford, *Random Recollections* (n.p., 1905), 154.

⁶³ By street etiquette, I mean what Erving Goffman calls "rules of conduct," or "ceremonial rules," through which an "individual expresses his character or conveys his appreciation of the other participants in the situation." Street etiquette falls under Goffman's category of "symmetrical rule[s]," or common courtesies, which are considered mutually binding. See Goffman, "Deference and Demeanor," 476–77.

⁶⁴ Noel was 26 years old in 1880, which made him 28 or 29 in 1883. He is identified in the 1880 manuscript census as an unmarried clerk in a grocery store and a boarder in the home of Richard and Catherine Walk. By 1883 Noel was a clerk for a tobacco commission merchant.

out of the way of a lady, and a white lady at that.”⁶⁵ Noel told Lawson that was all right and continued on his way. Only a few steps further, he heard Lawson’s black companion, Davis Lewellyn, a tobacco worker, tell Lawson that it did not matter if Noel thought it was “all right”—Lawson had apologized and was in no need of pardon.⁶⁶ At this point, Noel turned and struck Lewellyn, who fought back, hitting Noel and twice knocking him off the sidewalk into the gutter. Seeing that he was beaten, Noel left, and Lawson and Lewellyn did the same.

What did Noel and Lewellyn fight over? It was Lawson, not Lewellyn, who had bumped Noel, violating his personal space; but this was put right by Lawson’s explanation—though, with its implicit denial of a natural correlation between “lady” and “white lady,” the response may have irritated Noel more than it appeased him.⁶⁷ Charles Noel appears to have been angered by what he might have termed Davis Lewellyn’s “insolence,” i.e., Lewellyn’s remark that it made no difference whether or not Noel was satisfied with Hense Lawson’s explanation because Lawson had justified his actions and the matter was closed. Davis Lewellyn’s lack of concern for Charles Noel’s opinion drove the white man into a rage.⁶⁸

Tempers were running high that Saturday. The night before, William E. Sims, chairman of the Readjuster party in Pittsylvania County, had spoken in Danville and denounced the Danville Circular. The crowd was variously described as placid or whooping (depending on the politics of the observer), and Sims was “as severe as could be” in his criticism of the creators of the circular. In fact, he outraged white opinion in Danville by invoking the language of honor to denounce the signers of the circular, calling them a set of “liars, scoundrels and cowards!”⁶⁹

⁶⁵ Hense Lawson’s full name was Henderson Lawson. He was 21 years old in 1880, which made him 23 or 24 in November 1883. Lawson was identified as a porter in the 1880 census and as a waiter in Nicholas and Hessberg’s restaurant in the 1881–1882 Danville city directory. Lawson was unmarried in 1880. For the Noel quotation see Charles Noell testimony, *Danville Riot . . . Committee of Forty*, 11–12. The Committee of Forty report spells Noel’s name as Noell. He is listed as Noel in the census and in the index of the Senate Report.

⁶⁶ Davis Lewellyn is identified in the 1880 manuscript census as 21 years old, which made him 23 or 24 in 1883. He worked in a tobacco factory and shared a room with a storeclerk. He was unmarried in 1880.

⁶⁷ On “coming too close” as a violation of personal honor, see Georg Simmel, “The Secret and the Secret Society,” in Kurt H. Wolff, trans. and ed., *The Sociology of Georg Simmel* (Glencoe, Ill., 1950), 321.

⁶⁸ Edward L. Ayers has written of the propensity of white men in the postwar South to overreact to perceived African American insolence. “When black gestures signaled flagrant contempt,” Ayers writes, “many white Southern men literally knew no way to react other than with violence. If a black man insulted a white man and the white did not strike back immediately, he had, in his own eyes and in the eyes of his peers, no honor left to lose.” Ayers, *Vengeance and Justice*, 235. See also Doyle, *Etiquette of Race Relations*, 117; Litwack, *Been in the Storm So Long*, 278.

⁶⁹ W. E. Sims testimony, contested election case, *Sims v. Hurt*, quoted in Mahone Handwritten Speech #1 (December 1883), Box 192, Mahone Papers. See also Sims testimony, Senate Report,

The morning after Sims's Friday night speech, the Third Ward Democratic Club met at the Opera House at the request of George C. Cabell, Danville's Democratic congressman. The meeting was called to reaffirm the truth of the Danville Circular in the face of Sims's denunciation.⁷⁰ Thus on Saturday afternoon nearly every white Democrat in Danville was cloistered in the Opera House, as Cabell was determined to get the signature of each and every one of them.⁷¹

While the Democrats were meeting, Davis Lewellyn was knocking Charles Noel into the gutter. After the fight, Noel stopped at the Opera House to check on the Democratic meeting, where he discussed his trouble on Main Street with his friends George A. Lea and W. R. Taylor. Noel decided to confront Lewellyn, taking his friends along for support. The three white men walked down Main Street and approached Lewellyn, Lawson, and a third black man, James Love, from behind. Noel grabbed one by the collar and ended up, not with Lewellyn, but with Lawson instead.⁷²

As Noel struck Lawson, Taylor and Lea moved (as they put it later) to insure "fair play."⁷³ Lea brandished his pistol to keep Love and Lewellyn from interfering. As "Noel had the advantage of two or three inches of length in the arm," Lawson got the worst of the fight. At this point, as was routine with a street fight, a crowd began to gather.

701-4; and *Danville Times*, November 20, 1883 (entered as testimony in *Danville Riot . . . Committee of Forty*, 13-14 [quotation]). Sims described the crowd as polite and controlled. White Democrats portrayed the audience as "a vast crowd of Africans, who were yelling and whooping at the top of their voices." See Peter Bouldin editorial in the *Danville Times*, November 20, 1883, entered as testimony in *Danville Riot . . . Committee of Forty*, 13-14.

⁷⁰ Although Cabell's name was not affixed to the circular, his reputation was attached to it, as he had made speeches personally affirming its truth. See N. T. Reid testimony, *Danville Riot . . . Committee of Forty*, 22; Mahone handwritten speech #2, citing the report of S. M. Dickey, Grayson County, to Mahone, Box 192, Mahone Papers.

⁷¹ Charles Friend testimony, *Danville Riot . . . Committee of Forty*, 21; B. B. Temple testimony, Senate Report, 44 and 49. According to Temple, there were between six and seven hundred men in the Opera House. Even after the violence, Democrats upheld the truth of the circular. In a mass meeting at the Richmond Armory Hall on November 4, Col. John B. Purcell chaired a meeting called to denounce Mahone for casting aspersions upon the honor of the white men of Danville by questioning the claims of the circular and moved to uphold the circular. *Lynchburg Virginian*, November 6, 1883.

⁷² Charles Noel testimony, Senate Report, 109-111; Hense Lawson testimony, Senate Report, 144; Davis Lewellyn testimony, Senate Report, 157-58; W. R. Taylor testimony, Senate Report, 29; and George A. Lea testimony, Senate Report, 85-87. Taylor and Lea both identified Lawson as the man Noel was after. Noel identified the man he saw on the street as the same man who pushed him off of the pavement, who was Lewellyn.

⁷³ The concept of insuring "fair play" belongs to the vocabulary of duelling. It is striking that the white men should use such language in regard to a fight with a black man that began, after all, over white resentment at being treated as equal to a black. It is more likely that Noel's intent was to beat Lewellyn with brass knuckles while Lea and Taylor stood by armed. In a cultural sense, perhaps this fight lies between the duel, the older southern defense of honor, and the street fight, its New South replacement. On street fights see Ayers, *Vengeance and Justice*, 268-70.

Because it was Saturday afternoon, the traditional market time for African Americans, there were many people, mostly blacks, on the streets.⁷⁴ Lawson was bleeding profusely, somebody shouted "murder," and an African American policeman, Robert J. Adams, came running.⁷⁵ Officer Adams moved to separate Noel and Lawson, identifying himself as a police officer, but Lea resisted. Jeff Corbin, a white man, affirmed Adams's office, and the policeman separated Lawson and Noel, who were sent to wash off the blood.⁷⁶

The fight over, a small crowd of two or three white men and a half-dozen black men loitered; things seemed to be quieting down. This was all routine in a medium-sized southern city. But suddenly George Adams, a black man (no relation to Adams, the policeman), tackled Lea and rolled him into the gutter in an attempt to wrestle away his pistol. Adams failed to disarm Lea, got up, and ran away. As Adams ran, Lea shot at him from the gutter.⁷⁷ Hearing the shot, more people gathered. Policeman Adams blew his whistle for reinforcements. A second black policeman, Walter Withers, and a white policeman, Charles Freeman, arrived. Black men, women, and children drifted over, and white men began to come down from the Opera House. A white man, Joel Oliver, captain of the local Democratic militia, approached Officer Adams and ordered that he disperse the crowd. E. M. Hatcher seconded Oliver's order, saying, "Damn it, make these niggers get off the street." Officer Freeman (the white policeman) responded that the black crowd was doing nothing and "if you all don't bother them they won't bother you."⁷⁸

⁷⁴ The tobacco factories and warehouses, employers of the majority of African Americans in Danville, were open half-days on Saturday, and most people stopped work at noon. Saturday afternoon was the traditional market day for Danville blacks. For tobacco factory hours see R. W. Glass testimony, Senate Report, 84.

⁷⁵ Lawson and Lewellyn claimed that Noel was wearing "knucks," brass knuckles. Noel, Taylor, and Lea insisted Noel fought with his bare hands. See note 72 for the testimony of the five men.

⁷⁶ George A. Lea testimony, Senate Report, 87; Davis Lewellyn testimony, Senate Report, 158–59; Hense Lawson testimony, Senate Report, 144–45; R. J. Adams testimony, Senate Report, 238–39.

⁷⁷ R. J. Adams testimony, Senate Report, 238–39; and W. R. Taylor testimony, Senate Report, 30. Lea refused to say whether he had shot or not, fearing to incriminate himself.

⁷⁸ R. J. Adams testimony, Senate Report, 239. The Democrats denied that there were women and children present in the crowd. But there is ample testimony that there were women and children in the street, although none were injured. John F. Carl, keeper of the United States Cemetery, which lay within the corporate limits of Danville, estimated that "fully one half of (the crowd) were youths and children from 6 years upwards with a sprinkling of girls and women." The women and children were milling around at the back of the crowd and were not in the path of the violence. John F. Carl deposition, November 1883, contained in Mahone handwritten speech #1, Box 192, Mahone Papers. See also Rev. W. H. Barksdale deposition and George W. West deposition, Box 192, Mahone Papers; and Sophia Powell testimony, Senate Report, 179.

While the white men on the sidewalk were demanding that the street be cleared, the black crowd in the street was demanding the arrest of Lea—the man who had fired at George Adams—for violating the concealed weapons law.⁷⁹ All three policemen and a few white men were circulating among the black crowd, which had grown to perhaps a hundred people, asking them to leave. The twenty or so white men on the sidewalk were angry about (and perhaps a bit afraid of) the size of the black crowd, and they exhibited their pistols as they repeated their demand that the people go home. The black crowd was defiant: they felt an arrest was called for and “were not willing to move off, on the order of the white men.”⁸⁰ The crowd “intended to have their rights,” meaning the rights to have Lea arrested for shooting at George Adams and to remain on the street until that happened. When Officer Freeman pleaded with the black crowd to go home, they replied that they would not be run over and told him to make the white men leave.⁸¹

There seemed to be a standoff. A young Democrat, Walter Holland, perhaps thinking to join the men urging the black crowd to disperse, stepped off the sidewalk and walked through part of the crowd toward a policeman. When Holland was a few steps away from the sidewalk, the white men raised their pistols and opened fire on the crowd. Some said they heard a command to “fire!”; others said the shooting began spontaneously, with no warning. Members of the white crowd testified that they shot in the air at first; nevertheless, Walter Holland fell on that first volley, shot through the back of the head. Between seventy-five and two hundred shots were fired in the space of two or three minutes. When the smoke cleared, three black men, among them Terry Smith and Edward Davis, lay dead beside Holland on the street. A fourth black man died later.⁸²

⁷⁹ There was confusion among the crowd over who had fired at Adams—Lea, or Taylor, who was also openly armed. Some people demanded the arrest of Taylor, while others identified Lea as the shooter.

⁸⁰ Walter S. Withers deposition, in Mahone handwritten speech #1, Box 192, Mahone Papers.

⁸¹ R. J. Adams testimony, Senate Report, 239–40; Walter S. Withers testimony, Senate Report, 1–2; W. R. Taylor testimony, Senate Report, 30; J. C. Reagan testimony, Senate Report, 64; R. W. Glass testimony, Senate Report, 75. Similar language was used in Richmond during the struggle over integrated streetcars there. In the spring of 1867 when three blacks refused to leave a whites-only streetcar, a crowd gathered, shouting, “let’s have our rights!” In Rachleff, *Black Labor in Richmond*, 42.

⁸² The number of dead in the shooting is difficult to ascertain, although there is general if undocumented agreement that five men were killed. See Wynes, *Race Relations in Virginia*, 31; and Moore, *Two Paths to the New South*, 117. The Virginia Bureau of Vital Statistics records are unclear on this issue. Only two black men can be located—Terry Smith and Edward Davis—who died of gunshot wounds in Danville on November 3, and there is no record of black men dying of shooting wounds in the surrounding counties either. In addition, Walter Holland cannot be located in these records, although all testimony agrees that he died on the street that day. See Records of the Bureau of Vital Statistics (Library of Virginia) microfilm, Reel 32. The Danville Common Council Proceedings for November 1883 report that three people died from gunshot wounds that month, all African Americans. See also R. W. Glass testimony, Senate Report, 79–80; and R. W. Glass deposition, in Mahone handwritten speech #1, Box 192, Mahone Papers.

The crowd began to run at the first shot, and by the time the firing ended the street was nearly empty. A few white men pursued the retreating blacks and attacked a number of people. Their targets appear to have been prominent black citizens. Charles Adams, brother of police officer Robert Adams, left the safety of Nicholas and Hessberg's store to calm his horses. William P. Graves approached Adams and leveled his pistol at him. According to his later testimony, Adams attempted to mollify Graves through a show of deference. "I said, pulling off my hat to him, 'For God's sake, Capt. Graves, don't shoot; I am not doing anything'." Graves shot anyway, breaking Adams's arm, which he had raised to protect his head.⁸³ Jack Redd, a black Readjuster leader, was beaten and kicked, and the white crowd was preparing to shoot him when Congressman Cabell intervened and stopped them.⁸⁴ Meanwhile, the men who remained at the Opera House, hearing the shots, poured out and onto the street in spite of the efforts of the Democratic organizers to keep the meeting in session until all the men had signed the new affidavit validating the Danville Circular.⁸⁵

With the streets empty of African Americans, the white men of Danville organized themselves into patrols to augment the local militia. Despite Readjuster Mayor J. H. Johnston's plea that "all good citizens . . . resume their usual avocations; [and] cease appearing upon the streets armed with shot-guns or other weapons," all that afternoon and night groups of armed white men patrolled the streets, sending a clear message of possession.⁸⁶ Sophie Powell, a black Danville resident, testified that squads of white men armed with shotguns patrolled her neighborhood on the weekend of November 3 and 4. She said that at night she and her family could hear sounds of gunfire "all around" and

⁸³ Charles Adams deposition, in Mahone handwritten speech #1, Box 192, Mahone Papers; see also Charles Adams testimony, Senate Report, 234; and R. J. Adams testimony, Senate Report, 241. Graves admitted encountering Adams and acknowledged that Adams had been shot but argued that it was impossible for him to have fired the shot. W. P. Graves testimony, Senate Report, 210-11.

⁸⁴ L. L. Ivy (black) deposition, in Mahone handwritten speech #1, Box 192, Mahone Papers; J. C. Reagan testimony, Senate Report, 63-65; Jack Redd testimony, Senate Report, 10 and 14; and L. L. Ivy testimony, Senate Report, 19 and 20.

⁸⁵ Charles Friend testimony, *Danville Riot . . . Committee of Forty*, 21; James P. Harrison testimony, *ibid.*, 23; and R.M. Hubbard testimony, *ibid.*, 24.

⁸⁶ Flyer, "To the People of Danville," November 5, 1883, printed in *Danville Riot . . . Committee of Forty*, 31-32. According to Mayor Johnston, these men had no authority to be on the streets, but they defied all attempts to disband them. J. H. Johnston testimony, Senate Report, 659. On November 7 the Common Council, over the protests of black Readjusters, created a special all-white police force of fifteen to patrol the city. It was still active in mid-November, and, rather than discouraging crime, was implicated in it. As Mayor Johnston complained, in calling for its dispersal, "it is to be noted that since this constabulary force has been on duty there have been more successful burglaries, attempts at burglary, and house breaking without discovery of the perpetrators, committed in this town than ever before in the same space of time." Report of the Mayor, Proceedings, November 15, 1883.

that “we were surely scared & did not know when we would be killed.”⁸⁷

In the election held the Tuesday following the Danville massacre, the Democrats carried the state, gaining majorities in the formerly Readjuster mountain counties that had a majority of white voters.⁸⁸ But the importance of the Danville Riot lies less in its effect on the 1883 election than in the stories told about it. Virginia’s 1883 Democratic victory was narrow, and the violence in Danville provided Readjuster Senator William Mahone with a convenient basis for congressional investigation into fraud and intimidation at the polls.⁸⁹ In an attempt to have the election results overturned, the Readjusters presented the massacre in Danville as the centerpiece of a Democratic campaign strategy to overthrow the coalition through violence.⁹⁰ In response, the

⁸⁷ Sophia Powell deposition, handwritten depositions (December 1883), Box 192, Mahone Papers. See also R. A. Schoolfield manuscript (edited by his daughter, Blanch S. Church), Robert Addison Schoolfield Papers (Alderman Library, University of Virginia), in which he recalls patrolling Saturday night and parts of Sunday and Monday nights. Violet Keeling, a friend of Sophia Powell, said, “We did not know how many people had been killed, and how many would be killed. We did not know where to run to, and we just stayed at home.” Violet Keeling testimony, handwritten depositions (December 1883), Box 192, Mahone Papers.

⁸⁸ For 1883 election statistics, see Mahone Scrapbooks, vol. 2, Box 216, Mahone Papers. In the mountain southwest, the coalition vote declined from over 60 percent in 1882 to 48 percent in 1883. While it is tempting to posit a causal relationship between the violence in Danville and the Readjusters’ defeat, evidence suggests that the Readjusters lost in the mountain regions not because of white defections but because of Democratic gains among first-time voters. Although there is some evidence that many former Readjusters switched allegiances and voted Democratic, they did not necessarily do so because of hearing the news of the Danville Riot. On the 1883 election see McKinney, *Southern Mountain Republicans*, 106 and 239n245. I argue in “Race, Sex, and Citizenship” (Chap. 6) that the Danville shooting was less important overall to the Readjuster loss than the coalition’s decision to integrate the Richmond school board and the Democrats’ subsequent success in portraying the public schools as sites of miscegenation. The violence in Danville did check the black vote in Pittsylvania County, but this loss did not affect the Readjuster outcome there: Pittsylvania was a strongly Democratic county, as were several adjacent piedmont counties. See Moore, *Two Paths to the New South*, 128–29.

⁸⁹ The Mahone investigation did not result in the Virginia election results being overturned, although the Republican party had a compelling interest in a GOP victory there. Of the ten southern states with viable independent movements in 1883, Virginia was regarded as the most likely to vote Republican in the 1884 presidential election; a Readjuster victory in 1883 would almost certainly have meant that Virginia’s presidential electoral votes would be cast in the Republican column. Thus, the Readjusters’ loss in 1883 contributed to the GOP’s 1884 presidential loss. On the 1884 presidential election and the Republican party’s “southern strategy” of aiding independent movements see Vincent P. De Santis, *Republicans Face the Southern Question: The New Departure Years, 1877–1897* (Baltimore, 1959), Chap. 4; Stanley P. Hirshson, *Farewell to the Bloody Shirt: Northern Republicans and the Southern Negro, 1877–1893* (Bloomington, 1962), 118–22 and 138; and Kousser, *Shaping of Southern Politics*, 23–24.

⁹⁰ In light of Democratic behavior in other southern states, such charges were credible. However, in this case, the evidence is against Democratic premeditation of the violence in Danville, although the Democratic election campaign was rife with predictions of “race war” in the event of a Readjuster victory. Democratic efforts to keep the white men of Danville in the Opera House until they had all signed the affidavit denouncing William Sims is the strongest piece of circumstantial evidence that the violence was not premeditated. Also, the frenzied efforts

Democrats crafted a narrative that presented their actions in Danville as self-defense, making their case in terms of honor and courtesy. They denied that they had shot into an unarmed crowd of black men, women, and children. Recasting the violence as a struggle among equals, the Democrats insisted that the black crowd in the street had been armed and had fired shots and that the white men on the sidewalk had fired in their own defense. One participant lectured his Readjuster uncle that the men who fired “were not bullies and rowdees but were in the main your equals in every particular which goes to form honorable manhood & integrity.”⁹¹

Shifting the blame for violence from Danville’s white to its black population was central to Congressman Cabell’s response to the charge that the violence was planned by the Democrats as part of their campaign strategy. “The charge that the disturbance at Danville was premeditated,” Cabell fumed, “is false and absurd. The truth is that Mahone’s orators had inflamed the minds of the colored people to a dangerous pitch.” In Danville that Saturday afternoon the streets were crowded with working-class blacks “influenced by liquor and bad political teaching” and looking for a fight. Conceding that “each race was in an excited state of mind,” Cabell viewed the “row” as spontaneous, unexceptional, and the result of the lamentable effect on manners of the Readjuster coalition’s politics.⁹² Whoever’s manners were most lacking, Cabell was probably right about the spontaneity of the explosion of violence.

Cabell’s statement anticipated the report of the Committee of Forty, the predominantly Democratic local committee impaneled to investigate the causes of the violence. After examining thirty-seven witnesses, the committee determined that the black crowd had been armed and interpreted the white shooting as self-defense. The melee was presented as the natural result of coalition rule in Danville, which had encouraged, by appointing African Americans to public office, Danville’s black population to become “rude, insolent and intolerant to the white citizens of the town”⁹³

of George Cabell to keep the peace, testified to by witnesses on both sides of the political divide, argues against the violence as Democratic plot. Mayor J. H. Johnston, hardly a fan of Cabell, nevertheless volunteered that immediately after the shooting he “found Colonel Cabell taking a very active part, trying to quiet the people, and but for his influence I think they would have torn things up generally. . . . they were perfectly crazy—desperate.” J. H. Johnston testimony, Senate Report, 655.

⁹¹ Lewis E. Harvie of Danville (Democrat) to Lewis E. Harvie of Amelia (Readjuster), December 8, 1883, Harvie Family Papers (Virginia Historical Society, Richmond).

⁹² Clipping, *Washington Star*, n.d., Mahone Scrapbooks, vol. 31, Box 216, Mahone Papers. See also Marion *Conservative Democrat*, December 6, 1883.

⁹³ *Danville Riot . . . Committee of Forty*, 3–6 (quotation on p. 4).

The report of the grand jury, formed to determine individual responsibility for the five deaths, paralleled the findings of the Committee of Forty, including the charge that Danville's black community "rushed upon the scene from all quarters, advancing upon the whites with drawn pistols . . ." ⁹⁴ The unanimous report of the jury concluded that the whites used their firearms in self-defense "and by their courage and pluck in standing up against such odds saved the lives of hundreds of people in this city." No indictments were issued, and no one was tried for the violence in Danville on November 3. The solitary African American member of the grand jury, Preston Watkins, later testified that no evidence was put before the jury that black men had carried firearms but that he had assented to the report because he "never expected" to ascertain the true facts, saying, "It was a heart-rending mystery to me, and I wanted to get off it as soon as possible . . . [W]e had seen men dead and of course somebody was responsible for it, but we didn't think we would get any nearer to it." ⁹⁵

Investigations of violence in the New South have focused on lynching, which was largely a rural phenomenon. ⁹⁶ However, postbellum southern cities, as well, sustained high levels of personal violence. ⁹⁷

⁹⁴ Report of the Grand Jury, printed in Senate Report, 484. There is no reliable testimony that any of the men in the African American crowd were armed with guns, much less that they fired. In fact, it is unlikely that the black men and women out on the streets that afternoon doing their marketing and otherwise passing the time would have courted the fines imposed for possession of concealed weapons. More to the point, the black crowd outnumbered the whites by an estimated margin of ten to one. Had the black men been armed, they might have massacred the white men on the sidewalk. Walter Withers, black policeman, was quoted in the report of the Committee of Forty as having said that "the firing seemed to be on both sides right at each other" (*Danville Riot . . . Committee of Forty*, 36); however, in a deposition cited by Mahone, Withers insisted he "used no such language nor any language intended to convey any such idea. I swear positively that I saw no colored man fire a shot nor did I see any colored man with any weapons in his hands, at that time" (Withers deposition, in Mahone handwritten Speech #1, Box 192, Mahone Papers).

⁹⁵ Report of the Grand Jury, printed in Senate Report, 484; and Preston Watkins testimony, Senate Report, 485.

⁹⁶ On lynching see Arthur F. Raper, *The Tragedy of Lynching* (Chapel Hill, 1933); Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, *Revolt Against Chivalry: Jessie Daniel Ames and the Women's Campaign Against Lynching* (New York, 1979); Ayers, *Vengeance and Justice*, 238–65; George C. Wright, *Racial Violence in Kentucky, 1865–1940: Lynchings, Mob Rule, and "Legal Lynchings"* (Baton Rouge and London, 1990); and W. Fitzhugh Brundage, *Lynching in the New South: Georgia and Virginia, 1880–1930* (Urbana and Chicago, 1993). On the predecessor to lynching—the more overtly political mob violence of Reconstruction—see William Gillette, *Retreat from Reconstruction, 1869–1879* (Baton Rouge and London, 1979); Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution, 1863–1877* (New York and other cities, 1988), 425–44; Allen W. Trelease, *White Terror: The Ku Klux Klan Conspiracy and Southern Reconstruction* (New York, Evanston, Ill., and London, 1971); George C. Rable, *But There Was No Peace: The Role of Violence in the Politics of Reconstruction* (Athens, Ga., 1984). On Reconstruction violence in Virginia see Maddex, *Virginia Conservatives*, Chap. 12; Chesson, *Richmond After the War*, Chap. 4; and Taylor, *Negro in the Reconstruction of Virginia*, Chaps. 3 and 4.

⁹⁷ Lynching occurred more frequently in the countryside than in urban settings; nevertheless, southern cities had to contend with threatened lynchings and other forms of violence. On urban lynchings see Robert P. Ingalls, "Lynching and Establishment Violence in Tampa, 1858–1935,"

Particularly in times of black political influence, violence erupted into riots and other forms of mass action. Many of these disturbances were organized attempts by whites to prevent or discourage African American political participation—which lent credibility to the Readjusters' claim of Democratic premeditation in Danville. Other violent eruptions, though, were spontaneous and were commonly precipitated by disputes between black and white city dwellers over the control of public spaces, as, for instance, in the 1866 and 1867 riots over segregated streetcars in Richmond and the 1866 Norfolk riot set off by a parade of blacks celebrating the Civil Rights Bill. A third example occurred in March 1875, after passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1875, when a near-riot erupted in Richmond after two black men, in accordance with the new law, sat in the white section of the Richmond Theater.⁹⁸

Of course, not all altercations across the color line ended in riots. An interracial fistfight in Charleston in 1876, which began under circumstances strikingly similar to the origins of the Danville massacre, was limited to the immediate participants.⁹⁹ Still, the potential for communal violence was never far from the surface of life on the streets of the postwar urban South. For example, in Atlanta in 1881 two hundred blacks fought police officers after they had clubbed a black man accused of pushing a white woman off the sidewalk.¹⁰⁰

Mob violence such as the massacre in Danville or the Atlanta police riot undercut the efforts of urban leaders to project an image of an orderly New South. After the November 3 violence in Danville, the common council of the city, in an attempt to legislate civility, proposed a law that fined any pedestrian not yielding to the right on the city sidewalks. In defining a uniform and equitable standard of behavior on the city sidewalks, this color-blind rule might have formed the basis in Danville for a common urban identity. Such an ordinance, based on the collective ownership of the city by its citizens, was diametrically opposed to the hierarchical predispositions of Danville's white residents, and the

Journal of Southern History, LIII (November 1987), 613–44; and Rabinowitz, *Race Relations in the Urban South*, 52–54. On urban violence in the New South see Ayers, *Vengeance and Justice*, 223–65; Joel Williamson, *The Crucible of Race: Black-White Relations in the American South Since Emancipation* (New York and Oxford, 1984), 57–59, 115–19, and 180–223; Herbert Shapiro, *White Violence and Black Response: From Reconstruction to Montgomery* (Amherst, Mass., 1988); William Ivy Hair, *Carnival of Fury: Robert Charles and the New Orleans Race Riot of 1900* (Baton Rouge, 1976); and H. Leon Prather Sr., *We Have Taken a City: Wilmington Racial Massacre and Coup of 1898* (Rutherford, N.J., and other cities, 1984).

⁹⁸ On Richmond see Chesson, *Richmond After the War*, 102 and 160. On Norfolk see Taylor, *Negro in the Reconstruction of Virginia*, 23.

⁹⁹ Story told in Joel Williamson, *After Slavery: The Negro in South Carolina During Reconstruction, 1861–1877* (Chapel Hill, 1965), 257.

¹⁰⁰ Rabinowitz, *Race Relations in the Urban South*, 337.

proposal was rejected by the Committee on Public Ordinances as unenforceable. In a postscript to its dismissal of the law, the committee expressed the belief "that in future the general rules of common politeness will be observed and that we will not need such an ordinance."¹⁰¹

The Danville Common Council's rejection of a color-blind standard for street etiquette goes to the heart of the dispute over public space between whites and blacks in the postwar urban South. For African Americans, white civility toward blacks in a public arena stood first and foremost as the marker of black equality. For whites, such behavior meant precisely the same thing, and thus such gestures were often seen as tantamount to admitting whites' defeat and dishonor. This was exactly the meaning that filmmaker D. W. Griffith meant to convey in the street encounter between Silas Lynch and (future Klansman) Colonel Ben Cameron in *The Birth of a Nation*. Again and again, both in primary historical documents and in contemporary popular representations of the era, altercations over sidewalk space serve as a metaphor for broader questions of racial domination and subordination. Thus did African American author Charles W. Chesnutt satirize white concerns in his 1901 novel *The Marrow of Tradition*. Much as the Danville Circular did, Chesnutt combined white social, political, and economic anxieties. As he has a member of the white elite remark, "Things are in an awful condition! A negro justice of the peace has opened an office on Market Street, and only yesterday summoned a white man to appear before him. Negro lawyers get most of the business in the criminal court. Last evening a group of young white ladies, going quietly along the street arm-in-arm, were forced off the sidewalk by a crowd of negro girls. . . . Something must be done, and that quickly!"¹⁰²

Southern whites' insistence on enforcing race-based standards of social deference reflected their disinclination to recognize the civic equality of African Americans, just as black insistence on white civility reflected blacks' civic claims. Sometimes the refusal of whites to recognize the public equality of blacks resulted in resistance to African American authority. One such example occurred during the Danville riot. As George A. Lea later explained when asked why he had leveled his gun at Officer Adams after the latter had attempted to separate Lawson and Noel, "He [Adams] came up with the rest of the niggers . . ." Upon being persuaded that Adams was a policeman, Lea had lost no time in attempting to take charge, "ordering," as he testified, Officer Adams to separate Lawson and Noel. When asked what right he had to

¹⁰¹ Proceedings, November 15 and 21, 1883.

¹⁰² Charles W. Chesnutt, *The Marrow of Tradition* (1901; Ann Arbor, 1969), 33.

order an officer of the law, Lea answered, "Well, we generally speak that way to that class of people down there [in Virginia]. We are in the habit of ordering them . . . I would not speak to them in the same way I would speak to a white man."¹⁰³ More often, the white urge toward domination revealed itself in small, routine, and seemingly insignificant ways, such as a calculated bump with a shoulder or an imperious demand for an "explanation" when jostled on the street.

The point here is not that black and white southerners could not understand each other because they spoke different social languages, but just the opposite. The issue was not conflicting standards of civility: black and white men and women agreed on the meaning of civil behavior. However, black southerners wanted the rules of civil behavior to apply equally to white and black alike, while white southerners continued to promote two opposing standards of conduct—one for relations among whites and another for relations across the color line. In the clash between honor and equality, the discourse of civility itself became a primary mode of confrontation for black and white southerners. It was the convergence of black and white opinion on markers of status and face in the postwar urban South that turned public behavior into a zero-sum game where one person's gain was another's clear loss.

The social consequences of this disagreement over civil behavior are clear when the theorization and representation of public behavior in the urban spaces of the postwar South are contrasted with those observed by Friedrich Engels in mid-nineteenth-century England. Peering at the crowded streets of London, Engels reflected how as "people of all classes and ranks of society jostle past one another . . . their only agreement is a tacit one: that everyone should keep to the right of the pavement, so as not to impede the stream of people moving in the opposite direction."¹⁰⁴ No such agreement was forged along urban southern sidewalks because racial divisions precluded it. In the postbellum South, fractured along the race line, there could be no collective ownership of the streets, no space for the sorts of collective action feared by urban elites and lionized by champions of the people. In the absence of a common urban identity—as reflected in the inability of city dwellers in the New South to recognize one another as part of a collective and conform to uniform tacit standards of acceptable public behavior—the urban white leaders of the region

¹⁰³ George Lea testimony, Senate Report, 88–89.

¹⁰⁴ Engels quoted in Walter Benjamin, "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire," in Benjamin, *Illuminations*, edited by Hannah Arendt (New York, 1969), 167. See also Susan Buck-Morss, "The Flaneur, the Sandwichman and the Whore: The Politics of Loitering," *New German Critique*, No. 39 (Fall 1986), 99–140.

looked for an alternative way to end urban violence and forge a race-based civility.

They found it in Jim Crow. Legal segregation of the races, through demarcation of the public space allotted to each race, was meant to provide a clear answer to the question of who owned the streets in the New South and, in the process, to end extralegal violence in southern cities.¹⁰⁵ Certainly, segregation limited the opportunities for conflict between black and white urban southerners. After segregation, the possibility of an urban lynching such as the one in Augusta in 1900 was sharply circumscribed. In that city, a well-known white man was killed by a black man following a dispute over seating on a streetcar. The killing prompted both the lynching of the black man and the passage by the city council of a Jim Crow law that separated blacks and whites on streetcars.¹⁰⁶

Around the turn of the century, what had been an open and public conflict—white-black altercation on the streets hammered out in an agonistic political climate—was forced underground by segregation and became the “hidden transcript” of black opposition to Jim Crow. Yet, despite the Jim Crow laws, the sidewalks remained a juncture between overt and covert resistance, and encounters between the races on the public streets revealed the incomplete dominance of white supremacy. While the color line could be drawn with precision on trains and in theaters, one’s position on the public streets and sidewalks was always ambiguous.¹⁰⁷ Spatial ambiguity furthered conflict between the races in two ways. As one of the few public spaces that defied racial segregation by law, the streets had an etiquette that required enforcement by individuals, not by civil authorities. Second, the ambiguity of street space intensified interactions between the races—was a violation of white racial etiquette by a black man or woman intentional or not?—and nourished in dominant white minds fear of the mental revenges of the weak. The intensity of white anxieties over breaches in the color line is revealed in the way street encounters between whites and “uppity” blacks became, for white southerners, symbolic of all that was wrong with the New South.

It is appropriate to glance at Thomas Dixon’s 1902 novel *The Leopard’s Spots* in this context—for, as the seventeenth-century French writer Claude Fauchet reminded his readers, “Any writer,

¹⁰⁵ W. Fitzhugh Brundage makes this point in *Lynching in the New South*, 155–56 and 200.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 200.

¹⁰⁷ The color line was also imprecise in buses and streetcars: hence the volatility of the shifting no-man’s-land between the white and black sections. See Kelley, “‘We Are Not What We Seem,’” 104.

including the most wretched, can be occasionally useful, at least as a witness of his own age."¹⁰⁸ Dixon's portrayal of black "insolence" and white violence in the fictional town of Independence, North Carolina, has rightly been read as a thinly disguised version of the 1898 Wilmington Riot. The standard historical narrative of the massacre turns on an editorial in which the black journalist, Alexander Manly, in the process of rebutting Rebecca Latimer Felton's defense of lynching on the grounds of black rape of white women, suggested that sex between black men and white women was often consensual.¹⁰⁹ When set in context—black North Carolinians had achieved unprecedented political power via their participation in a third-party government similar in composition and goals to that of Danville under the Readjusters—white revolution seems explicable, if not justifiable.¹¹⁰ But in his re-creation of the riot, Thomas Dixon did not center his story on the Manly editorial.¹¹¹

In *The Leopard's Spots*, which is set during the Spanish-American War in the context of biracial rule in North Carolina, a black soldier walking down the street in Independence refuses to yield the sidewalk to a young white woman and her escort. Instead, the black man bumps into the woman, "jostling her roughly," and her white companion knocks the black soldier down and beats him to death. The death of the African American soldier enrages local blacks, who form a mob with the intention of killing the hero of Dixon's novel, Charles Gaston, a white supremacist politician. The black mob fails to kill Gaston, but its actions convince the town's white citizens that the political and social deference of blacks must be restored through violence.¹¹² In Thomas Dixon's version of the

¹⁰⁸ Thomas Dixon Jr., *The Leopard's Spots: A Romance of the White Man's Burden—1865–1900* (New York, 1902). Claude Fauchet, quoted in Carlo Ginzburg, "Fiction as Historical Evidence: A Dialogue in Paris, 1646," in Michael S. Roth, ed., *Rediscovering History: Culture, Politics, and the Psyche* (Stanford, 1994), 381. The occasion for Fauchet's comment was his defense of the use of fiction in the writing of history. On Dixon and history see F. Garvin Davenport, Jr., "Thomas Dixon's Mythology of Southern History," *Journal of Southern History*, XXXVI (August 1970), 350–67.

¹⁰⁹ On the Wilmington Riot see Prather, *We Have Taken a City*; Shapiro, *White Violence and Black Response*, 65–75; Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow*, Chap. 4; Helen G. Edmonds, *The Negro and Fusion Politics in North Carolina, 1894–1901* (Chapel Hill, 1951), 158–77; and Jerome A. McDuffie, "Politics in Wilmington and New Hanover County, North Carolina, 1865–1900: The Genesis of a Race Riot" (Ph.D. dissertation, Kent State University, 1979).

¹¹⁰ In the 1896 election, Populism split North Carolina's white vote, and the Populists combined with Republicans to create a third-party fusion government. The fusionist legislature altered the city charter of Wilmington, expanding its borders and concentrating its black Republican majority. On biracial rule in North Carolina, see Edmonds, *Fusion Politics in North Carolina*.

¹¹¹ Dixon's fictional version of the Manly editorial is an afterthought, mentioned almost parenthetically: "The incendiary organ of the negroes, a newspaper that had been noted for its virulent spirit of race hatred, had published an editorial defaming the virtue of the white women of the community." *Leopard's Spots*, 411.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 410–11.

Wilmington Riot, it is not whites' outrage over the Manly editorial but disagreement over social conventions between the races, and the broader implications of that disagreement, that leads to white violence.

The altercation on the sidewalk between the black soldier and the white couple that Dixon narrates in *The Leopard's Spots* did not in fact occur, but its "poetic plausibility," to borrow a phrase from Carlo Ginzburg, is punctuated by the complaints of white Wilmington residents prior to the November 1898 violence.¹¹³ In addition to reports of increased black criminality, biracial rule in Wilmington was deemed responsible for the deterioration of African American manners where whites were concerned. According to the *New Bern Journal*, black men liked to obstruct the sidewalk, forcing white women to abandon the walk and pass in the street. Whites portrayed the behavior of black women as even more outrageous. In an instance cited by the *Wilmington Star*, a black woman forced a white woman off the sidewalk and then, to underscore her intent, hit "the white woman over the shoulder with an umbrella." A black man standing nearby shouted his approval. On another occasion it was reported that "a colored woman passing along the street insolently shoved her elbow into the face of a white man who was standing in his yard leaning over the fence."¹¹⁴

By the time *The Leopard's Spots* was published, open confrontation between black and white southerners on city streets was largely a thing of the past. Implacable white hostility towards African American self-assertion—political, economic, and social—had driven black resistance underground. By the early years of the twentieth century, the sensations of such moments, however fleeting, expose the submerged possibilities of daily existence, as the young Katharine Lumpkin discovered in South Carolina *circa* 1905:

We knew the streets were the white man's wherever he chose to walk; that a Negro who moved out into the gutter to let us pass was in our eyes a "good darkey." I could have been hardly more than eight when a little Negro girl of our age, passing a friend and me, showed a disposition to

¹¹³ Ginzburg constructed this phrase to describe Aristotle's argument in the *Poetics* (1451 a) that "a poet's object is not to tell what actually happened but what could and would happen either probably or inevitably." Ginzburg, "Fiction as Historical Evidence," 380. Dixon was not a witness to the riot; he was in New York at the time, and, according to historians of the riot, the sidewalk shoving incident Dixon uses as a catalyst to violence in *The Leopard's Spots* did not occur. See Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow*, Chap. 4. See also Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore, "'One of the Meanest Books': Thomas Dixon, Jr., and *The Leopard's Spots*," *North Carolina Literary Review* II (Spring 1994), 87–101.

¹¹⁴ *New Bern (N.C.) Journal*, quoted in *Wilmington Messenger*, September 18, 1898; and *Wilmington Messenger*, September 18 and October 27, 1898 in Prather, *We Have Taken a City*, 53–54.

take her half of the sidewalk. We did not give ground—we were whites! Her arm brushed against my companion's. She turned on the Negro child furiously. "Move over there, you dirty black nigger!" I know why this recollection stayed with me while others did not. It outraged us so because this particular colored child did not shrink or run, but flared back at us with a stinging retort, remaining dead in her tracks, defying us, and we had no choice left us but to move on.¹¹⁵

¹¹⁵ Lumpkin, *Making of a Southerner*, 134. On the idea of the revelatory "moment," see Henri Lefebvre, *La somme et le reste* (Paris, 1959). Childhood did not always protect African American children from white wrath. In 1912 a young J. A. DeLaine, who later caused Clarendon County, S.C., to be one of the five cases brought before the Supreme Court in *Brown v. Board of Education*, was sentenced to twenty-five lashes for pushing a white boy who had shoved DeLaine's sister off the sidewalk. Rather than submit, DeLaine ran away to Atlanta. In Richard Kluger, *Simple Justice: The History of Brown v. Board of Education and Black America's Struggle for Equality* (2 vols. paged consecutively; New York, 1975), 12.