

Book Abstract

There is no greater generator of black wealth in the United States than fast food franchising. The days of black-owned funeral homes, insurance companies, and banks anchoring the central business district of the once labeled ‘colored sections’ of cities are long gone. In their places: McDonalds, KFC, Taco Bell, and other fast food joints in the now simply segregated quarters of our cities, suburbs, and exurbs. We think we know the story of what the presence and impact of fast food in communities of color means. Poor people eat too much of it. The jobs it provides pay too little. Children are too enticed by it. But, as the food revolution looks to eradicate trans fats from American diets and enthusiastic, do-gooders plant gardens in inner city schools, few have stopped to ask the most important question: How did we get here? How did fast food outlets spread across the South Side of Chicago, the central core of Los Angeles, and the southeastern quadrant of Washington, D.C.? How did a concept borne in the suburbs become a symbol of urban deficit—nutritional and economic? *From Sit-In to Drive Thru* has the answers. The book tells the story of black capitalists, civil rights leaders, and even radical nationalists who believed that their destiny rested with a set of golden arches. And it tells of an industry that blossomed at the very moment a freedom movement began to wither.

Chapter One: The Racial Roots of McDonald's

San Bernardino's Route 66 has seen better days.

The former "Mother Road" that connected Chicago to Los Angeles was established in 1926, and Route 66 has been memorialized in movies, television, and song. Long replaced by a network of superhighways, freeways, and toll roads, old Route 66 intersects cities and towns across a 2,448-mile expanse. Some Chambers of Commerce and city councils have allocated generous funds to ensure their Route 66 historical marker signs remain clean and old, neon road signs remain illuminated. San Bernardino's indicators of its time as part of what was once known as the "Main Street of America" have been largely neglected, a victim of the city's economic woes, including a deflated housing market, a Chapter 9 bankruptcy in 2012, population loss, and shuttered buildings in the city's central business district.¹

Yet, one of the city's Route 66 attractions has been able to draw thousands of visitors to the intersection of 14th and E. Streets, where a mix of shuttered businesses and abandoned homes signal more prosperous times along the road. On weekends, rental car sedans, motor coaches too large to fit into the parking lot, and muddied motorcycles converge outside of The Original McDonald's Site and Museum, an octagonal tribute to so many histories—mid-century America, fast food, and the route itself. The Site and Museum is carefully named to distinguish it as the first-ever McDonald's founded by two brothers in 1940, from the behemoth franchise that rewrote its origin story in Illinois after being acquired by franchise pioneer Ray Kroc. Although it is not the official McDonald's Museum sanctioned by the corporate giant based in suburban Chicago, it is no less an overwhelmingly rich tribute to the brand, its founders, and the globalization of American tastes and sensibilities.

The museum was established in 1998 by local businessman Albert Okura, who created a rotisserie chicken franchise named Juan Pollo in the 1980s. Okura purchased the site from the city after

¹12/30/2016. San Bernardino Faces Its Post-Bankruptcy Future, *The Bond Buyer* (New York, N.Y. 1982), 1(f397). (ISSN: 0732-0469). Also Joe Mozingo, "San Bernardino: Broken City," *Los Angeles Times*, June 14, 2015.

he heard that it was slated for demolition. Okura's love of fast food coupled with his admiration for the lessons he learned working in the industry compelled him to convert the abandoned restaurant into a shrine to Maurice and Richard McDonald's legacy (and Juan Pollo's corporate headquarters). So, lovers of kitsch, scholars and documentarians of McDonald's and hungry travelers misled by their GPS systems that they are visiting an operating McDonald's converge on the very spot where the brothers first offered barbecue sandwiches and then switched to the million-dollar idea of a low cost, three-item menu: hamburger, French fries, and milkshakes. Okura, along with a couple of staff members, receive hundreds of donated material objects each year from Site visitors. Former McDonald's crew members offer polyester blend uniforms and standard-issue visors from their first jobs in the 1970s. Foreign visitors bring cardboard pie sleeves for the dessert flavors only found in Asia: taro root, banana, and sweet corn. Okura's ever expanding collection chronicles 70 years of evolving tastes in food, aesthetics, and children's popular culture in the U.S. and around the world, all emanating from the same company and the same promise that everyday people can get a hot meal, delivered quickly for a low price.

As versed as Okura and his curatorial team is in the story of the McDonald's brothers, the Kroc family, the manufacturers of Happy Meal toys and the evolution of McDonaldland characters, there is a gaping hole in the Museum's historiographical view of the Golden Arches. There is no recognition of the calamitous meeting between McDonald's and black America and the way this encounter shaped civil rights, transformed the wealth and health of entire communities, and has changed sectors from advertising to education to the federal government. This hidden history is not fully articulated in the glass shelves of the McDonald's Museum or accurately told in the pages of the case studies on McDonald's rise, dominance, and recent missteps. Yet, the consequences of this history have been widely broadcasted in newspaper headlines about the obesity crisis among poor people of color. This past is present on the front lines of the battle to raise the minimum wage. And, hints of this story can be found in plaques recognizing generous monetary gifts made by African Americans who made their fortune in fast food franchising.

This is the missing piece of the story of how race, civil rights, and hamburgers converged and changed everything.

This is the story of how McDonald's became black.

* * *

Richard McDonald was born in Manchester, New Hampshire in the fall of 1902; his brother Maurice arrived seven years later in February of 1909. In 1902, 85 African Americans were reportedly lynched that year. Four days before Maurice's arrival, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People was founded by an interracial coalition seeking to eradicate the reign of terror of Jim Crow. These historical moments may appear disparate--the birth of two white entrepreneur in what was then the rural Northeast and the racial violence meted upon blacks, largely in the Deep South, and the activist response to it. Yet, everything that shaped their legacy in the fast food industry--their ability to move across the country without fear of racial violence, their access to second and third chance before they were able to strike gold in California with a hamburger stand, and the channels available for their namesake restaurant to become a global leader--was informed by the immobility, the constrained opportunities, and the fight against these forces experienced by African Americans. The McDonald's story that is captured in books like John F. Love's *McDonald's: Behind the Arches* and the 2016 film "The Founder" is one that centers innovative thinking, of opportunities made possible by a booming wartime economy, and the American desire for efficiency and novelty.² These stories are both accurate and deceptive. McDonald's--and its fast food brethren--illuminates the ways that many Americans live and what they enjoy and how they consume. For good or for bad, McDonald's is a reliable mirror. But like many aspects of American culture, the centrality of race, its role in shaping what is possible for some and impossible for others is

² Jon Love, *Behind the Golden Arches*, *The Founder*, dir.

obsured in the interests of forgetting what is painful, what is complicated, or what is merely hard to digest.

Richard and Maurice McDonald, having seen what the ravages of the Depression had wreaked on their family, decided to head West in 1930 to seek what they could make for themselves. The twenty-year old were probably lured to California by the images peddled by Hollywood, their first destination, of cosmopolitan nightlife in an ever expanding Los Angeles or San Francisco. Maybe they saw themselves in Gary Cooper's cowboy roles, conquering the West with a trusty horse and gun by his side. The men undoubtedly had an affinity for film, and after working as stagehands, they opened a movie theater in Glendale, a town a few miles Southeast of Hollywood. In addition to 'manly' Westerns and over-the-top musicals, Hollywood churned out features that delivered the most insidious and harmful images of African Americans, Native Americans, Asians, and Mexican-Americans. Between 1930 and 1937, when the brothers pivoted from the movie business to the drive-in world, films such as Fred Astaire's "Swing Time" and Judy Garland's "Everybody Sing," presented the stars in blackface as they danced and sung in the style of African American folk and jazz culture.³ Despite the best efforts of the national NAACP, and local chapters such as the Los Angeles one founded in 1914, Hollywood rarely censored racist content or took seriously the claims that what was seen by white viewers on the screen had real implications on the streets. In 1915, the Los Angeles NAACP joined forces with other local civil rights group to request the city council ban the screening of Thomas Dixon's film adaptation of his book, *The Klansman*. The film, *The Birth of a Nation*, was heralded for its cinematic techniques infused into a disturbing, historically inaccurate telling of

³ See Stephen Johnson, *Burnt cork : traditions and legacies of blackface minstrelsy*, edited by Stephen Johnson, Amherst : University of Massachusetts Press, 2012

Black like you : blackface, whiteface, insult & imitation in American popular culture, John Strausbaugh New York : Jeremy P. Tarcher/Penguin, 2006

Reconstruction and the rise of the Ku Klux Klan. Fearful that the film would incite violence against blacks in Los Angeles, NAACP chapter leaders joined their colleagues across the country in pleading for a ban.⁴ The city council's ban on screening the film was later overturned by the state supreme court, and *Birth of Nation*--a film that depicted an attempted rape by an African American man on a white girl, a group of bare-footed, black Congressman eating chicken on the floor of the U.S. House of Representatives and an image of Jesus superimposed on a scene depicting a cavalcade of righteous KKK members--was screened for an entire year at L.A.'s Clune Theater.⁵

To be sure, the McDonald's brothers were not settling in a region as devoted to Jim Crow as the Deep South or a city as overwhelmed by the rural emigrants of the Great Negro Migration, but the West was not the land of racial harmony.⁶ Rather, the McDonald's brothers were establishing themselves in the state built upon a history of Native American conquest and extermination, border wars with Mexico, a dependence upon and vilification of Asian and Middle Eastern immigrant labor, and a hostility toward blacks that may have been tempered due to their relatively small size rather than its principles. In Monrovia, where the brothers opened their first food business--the Airdrome hamburger stand--was home to an established African American community as early as the 1880s. Comprised of freedmen and the descendants of slaves who believed their destinies would be met out West, rather than in the South, black Monrovia established churches, mutual aid societies, and their own NAACP chapter.

⁴ Douglas Flamming, *Bound for Freedom: Black Los Angeles in Jim Crow America*, UC Press, 2005

⁵ Flamming, 88.

⁶ The literature on race and the West include: Josh Kun and Laura Pulido, eds., *Black and Brown in Los Angeles: Beyond Conflict and Coalition* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2013); Shana Bernstein, *Bridges of Reform: Interracial Civil Rights Activism in the Twentieth-Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); Kenneth W. Mack, *Representing the Race: The Creation of the Civil Rights Lawyer* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010); Douglas Flamming, *Bound for Freedom: Black Los Angeles in Jim Crow America* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2005).

Monrovia's shared name with the capital city of the African nation recolonized by former slaves, Liberia, may have made it doubly interesting to the activists and intellectuals who looked West for greater freedoms. Despite Monrovia's vibrant black community and the fact that it was believed to be, in 1926, the site of the assembly of the first, all-black jury to hear a case anywhere in the United States, was still subject to the color line.⁷ It is unclear whether the McDonald's brothers served up their ten-cent hamburgers and their endless cups of orange juice for five cents on a 'separate, but equal,' basis. Yet, the archives of the blacks that settled in Monrovia, and nearby Pasadena, chronicle separate schools, colored days at the local pool, a segregated cemetery, and battles over library cards, representation on the police force, and the numerous indignities of being the wrong color at the wrong time.⁸

Unlike their black neighbors who questioned whether there was anywhere else they could move to improve their lot in life, the McDonald's brothers shuttered the Airdome and headed to San Bernardino in 1940. The surrounding county was once proposed to be the location of a "new utopia for Negroes," in 1904.⁹ The utopia never fully manifested, and by 1940, San Bernardino was well on its way to becoming a utopia for the fast food business.¹⁰ Its location near military bases, on Route 66 and in the center of growing lower, middle-class suburbs made it the ideal location for a restaurant that you could drive, walk, or ride a bike to, and with only a few coins in your pocket enjoy a full meal. Initially, the brothers departed from the austere menu

⁷ All-Colored Jury Hears Man's Case In California The Pittsburgh Courier (1911-1950); Mar 27, 1926; ProQuest Hi

⁸ See Archive.org, Black history Collection 1984-1998, Pasadena History Collection

⁹ The history of Black San Bernardino extends to the mid 19th century when a group of 26 slaves joined a band of Mormons leaving Salt Lake City enroute to California. The 26 became free upon entering the state. Nick Cataldo, Cajon Pass brought first black pioneers to San Bernardino Valley, San Bernardino Sun, February 22, 2016 at 4:19 pm | UPDATED: July 24, 2017 at 5:26 pm

¹⁰ NEW UTOPIA FOR NEGROES.: Colored Colony Started in San Bernardino ... Los Angeles Times (1886-1922); Dec 19, 1904

they offered in Pasadena, and they indulged their interest in barbecuing for their new location. By 1943, patrons could choose from an array of dishes including hamburgers, peanut butter and jelly sandwiches, tamales, chili, and barbecued beef, ham, and pork sandwiches. The brothers assured diners that their meats were not simply “cooked in a stove” and passed off as barbecue, a move they accused other restaurants of pulling, and they even welcomed guests to see the pit for themselves.¹¹

The early menu was a hit with locals and the offerings with roots in Europe (hamburger), Mexico (tamale), and the Caribbean (barbecue) highlight how foods from around the world were adjusted and Americanized for mid-century palates. The origins and the popularization of the most iconic fast food staple, the hamburger, in the United States are often traced to German immigrants, who developed the idea of sandwiching the thinly pressed Hamburg steak served between slices of bread. Hamburger historian Andrew Smith has argued that while “there are several contenders for the title of ‘inventor of the hamburger sandwich,’ but no primary evidence has surfaces to support any of their claims.”¹² No one has definitively settled the debate about who first made and marketed the hamburger, but it is clear that the advent of the meat grinder, and the ability to form, grill, dress, and serve hamburgers rapidly transformed the American diet. Smith has found that the introduction of the meat grinder to visitors at the 1876 Philadelphia Centennial Exposition added a dimension to preparing beef, and provided a far more economical way of feeding people than the tradition of creating steaks and chops. “The meat grinder was a great asset to butchers, who could now use unsaleable or undesirable scraps and organ meats that

¹¹ “Early McDonald’s Menu,” <https://kottke.org/13/03/early-mcdonalds-menu>, posted March 18, 2013, accessed January 17, 2018; “McDonald’s Barb-B-Que,” https://blogs.loc.gov/inside_adams/2010/05/mcdonald%E2%80%99s-bar-b-que/

¹² Hamburger, A Global History, Andrew Smith, Reaktion Books: 2008, 10. Smith debunks the urban legends that Delmonico’s in New York invented the hamburger, and the other claim that the Lewis and Clark Exposition in St. Louis in 1904 was the first time Americans tasted hamburgers.

might otherwise have been tossed out. It also became possible to add non-meat ingredients to the ground beef, and it was very hard for the consumer to know what was actually in the mixture.”¹³ Cheaper meat meant that working-class people could incorporate beef--often enriched with additives and pieces of fat and gristle that were previously discarded or fed to animals--into their diets. Soon, the hamburger sandwich was being sold throughout major cities, from carts, roadside stands, and automats.¹⁴

For the first eight years of the brothers’ success in the octagonal drive-thru in San Bernardino, they were unconcerned with the profitability of their wide-ranging menu items. The restaurant was averaging \$200,000 in sales each year, the men were splitting \$50,000 in profits, and were living lives dramatically different than those cold winters of their New Hampshire youth or the lean years in Glendale.¹⁵ By 1948, the men realized that their business was being challenged by the growing number of drive-ins setting up shop in the area and the rising costs of employing carhops, replacing pilfered and broken dishware, and had yet to fully capitalize on the growing market of families moving into the area, rather than their main clientele, teenagers. The men closed their wildly successful business and spend three months gestating the modern, fast-food restaurant that would mature into the McDonald’s we know today. The brothers determined which foods turned the highest profits and were easiest to prepare and designed or commissioned kitchen supplies to maximize efficiency. They dispensed with the car hop concept, believing young women were too distracting and distracted as employees. Then, in a move that surprised their competition, they lowered the prices on their scaled back menu. At the new McDonald’s, you would be able to purchase a 15-cent standardized, hamburger, a 19-cent

¹³ Smith, 15.

¹⁴ Smith, 20-24.

¹⁵ Love, 12.

cheeseburger, a 19-cent milkshake, and dime could get you a side of French Fries (which substituted a short-lived foray into potato chips), a paper cup of milk, root beer from a barrel, a fresh glass of orange juice (or an orange soda, called orangeade), a Coca-Cola, or a slice of pie.¹⁶ The new McDonald's, outfitted with a new fishbowl kitchen, introduced their signature Speedee system--the approach to making and delivering food quickly--was characterized by a hamburger bun-faced chef represented as in motion on neon signs and menus.¹⁷

The menu and the staff weren't the only changes that made the 'new' McDonald's so successful that within 7 years, the brothers had doubled their share of profits. McDonald's lightning-speed dominance over the local, restaurant market was as much about family as it was about food. McDonald's catered to the newcomers in town, who were drawn to the Inland Empire by the drivers of mid-century, middle-class prosperity: the military and the manufacturing industries. Each of these areas would be the pathway for white families to ascend the class status of their old-world, immigrant or native-born, working class parents. Each of these same roads were segregated or at the very least racially discriminatory or abusive. African Americans, despite their long service in the military, but trained and served on a segregated basis until Harry S. Truman signed Executive Order 9981 in 1948, eight years after the U.S. Army acquired the San Bernardino airport for its Air Material Command center that drew scores of military trainees and later employees to the area.¹⁸ San Bernardino's industrial boom, fueled by the railroads and steel, metalwork, and machinery plants, created well-paying, union jobs for

¹⁶ Love, 15, and George Harrison, "Anyone for a Tempting Cheeseburger? This is what the original McDonald's menu looked like," *The Sun*, December 2, 2016.

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¹⁸ The Air Material Command Center, later renamed after World War II casualty Leland Francis Norton, and became known as Norton Air Force Base, was where a young Morgan Freeman discovered he did not want to become a fighter pilot, rather he wanted to play the role of a pilot in the movies. See Henry Louis Gates, Jr. *In Search of Our Roots: How 19 Extraordinary African Americans Reclaimed their Past*, New York: Crown, 2009.

workers new to the area.¹⁹ Yet, black workers found themselves routinely among the first fired and last hired, without protection from labor unions. In 1961, local railroad employee Lennie Andrews filed a complaint against the Santa Fe Railway for firing him, after 14 years of service as a train car cleaner, for merely sitting down while waiting for a train to pass before crossing the tracks. He believed he was fired for seeking a better position with company.²⁰ Although San Bernardino was not among the most affluent of the Los Angeles communities borne from the suburbanization movements of the late 1940s and 1950s, the town and its beloved hamburger spot was one way an upwardly mobile could exercise their newly obtained consumer power and spend a little of the discretionary income that came their way. There is no indication that the Speedee system in San Bernardino refused to deliver the city's residents of color, but there was no question that equal opportunity was not equally applied during the boom years.

The revamped McDonald's hamburger assembly line resembled the factory floors of the nation's post-World War II manufacturing centers, at a time when U.S.-made products were still dominating the global marketplace. Inside the kitchen, Fordism inspired the rhythm of the flat top grill, the Malt-o-Mixer milkshake machine and the deep fat fryers calibrated to ensure each French Fry was perfectly crisped. Outside the restaurant, Ford's imaginative dream of a car priced just so that his workers can afford them was made real as lines of cars waited in the McDonald's parking lot. Now that McDonald's was a suitable place for a family, children could run in and collect the family's meal--each component wrapped in disposable paper, and return to the car, which could double as the family's dining room. The prices and the burgers drew in customers, but the car also made it possible for the roadside eatery to thrive. In 1950, an estimated 8 million new cars were joining the already 25 million cars traversing the expanding

¹⁹ AJ Scott, "The technopoles of Southern California" *Environment and Planning*, 1990, 1575-1605

²⁰ FEPC Hearing Opens on Railman's Charge: Alleged Discrimination in Job," Los Angeles Times (1923-Current File); Jan 10, 1961; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Los Angeles Times pg. B26

highway system. By 1960, the number of cars in the U.S. doubled., and car cultures from hot rod racing to drive-in movies characterized the sense of freedom and independence that car travel provided youth or anyone seeking a quick escape from everyday life.

Car ownership, however, was not as simple as saving up money and visiting a local car dealership for the very people who may have desired the freedom of mobility the most. The color line and its extensions--from a lack of access to capital, racial discrimination in selling, and a unsafe driving for black motorists traveling far from home, made driving a fraught, and sometimes terrifying experience.²¹ Black car ownership lagged that of whites, but even if all things were equal, where African Americans could travel to was determined by the 'local customs' and their approach to the still-legal racial segregation. The uncertainty of safety allowed black owned restaurants, gas stations, and motels distinguish themselves in the expanding hospitality industry emerging from highway creation and road improvements. Black drivers could rely on Victor H. Green's essential travel guide, *The Negro Motorist's Green Book*, which was published between 1936 and 1964 and listed the address of hotels, restaurants, resorts, and entertainment venues that did not discriminate. If a black traveler headed west toward San Bernardino and was unsure whether McDonald's would greet them with open arms, they could make a detour to some of Inland Empire's black-owned accommodations. If a driver could stave off their hunger long enough or the need to use a bathroom, the *Green Book* assured them they would received at the Moore Hotel in Lake Elsinore, Victorville's Murray Dude Ranch or Raglan Guest Ranch, or the Muse-a-White in Perris.²²

²¹ Automobile in American Life and Society Driving While Black: The Car and Race Relations in Modern America, Thomas J. Sugrue, <http://www.autolife.umd.umich.edu/>, accessed January 18, 2018.

²² [Green, Victor H.](#) [The Negro Travelers' Green Book.](#) [New York: Victor H. Green & Co., 1956.](#) [USC South Caroliniana Lib., Columbia, SC.](#) <<http://library.sc.edu/digital/collections/greenbook.html>> and Brown, DeNeen L.

When McDonald's patrons returned to their cars with a full stomach, some drove to the newly built housing developments that sprouted up across the city and country in the late 1940s and 1950s. The opening of the Air Command Center in 1941 brought 4,000 members of the military and an additional 11,000 family members into a town of 43,000 people.²³ After the conclusion of World War II, military personnel continued to move to the area, leading to a housing shortage on the base. In 1948, 4,000 more Air Force employees arrived for new roles in the one-year-old branch of the military. As the military scrambled to accommodate newcomers in hotels, campsites, and private homes, returning veterans of color also struggled to find a place of their own. The African American newspaper, *The Los Angeles Sentinel*, reported on the plight of Marvin Spears, a returning veteran, who tried for two years to secure the home loan he was entitled to under the GI Bill. The newspaper described his battle with the veterans' administration as, "typical of what Negro and Mexican veterans in Southern California face in trying to substitute homes for the shacks, trailers, and emergency housing in which they still live with their families." The *Sentinel* hoped that in publishing Spears's account of being denied an adequate appraisal for the home he wanted built and being forced to navigate several bureaucracies, "the loan guarantee division of the veterans administration will get off its dime."²⁴

Housing was never an issue for the Richard and Maurice, and within years of striking gold with McDonald's they purchased homes befitting their new station in life. After living with his brother for a few years, Richard chose a columned, two-story home on 3420 Beverly Drive, at the foothills of the San Bernardino Mountains. Richard's five-bedroom, seven-bathroom was

06/01/2017. 'Life or death for black travelers': How fear led to 'The Negro Motorist Green-Book', *The Washington post*.

²³ Ryan Hagen, "Norton Air Force base marks 20 years since closure," San Bernardino Sun, March 22, 2014,

²⁴ San Bernardino Vet Tells Story of Two-Year House Hunt: Awaits VA Loan Approval [Simon, Jean. Los Angeles Sentinel \(1934-2005\)](#); Los Angeles, Calif. [Los Angeles, Calif]15 Jan 1948: 7

minutes from his home in the hills, but world's away from the center of San Bernardino, where the edges of the downtown core were known to be hotbeds of vice activity and mob-controlled enterprises.²⁵

As word of the McDonald's magic spread across the region, and national trade publications like *American Restaurant Magazine* featured McDonald's in the pages, businessmen with aspirations of their own began to learn from the brothers. The McDonalds' saw no harm in disclosing how they sourced their ingredients, commissioned specially designed equipment or managed their crew members. It was a wide-open world, and they were not interested in growing McDonald's beyond a few additional restaurants in California and the one franchise deal they inked in Arizona. Some visitors returned to their hometowns and copied the McDonald's System, but realized that it took more than mimicry to make a successful business. Others used the McDonald's methodology to sell hot dogs, fried chicken, or roast beef sandwiches. Glen Bell, a San Bernardino local, was so inspired by the men he opened a fast food restaurant of his own, but added his own twist, tacos. Later he abandoned burgers and created Taco Bell, the first national chain of Anglicized Mexican food in the U.S.²⁶

By today's standards, it may seem bizarre, if not foolish, that the men with the winning idea would be so willing to allow others to use and adapt it. But the growth of America's roadsides, especially after the passage of the Federal Aid Highway Act of 1956, convinced fast food pioneers that there was enough market share for everyone. Highways were promising developments, if you lived at the right distance from them. Advocates for a national highways system saw the building of these multi-lane roads as essential to developing suburbs, while also

²⁵ John Weeks, San Bernardino's Grandest house for sale, November 9, 2010, accessed, January 18, 2018, <https://www.dailynews.com/2010/11/09/san-bernardinios-grandest-house-is-for-sale/>

²⁶ Love, 25-26.

addressing the problems of slums in cities. As whites of means fled out of cities, they left behind rental stock that became the only option for African Americans and poor immigrants to inhabit. From Harlem to Chicago to Oakland, the creation of Negro slums made city leaders anxious, but never so concerned that they took steps to fight the housing discrimination that limited where blacks could live. The building of highways provided the impetus for slum clearance, the demolition of unsightly, low quality housing, which also served to disrupt black communities, some that had roots planted long before the Great Migration.²⁷ Scholar Raymond Mohl has found that seven years before the Federal Highway Act was passed, lobbying organizations like the American Road Builders Association was arguing that highways could accelerate the process of eliminating, “slum and deteriorated areas.” The primary target of this dual approach to transportation and urban renewal caused planners to “drive the Interstates through black and poor neighborhoods.”²⁸ In an earlier period train tracks displaced, divided, and sometimes demolished the black and brown enclaves of cities and towns; those tracks were replaced by the smooth asphalt of the highway system.

The same highway that devastated some Americans were the same roads that led Multimixer salesman Ray Kroc from suburban Chicago to San Bernardino in the summer of 1954, the first step in a journey that would change everything for the 52-year-old man, and eventually the world. Kroc had been keeping tabs on McDonald’s; they were among his best customers having purchased up to 10 of the five-spindle milkshake machines for him in a few years. Kroc was accustomed to supplying soda fountains and diners with one or two, and he

²⁷ John F. Bauman, Roger Biles, and Kristin Sylvian, ed. *From Tenements to the Taylor Homes From Tenements to the Taylor Homes: In Search of an Urban Housing Policy in Twentieth Century America*, Raymond Mohl, “Plan Destruction: The Interstates and Central City Housing,” Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000,

²⁸ Mohl, 233-234.

heard from his West Coast colleague that McDonald's had to be seen to believe.²⁹ Soon, Kroc was in business with the McDonald's brothers; Kroc replaced the McDonald's franchising agent, a position they needed to ensure some level of uniformity among their handful of franchise owners in California and their one outlet in Arizona. Kroc's original intention was to help McDonald's expand in order to boost sales of the milkshake mixers, in which he had a stake. In the spring of 1955, Kroc established McDonald's System, Inc. and set about recruiting new franchisees among his peer groups: fellow salesmen, first-generation suburbanites, and members of his country club that catered to the newly middle-class. Kroc's selling points for the new hamburger stand concept was to keep the initial investment as low as possible to expand the franchise corps, provide exhaustive detail on how to maximize restaurant efficiency, and keep franchise fees at a level that ensured that franchisees could turn profits quickly and sustain their restaurants for the long run.³⁰

Kroc successfully signed up new franchisees throughout the 1950s and early 1960s, but he did not take full control of McDonald's until 1961, after years of a deteriorating relationship with and tense exchanges between the McDonald's men in California and Kroc. After a flurry of correspondence between San Bernardino and Des Plaines, a wild goose chase for funding, and hours of meetings among attorneys, company executives, and accountants, Ray Kroc became the head of a newly independent McDonalds. Richard and Maurice each received a check for \$1 million dollars, and dispensation from dealing with the sometimes harsh and impossible Kroc. In a final act of aggression against the men, Kroc avenged having lost access to the San Bernardino store in the sale, opened his own McDonald's a block away from the birthplace of the chain. Confused customers patronized what they believed was a relocated McDonald's, and the 'old

²⁹ Love, 27-28.

³⁰ Love, 41-44.

McDonald's' was longer the brothers' namesake: Kroc prevented the men from using the name on their store. Although long-time employees christened it the Big M, they could not compete against the brand name they helped build. The store was closed to Neal Baker, who had years earlier entered the burger and taco business with Glen Bell. In 1970, the property at 1398 E. Street in San Bernardino ceased serving food to families looking for an affordable night out, teenagers on first dates, and drivers seeking a pick me up as they traversed Route 66.³¹

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Three days after Christmas in 1961, Ray Kroc was officially the head of McDonald's, the reliable hamburger chain of 323, that could be then found in 44 states.³² In the early days, Kroc would board a single-engine Cessna plane with his trusted advisors and scout locations for potential new franchises from the air. He took note of the neatly drawn grids of suburban towns, the highway exits and the vacant lots near schools and churches. As the men searched for places to build McDonalds, and the franchisees that would implement the Speedee system, they also discovered that their fortunes would be best secured if they also purchased the real estate where the golden arches would be laid. McDonald's executive Harry Sonneborn presented the idea of investing in real estate to Kroc and was instrumental in the establishment of the McDonald's Franchise Realty Corporation in 1956. McDonald's biographer Jon Love described the move toward real estate as "the most important reason why McDonald's now boasts a financial position that is not close to be equaled in the food service business."³³

³¹ Love, 192-201. Love estimated in 1995 that, "If McDonald had not sold his right to the 0.5% of McDonald's sales that was due him and Mac under their ninety-nine-year contract with Kroc, he would have become one of the country's wealthiest men, almost as wealthy as Ray Kroc. Since the brothers sold their rights for \$2.7 million in late 1961, McDonald's restaurants have rung up a total of \$198 billion in sales. The royalty payments that would have been due the McDonalds brothers had they not sold out come to a total of \$990 million. Today, the McDonalds would be earning more than \$109 million a year. Love, 201.

³² Love, 201.

As Kroc flew across the country evaluating McDonald's next territory, his pilots probably didn't linger in the inner cities, which by 1961 were becoming less and less white and less and less affluent. Kroc believed in suburbia, he called it "where McDonald's grew up" and expressed uncertainty about the urban landscape.³⁴ Despite his own reservations about the city, some of the early franchises were in fact in neighborhoods still transitioning from white to black, and local franchisees in the new McDonald's hub of the Midwest advertised in African American newspapers. In 1957, a location opened near Chicago's South Side Chatham, a solidly black, middle-class neighborhood. The operator, Joseph, appeared to have a cordial relationship with the local black residents; his wife co-hosted a community Chamber of Commerce event in 1959. In the pages of the nation's leading African American daily, *The Chicago Defender*, a local McDonald's used the image of James North, an African American. North declared, "For a treat that can't be beat...I'll take McDonald's Hamburgers."³⁵ Another McDonald's franchise opened in the heart of black Chicago in 1961, in the Bronzeville neighborhood, and the outlet promised, "plenty of parking, no car hops, no tipping," only the "tastiest food in town at prices that please!"³⁶ Throughout the 1960s, the Bronzeville location took out *Defender* ads to entice locals to try French fries made from Idaho premium potatoes, the new Fish Filet sandwich, and tune into the McDonald's float in the 1965 Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade. In 1966, the newspaper published a story with a headline that declared, "McDonald's Hamburgers are Just Great," and a profile piece about Samuel Sheriff, a black McDonald's manager at the helm of the company's fifth highest grossing store.³⁷

³³ Love, 153.

³⁴ Ray Kroc, *Grinding it Out: The Making of McDonald's* (New York: Bedford St. Martin's, 1992), 203.

³⁵ Other Peoples BUSINESS, *Chicago Defender* Jun 13, 1959 p.4 *Daily Defender* Apr 08, 1957

³⁶ Untitled [display ad] *Chicago Defender* Sep 09, 1961 p.16

Black Chicagoans with the means and the desire to eat a McDonald's or try to follow in Sheriff's footprint may have read *The Defender* items with interest, but for readers in the Deep South, the advertisements and stories may have been difficult to relate to or the items may have struck a feeling of poignancy in light of the battles being waged over public accommodations. Wherever whites and 'others' lived in proximity, a color line could be erected and legislated, but the most virulent application and defense of separation resided in the South. At the very moment that white Americans were relishing in their growing purchasing power and industry was offering them an array of new products and experiences, blacks were comparatively left behind in what historian Lizbeth Cohen has characterized as "the consumers republic." Cohen characterizes the U.S. after World War II this way:

Americans...saw their nation as the model for the world of a society committed to mass consumption and what were assumed to be its far-reaching benefits. Mass consumption did not only deliver wonderful things for purchase—the televisions, air conditioners, and computers that have transformed American life over the last half century. It also dictated most central dimensions of postwar society, including the political economy, as well as the political culture.³⁸

In the years that McDonald's was taking its idea national, the struggle against Jim Crow had become internationalized as television stations began broadcasting the violent responses to non-violent sit-ins, boycotts, and marches. These protests, brought to homes across the world through television sets, radios, and newspapers, heightened awareness of the ways that blacks were only allowed second-class consumer citizenship.

Although Americans of all colors were free to believe in the idea of this republic, color dictated how one's citizenship could be exercised. Black women could not try on a dress in a department store. Black men had to use the back door windows of diners to carry out meals to

³⁷ A Great Decade, *Daily Defender* Feb 24, 1966 p.24 and Opportunity Awaits At McDonalds *Chicago Defender* Mar 12, 1966 p.A16

³⁸ A Consumers' Republic, Lizbeth Cohen, 7-8

eat at their homes, and they could never dare to eat inside. Black children, like Martin Luther King, Jr.'s daughter Yolanda, longed to visit amusement parks that upheld a ban on them.³⁹ The national enthusiasm for the marketplace, and the local realities of segregation made black consumers feel alienated from the nation's prosperity and in a sense they were like aliens masked in human bodies, observing a world they could never fully belong to or enjoy.

Humiliation was commonplace in the Jim Crow era, and restaurants could provide the setting for particularly shameful experiences. Restaurants have a long history in the United States, and by mid-century dining out became a national obsession, and with more franchises entering the diners' market, having a meal out could communicate your social mobility, serve as a treat for yourself and your family, and was one way to exercise your buying power African American activists and writers have long reflected on the ways that segregation at restaurants, lunch counters, and at roadside stands illustrated their exclusion from the small luxuries that consumer culture offered whites without restrictions. Their memoirs remind the post-Civil Rights Act of 1964 generations why dining establishments were key sites of activism. Melba Patillo-Beals's autobiography reveals the way that blacks under the weight of segregation experienced dining culture. In her narrative on the summer before she entered the annals of education history by joining eight other black students in the integration of Little Rock Central High School, she visited family in Ohio. Beals remembered eating at an integrated restaurant in Cincinnati and calling it "the promised land," Months later, when future Supreme Court justice Thurgood Marshall visited the Arkansas capital to advocate for black schoolchildren and the resistance they met to desegregation, Beals remembered feeling embarrassed because the

³⁹ See Victoria W. Wolcott, *Race, Riots, and Roller Coasters The Struggle over Segregated Recreation in America* (Penn, 2014).

NAACP lawyer could only “eat a greasy hamburger,” for dinner, as Little Rock restaurants were closed to blacks, especially ones fighting for civil rights.⁴⁰

The exclusionary and abusive behavior in restaurants toward blacks often began with a host or a manager ignoring an expectant black customer or simply stating that they do not service black people at their establishments. Although locals were aware of these rules, travelers passing through town or visiting the United States for the first time found themselves shocked or insulted by these confrontations. This was the case when William Henry Fitzjohn, a Sierra Leonean diplomat, was refused service while traveling between Washington, D.C. and Pittsburgh and stopped at Howard Johnson’s restaurant on Maryland’s Route 40. This stretch of Route 40 was filled with eating establishments and gas stations, and it was a CORE target due to its policies against blacks. Although many before the diplomat suffered such abuse, Fitzjohn’s multiple statuses—as outsider, a person with access to the U.S. State Department, and a representative of a nation the U.S. wanted to appease as the Cold War continued to shape foreign relations this incident was different. Fitzjohn’s experience of discrimination, and the other challenges felt by African diplomats and scholars who moved to Washington in the early 1960s was the impetus for the Kennedy administration—with the Departments of State and Justice taking the lead—to move on the issue of desegregation.⁴¹ The Cold War would be an integral factor in motivating Kennedy, and later Johnson, into seeking a federal law to protect people as they sought to quench a thirst or satisfy a hunger.

Route 40 businesses, like the Howard Johnson’s that refused to seat and serve Fitzjohn, were based on the model of the sit-down experience of dining, in which a customer interacted

⁴⁰ Anne Moody, *Coming of Age in Mississippi*, Melba Patillo-Beals, *Warriors Don’t Cry: The Searing Memoir of the Battle to Integrate Little Rock Central High School* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2015), 21, 66

⁴¹ “No Diplomatic Immunity: African Diplomats, the State Department, and Civil Rights, 1961–1964,” *Journal of American History* 87, no. 2 (September 2000): 546–79

with a host, a member of the wait staff, and if problems arose or the service was particularly excellent, a customer may seek out a manager. Fast food in the early 1960s was still based on the drive-in model, so Kroc's empire did not follow the form of its franchise family, and with no seats, no wait staff, and a mostly outdoor or car-based dining experience, one could conclude that fast food did not feel as wedded to the machinations of separate and unequal. McDonald's did not begin to incorporate seating into new restaurants until 1963, and Kroc maintained many of the Speedee system elements that discouraged diners from lingering. Yet, as the building of McDonald's was not race-neutral in its site selections and reliance on a racially disparate set of federal and financial policies, and despite McDonald's restaurants reputation as innovative in fast food, in the South, franchisees did not rock the boat when it came to race.

While diplomats and foreign affairs officers could appeal to Kennedy's presidential power to mobilize advisors and cabinet members, everyday people relied on the strength of movement organizing and local leadership to address the problem of restaurant segregation. The historic Greensboro was not the first, but the coverage of the four North Carolina Agricultural and Technical students' stand against segregation energized activists to concentrate their non-violent strategies toward restaurants in their own communities. The February 1, 1960 Greensboro sit-ins at the downtown Woolworth and Co.'s lunch counter was not the first time a group of youth used this non-violent method to challenge segregation, but its influence was unmatched. The news media coverage of the four, young men from North Carolina Agricultural and Technical College coupled with the small victories of recent years in Wichita, Miami and Oklahoma City, transported the sit-in strategy to cities and college towns across the South, and it encouraged solidarity actions in major metropolitan areas from Los Angeles to Harlem. The A&T students' stand against segregation energized activists to concentrate their non-violent

strategies toward restaurants in their own communities. Today, the Greensboro lunch counter is part of the collection of the National Museum of African American History and Culture, and despite Woolworth's demise in July of 1997, the company is as associated with its place in Civil Rights history as much as its position among the early, great American retailers. Kress's, another five-and-dime visited by Greensboro sitters, closed in the early 1980s, and is sometimes mentioned alongside Woolworth's. Curiously, McDonald's place in this movement has long been ignored, unknown, and under-analyzed. As one of a handful of fast food restaurants that exists today that was born at mid-century, the history of sit-in activities at McDonald's helps us better understand the restaurant's roots and directions in first decades.⁴²

Brandon Lewis joined the sit-ins within a few days of the February 1 launch of the movement. Lewis grew up in Asheville, North Carolina, and before he even considered participating in a sit-in, he had collected a set of experiences in interracial leadership and friendship building, which would serve him well as he joined. Asheville—a town in the western end of the state, known as a gateway to the Appalachian Mountains—mirrored Greensboro in its segregation policies, but Lewis managed to find ways to circumvent its rules and restrictions. Lewis, an A&T biology major, was an alum of Asheville's Interracial Youth Council, and regularly attended interfaith groups that brought Jewish and Christian students together at houses of worship and on retreats. He had also used sports—a pathway for integration for mostly men in the early twentieth century—to bridge the racial gaps in his town. He realized that he was already a movement man before he even enrolled at A&T: “We integrated a lot of the baseball diamonds and parks...just by going in and playing and using those facilities”⁴³ Integrating Greensboro's lunch counters would require more than just showing up, and Lewis gained

⁴² For

⁴³ GREENSBORO VOICES/GREENSBORO PUBLIC LIBRARY ORAL HISTORY PROJECT, INTERVIEWEE: Lewis A, Brandon III INTERVIEWER: Eugene E. Pfaff, Jr. DATE: June 3, 1981, [Begin Tape 1, Side A].

confidence in his activist acumen after joining sit-ins at Woolworth's and Kress's. The lunch counters did not fully capture the pervasiveness of the segregation problem, and Lewis was well aware of it. The integration of the lunch counters did not mean a wholesale demolition of the color line in the city. He remembered decades later that finer dining establishments seemed immune to the urgings of the protests, and other eating establishments avoided protestors altogether due to so few movement members for so many segregated facilities.

You see, if you look at most of the exclusive restaurants [in Greensboro], they didn't make that move. The cafeterias didn't make that move. We had to come back to them and, hence, the larger demonstrations. These were kind of the private domain, the supper clubs. They really weren't that public.

With no legal mechanism to fight the private clubs and concern that observers would think that the high street was the only section governed by Jim Crow, the Greensboro activists set their sights on "attacking the problems with desegregation in the city," outside of the downtown core, and they therefore set their sights on McDonald's in early May of 1960. Armed with signs that said, "Mc!--Don't Set America Back--Get on the Right Track," long time users of the sit-in strategy Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) linked up with local college students, and they converged on the state's very first McDonald's location, opened in 1959 at 1101 Summit Avenue in East Greensboro, and the arrival of the thrifty meal made it an instant success. In addition to the distinction of being the Tarheel State's first place to welcome the Golden Arches, the restaurant would later inspire Navy veteran-turned restaurateur and innkeeper Wilber Hardee to create his namesake, burger franchise a year later in Greenville.⁴⁴

⁴⁴ Jerry Bledsoe, "The Story of Hardees," May 27, 2011, Accessed January 21, 2018, <https://www.ourstate.com/hardees/>

The protesting outside and inside the restaurant proceeded without much police intervention for a few days, then mass arrests began to occur. The arrests only added fuel to the fire of the East Greensboro cohort. One of the ministers involved in the McDonald's campaign told leaders that: "Now, you've got something going here. Keep it going and I'll have a mass meeting at my church and we'll turn out the adult community." Further mobilization would not be necessary, the McDonald's franchise did not want any more negative publicity and relented within four days of the mounting of a picket line.

Like the East Greensboro movement workers, Memphis freedom strugglers also found themselves outside of McDonald's restaurants seeking relief from the local law and long custom of segregated dining. The Memphis Movement—having gained ground in 1959 with the removal of colored waiting signs in the Greyhound stations and filed lawsuits against segregation in the public library--followed in Greensboro's historic step by initiating sit-ins in March of 1960.⁴⁵ The sit-in movement targeted a number of Memphis businesses, including the city's McDonald's restaurant--the 20th in the franchises system to open—and operated by local businessman Saul Kaplan. A Korean War veteran, Kaplan moved to Memphis to become a buyer for a local department store chain. After visiting a McDonald's during a trip to the Midwest, he consulted with a family member who also entered franchising and busied himself with applying for a license.⁴⁶ Two McDonald's drive-ins, including Kaplan's original store," were among the list of restaurants that agreed to voluntarily desegregate. The sit-ins swept Memphis, and the impasse was finally broken 18 months later when the civil rights groups

⁴⁵ <https://memphislibrary.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/p15342coll4/id/88>, 1958-08-15 Complaint, Digital Memphis, Memphis Public Library and Sit-In Training, George W. Lee Collection, photograph

⁴⁶ Golden Arches paved way for Memphis entrepreneur Saul Kaplan, *The Memphis Commercial Appeal*, February 26, 2016.

brokered a desegregation plan with local businesses, which went beyond equal service and included promises to hire African Americans.⁴⁷

Other McDonald's victories in the South would take much longer and the costs—physical, legal, and emotional—would be much higher than those paid in East Greensboro. In the winter of 1963, the then three-year-old Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, began their own desegregation effort in Arkansas targeting McDonald's #433, a Pine Bluff in a residential area, and opened on July 3, 1962 just in time for Independence Day celebrations near the residential section of town.⁴⁸ Within six months of the grand opening, members of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee's Pine Bluff branch became aware that the McDonald's was barring black customers from service, and folded the restaurant into its larger plan to transform the city.⁴⁹ Considering SNCC's birth in April of 1960 came shortly after the Greensboro sit-in, Pine Bluff activists were moved by the successes in bending color lines across the South, and McDonald's popularity may have made it a key site for heightening awareness of this maturing movement.

Although the Pine Bluff contingent worked on McDonald's beginning in the winter of 1963, it appears their work in the summer of that year grabbed the most attention. Vivian Carroll Jones, an early Pine Bluff volunteer, participated in a four-day, demonstration in early August. She recalled: "As we entered the restaurant in a single file, we orderly made several attempts to

⁴⁷ List of Memphis businesses willing to desegregate, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, Compiler, 1960, Maxine A. Smith NAACP Collection, Box 4, Folder 2

⁴⁸ <http://www.arkansaspreservation.com/National-Register-Listings/PDF/JE0672.nr.pdf>, Accessed January 26, 2108

⁴⁹ See, Arsnick: The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee in Arkansas, Jennifer Jensen Wallach and John A. Kirk, ed., 2011, University of Arkansas Press, Crossing the White Line: SNCC in Three Delta Towns, 1963–1967, RANDY FINLEY, 68. DOI: 10.2307/j.ctt1f fjfsx Carrol, 170-171; Students Attacked With Amonia, Acid In Pine Bluff, Ark. Atlanta Daily World (1932-2003); Aug 4, 1963; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Atlanta Daily World pg. A2

place our orders. We were repeatedly ignored by the waiters. White customers continued to come in and place orders. The orders were served over our heads to white customers while we stood in line for service.” Like in the similar battles across the South, the protestors’ passive resistance was met by a crowd’s escalating emotions. Jones remembered white patrons pushing and cursing at the demonstrators. Drawing upon the training that SNCC provided protesters in remaining unresponsive to insults, threats, shoves, and slaps. The mob persisted. The SNCC volunteers persisted. Eventually, their focus on remaining calm in the face of the contempt of the employees and customers was broken by sounds coming from outside the restaurant, where an iconic, and now retired, single-arch neon sign beckoned customers to “McDonald’s Hamburgers, Over 99 Billion Sold.” Sensible drivers proceeding down Pine Bluff’s Main Street toward the restaurant may have kept on driving when they saw a “mob of about two hundred white youth...gathering outside...carrying bats, bottles, and bricks.” Other folks, who wanted to teach SNCC a lesson; the good people of Pine Bluff who wanted to draw a line that had been coming down since those kids in Little Rock got the President of the United States to let them go to the crown jewel of Southern high schools; those were the folks who pulled their car up the parking lot or across the street, and joined in the resistance.

Jones could start to feel the temperature rise inside the restaurant; maybe it was a stress response that was making her sweat. But, everyone was overheating and breathing in the air thick with the smell of hamburgers left too long on grills and the perspiration of a mass now locked inside of the McDonald’s for safety’s sake, but the SNCC-ers were far from feeling secure. They soon realized a McDonald’s employee disabled the air conditioning unit in the restaurant , and as the temperatures rose, Jones wondered if she would make it out alive. Jones knew that knew that civil rights demonstrations could be the place where you took your last

breathe. Protests and mass meetings, as well as car trips through unfamiliar territories and talking back to your boss or a storekeeper, could sign your death warrant. Movement activities had taken the lives of people seeking the basic rights of American citizenship before—whether you were seeking a ballot or a burger, standing up for yourself could lead to your death. Then, the doors to the McDonald's were unlocked, allowing the group to inhale some desperately needed fresh air. But, the bittersweet respite turned into a brutal reckoning, as local police charged for the SNCC members, and proceeded to arrested them for “failure to leave a place of business.” The officers did little to protect the arrestees from the rabidity of their canines they brought with them or the madness of the crowd of Pine Bluff's segregation advocates.

As the McDonald's protesters sought treatment from their bruises and called their colleagues to help them make bail, newspapers in other Southern cities took notice of the action. The *Atlanta Daily World* reported that “three students and a field secretary,” had to seek out medical help after being on the receiving end of glass bottles and home-made ammonia bombs.⁵⁰ It was discovered that some of the anti-integration forces threw acid inside the restaurant. One of three teenage girls who were victim of the acid attack was an Arkansas Agricultural & Mechanical College student. She hoped that handkerchief would soothe her burning face, but the acid devoured the cloth and she hoped she would be taken to a hospital for treatment.⁵¹ By the winter, after a 10-month battle to ‘break open’ McDonald's, SNCC's national newspaper, *The Student Voice*, reported that the Pine Bluff contingent had called for a “nationwide protest,” against the hundreds of locations, which could now be found coast to coast. In addition to the physical retaliation against SNCC protestors, the local McDonald's operator used the courts in an

⁵⁰ Students Attacked With Ammonia, Acid In Pine Bluff, Ark. *Atlanta Daily World* (1932-2003); Aug 4, 1963; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: *Atlanta Daily World* pg. A2

⁵¹ Students Attacked With Ammonia, Acid In Pine Bluff, Ark. *Atlanta Daily World* (1932-2003); Aug 4, 1963; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: *Atlanta Daily World* pg. A2

attempt to dress down the activists. If the “mass arrests, beatings, and the throwing of acid,” as the SNCC annual report recorded, were unable to deter the group, then maybe an injunction banning further action at the restaurant would work. Injunctions were filed against major civil rights organizers throughout the 1950s and 1960s, and even when they were found unconstitutional, they could tie up precious, movement time with appearances before judges and expose protesters to more arrests as they awaited the news if the injunction was indeed enforceable. In late November, two SNCC field secretaries accompanied members to a hearing on whether McDonald’s could permanently ban SNCC from protesting at the Pine Bluff restaurant. The injunction was also filed to keep members of the Arkansas chapter of the “NAACP and Black Muslims” from mobilizing in front of the store. McDonald’s inflexibility was particularly enervating, considering that SNCC found “most lunch counters” in the area were integrated.”⁵² By February 1964, after a full year of action, the Pine Bluff McDonald’s moved to desegregate.⁵³ Scholar Angela Jill Cooley believes that fast food chains in the South were particularly loyal to the local customs. “Segregation and discrimination were practiced at McDonald’s locations and at other chains in the South...McDonald’s, which, despite lacking a dining room, refused to allow equal service. When McDonald’s implemented indoor seating, in the midst of civil rights sit-in activism, many Southern franchisees practiced racial segregation even when other local eateries had abolished the practice.”⁵⁴

⁵² “In Arkansas: McDonald’s Boycott Called; Helena Police Arrest Three,” *The Student Voice*, December 9, 1963, 4.

⁵³ SNCC, ANNUAL REPORT, 1964, Jensen.Arsnick

⁵⁴ Also see, “A Helping of Gravy: Golden Arches & White Spaces, Gravy, #53,” DECEMBER 3, 2014. Accessed January 21, 2018. *To Live and Dine in Dixie: The Evolution of Urban Food Culture in the Jim Crow South*, Athens, University of Georgia Press, 2015, .

The long year of the Pine Bluff struggle is not as well-known as the other lunch counter struggles of the 1960s, especially the fight in Greensboro that is often erroneously believed to have been the very first sit-in. McDonald's does not appear on the list of historical icons of segregation like Woolworth's, and outside of Arkansas, few may be aware of Pine Bluff. If Kroc and his associates knew about the Pine Bluff protests—which was highly likely as Kroc was known to be controlling to the point of obsession about his restaurants—then it was too insignificant or too damning to be included in his biography and other official accounts of McDonald's. If McDonald's executives remained silent about Pine Bluff because they believed that the racial violence and chaos in Arkansas was an outlier, an issue that had nothing to do with Speedee or his growing dominance in the burger market, then they would soon learn better. Kroc's McDonald's--only ten years old when President Lyndon Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and made it a violation of federal law to keep people of McDonald's, a Howard Johnson Inn, the local swimming pool, or a movie theatre--was growing up in a turbulent decade, and the company would find itself maturing in unfamiliar territories--the inner-cities of America.⁵⁵

* * *

The July 2, 1964 signing ceremony for the Civil Rights Act of 1964 was the sort of interracial gathering civil rights organizations hoped could then be replicated in restaurants and diners across the country. The Act made it plain that the federal government would had the authority to ensure that “all persons” would be “entitled to the full and equal enjoyment of the goods, services facilities, and privileges, advantages, and accommodations of any place of public accommodation...without discrimination or segregation on the ground of race, color, religious,

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or national origin.”⁵⁶ After President Lyndon Johnson celebrated with the guests present at the signing—including an ebullient King, Urban League head Roy Wilkins and the supporters of the bill who waited out a 75-day filibuster against it—the hard work of implementation was still ahead.

The law was only as strong and as meaningful as local compliance, and a presidential pen could not compel obedience to the law. Attorney General Robert Kennedy dispatched Department of Justice investigators to monitor adherence, and each month field reports from Southern cities charted how much impact the Act was having on the local level. Resistant restaurants and hotels got creative with their strategies of circumvention. Richmond’s Emporia Diner offered two sets of menus to black and white customers with varying prices; whites were offered an “order of southern fried chicken at \$1.75...and \$5.25” was the price for “undesirable” customers.⁵⁷ While the DOJ concentrated its attention on the South, blacks in northern cities feigned for themselves, and many saw the Act fail to address more urgent issues--fair or ‘open’ housing and education. Three months after he attended the White House ceremony celebrating the Rights Act become law, Urban League executive director Whitney Young summed up the limits of a public accommodations effort in his “What Negroes Want” column in the *Chicago Defender*. “Negroes are learning that even the passage of a historic Civil Rights Act is not sufficient to wipe out rats...” He accused whites of being delusional about the impact of the Act, arguing that “frivolous inertia” and “conscienceless gentility” was a result of when

a human being tries desperately to believe that, by the removal of old signs and symbols--in this case “white only”--that a new world has been created...the rats are still biting; the children are still in the worst schools; the prenatal care is absent; the landlord won’t send

⁵⁶ Civil Rights Act of 1964

⁵⁷ Fried Chicken: Whites, \$1.75 Negroes, \$5.25 , *Daily Defender* Sep 24, 1964 p.2

up any heat, and the husband is doing the hardest, dirtiest work for the smallest pay and then labeled as “lazy”...that is, if he’s lucky enough to find work.⁵⁸

Young’s editorial summed up the frustrating state of black America as the goodwill and hope engendered by the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom and the passage of major civil and voting rights legislation between 1963 and 1965 yielded little in terms of employment, health, housing, and educational opportunity. Young, and other activists, not only lamented the growing poverty among black communities devastated by bisecting highways and sinking poverty, but they were also connecting a growing disillusionment and hopelessness, especially among black youth, with rising instances of urban uprisings and rebellions. Throughout the 20th century, African American communities confronting police brutality or mobs of vengeful whites have bore the brunt of lost lives and property damage when their neighborhoods become the battlefields of racial unrest.

By 1967, these confrontations and uprisings were so prevalent and disturbing, that the year’s summer has been christened “the long, hot summer.” From June to August of that year, uprisings broke out in Buffalo, Detroit, Newark, Atlanta, Cincinnati, and Birmingham. At the close of the season, at least 85 people were dead, more than 2,000 injured, and 11,000 people had been arrested. The summer led to the formation of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders—known colloquially as the Kerner Commission after the committee chairman Illinois Governor Otto Kerner. The Commission was tasked with assessing the causes of the violence and suggesting ways to stave off future devastation. The Commission’s conclusion delivered in February of 1968, was not radically different than the knowledge gathered by previous bodies, including the 1919 Chicago Race Riot Commission which determined that housing, jobs, education, and police protection were unequally experienced by blacks and whites. The Kerner

⁵⁸ To Be Equal, *Chicago Defender* Oct 24, 1964 p.9

Commission also took note of the lack of black representation in journalism and media. And, they concluded that blacks living in the inner cities from Watts, California to Newark, New Jersey were prone to loot and riot out of retaliation for the abysmal condition of their neighborhood businesses. The Commission's investigation determined that blacks expressed "grievances concerning unfair commercial practices affecting Negro consumers," and they often encountered, "inferior quality goods (particularly meats and produce) at higher prices and [they were] subjected to excessive interest rates and fraudulent commercial practices."⁵⁹ The Committee advocated a plethora of federal, local, and private-sector funded programs to increase job training, educational opportunities, and better community-police relations. In the Report's two-paragraph Conclusion section, the Commission quoted Kenneth B. Clark, the noted black psychologist whose 'doll study' poignantly linked the relationship between segregation and self-hatred among black children. Clark was among one of the first experts called before the august panel, and his words captured the skepticism of black Americans who had believed that they had seen it all up to that point:

I read that report...of the 1919 riot in Chicago, and it is as if I were reading the report of the investigating committee on the Harlem riot of 1935, the report of the investigating committee on the Harlem riot of 1943, the report of the McCone Commission on the Watts Riot. I must again in candor say to you members of the Commission—it is a kind of Alice in Wonderland with the same moving pictures reshowed over and over again, the same analysis, the same recommendation, and the same inaction.

Shaped by the psychologist's words, the Kerner Commission contended that it was "time now to end the destruction and the violence, not only in the streets of the ghetto but in the lives of people." Five weeks after the first printing of the National Advisory Commission on Civil

⁵⁹ National Advisory, 82.

Disorders by the Federal Publishing Office, Clark’s reflection about the cycle of racial uprisings and Kerner’s declaration that now was the time would be read with even more scrutiny and urgency after the announcement of Martin Luther King, Jr.’s assassination.

* * *

Martin Luther King’s 1968 visit to Memphis was not about the business communities segregation practices—this time. King had visited the city throughout his tenure as leader of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, and he knew the contours of black struggle in Tennessee around equal access to the city’s downtown shops, local colleges, and well-compensated work. Some observers considered Memphis a racially moderate city, in light of the police brutality that met civil rights workers in Alabama and the proliferation of those deemed ‘missing’ in Mississippi. In 1959, King was a welcomed presence nine years earlier, when he traveled to Memphis to support the Volunteer Ticket, a slate of black candidates for local office. Among the Volunteer Ticket hopefuls was civil rights attorney Benjamin Hooks (who would later play his own role in fast food franchising as the legal representative for Mahalia Jackson’s Glori-Fried Chicken).⁶⁰ King joined Arkansas NAACP chairwoman and representative for the nine brave souls that tried to integrate Little Rock Central High School in 1957, Daisy Bates to support Volunteer Ticket competitors for Commissioner of Public Works, juvenile court judge, and two seats on the city’s board of education. The pamphlet introducing the candidates displayed the group’s slogan: “The Negro Has a Love Affair with Destiny.”⁶¹ By 1968, locals had witnessed the end of segregation in restaurants, stores, and public parks and libraries, and celebrated the first black graduate of Memphis State University. Additionally, the black vote

⁶⁰ DIG Memphis, Benjamin L. Hooks Collection, photograph, Freedom Rally for the Volunteer Ticket, photo graph, George W. Lee Collection, Box 1, Folder 8, Memphis & Shelby County Room, MPLIC, and Campaign flyer for Sugarmon, Hooks, Bunton, and Love. Contains position statement written by George W. Lee.

⁶¹ DIG Memphis, Civil Rights Collection, August 21, 1959, online timeline.

was able to secure a victory for A.W. Willis, a member of the state's general assembly in 1964, a first for a black Tennessean since the Reconstruction era.⁶²

Despite all the wins, by the time King arrived to support a sanitation workers strike in March of 1968, Memphis was an apt illustration for the minister's concern about the next stage in the fight to realize racial progress. The 'colored only' signs had disappeared, but the signs of economic inequality were visible—and seemingly permanent—throughout the city. Black sanitation workers took to the streets to protest the unsafe conditions and poor pay they endured keeping Memphis communities free from garbage and the vermin that could attack a city at any moment. After the horrific deaths of Echol Cole and Robert Walker, two workers who were crushed to death by a malfunctioning trash compactor, their compatriots and community were galvanized to go on strike. Thirteen hundred workers went on strike. Hundreds of the workers, costumed with placards covering their torsos that declared: I AM A MAN marched along the main thoroughfare of Memphis alerting the city that the dehumanizing machinery of low-wage work and racism did not successfully strip these men of their human dignity.

“The Negro Has a Love Affair with Destiny.” Who still believed that in 1968?

Blacks in Memphis were not living out anything resembling a love affair with the city. The dilapidated housing. The schools that had yet to desegregate. The jobs, if you were lucky to have one, and their insulting pay. With no love lost between them, the city and the sanitation workers remained at an impasse as strikes continued to wear their signs and hold up their placards. As the strike continued, and the heightened tensions of the strike led to instances of violence during the march, local organizers reached out to the SCLC and requested that King visit the strikers. King's presence could guarantee fiery words of encouragement, and the flash of news cameras at the very least. After his March visit, King returned a month later.

⁶² A.W. Willis,

On his second visit in April, King gathered workers and their supporters for a mass meeting at the Bishop Charles Mason Temple. The audience braved a tornado warning to hear King's electrifying message after an introduction from his associate Ralph Abernathy of the SCLC. King spoke for more than 40 minutes about the arc of history, from the biblical march through the wilderness to the most recent turning points in the civil rights movement—from the sit-ins to the freedom rides to the securing of voting rights in Alabama. King reminded the crowd of their moral power when they practice nonviolence, as well as their economic importance. This address—King's final public oration—is often noted for its prophetic declarations, including "I may not get there with you." Yet, the substance of the address also forecasts the ways that economic issues from poverty to strategic boycotting of national companies and business ownership would become central to civil rights visions in the 1970s.

Now the other thing we'll have to do is this: always anchor our external direct action with the power of economic withdrawal. Now we are poor people, individually we are poor when you compare us with white society in America. We are poor. Never stop and forget that collectively, that means all of us together, collectively we are richer than all the nations in the world, with the exception of nine. Did you ever think about that? After you leave the United States, Soviet Russia, Great Britain, West Germany, France, and I could name the others, the American Negro collectively is richer than most nations of the world. We have an annual income of more than thirty billion dollars a year, which is more than all of the exports of the United States and more than the national budget of Canada. Did you know that? That's power right there, if we know how to pool it.⁶³

King spoke about initiating a "bank-in" movement in Memphis by withdrawing monies from discriminatory bank and moving accounts to black-owned institutions. He suggested an 'insurance-in' to promote the handful of black insurance companies still in operation in the late 1960s, and gestured toward a young Jesse Jackson's experience with consumer boycotts. King advised the group to boycott Coca-Cola, Sealtest Milk, Wonder and Hart's Breads.

⁶³ Martin Luther King, Jr. "I've Been to the Mountaintop," Memphis, TN, http://kingencyclopedia.stanford.edu/encyclopedia/documentsentry/ive_been_to_the_mountaintop/, Accessed February 1, 2018.

As Jesse Jackson has said, up to now only the garbage men have been feeling pain. Now we must kind of redistribute that pain. We are choosing these companies because they haven't been fair in their hiring policies, and we are choosing them because they can begin the process of saying they are going to support the needs and the rights of these men who are on strike.⁶⁴

The tragic accident that claimed the lives of Cole and Walker—eight years to the day that the Greensboro sit-in ignited a movement—bookended a period of King's leadership and guidance of the nonviolent movement toward integrating explicit calls for an economic response to racial inequality. The distance between the Woolworth's Counter in Greensboro and the pulpit of Mason Temple, was bridged by the March on Washington's call for *jobs* and freedom. The route between Greensboro and Memphis was connected by the SCLC's Northern Campaign to end housing discrimination in Chicago. This ideological roads was traveled by the architects of the Poor People's Campaign, King's ambitious second March on Washington to create a tent city in the nation's capital where the poor from every corner of the nation could rally for economic justice.

King ended his speech by assuring the crowd: "And so I'm happy tonight; I'm not worried about anything; I'm not fearing any man. Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord."

The next evening, an assassin shot and killed Martin Luther King, Jr.

That night, the Holy Week Uprising began.

* * *

After Roland Jones heard the news out of Memphis, he sat behind the wheel of his car and wondered what direction he was going to take. The West Tennessee native moved to

⁶⁴ Ibid.

Memphis when he was ten years old, and he thought about the city of blues as his hometown. Jones was a McDonald's manager in Washington, D.C., and among a handful of blacks with supervisory responsibilities in the network of then 1,000 restaurants. Jones had arrived in the nation's capital to manage a franchise location on New York Avenue.⁶⁵ Jones had never been to a McDonald's drive-in, until he became an employee of the system. A career in restaurant management was not a path Jones actively pursued. As a member of the generation of black men who used military service as a means of social ascension, Jones served in the U.S. army and was discharged in 1963. He didn't grow up eating in restaurants, and when Jones tested the color line in his city, he found himself subject to police harassment. Despite the edifice of segregation that built walls around black Memphis, Jones also holds fond memories of his upbringing, and he credits a sort of patronage system for providing black children in Memphis what he calls "close to equal schools."⁶⁶

Jones was proud of his work turning around New York Avenue, a location known as one of the most difficult stores in the district.

Jones had just departed a suburban McDonald's restaurant and as he drove toward D.C., still uncertain if he would change course and drive back south, he could see a cloud of smoke hovering over some of D.C.'s black neighborhoods. The announcement that King had died was met with a wave of grief, anger, and chaos in American cities. The week before the 1968 Easter holiday—Holy Week, mirrored aspects of the local unrests during the previous summer: Molotov cocktails flying through storefront windows, National Guardsman lining city streets, and trusted elders pleading for people to obey emergency curfews insisting that King would have

⁶⁵ McDonald's Buys Gee Gee Holdings The Washington Post, Times Herald (1959-1973); Oct 25, 1967; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Washington Post pg. D9

⁶⁶ Interview with author

disapproved of what was transpiring. This round of urban riots was not a matter of isolated incidents linked by some of the standard factors that lead to property destruction and death—racial conflicts, police brutality, or resistance to integration. The Holy Week Uprisings, as they were later termed, was a nationalized response to a single incident. Therefore, unlike the summers of eras past, the synchronicity of these uprisings, the singularity of the cause made it feel different, and it would be remembered as the most catastrophic of all the catastrophes because of why it started, as well as what many would later say it commemorated: the death of civil rights. Historians have tried to fight this misunderstanding. Jacquelyn Dowd Hall has made a plea for the Long Civil Rights Movement, and David Chappell has tried to remind us that the Holy Week uprisings were not the “national upheaval...great orgy of violence and destruction,” many imagined. In fact, Chappell argues, that “Americans actually began correcting their memory of the riots within a week of the assassination — very widely and publicly in the press, in white papers as well as black. Their experience of mass violence in the streets had swiftly failed to live up to the hype.” In fact, the national death total—a devastating 43 people, was far fewer than originally believed, and a number of cities that had experienced hot summers in previous years reported no fatalities.⁶⁷ King’s death did not mean civil rights had ended, and although the carnage of 1968 has been misremembered, the movement and the lives of those who survived the uprisings were forever changed after King was eulogized and calm returned to city streets. And, as Roland Jones was driving around the supposed center of democracy, where King’s Poor People’s Campaign would in a few months create Resurrection City, he

⁶⁷ AFTER THE DREAM DIED: NATIONAL MEMORIES OF THE KING ASSASSINATION AND HOW THEY PLAYED OUT IN SUBSEQUENT LEGISLATION David L. Chappell, *German Historical Institute Bulletin*, 149-151. **Bulletin Supplement 11 (2015)**

contemplated whether he “should pack up and go back to Memphis,” he couldn’t imagine that he would be a crucial link between King’s death and the birth of new era for McDonald’s.

While Jones called the franchise owners to see what he could do to keep watch over the McDonald’s restaurants in the eye of the storm, local and federal forces tried to compel order on streets across the country. Chicago’s local authorities were not as successful as their municipal peers in restoring order as effectively and safely during Holy Week, and McDonald’s executives housed in a downtown office building nervously fielded reports on how their city locations were faring during the unrest. Jones’s success in keeping restaurants closed immediately after King’s death and later securing and clean up after vandalized location brought him to the attention of McDonald’s senior leaders. After a series of phone calls back and forth between Jones and McDonald’s executives in downtown Chicago, Jones was offered a special advisory role with the company: Jones would travel around the country and search for the very first black franchise owner in McDonald’s history. So, Jones headed to Chicago and he did just that.
