

“Calm of the Tornado:” C. Sumpter Logan, Theodore A. Braun, and School Desegregation in Henderson, Kentucky

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In comparison to the disorder surrounding nearby cities, Henderson, Kentucky's September 1956 school desegregation campaign stands out for its relative peacefulness. Clay and Sturgis, two cities located thirty-some miles south of Henderson, experienced mob violence so fierce that state governor Albert B. Chandler called in the National Guard to ensure the safety of African American students. The local school boards used the violence as an excuse to halt desegregation efforts, receiving support from state attorney general Jo M. Ferguson that they alone controlled desegregation's pace. In contrast, Henderson's school board held firm in the face of a citizen-led boycott and received a supportive opinion from Ferguson that stated that local citizens could not interfere with the board's decision and that the board could prosecute boycotters who encouraged truancy.¹

First Presbyterian Church pastor C. Sumpter Logan and Zion Evangelical and Reformed (E&R) Church pastor Theodore A. Braun were instrumental in bringing about such a positive outcome. Logan, as president of the local Henderson Ministerial Association (HMA), and Braun both organized people behind-the-scenes and used their public profiles to unabashedly support desegregation. According to an editorial from the local *Henderson Gleaner and Journal* newspaper, their "sincere leadership" helped to relax tensions and temper pro-boycott sentiments. Local desegregationists, in turn, claimed that "if it hadn't been for the ministerial association, we'd have emptied the schools on the third day."²

Christian commentators at the time looked at Henderson's outcome as a case study for clerical intervention, hoping that its success could inspire clergy elsewhere to take concrete action in support for school desegregation. Colbert S. Cartwright, pastor of a church in Little

¹ David L. Wolfford, "Resistance on the Border: School Desegregation in Western Kentucky, 1954-1964," in *Ohio Valley History* 4, no. 2 (Summer 2004), 50-52; "Integration Foes Call off Boycott," *New York Times*, 29 September 1956; Jo M. Ferguson, OAG No. 38, 945, 13 September 1956 and OAG No. 38,978, 28 September 1956.

² C. Sumpter Logan and Theodore A. Braun, "Henderson Pastors' Diary," *Christian Century*, 24 October 1956, 1232.

Rock, Arkansas and member of the Arkansas Council of Human Relations, drew inspiration from the pastors' unity, arguing that the HMA gave Logan and Braun "strength and effectiveness in their united defiance." While Henderson ministers experienced some opposition, Cartwright observed that "all continue to be leaders among their people," as opposed to individual pastors elsewhere who lost their jobs for taking an antisegregationist stance.³ From a distance, the Henderson campaign suggested that clergy could survive taking a prophetic stand if they took proper measures such as standing together.

Such a rosy portrayal, however, fails to capture the reality of the situation. Even in Henderson, ministerial unity fell apart in the face of substantial opposition. As local ministers experienced considerable dissent within their congregations, reduced church attendance, and intense scrutiny due to their newfound notoriety, many repudiated their connections with the controversial ministerial association. Such hostility even led some clergy to fear for their personal safety. In a recent interview reflecting on his Henderson "baptismal bonfire," Braun stated that "back then, I never thought that I'd live the age I am now. I had the feeling that maybe my life might end with some bullet or something in Henderson." While he survived the experience, both he and Logan would resign their pastorates and leave the city within eighteen months. Braun's resignation was voluntary, but he was frustrated at the lack of progress regarding local racial issues and decided that "it was my time to leave."⁴ In contrast, Logan found himself ousted from the relatively elite First Presbyterian Church and reassigned to Utah. Despite Cartwright's hope, their prophetic witness did have significant personal repercussions.

³ Colbert S. Cartwright, "What Can Southern Ministers Do," *Christian Century*, 26 December 1956, 1505. For more on Cartwright, see David Andrew Lai, "Up in the Balcony: White Religious Leaders and School Desegregation in Arkansas, 1954-1960," M.A. thesis, University of Kentucky, 2012.

⁴ Theodore A. Braun, interview by author, Pleasant Hill, TN, 16 March 2013.

Instead, Logan and Braun's lives illustrate both the promise and the difficulty of liberal white ministerial intervention in school desegregation during the immediate post-*Brown* years. As moral compasses for their communities, ministers had the potential to galvanize other sympathetic figures to support the movement. While they faced substantial obstacles, such opposition was ultimately surmountable. Braun stated:

“There was a calmness about being in the midst of the struggle in Henderson, and the danger, because I thought I was on the right side of things, of justice issues, and I explained it as being more like in the middle of the calm of the tornado, the quiet there in the center. If you get in the center of justice, then no matter what happens, you have this calmness.”⁵

The moral conviction both clergy possessed allowed them to obtain “the calm of the tornado” and continue to speak out for social justice despite community opprobrium.

Braun and Logan's considerable courage stand out in contrast to the religious historiography surrounding the movement, which attributes white clergy's silence to their cowardice and apathy. According to James Findlay and Michael Friedland, southern pastors had limited long-term impact because they failed to take similarly bold stands their northern neighbors would take. Ostensibly in opposition to Findlay and Friedland, David Chappell contends that southern religious leaders' neutrality over segregation was sufficient to convince white southerners to listen to Martin Luther King's ideology and that active pro-segregationist religion played a relatively minor role in the matter. By emphasizing personal choice to explain limited results, both of these arguments caricature segregationists as extreme die-hards and Ku Klux Klan members.⁶

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ James F. Findlay, *Church People in the Struggle: The National Council of Churches and the Black Freedom Movement, 1950-1970* (New York: Oxford, 1993); Michael Friedland, *Lift Up Your Voice Like a Trumpet: White Clergy and the Civil Rights and Antiwar Movements, 1954-1973* (Chapel Hill: UNC, 1998); David L. Chappell, *A Stone of Hope: Prophetic Religion and the Death of Jim Crow* (Chapel Hill: UNC, 2004). For more on the historiography, see Lai, “Up in the Balcony,” Chapter 1.

Such caricatures struggle to explain the vast support segregationists possessed in the 1950s. For Pete Daniel, segregation was popular precisely because “a timorous clergy avoided engagement, and indecisive white liberals were no match for ruthless segregationists.” He argued, “it is impossible to know how many whites would have traveled down the road to equal rights in the 1950s” had clergy and other liberal forces spoken out, and that their silence represents a “lost opportunity” for equal rights activism in the 1950s. Looking at clergy specifically, Daniel observed that “the flocks of laypeople did not always follow” their minister’s lead, but that many southerners, especially the young, endorsed *Brown* as correct. The vast groundswell of opposition that Logan, Braun, and countless other liberal white ministers faced, however, suggests that the deep-rooted nature of racial discrimination expanded beyond the lunatic fringe.⁷

Rather, the outcry surrounding Braun and Logan’s activism points toward segregationist thought’s deep roots. Even if theological arguments in favor of segregation had little support among seminarians and national church leaders, many churchgoers believed that racial separation was indeed God-ordained. Jane Dailey argues that many southern whites believed that God ordained racial purity and that Christian unity did not mean “that God intended the different races of men to inter-marry.” School integration, then, proved an explosive subject precisely because it offered opportunities for interracial youth mixing, which they feared would inevitably lead to miscegenation.⁸

Instead of cowardice or apathy, Braun and Logan’s activism highlighted both the promise behind the “lost opportunity” of clerical leadership and its ultimate improbability. As a success story during massive resistance’s heyday, Henderson’s school desegregation campaign rightly

⁷ Pete Daniel, *Lost Revolutions: The South in the 1950s* [Chapel Hill: UNC, 2000], 1-3, 180-185.

⁸ Jane Dailey, “Sex, Segregation, and the Sacred after Brown,” in *Journal of American History* 91 (June 2004), 119-144.

stands out as an example of the clerical leadership's potential, removing religious sanction from local segregationists and undercutting their movement. At the same time, the severe stress that both ministers experienced helps to explain why so few ministers converted this potential into concrete action.

Perhaps one reason why Logan and Braun acted on their moral convictions in Henderson was that they had a lifelong interest in civil rights issues, reaffirming Jacquelyn Dowd Hall's call for a "long civil rights movement" extending back to the New Deal "liberal and radical milieu," in contrast to classical histories that begin with *Brown*, Montgomery, or Greensboro.⁹ In 1938, a state senator threatened Logan after he had spoken at an African American youth conference in Central Kentucky. Specifically, the senator said that "if you sleep and eat with any more 'niggers', we shall run you out of town in six months." Logan's response was to give the senator "the best job of ecclesiastical cussing I was capable of rendering at the time." Despite the senator's threats, Logan managed to hold his pastorate there for two more years, even once dining with local black leaders in the local hotel's all-white dining room. After a string of other pastorates, he eventually became pastor of Henderson's First Presbyterian Church in September 1954 and president of the HMA a year later. His brashness made an impression on Braun, who recalled that Logan "was an inspiration because of his consciousness and prophetic livelihood. He would say things that I would be hesitant to say, way out there, in front of people."¹⁰

Thirty-some years younger than Logan, Braun grew up in a racially progressive household. Braun's father, who was also a pastor in the E&R church, frequently had black

⁹ Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, "The Long Civil Rights Movement and the Political Uses of the Past," in *Journal of American History* 91 (Mar. 2005), 1234-1235.

¹⁰ C. Sumpter Logan to Edward J. Odom, 4 May 1959, in the NAACP Papers, Part 24, Reel 11:435; "Rev. Logan Is Elected Head of Pastors' Group," *Henderson Gleaner and Journal*, 13 December 1955, 1; Braun, interview.

visitors over and was involved with integrating local denominational lay education conferences. Braun carried the progressive torch forward, becoming the chair of the Social Action Committee at Eden Seminary during his time there and joining the Fellowship of Reconciliation. According to Braun, his educational efforts also helped prepare the way for his future efforts. “Back in those days, it was customary for [pre-theological students] to major in philosophy,” he remembered, “and I was one of the early ones to major in sociology rather than philosophy, which made me rooted much more into social problems and so on.” After graduating from Eden Seminary in 1950, Braun took up an assistant pastorate in Chicago, but left there after the head pastor forbade that he make efforts to integrate the church with the growing African American population present. After spending two years at Yale doing graduate work, Braun became pastor of Zion E&R in Henderson in February 1953.¹¹

Located right across the Indiana state line, Henderson’s approach toward race relations reflected its border location. In her book on the local civil rights movement in Louisville, Tracy K’Meyer argues that the city’s “gateway” status between the South and Midwest shaped its attitude toward civil rights campaigns, proclaiming a progressive racial politics but still struggling with the “indivisible and pervasive” racism that manifested in struggles over open housing, truly integrated education, and the like. Like Louisville, Henderson also prided itself on its racial progressivism. According to Henderson resident Donald Banks, the city’s general approach toward school desegregation was basic compliance: “Now they didn’t go out and advertise for blacks to go to that school, and they didn’t encourage you to go to the school, but the doors were open if you wanted to come.” Banks theorized that one reason for Henderson’s

¹¹ Braun, interview; Catherine Fosl, *Subversive Southerner: Anne Braden and the Struggle for Racial Justice in the Cold War South* (2002 repr., Lexington: Kentucky, 2006), 222-223.

relatively liberal attitude was that, unlike in other cities, African Americans in Henderson were dispersed throughout the city, providing close contact.¹²

Despite the close contact, segregated customs still persisted in the 1950s. Public accommodations remained segregated and local custom dictated that African Americans had to go through the back door when visiting white people or establishments. Greater Norris Baptist Church pastor and fellow HMA member Austin Bell would make sure to follow that custom when visiting Braun. Braun “had to emphasize to him to come to our front door” because Bell feared “of what people might say.” Other black residents found the custom odious. Pierre Jackson, a high school student at the time, remembered that his mother had once heard that he went to a white establishment through the back door and, “in so many words she said if you go in again, I’ll knock your block off.” According to Jackson, black parents generally “encouraged their children to go to their own places.”¹³

School desegregation in Henderson had its own rocky beginning. In 1955, a biracial committee was formed to discuss school integration, eventually recommending that first-grade desegregation should occur for the 1956-1957 academic school year at the city level, leaving the county undetermined. However, in December, the school board received a petition claiming to represent “95 per cent of the colored patrons of the county school system” stating that the board set up a separate “first class school with adequate equipment and teachers of our own race,” rather than pursue integration at the county level. Specifically, the petition stated that “we are not sure that integration is the answer” because, as a minority, they would have limited control over

¹² Tracy K’Meyer, *Civil Rights in the Gateway to the South: Louisville, Kentucky, 1945-1980* (Lexington: Kentucky, 2009), 293; Donald Banks, interview by David C. Wolfford, 16 August 2002, interview 2002OH08.14, School Desegregation in Western Kentucky, Kentucky Oral History Collection, Kentucky Historical Society, Frankfort, KY.

¹³ Braun, interview, and Pierre Jackson, interview by David C. Wolfford, 16 August 2002, interview 2002OH08.15, School Desegregation in Western Kentucky, Kentucky Oral History Collection.

the educational process. James Clancy, president of the local NAACP chapter, objected because he had not been consulted for the petition and that it did not reflect the wishes of the city's African American community, which contained the vast majority of the county's black residents. In a private letter with Gloster B. Current, the NAACP director of branches, Clancy asserted that the school board orchestrated the petition as a ruse to limit integration efforts.¹⁴

While such a petition could well have been faked, its arguments are still striking regardless of their veracity. It is notable that the petition highlighted community control of education, as African American teachers all over the state suffered during the slow crawl toward an integrated school system. The request for a quality education over a specifically integrated one also highlights the search for self-determination that motivated many African American communities at the local level. A local principal told Austin Bell, who also served on the school committee, that "the teachers don't like it that you're trying to integrate the schools" because they feared that they would lose their jobs in the process. Anthony Brooks, who would follow Clancy as Henderson NAACP president and play a central role in leading local sit-in demonstrations, estimated that most of the black community was indifferent about integrated schools and that "it was not anything they would aggressively seek." Rather, their primary concern "was equal opportunity, which could have been done at Douglass [High School] if they had the... common curriculum and facility and staff."¹⁵

¹⁴ "Negroes Urge County Build Them A School," *Henderson Gleaner and Journal*, 13 December 1955, 1 and "NAACP Questions Backing of Petition," 18 December 1955, 1; James W. Clancy to Gloster B. Current, 17 December 1955, in NAACP Papers, Part 3, Series C, Reel 1.

¹⁵ Austin Bell, interview by George C. Wright and Terry L. Birdwhistell, 20 August 1985, Blacks in Kentucky Oral History Project, Louie B. Nunn Center for Oral History, University of Kentucky Libraries, Lexington, KY, and Anthony Brooks, interview by David C. Wolfford, 17 August 2002, interview 2002OH08.16, School Desegregation in Western Kentucky, Kentucky Oral History Collection. For a representative example in Louisville, see K'Meyer, *Civil Rights in the Gateway to the South*, 58-61, 252-255. While Louisville schools had desegregated peacefully in September 1956, black representation in white schools remained largely token by 1970, resulting in a new suit demanding a truly integrated system. One of the other complaints was the difficulty in integrating the teachers, as

Moreover, the Henderson NAACP branch was also struggling at this time, making it an uncertain representation of the entire community. The previous branch president had resigned, according to the NAACP regional secretary, because of his “fear that his reputation with the white people would be injured if he continued as president,” and by December 1955 the branch had only sixteen members—six who had signed up after the recent petition incident. According to Brooks, there was latent potential for the local chapter, “but because there was no offensive movement, it became more or less lackadaisical” during the 1950s.¹⁶

That being said, actual desegregation in early September 1956 started smoothly. African American first-graders, including James Clancy’s son, had peacefully desegregated Henderson’s Seventh, Central, and Jefferson Elementary, and Weaverton Elementary over in the county. Henderson’s peaceful process played out over a national backdrop of resistance emerging in Clay, Sturgis, Clinton, Tennessee, and Mansfield, Texas. Governor Chandler’s mobilization of the National Guard to protect the African American students at Sturgis and Clay was unsettling for local leaders. The *Henderson Gleaner and Journal* newspaper opined, “we question the use of force in carrying out the edict of a judicial body. We question the calling out of troops to act in a matter which might better be handled at the local level.”¹⁷ Like other moderate voices, the *Gleaner and Journal* supported desegregation but latched upon the idea of “deliberate speed” and a gradual transition period, emphasizing order over the moral call for immediate desegregation. In contrast, Logan praised Chandler’s “forthright courage and action,” observing “you did not do the easy task.”¹⁸

the school board set standards that disadvantaged African American applicants for the white teachers already employed.

¹⁶ Donald Jones to Current, 30 July 1955, in NAACP Papers, Part 3, Series C, Reel 1; Clancy to Current, 17 December 1955, and Brooks, interview.

¹⁷ “Tenting on the School Grounds,” *Henderson Gleaner and Journal*, 6 September 1956, 1.

¹⁸ Logan to A. B. Chandler, 12 September 1956, in the Albert. B. Chandler Papers, Box 280, University of Kentucky Libraries, Lexington, KY.

Braun decided to visit Sturgis on a fact-finding mission after violence broke out there, making sure to dress in “jeans, old clothes, so I could mingle with the crowd.” His camouflage allowed him to witness the mob’s “animal, raw hatred” as he watched them “catcalling, cursing, jeering, taunting” the schoolchildren. Dressing down may have been a needed precaution, as nearby Clay residents had warned visiting news reporters to stay away and “if you try to get up the hill to the school you may never get back.”¹⁹ After witnessing the mob firsthand, Braun visited with local black ministers and give them support and encouragement.

Braun’s active approach differed from Sturgis First Baptist Church pastor H. K. Sorrell, who avoided raising the issue in his Sunday sermon “because it would stir up already strong feelings” and “desegregation can’t be done by force.” In lieu of concrete action, Sorrell urged his congregation to pray for divine intervention in light of the now worldwide attention. Sorrell’s hopes that the problem would disappear did not mirror those of the African American congregants at Sturgis Missionary Baptist Church. L. W. Jackson, the pastor there, encouraged his congregation, “The law is God’s will and the people who disobey him will suffer.” Such words condemned the white demonstrators, not the African American students.²⁰

Returning to Henderson, Braun invited Logan to join him for another visit down to Sturgis, which would unwittingly transform them from observers into active participants. After police arrested the National Guard driver assigned to escort the students for running through a stop sign, Logan attended his trial and paid the man’s fifteen-dollar ticket. When Braun and Logan left the court, a white woman pointed to them and said “these white men paid his fine,” and the crowd began to mill around them. White pursuers tailed their car on their way home until

¹⁹ Braun, interview; “Newsmen Run Out of Clay By Irate Mob,” *Evansville Courier*, 8 September 1956.

²⁰ Forrest Black, “Quiet Congregation Prays For End To Racial Disturbance in Sturgis,” *Evansville Courier*, 10 September 1956, and Howard Hall, “Negroes Attend Church As Guard Patrols Streets,” *Evansville Courier*, 10 September 1956.

Logan accelerated to eighty miles an hour, eventually losing them. Braun recalled, “But who knows what would have happened otherwise if we hadn’t, they may have run us off, shot at us, or something.”²¹ Braun’s fears were not simply paranoid fantasies—several cars had also followed news reporter Ralph Smith out of town, attempting to drive him off the road.²²

Fierce opposition gave Sturgis and Clay’s school boards a reason to suspend desegregation, portending the stormy future awaiting Henderson’s campaign despite support from local officials. After helping organize segregationists in Sturgis and Clay, W. W. Waller, a prominent leader of the regional White Citizens’ Council (WCC) who lived in Morganfield (twenty-some miles away), announced a mass meeting in Henderson for 22 September with the stated purpose “to work for the removal of the Negro children at Weaverton school.” The WCC secured five hundred signatures for their petition, suggesting that similar sentiments existed among Henderson residents.²³

The Henderson Ministerial Association saw the WCC announcement as a call to arms. The HMA members represented seven denominations: Disciples of Christ, Episcopal, E&R (Braun), Methodist, Southern Baptist, Southern Presbyterian (Logan), and the Salvation Army, and had only recently become an interracial organization itself with Bell’s appointment. After meeting for several hours on 21 September, the HMA prepared a statement to be read at the mass meeting. It avoided endorsing *Brown*, even acknowledging that “some of the ministers here present do not agree with the high court’s decision.” Rather than making a purely moral appeal, they found unity in their desire for “Cool Heads Calm Emotions” and wisdom, and endorsed the school board’s plan as satisfactory for “the overwhelmingly large majority of our citizens’

²¹ Logan and Braun, “Who Bears the Cross?,” *Christian Century*, 10 October 1956, 1165; John Munger, “Clergymen Bail Out Negroes’ Chauffeur,” *Evansville Press*, 11 September 1956.

²² “Newscaster Reports Attempt To Halt Car,” *Evansville Press*, 11 September 1956.

²³ “Citizens Council Meeting Set For Tomorrow,” *Henderson Gleaner and Journal*, 21 September 1956, 1.

wishes in keeping with the Supreme Court's decision." However moderate the statement was, it ended with a broad plea for brotherhood and democracy, asserting that "the founding fathers envisioned a land in which no person would ever be disadvantaged because of his previous condition, or creed, or race."²⁴

Despite its moderate tone, the statement drew a hostile reaction from its intended audience. All thirteen HMA members attended Waller's mass meeting the next day, joining with the estimated 1800 who attended. As the ministerial association's president, Logan eventually gained control of the microphone. However, when he asked that "sanity prevail" and that "that there be no upheaval," a chorus of boos from the crowd drowned him out. Buoyed by the mass meeting, the segregationist boycott succeeded in driving down Weaverton Elementary enrollment from 863 down to 300 the following Monday, and 206 the day after (25 September).²⁵ However murky their statement's content, the mere action of issuing one marked the clergy as school desegregation supporters in opposition to the council.

The HMA were able to mobilize support for desegregation through both behind-the-scenes activity and through their status as ministers. In response to the low attendance rolls, Braun and Logan sent an invitation to the parents who defied the boycott to gather at Zion E&R for encouragement. At the two meetings on 25 and 27 September, parents who attended shared their reasons for continuing to send their children to school, followed by "cookies, coffee, fellowship time." The end result of the meetings was to build "solidarity of concern," even encouraging parents who were unable to attend. Whether because of these parent meetings or for other reasons, attendance increased from 206 to 267.

²⁴ Logan and Braun, "Henderson Pastors' Diary," *Christian Century*, 24 October 1956, 1230; "Complete Text of Ministerial Assn. Statement," *Henderson Gleaner and Journal*, 25 September 1956, 1.

²⁵ "'Action' Is Urged On Council," *Henderson Gleaner and Journal*, 23 September 1956, 1; Logan and Braun, "Henderson Pastor's Diary," 1230.

The surge of attendance was only one blow in the successful effort to break the boycott. On 28 September, state attorney general Jo M. Ferguson issued an opinion on the matter, stating that once a state school board commenced its desegregation plans, it “has no legal right, under the Supreme Court decision, to abandon these plans and assume the position occupied originally.” Furthermore, because boycotters were encouraging child truancy, they could be tried for conspiracy to violate Kentucky’s compulsory attendance law. Ferguson recalled that because “the school board had taken action to integrate, so I held that integration had happened in Henderson” – as opposed to Clay and Sturgis, where he had allowed the local school boards to halt desegregation efforts because there the state was trying to force desegregation. The threat of legal action, combined with the popular support that the ministerial association rallied, was enough for the segregationists to call off the boycott and seek legal alternatives instead, such as establishing private white-only schools. Logan commented that while he still opposed the WCC’s stated purpose of halting desegregation, “he was 100 per cent behind their proposal to seek legal remedies.” By 10 October, attendance had returned to about 670 at Weaverton Elementary.²⁶

The HMA’s endorsement of school desegregation also claimed the moral high ground away from the segregationists, who then made considerable efforts to reclaim it. Braun and Logan relied heavily upon Scripture to defend desegregation, with mixed success despite Braun’s seminary training focusing on the Old Testament prophets and graduate work at Yale in Christian Ethics amply equipping him for the task. Making his case in the *Gleaner and Journal*, Braun argued that racial prejudice, far from being divinely ordained, was spiritually rooted in pride, fear, greed, and hate—making it “first of all a spiritual problem, one which the Bible has

²⁶ Ferguson, OAG No. 38,978, 28 September 1956; Ferguson interview by Bonnet Productions, 12 July 1990, Henderson County Public Library; “Leaders Meet, Decide to Turn to Legal Means,” *Henderson Gleaner and Journal*, 29 September 1956, 1 and “Enrollment Near Level as Boycott Of Schools Fades,” 11 October 1956, 1.

much to say.” Specifically, the Bible “tells us that every man is created in the image of God (Gen 1.27). It says that every body is the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 6.19),” and this applies to “the whole scope of human relations, and every sin of inequality, whether it be economic, political, or social.” Therefore, he concluded, “if Jesus gave his life for” both white and black, “then we can do no less that [sic] show the same Christian love for each other.” Braun’s editorials communicated his own longstanding religious commitment toward racial reconciliation, presenting it as the only obvious Christian answer. During the boycott, the HMA spread these views through both local radio and through *Gleaner and Journal* ads, as both the radio station owner and newspaper publisher were First Presbyterian Church members.²⁷

Braun and Logan’s public reports over their Sturgis visit sought to build sympathy for desegregation by juxtaposing the mob’s virulent hostility with local blacks’ calm courage. In a joint editorial for the *Gleaner and Journal*, the ministers claimed that the crowd, “by their behavior and language (but not by their looks), we would have classed them as non-Christians.” In contrast, they found the local black community “remarkably devoid of any bitterness and hatred.” Their commitment to nonviolence provided hope for an eventual solution to be worked out in a later time, when “all sides of the controversy strive to discover the Christian solution.” Their article about Sturgis in the *Christian Century* presented a more polarized picture. While Braun and Logan detailed the mob’s rough handling of themselves and of the black schoolchildren, they also claimed that the local African American community displayed a “calm Christian courage stemming from faith, hope, and love grounded in Jesus Christ, which has given them genuine self-respect. They know God will not let them down.” While the *Gleaner and Journal* article suggested that responsibility lay with all parties, the ministers declared in the

²⁷ Braun, “The Problem of Race Relations Lies In Lap Of Christian Church,” *Henderson Gleaner and Journal*, 16 June 1957, 6, Braun, interview.

Christian Century that local blacks “cannot transform the white community without its help. What can transform it until the cross has been borne and endured, and Christ’s power has been released through the cross and the resurrection which follows it?”²⁸ If all sides needed to display Christian behavior to produce an ideal solution, in reality only the black community was doing its part to achieve such an end.

Several local residents expressed their support for the ministers, but they were a distinct minority. The Western Kentucky school desegregation cases proved a hot topic in local newspapers’ opinion sections, so much so that the *Gleaner and Journal* eventually announced that it would halt publishing letters to the editor on “racial problems, integration, segregation, etc.” because they would “merely repeat and repeat the themes and ideas already so thoroughly explored.” Some of these letters firmly endorsed integration on moral and theological grounds. A self-proclaimed former KKK leader wondered if segregationists imagined that Heaven would reflect their segregated biases and that denying equal rights to blacks seemed to him “to be a poor brand of Americanism.” Another praised the HMA specifically for its public stance and accused “outside agitators” for organizing the local WCC despite the lack of popular support. “The Bible says to love your neighbor,” one letter read. “It doesn’t specify your neighbor has to be a certain color.” Such statements provided an apt summary of Braun’s argument.²⁹

Many other residents took to the editorial page to renounce the ministers’ antisegregationist Christian views as anathema to their cultural values. One Henderson resident noted that desegregating schools would inevitably lead to integration elsewhere, and “I am quite sure” that those who advocated desegregation would not “open their homes to the Negro

²⁸ Logan and Braun, “Who Bears the Cross?,” 1165; “The Ministers Viewpoint,” *Henderson Gleaner and Journal*, 12 September 1956, 4.

²⁹ “Love Everybody,” *Evansville Press*, 23 September 1956; “About Segregation,” *Evansville Press*, 30 September 1956; “Cheers for Ministers,” *Henderson Gleaner and Journal*, 30 September 1956; “Regarding Forum Letters,” *Henderson Gleaner and Journal*, 9 October 1956.

children” that they want to see in integrated school settings. W. H. Dunagan, a sixty-year old Clay resident, saw distinct parallels between the HMA’s “intemperate” endorsement of *Brown* as “the law of the land” and “the way Russia is governed.” Others, such as “A Southern Presbyterian,” asserted that segregation was an amoral issue that had “nothing to do with Christianity,” and “that it is un-Christian, unrealistic, and utterly foolish to force those barriers of race which have been established by God and which when destroyed by man are destroyed to his own loss.” P. A. Smith, a self-described “hot segregationist,” defended his right to have a differing theological interpretation than the ministers because “anybody can sit down and read the Bible a dozen different times and each time you can get twelve different meanings,” which “is why there are so many different religions today.”³⁰ These accusations, variously calling the ministers hypocritical, Communist, uninformed, or simply different, reflected the vast popularity that segregationist theology had among everyday residents.

The hot debate in the editorial pages reflected the contested nature and vast significance that ministerial support held for local citizens. Logan’s expressed support for desegregation at the initial 22 September WCC mass meeting surprised W. W. Waller, who retook the stage to emphasize his own Christian background and assert that “in my own mind I don’t think it’s wrong” to seek segregation. The WCC also took pains to make sure its next mass meeting on 25 September would have religious sanction. According to Braun and Logan, the WCC “imported” outside clergy for the situation after it found out that “the local talent was undependable.” They found Rev. Don Weaver, pastor of an independent church in nearby Geneva, Ky., and Brother Fred Stroud of the Bible Presbyterian Church in Nashville, who gave the invocation and benediction at the meeting, praying against the HMA’s involvement and claiming that the

³⁰ “100 Per Cent for Segregation,” *Evansville Courier*, 13 September 1956; “Force is Unnatural,” *Henderson Gleaner and Journal*, 28 September 1956; “The Other Side,” *Evansville Press*, 30 September 1956; “Read Your Bible, I’ll Read Mine,” *Evansville Courier*, 7 October 1956.

desegregationists “didn’t use God’s wisdom.” Local WCC leader Rayburn Sugg tried a different tack, declaring at a 28 September rally that he had met with the HMA and that as a result “the ministers have gotten off our back,” reducing their radio and print ads. Logan denied such a claim, observing that the WCC wanted the HMA “on their side,” and “they will use any methods, legal or not, to gain their ends.”³¹ The WCC’s repeated attempts to undermine the HMA suggests that they saw local ministers like Braun and Logan as obstacles toward their goal.

For the ministers, placing themselves in the segregationist tornado’s path meant risking not only their careers but their very lives and their churches’ wellbeing. Many of the white HMA members withdrew after they “got scared because of the pressure” from hostile congregation members over the matter, and soon only Logan, Braun, and the African American ministers remained with the association.³² The pressures they experienced were typical for many white ministers speaking out at this time. In their study on Little Rock religious leaders following the September 1957 school desegregation campaign there, sociologists Ernest Q. Campbell and William T. Pettigrew coined the term “role conflict” to describe the pastor’s dilemma between adhering to his prophetic call to support civil rights locally and his priestly duties to shepherd his congregation’s spiritual growth. The latter was particularly strong because a minister’s professional training taught him to “rest the case for his personal competence on the responses people make to his ministry,” making him remarkably unequipped to handle disagreements from his congregation.³³ Even though many white southern ministers shared Braun’s theological

³¹ “Integration Problem Moves Into Henderson,” *Evansville Courier*, 23 September 1956; Forrest Black, “Harsh Words Net \$500 For Council,” *Evansville Courier*, 26 September 1956; “Rally Held Near School,” *Evansville Press*, 28 September 1956; Braun and Logan, “Henderson Pastors’ Diary,” 1231.

³² Braun, interview.

³³ Campbell and Pettigrew, *Christians in Racial Crisis: A Study of Little Rock’s Ministry* (Washington D.C., Public Affairs, 1959), 119-120; and Braun, interview by author, 19 March 2013. For more on Campbell and Pettigrew’s work, see Lai, “Up in the Balcony,” M.A. thesis, Chapter 4.

convictions that Christian brotherhood extended toward all races, their dual responsibilities made it difficult for them to fully endorse local civil rights efforts.

Unhappy congregants also affected Braun and Logan. Zion E&R's church council had already expressed reservations about Braun's investment in race relations because such activities took away from church business. Specifically, council members criticized his "being away too much of the year" attending various conferences—some on race—and demanded that Braun first receive their approval before attending future conferences. For his part, Braun explained that such conferences were necessary for his pastoral growth, and the race relations conference he was attending "will be of invaluable help to us particularly in Henderson where we're on the frontier, as it were, of integration and desegregation."³⁴

Such pressure only increased when the WCC arrived. Following Logan's sermon on 23 September, which alluded to the segregationist boycott, a First Presbyterian member came up to Logan and requested that "he give no more 'nigger lectures' from the pulpit." Braun also gave a sermon around this time, stating that if anyone causes these little schoolchildren to miss a chance at a quality education, it would be better for them if a large stone were hung around their neck and they were thrown into the Ohio River (cf. Mark 9:42). After that sermon, one of his congregation members demanded a congregational meeting because "I've had some complaints about our pastor's behavior this past week. Let's talk about it." The meeting gave the chance for a few of Braun's supporters to claim the floor, stating that the minister was "doing exactly what he should be doing." Still, attendance declined from about 82 members per week average in 1955 to about 73 members per week in 1957.³⁵

³⁴Braun to Friends, 1 August 1956, Zion UCC Papers; Zion E&R Church Council Meeting Notes, August 1956, Zion UCC Papers.

³⁵ Logan and Braun, "Henderson Pastors' Diary," 1230; Braun, interview; "Zion Attendance, 10 Years," 1949-1958, Zion UCC Papers.

While other pastors shied away from internal conflict, both Logan and Braun defended their prophetic witness through their “given authority by virtue of our positions.” After the start of the boycott, his church organist walked out of the church after playing the anthem, protesting Braun’s anti-segregation stance by skipping his sermon. This continued for about six weeks, until she baked a pecan pie as an apology and returned. A decade later, Braun ran into several Henderson residents, who thanked him for being an “inspiration” to them during that time. The takeaway for Braun was that conflict could bring about surprising results, as “you never know what the impact of an example will be.”

Such disagreements could even help nudge the congregation toward sharing the minister’s prophetic impulses. In a later interview, Braun claimed to be largely immune from the desire to measure success by the size of one’s congregation. He instead suggested that a church should be “living the future as if it was already present,” adopting God’s values of love and justice. Using his 1970s pastorate in Carbondale, Illinois, as an example, Braun observed that the more conservative elements of the church, upset that Braun was visiting political prisoners held at nearby Marion, left the church after Braun refused to do so. Although the departing members took with them most of the church’s financial base, their departure “liberated us to be more overt and more up-front about everything.” While the church did not match its neighbors in donations, it reflected its pastor’s commitment to social justice causes and living authentic Christian lives.³⁶

Braun’s increasing celebrity also likely helped his Henderson pastorate tolerate his progressive views. Braun was catapulted into the national eye because of the national press that Henderson’s desegregation campaign received. The October 1956 church minutes reported that

³⁶ Braun, interview. Braun also stated that “one thing the pastor can do [to mobilize church activism] is to give support to that element of the church, and vice versa.” His pastorate at Henderson, which became Zion United Church of Christ after a denominational merger, also stands as evidence that supports Braun’s view. In the early 1990s, the church was the first in Henderson to declare support for LGBT rights, becoming an Open and Affirming church—a highly controversial move at the time that resulted in several members leaving.

Braun received an invitation to the Commission of Christian Social Action, proudly noting that he was “the youngest person to be elected to serve in that capacity.” The next month, the seven attending members of the council approved, with only one dissent, publishing support letters that the church had received in the church newsletter so that congregants “would know how other people felt toward the Minister and toward integration.”³⁷ The meeting minutes suggest that the church understood that having a famous pastor would boost the church’s own profile, even if not all congregants agreed with his views.

For his own part, Braun made sure not to go out of his way to antagonize his church members. In October 1957, Braun was invited to participate in a special edition of the NBC Today Show focusing on desegregation. While the church was supportive, it was also worried that Braun would disparage either them or the town on the interview. As a result, Braun focused less on Henderson’s case specifically and discussed “mainly the reasons why I was for integration, the Biblical reasons, faith reasons, and so on.” His congregation was “quite relieved” at his decision to not air the city’s dirty laundry on the nationally broadcast program, suggesting the multiple obligations that Braun and his congregation had toward each other.³⁸ Despite a few bumps, Braun was able to use his conviction and celebrity to retain a majority of support from his pastorate. Thus, when Braun left Henderson in January 1958 to pursue student ministry at Pennsylvania State University, he was able to do so on his own terms.³⁹

While the dissent within Braun’s church was manageable, Logan did not have nearly so lucky a fate. According to Braun, First Presbyterian members expected that Logan “would be for segregation, a Southern Presbyterian church,” but his progressive values proved too

³⁷ Zion E&R Church Council Meeting Notes, 3 October 1956 and 6 November 1956, Zion UCC Papers.

³⁸ Braun, interview.

³⁹ According to Braun, he left Henderson because he “felt this was that time. And I had just had the feeling that a new pastor could build upon what I had done and move on. I don’t know how to put that more in definite words. It was a feeling.” Braun, interview.

controversial. In its 1960 church history, First Presbyterian lavished praise upon each of the pastors and significant religious figures who shepherded it throughout its sixty-seven years. The only exception was the Reverend C. Sumpter Logan, of which the history merely mentioned his arrival in September 1954 and the 19 May 1957 congregational meeting where he resigned without explanation. The silence surrounding Logan's term suggests that it remained a sore and touchy subject for too many of its members only a few years after his resignation.

Both Braun and Logan confirmed that Logan left First Presbyterian on uncomfortable terms. The *Gleaner and Journal* – whose editor attended Logan's church – reported on the church's farewell party for the Logans, mentioning that the congregation had purchased the Logans a new blue Chevrolet for their appreciation. In Braun's eyes, the car was a "guilt offering" over the injustice surrounding his resignation. Logan also viewed his resignation as forced, and that he would have had to leave even sooner "if I had not been bawn-and-bred [sic] in the deep South." While Logan wanted to stay in the South rather than move to far-off Ogden, Utah, he admitted that "my name is mud" in the region because of his public role during the Henderson desegregation campaign.⁴⁰

Furthermore, both ministers also realized that speaking out meant them public targets, and both received hate mail at home as a result. At about midnight on 12 September, the Brauns prepared their car for the drive to Evansville for the birth of their first daughter when the chief of police showed up to make sure it was the Brauns and not some saboteur. Fearing mischief from local segregationists, the police chief had staked out their house "for the last week or so, thinking it might be bombed or something." That such precautions were necessary highlights both the

⁴⁰ "Presbyterians Bid Logans Farewell," *Henderson Gleaner and Journal*, 13 June 1957. Braun, interview; Logan to Odom, 4 May 1959.

potential for mischief as well as the unusual support from law enforcement, in stark contrast to many other civil rights narratives.⁴¹

Other threats were more ominous. Logan later admitted that he “had been threatened with death” right before the 29 September meeting where WCC leaders called off the boycott, and that that such threats “came thick and fast to me. Once it was tried and failed. And I’m not a brave man. And I had two in college, too.” Braun’s wife Donna remembered that during this time, she would always be “relieved, greatly relieved” to see her husband come back home at night safe and sound.⁴² Braun’s metaphor of a tornado to describe the crisis atmosphere seem apt when considering the congregational dissent, community opposition, and even the threat of physical danger he and Logan experienced in Henderson.

That tornado was one that ministers in other Southern communities recognized brewing from far away. Colbert S. Cartwright’s recommendation to band together not only proved to be a false view of life in Henderson but also failed to mobilize local ministers in Little Rock during the September 1957 Central High School crisis. Much like Braun and Logan, Cartwright experienced community censure, internal congregational dissent, and harassing phone calls that left him drained and feeling lost. Cartwright later confessed, “I tend toward despair in the church, despair of white persons generally having any effect in the area of radical change.”⁴³ Opposing the tornado meant putting one’s wellbeing in almost certain jeopardy for only a nebulous chance at achieving concrete change.

Yet Braun and Logan’s intervention, however costly, points toward a different lesson: ministers could bring about change and influence the situation in direct and indirect ways. Local

⁴¹ Braun, interview.

⁴² Logan and Braun, “Henderson Pastors’ Diary;” Logan to Odom, 4 May 1959; Braun, interview.

⁴³ Colbert S. Cartwright, quoted in Eleanor Humes Haney, “A Study of Conscience As It Is Expressed in Race Relations,” (Ph.D. dissertation, Yale, 1965), 136.

segregationists at the time recognized that the church's sanction was important, and the WCC tried its best to mitigate the HMA's influence. The HMA's behind-the-scenes work also helped mobilize other sympathetic residents to brave the crowd and continue to put their children into a controversial atmosphere. Had Logan and Braun stayed silent, it is possible that Henderson local officials could have given in to segregationist demands. For Braun and Logan, it was their deep moral convictions that grounded their involvement, believing that God called them to live prophetic lives in the midst of a broken world. Their intervention affirms Pete Daniel's claim that churches "offered the best hope for easing the transition from segregation."

At the same time, the hostile circumstances Logan and Braun faced suggest why so few clergy joined them in heeding the prophetic call to challenge a Jim Crow culture that was generally accepted. Effective action not only required a sincere heart for social justice, but particular courage in acting on one's convictions. More than condemning the many who offered only token support, one should also marvel at the Reverend Logans and Brauns who took such bold stances anyway. Looking at just how heavy the burden was not only helps to explain why exactly such a revolution was lost then, but also why the church continues to struggle with similar prophetic calls today.

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