“For Segregationists Only”:

Using music as a means of understanding both white and black opposition to the desegregation of the education system in the United States.
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Introduction

In 1970 Reb Rebel Records, based in Crowley Louisiana, released their only extended LP. Produced by J.D. Miller, famous for writing such country music classics as ‘it wasn’t God who made Honky Tonk Angels’, this compilation of Reb Rebel recordings made in the 1960s is distinguished by its fiercely segregationist ideology. With such tracks as Johnny Rebel’s ‘Nigger ain’t dead he just smells that way’ and the Coon Hunters ‘We don’t want niggers in our schools’ (Appendix 1), the album is a musical record of the deep seated racism provoked by the phenomenal societal changes that occurred in civil rights America. In 1973, Duke Records of Texas released the Greer Brothers anthemic ‘We don’t dig no busing (the busing song)’ (Appendix 2), a rousing retort to the seminal Supreme Court ruling Swann vs. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Board of Education (1971), demonstrating the anxiety and opposition to civil rights reforms amongst members of the African American community. These two tracks, from very different social and cultural locations, will be central in understanding both black and white opposition to desegregation of the education system in the United States.

Music has now become synonymous with the civil rights movement. Music as a means to both implicitly and explicitly characterise the struggle for racial equality became, and remains, a powerful tool in expressing the regret, anger and longing for a more racially tolerant American society. It was the 1960s that provided this expression so forcefully, with songs such as Bob Dylan’s ‘Oxford Town’ (1963), Phil Ochs ‘the Ballad of Oxford (Jimmy Meredith)’ (1963) and Nina Simone’s ‘Mississippi Goddam’ (1964), to name a few, that helped capture the public’s imagination and
propel commercial and popular music to the heart of the struggle for civil rights. The legacy of this cannot be underestimated, as it inspired future generations of artists such as Neil Young (*Southern Man* 1970), Gill Scott Heron (*The revolution will not be televised* 1970), Public Enemy (*Fight the Power* 1989) and NWA (*Fuck tha Police* 1988) to use music as a means of commercial protest. This is what we know about the music of the civil rights movement. What we do not know, and what this thesis will address, is firstly the importance of an earthy, localised and vernacular music culture in understanding opposition to civil rights, and secondly, the importance of white segregationist music, almost completely ignored in the academic literature. This music is emblematic of a counter musical and cultural narrative that has so far been ignored in the academic literature.

Within the historiography of the civil rights movement, music has come to be accepted as playing a crucial part in our understanding of the seminal societal changes that arose with the civil rights movement in the United States. However, despite this acceptance, there is an obvious lacuna in literature. Whist almost all the attention academically has been paid to the music of the civil rights movement; very little attention has been dedicated to investigating how we can use music as a means to understanding opposition to the civil rights movement. In a conversation with Duck Baker, internationally acclaimed finger style guitarist, and an expert on American musical traditions, Baker suggested that the segregationist music of the South was ‘known to those in the field, but everyone deliberately stays away from it’.¹ This is a telling insight. Although some of the music presented in this dissertation is difficult to listen to, it does not mean that they are not important historical artefacts worthy of discussion. Therefore, in this dissertation, I will try and remedy this by exploring the

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¹ Duck Baker interview at Harris Manchester College, Oxford University (2nd December 2010).
music of both white and black resisters to civil rights legislation. I will focus specifically on the desegregation of the education system by focusing much of my attention on the white and black response to Brown vs. the Board of Education (1954) that mandated the desegregation of the United States school system, and Swann vs. Charlotte Mecklenburg (1971), which supported controversial ‘busing’ legislation.

In this dissertation I will use the musical evidence offered to demonstrate how music can provide an extraordinary insight into the minds of those who resisted desegregation legislation. I will assert that the evidence presented in this paper will force us to rethink not only the cultural, musical and educational narrative of the civil rights movement, but our periodisation of it. Although Brown vs. the Board of Education (1954) is a significant political landmark, and as I will argue, a cultural landmark, we must not just start the desegregation literature with Brown. Rather than focus on an episodic narrative, opposition to integration must be seen in continuous terms. When I explore the black opposition to desegregation legislation, I will demonstrate that the opposition started long before Brown vs. the Board of Education, and where the opposition exists there is a thematic, as well as a vernacular, continuity to the process and ideas of racial desegregation of the education system. Of further significance is the nature of the musical challenge. Within music, most notably the blues explosions of the 1960s and the emergence of such artists as James Brown, it is of significant debate how involved these artists were in the emerging and developing civil rights struggle, and if they were, such musical opposition was implicit rather than explicit. This is not the same for the strong musical and vernacular approach to emerge from the segregationists. The music and the arguments are explicit,
uncompromising, and, in the case of the white segregationist challenge, relentless in its fiercely ideological racial position.

In order to meet these challenges, I will have to achieve three primary objectives: Firstly, to offer an account of how the music was appropriated by the artists who felt compelled enough to offer their opposition to desegregation through music. Here I will claim that the musical decisions made were not accidental, but self-conscious, and that the songwriters and producers were very much aware of music as a vehicle for disseminating their political message or segregationist ideology. Secondly, and following on from the first objective, I will make an important distinction between ‘vernacular’ and ‘traditional’ musical forms, and demonstrate how both white and black resisters very deliberately drew upon a vernacular musical approach to best communicate with their audiences, rejecting the self consciously ‘traditional’ approach of the folk revival of the 1960s, and the African spirituals that dominated the black civil rights marches. And thirdly, I will suggest that the music offered in this dissertation, rather than standing independently, can offer a continuity of opposition to desegregation that can be traced back before, and beyond, the landmark Supreme Court ruling Brown vs. the Board of Education (1954), and also demonstrate a convergence of interest by these seemingly disparate groups. Before addressing the above objectives in greater detail though, it is first important to discuss the existing literature and why a discussion about resistance to desegregation is, firstly, necessary, and why music is an important source for historical discussion and evaluation.

Despite the great deal of literature dedicated Brown vs. the Board of Education and the drive towards desegregation, there is very little discussion, relatively, on the
resistance movement and the opposition to the integration of America’s education system. The greatest contemporary attempt to try and understand what came to be known as ‘massive resistance’ are George Lewis’ scholarly *Massive Resistance: The White Response to the Civil Rights Movement* (2006) and *The White South and the Red Menace: Segregationists, Anticommunism and Massive Resistance* (2004). In these texts, Lewis demonstrates that ‘massive resistance’, rather than being a simple phrase, is in fact a ‘complex historical phenomenon’.² Lewis convincingly argues that to perceive white resisters as ‘monolithic, one-dimensional reactionaries possessing little guile and even less intelligence’³ demonstrates the intellectual laziness, or complete lack of interest, paid by scholars analysing opposition to the civil rights movement. What Lewis identifies as striking is that despite the initial interest in the concept of ‘massive resistance’, very little scholarly attention has been given to understanding what white southern resistance actually was. The publication of Numan V. Bartley’s *The Rise of Massive Resistance: Race and Politics in the South during the 1950s* in 1969 was the first significant attempt to analyse the phenomenon of white opposition to racial change in the south. Since this publication, Lewis suggests that for all the review articles on civil rights historiography ‘that run to twenty or thirty pages, readers can find a maximum of four books that deal exclusively with white segregationists’.⁴

If it is the case that the segregationist challenge to civil rights has been largely ignored, it is important to understand why this is. Lewis argues that,

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³ Ibid, p.4.
This great historical oversight may well be the result of the “great sympathy for the black freedom struggle” that many historians have brought to their work. Indeed, many of movement’s earliest historians were also participants in the African American freedom struggle, a factor that, if not impacting their analysis, certainly affected their choice of subject.⁵

There are two great consequences to this neglect, however understandable. One, an important social and political movement has not been readily recognised in the historiography, leaving a rather incomplete picture. And secondly, and more damningly, as William D Workman has argued, by largely ignoring the white segregationist response, historians have oversimplified the ‘complexities’ of the white resistance. However, more broadly within the civil rights historiography, this is beginning to change. A new generation of authors are trying to understand the complexities of the civil rights movement, moving beyond a top down leadership approach, and trying to analyse the significance of the dynamics of community responses and leadership⁶. George Lewis also developed this approach in his two significant texts on white Resistance. Lewis argues that white resistance encompassed a ‘diverse array of ploys and strategies’ and although this may have been driven at times by ‘neo-bourbon’ elites’, equally there were times when grassroots segregationists shaped the opposition agenda.⁷

Importantly, there appears to be a similar movement in shaping our understanding of music in the twentieth century, as historians and cultural commentators have began to readdress the value in only examining those artists who have been commercially successful. In the 1970s David Lee Roth commented that ‘rock critics like Elvis Costello because rock critics look like Elvis Costello’. What Roth was arguing was

⁵ Ibid, p.2.
⁶ This approach is most recently espoused in Stephen Tuck’s 2010 We Ain’t What We Ought To Be.
that ‘elitist’ critics were shaping the musical landscape. In his 2009 book, *How the Beatles Destroyed Rock ‘N’ Roll*, Elijah Wald argues that although history is usually written by the victors, in music history this is vary rarely true. He suggests that the history of music is artificially shaped by elitist critics, who revere certain artists but ignore others, no matter how commercially successful they might be. This same criticism can be applied to the academic study of the music of the civil rights movement. Many authors focus on particular artists while ignoring other important contributions. This is understandable. When Paul Oliver presented the world with ‘Blues Fell This Morning’ it was a seminal achievement, and fundamental in opening music up as a genuine academic resource for historians. However, because this scholarship emanated from Oliver’s deep affection for the music, and later the singer/songwriters who he could claim as friends, it may not have influenced his analysis, but it at the very least affected his decision making. Another important academic, Brian Ward, has also been crucial in demonstrating the importance of music, the recording artists and the means of disseminating these to the study of civil rights. In *Just My Soul Responding (1998)* Ward examines the contributions of James Brown, Berry Gordy, Aretha Franklin and Sam Cooke in the organised Black struggle for civil rights. It is an important and essential work. However, it again focuses on those artists who were dominant in the popular mainstream. In the same way that the historiography on civil rights is dominated by those who have ‘great sympathy’ for the black freedom struggle, the analysis of music is much centred on those artists that that the author is most excited by.

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Therefore, in this dissertation, I will aim to redress this balance and offer an overview of the music that has so far been almost entirely ignored in the academic literature. If Lewis’s attempts to help fill this vacuum in our understanding of the white resistance is important; and if it is generally accepted that music is an important historical tool in understanding the civil rights movement, then surely it is time to begin to analyse the music of those who opposed desegregation in order to more fully appreciate the dynamics of resistance to civil rights? Although much has been written on the music of the civil rights movement, whether it be Pete Seeger and Bob Reiser in their *Everybody Says Freedom: A history of the Civil Rights Movement in Song and Pictures*, Guy and Candie Carawan’s *Sing for Freedom: The Story of the Civil Rights Movement through Its Songs* or Kerran L Sanger’s masterly *When the Spirit Says Sing: The Role of Freedom Songs in the Civil Rights Movement*, these examinations exclusively focus on the music that accompanied those protesters in support of the Civil Rights Movement.

Where Lewis could only identify four texts exclusively dealing with White Resistance in the academic literature, the music of the White Resistance appears to have no books dealing exclusively with the topic. The most significant reference appears in Tony Russell’s seminal ‘*Blacks, Whites and Blues*’ (1970), but apart from specialist texts more concerned with Cajun music, or the music and musicians of Louisiana, very little is made of what has to be considered an important historical source in understanding opposition to the civil rights movement. Although an analysis of the gospel and spirituals that influenced the freedom songs sung in Selma and Birmingham are important; or the importance of the protest songs of Bob Dylan and the folk revival movement, a focus on these demonstrates a symptomatic of a way of
looking at the commercial, popular, or ideologically appealing elements of music in America in the 20th century, while obscuring other important musical and historical dynamics.

If we are to use music as a tool for historical examination and except the consensus that music plays a vital role in aiding our historical appreciation of the civil rights movement, then we must explain why music is an important historical tool. There appears to be an obvious correlation between music and society, and as such, this makes music an invaluable resource for the historian in the exploration of historical attitudes and themes. Music, as both a written, and since the development recording technology, vocal and melodic expression, offers an unparalleled access into the lives and attitudes of those people who felt compelled enough to document their experiences in this form. Hughson F. Mooney articulated this best when writing about Tin Pan Alley in his article, “Songs, Singers and Society, 1890-1954”. He commented that:

Tin Pan Alley has responded to the revealed emotional shifts of its public. As might be expected in an industrial society, trends have been exploited by super salesman and modified by technology, but their ultimate course has been shaped by public demand. Sheet music and phonograph records are among the few artefacts that afford insight into the inarticulate Americans of the twentieth century.9

This quotes analysis that music affords insights ‘into the inarticulate Americans of the twentieth century’ reveals two important themes. Firstly, that although the study of high politics, meaning, the study of institutions and those who operate and influence the levers of power, is important for historical understanding, and is fairly accessible in terms of sources and documents, music allows penetrating intellectual insights to

those people who are often ignored in the academic literature. It is very rare to witness a Tom Paine, Charles Dickens or Hogarth, who can capture for posterity the experiences of the lower socio-economic classes. Music can arguably do this better than just about any other historical medium. And secondly, that although the songwriter and performer is capturing the experience of the moment on record or music manuscript, the “inarticulate listener” is able to articulate themselves via the means of consumerism, as record sales are an invaluable indicator of social attitudes and behaviours.

In this thesis, I will present two chapters; ‘We don’t dig no busing’ that will explore the black resistance to desegregation and ‘We don’t want niggers in our schools’, which will analyse the white resistance to desegregation. In this first chapter I will begin by exploring how music was appropriated by the artists who performed the songs. Although in many cases the music developed spontaneously, there was also a great deal of collaboration and debate in deciding to use African spirituals and other traditional forms on the major protests such as Selma, Alabama. This provides an invaluable insight into the internal debate of the protesters and how they made their musical decisions. Secondly I will demonstrate how the use of a vernacular musical language that was employed by black resisters to desegregation was very different to the self consciously traditional musical forms adopted by African American civil rights protesters. And thirdly, I will again use music as means of exploring a seemingly difficult paradox: Why did many African Americans oppose desegregation measures in Brown vs. the Board of Education and Swann vs. Charlotte Mecklenburg? By using archival evidence collected in Berea Kentucky, I will explore the complex relationship between desegregation and black Americans.
In chapter two, ‘We don’t want niggers in our schools’, I will begin by examining the segregationist music that was recorded in Crawley Louisiana in the 1960s. Using the song ‘we don’t want niggers in our schools’, I will explore white opposition to the seminal Supreme Court ruling *Brown vs. the Board of Education* (1954). I will firstly demonstrate how the music was appropriated by the artists and producers involved, providing an analysis of how country music went from being considered a relatively apolitical musical genre to becoming politically engaged with the tremendous societal changes in the 1960s. Secondly, I will demonstrate that we can understand how the music developed by those in opposition as they deliberately moved away from the ‘self consciously’ traditional music of the folk revival, to use more vernacular music formats to engage with their chosen audiences. In doing this, I will develop a conceptual argument that distinguishes between the traditional musical forms vernacular musical forms. I will compare these artists with prominent revivalists Bob Dylan and Phil Ochs who both wrote on the subject of desegregation. And thirdly, I will demonstrate the complex relationship between desegregation and the segregationists. By using archival material collected in Berea Kentucky, I will demonstrate what Lewis has tried to achieve, that the listeners of this music are not unintelligent racists, but representatives of a much more complex political, historical, cultural and importantly, religious dynamic.
Chapter One: “We Don’t Dig No Busing” – Black resistance to desegregation

Twenty-five miles at morning and twenty-five miles at night,  
Mamma’s fussing and Daddy’s cussing, busing just ain’t right.  
We don’t dig no buses.  
The Greer Brothers, We don’t dig no busing (the busing song)\textsuperscript{10}

After nearly twenty years of Brown vs. the Board of Education, many of the school systems in the United States continued to ignore the problem racial segregation, or at the very least only made token gestures towards an active policy of desegregation. As a result, the controversial scheme of busing, whereby both black and white children would be ‘bused’ into each other’s neighbourhoods. In the landmark decision Swann vs. Charlotte-Mecklenburg, the Supreme Court ruled in favour of such measures to finally force greater patterns of racial integration. Of course such measures were met with a great deal of hostility from the segregationists. One historian has argued,

Put simply, the segregationists opposed busing because it had significantly reduced school segregation and for the first time brought thousands of poor black children the advantages of middle class white schools\textsuperscript{11}.

However, it was not just white parents and students who opposed these controversial measures. In the Greer Brothers ‘We don’t dig no busing’, we can get a sense of the anger and frustration of black Americans and their response to the Supreme Court’s ruling. In this chapter, I will start by exploring the importance of music in understanding the African American response to the civil rights movement. The music of the civil rights movement has provided us with one of history’s most iconic soundtracks, but the decisions made and how the songs would be used were not uncontroversial, and help us in determining a growing black opposition to some of the landmark changes of the civil rights movement. I will also again draw on the distinction between the traditional and vernacular, highlighting how vernacular

\textsuperscript{10} The Greer Brothers, We don’t dig no busing (the busing song), (Texas, 1973).
\textsuperscript{11} Lewis, Massive Resistance, p. 183.
musical forms were evoked in opposition to these changes and how they coincided with a growing black political consciousness. Finally, and most importantly, I will demonstrate how the Greer Brother’s ‘We don’t dig no busing’ actually highlights a continuity of opposition to the changes that occurred in the civil rights movement. By analysing the literary works of American novelist, folklorist, essayist, playwright and anthropologist Zora Neale Hurston, I will demonstrate how the arguments she used against the Brown vs. the Board of Education reflect similar voices of opposition from the Appalachian region of the United States, through to the Greer Brothers, and even to African American journalists and conservative intellectuals who also opposed busing legislation. By not focusing on ‘black power’ and instead focusing more on community opposition, it is possible to demonstrate how complex the arguments were, and hopefully remove the notion that black opposition to civil rights changes is somehow ‘paradoxical’.

Before engaging with the music that stood in opposition, or at the very least, questioned the changes that occurred during attempts to desegregate the school system, it is first necessary to explore the music that dominated the civil rights movement. In her book *When the Sprit Says Sing*, Kerran L. Sanger argues that the freedom songs of the civil rights movement served as ‘examples of purposeful communication that enabled civil rights activists to set fourth a definition of themselves and their undertaking that gave impetus to their movement’\(^{12}\). Sanger argues that prior to the 1960s, the dominant definition of black identity was generated by whites in order to serve white interests. The image thrust upon the black American

was one that considered them ‘barbaric, immoral and incapable of self government’\textsuperscript{13}. Blacks were deemed to be sub-human, passive and dependent on the altruism of white paternalism. Although the civil war may have abolished the physical cast iron chains of slavery, the emotional chains remained. Charles Kiel addressed this problem when he argued, ‘pick up any document dealing with the Negro problem, and the central message whether explicit or implicit will be the same: the problem of self-hatred, the lack of self esteem- the lack of self’\textsuperscript{14}. The crippling psychological effect of this definition of ‘black’ in American society was finally acknowledged in the legal system when Chief Justice Warren, in his opinion on \textit{Brown vs. the Board of Education}, argued that segregated schools created in children a ‘feeling of inferiority as to their status in the community that may their hearts and minds in a way unlikely to be undone’\textsuperscript{15}. Because of this, civil rights activists self-consciously tried to use music to create a positive re-definition of black consciousness. The testimony of civil rights activists suggest that they shared at least a ‘tacit understanding of the need to replace the prevalent definition with a self definition that would help them move forward’\textsuperscript{16}; and the freedom songs that became the soundscape of the civil rights struggle became an important part of the attempt to construct this new sense of identity.

The songs that were primarily used during the freedom marches were the traditional songs and spirituals that self-consciously referenced a past time and culture. It was decided that traditional songs and black spirituals represented a ‘vital return to the pass and recognition of their heritage, a heritage of which they felt they must learn to

\textsuperscript{13} \textit{Ibid}, p.3. \\
\textsuperscript{14} \textit{Ibid}, p.4. \\
\textsuperscript{15} \textit{Ibid}, p.4. \\
\textsuperscript{16} \textit{Ibid}, p.4.
be proud'. The next step was to find material suitable for the movement. In place of white hymns, songs such as ‘We shall not be moved’ and ‘We shall overcome’ were embraced as the freedom songs of the civil rights movement. Not only did familiarity breed wider participation, but also helped create a sense of identity and pride; an ambition that was being self-consciously realised. As well as rejecting white hymns, freedom marchers also adapted existing hymns and traditional songs. Two such examples are ‘Keep your eyes on the prize’ and ‘We’ve got a rope that’s a Berlin Wall’. ‘Keep your hands on the prize’ was originally called ‘gospel plow’, a hymn that, although the origins are unknown, predates the First World War. The original lyrics were,

\[
\text{Got my hand on the Gospel Plow,} \\
\text{Wouldn’t take nothing for my journey now,} \\
\text{Keep your hand on the plow,} \\
\text{Hold on, hold on.}
\]

But in the mid 1950s, Alice Wine of South Carolina thought of changing the last line from ‘keep your hand on the plow’ to ‘keep your eyes on the prize’. This version spread very quickly and became one of the dominant songs of the freedom marches. But more than changing the lyrics, the melody was adapted, to impose an African feel to the song. Pete Seeger demonstrates how the song was self-consciously adapted musically to impose an African tradition the protesters were trying to articulate. By flattening the seventh note of the scale in the word ‘on’ in the lyric ‘hold on’, the melodic clash with the accompanying chord is very reminiscent of African musical tradition. ‘Keep your eyes on the prize’ (Appendix 3) is an example of a freedom song that is quite generic. Others however were targeted much more carefully to recognise not only national events, but the international context as well. One of the

\[\text{Ibid, p.27.}\]

most fascinating songs to emerge from the freedom marches was ‘we’ve got a rope that’s a Berlin Wall’ (Appendix 4). Sung to the melody of the traditional black hymn ‘Joshua Fit the Battle of Jericho’, ‘We’ve got a rope that’s a Berlin Wall’ cleverly references the imagery and sentiment of the Cold War to elicit its desired response.

It is worth noting briefly here the important relationship between the fight for desegregation and the cold war, and how important this song is in highlighting the significance of this relationship. It was not lost on contemporary observers that segregation acted as a damaging tool in America’s propaganda battle with the Soviet Union. George Mitchell, director of the Southern Regional Council, an organisation at the forefront of interracial dialogue and cooperation, gave a lecture to the Kentucky Labour School in July, 1954, where he argued that the ‘entire South’, by ending racial segregation in schools ‘can contribute more to the battle against communism than all the bombers, battleships and guns put together’19. The relationship between the cold war and desegregation was also not lost on the Louisville Courier-Journal, one of Kentucky’s most circulated newspapers. The Courier-Journal noted, that upon the Supreme Courts ruling on Brown, the government’s radio station, Voice of America, ‘promptly began to beam the news of the ruling to Eastern Europe, where the communists have made much of the United States and racial segregation20. This connection was also not lost on the layperson. In a letter to Robert Menefee, who was conducting an Appalachian research project on the implications of desegregation, Dr Cameron McRae of the District Health Department, Burnsville, North Carolina wrote,

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My own feeling on school desegregation is that it is a good idea in theory anyway, from both the standpoint of providing better schools for the colored children and helping them do away with the feeling of inferiority which segregation is bound to cause, and as propaganda in the “cold war”\textsuperscript{21}.

By referring to the police blockades in the language of the Cold War, it seems to demonstrate the continuation of a rather effective and powerful argument that was not lost on observers in the 1950s, and demonstrates the political intelligence of the freedom marchers who incorporated these themes into their songs. As such, not only did the traditional musical forms play a significant part in informing the civil rights movement, the contemporary political and social context was pivotal in informing the traditional. Despite this, and the success of these traditional songs in motivating and framing the civil rights and desegregation movement, the use of these songs was not uncontroversial.

During the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, although many forms of black music began to flourish, many blacks began to turn away from their traditional roots. Many had come to see the ‘old, religious songs and the traditional way of singing them as embarrassing’\textsuperscript{22}. Robert Morton, who succeeded Booker T Washington as head of the Tuskegee Institute recalled his feeling on hearing spirituals being performed at the Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute when he attended at the age of eighteen in 1885. Although he had known these songs all his life, he was deeply disappointed at hearing them, arguing that ‘I had come to school to learn to do things differently; to sing, to speak, and to use the language, not of colored people, but of white people’\textsuperscript{23}. The interesting thing about this statement is it was as true in the late nineteenth century as it was for many blacks in the 1960s. Len Chandler, a

\textsuperscript{21} Dr Cameron McRae, Letter to Robert Menefee on July 11\textsuperscript{th} 1954.
\textsuperscript{22} Sanger, “When the Spirit Says Sing”, p.25.
prominent musician in the civil rights movement, recalls his complex relationship with traditional black music,

I was ashamed by my Grandmothers music…it wasn’t until this white professor took me to his house to listen to some tapes that I started to know what my music is about…why this music…is great

This complex relationship between black culture and the emerging civil rights movement is essential if we are to understand black opposition to desegregation, and equally, the power of a black vernacular language is at the heart of this cultural and political conflict. If Booker T Washington had gone to Tuskegee Institute to learn the language of ‘white people’, the same could not be said of the formidable Zora Neale Hurston.

An examination of the life and works of Zora Neale Hurston provides an important illustration of not only the black opposition to Brown vs. the Board of Education, but a continuity of opposition that existed before the Supreme Court ruling in 1954, and opposition after it. Zora Neale Hurston was the pre-eminent female writer of her day. The self-styled, ‘Queen of the Niggerati’, she rose to prominence as a novelist, folklorist, playwright and essayist during the ‘Harlem Renaissance’. However, despite her obvious talents, she had all but disappeared from public life during the 1950s as many of her contemporaries, black and white, became publicly critical of her increasingly conservative philosophy, with her most controversial public statements stemming from her attack on the Supreme Court ruling in 1954, Brown vs. the Board of Education. In a letter to the Orlando Sentinel on August 11, 1955, Hurston argued that if black schools were far inferior to that of white schools, then of course

desegregation should occur to provide black students with the same opportunities.

However, she went on to argue,

If there are Negro schools and prepared instructors and instructions, then there is nothing different except the presence of white people...for this reason, I regard the ruling of the U.S. Supreme Court as insulting rather than honouring my race. Since the days of Reconstruction, there has been current the belief that there is no greater delight to Negroes than the physical association with whites.\(^{25}\)

To understand this it is important to acknowledge the intellectual foundations of Hurston’s beliefs. Hurston studied anthropology at Barnard College, under the supervision of Frank Boaz. Boaz, a German born scholar who revolutionised anthropology in the early twentieth century, rejecting the cultural evolutionary school of nineteenth century anthropology. Instead, Boaz espoused cultural relativism, a belief that when analysing different cultures, one should try to work out the individual history of a place, and how the people exist within it. He argued that the individual analysing a culture should not use ‘their own’ language to describe how that culture operates, but use ‘their’ language to gain understanding.\(^{26}\) Through this training we can clearly understand Hurston’s intellectual opposition desegregation, the language of desegregation, as well as understanding the importance of vernacular language in her works, most fully realised in her 1937 novel ‘Their Eyes Were Watching God’. Significant in this novel is the vernacular dialect with which she uses to capture the language of her characters. This approach to dialect was not uncontroversial. Many of her contemporaries felt that her characterisations of her black characters played to cheap racial stereotypes. Paradoxically, what Hurston was trying to capture within her poetic vernacular style was a pride in black culture and

\(^{25}\) Zora Neale Hurston letter to The Orlando Sentinel, August 11\(^{th}\), 1955.

\(^{26}\) In Our Time, Relativism, broadcast on the BBC on the 19\(^{th}\) January 2006.
heritage. In a letter to Eslander Robeson, wife of Paul Robeson, Hurston comments that ‘I tried to be natural and not to pander to the folks who expect a clown and a villain in every Negro. Neither did I want to pander to those ‘race’ people among us who see nothing but perfection’. This pride in vernacular culture can too be indemnnified in the Greer Brothers ‘we don’t dig no busing’ whose title is in itself a proud declaration of vernacular culture. This is an important continuity that must be recognised and understood.

It is true that Hurston may have been naïve about the state of many black schools, but this does not deter from her intellectual and racial philosophy. It would be easy to understand Hurston as an exception, someone who amongst her contemporaries was an eccentric, who did not reflect the wisdom of the generation. However, although Hurston was ‘exceptional’ her works do demonstrate a theme of continuity in black suspicions and opposition to desegregation. In the Greer Brother’s ‘We don’t dig no busing’ there are clear similarities in both ideas and vernacular language to oppose busing, a programme to further the desegregation of America’s school system. But in between 1937’s ‘Their Eyes Were Watching God’ and the Greer Brothers 1973 ‘We don’t dig no busing’ there are many more examples of this continuity of opposition.

Archive research conducted in Berea College Sound Archives in Kentucky offer examples of this continuity of opposition. William Vastine, the Associate Executive Director of the National Council of the Churches of Christ, completed a report on desegregation for the Southern Regional Council in 1953. On Monday, November 6th 1953 Vastine spent the morning in Simpsonville with Dr. Whitney Young, principal

27 Zora Neale Hurston to Eslander Robeson, April 18th, 1934.
of the Lincoln Institute and father to civil rights leader Whitney Young, Jr. The Lincoln Institute was established by the trustees of Berea College after the Day Law was passed in 1904 by the Kentucky Legislature ending the racially integrated Berea College, integrated since before the Civil War. Although established in racially tolerant circumstances where desegregation was welcomed, Dr. Young suggested that the Lincoln Institute should remain segregated ‘as it would be a tragedy to destroy the service it is rendering.’

This is a recurring theme in the archival evidence. That where there was good black schools, with good black teachers, then desegregation became a much more complicated issue for Black Americans. For example, Mitchell County in North Carolina only had seven black children in the school system. Therefore, they were being bussed to McDowell County twenty miles away, plus another 10 miles to pick up another student. In a report by Robert Menefee for the Southern Regional Council, he notes that ‘Mr. Deyton, an unusually outstanding county superintendent’ from Mitchell County agreed that it would be more economically viable and simpler to integrate the schools. However, black parents in the region had requested the continuation of the current arrangement as the ‘black school was good’.

Despite the logistical considerations, this for many parents was seen as the best solution, and this is understandable. Dr. Cameron McRae, of the District Health Department in Burnsville, North Carolina expresses the potential difficulties for black Americans when desegregation occurred. He suggests in a letter to Robert Menefee on the 11th July, 1954 that ‘with teachers and principles selected locally, there is no chance of coloured teachers and principles (certainly the latter anyway) working in mixed

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schools…thus the largest field of white collar employment for Negroes would appear to be closed to them\textsuperscript{30}.

Given the response by some black Americans to Brown, it is hardly surprising that similar lines of opposition emerged after the controversial policy of busing was introduced in many states. The New York Times reported on August 3\textsuperscript{rd} 1969 that black Americans in Charlotte, North Carolina, were putting up strong opposition to busing policies. Charlottes Black Solidarity Committee handed the Charlotte School Board a 20,000 strong petition signed by parents objecting to the closing down of inner city schools to bus 4,200 black children into white neighbourhoods.\textsuperscript{31} Black community leaders were complaining that the plans represented ‘one way’ integration, and claiming the plans were devised to be as ‘least offensive to whites’ as possible.\textsuperscript{32} The National Black Convention, meeting in Indiana in 1972, overwhelmingly voted to voice their opposition to busing measures. The described the busing programme as “racist” and based on the false notion that “black children are unable to learn unless they are in the same setting as white children”\textsuperscript{33}, a clear reaffirmation of Zora Neale Hurston’s argument against desegregation in 1954. This opposition was given prominent media, and intellectual, support from \textit{Washington Post} writer William Raspberry. In several articles in 1972 he voiced his opposition to the busing plans. His three main concerns were that busing would ‘reinforce in white children whatever racially superior feelings they may harbour’ while saying to black students that they are ‘somehow improved by the presence of white school mates’\textsuperscript{34}. Secondly, that those who support busing have taken the ‘melting pot America’ far to

\textsuperscript{30} Dr. Cameron McRae to Robert Menefee, July 11\textsuperscript{th} 1954.
\textsuperscript{31} \textit{New York Times}, August 3\textsuperscript{rd} 1969
\textsuperscript{32} \textit{Ibid}
\textsuperscript{33} Denton, Herbert, \textit{The Washington Post, March} 12\textsuperscript{th} 1972.
\textsuperscript{34} Raspberry, William, \textit{The Washington Post}, February 16\textsuperscript{th} 1972.
literally, and that a mathematically precise distribution of different people is the answer to America’s racial difficulties. Thirdly, he argues that the main problem for black children is not busing, but an unequal distribution of resources, and if this changed, then busing ‘becomes what it should have been all along: a means of transportation’.\(^{35}\) Statistical evidence also demonstrates the complicated relationship between busing and black opposition. A Gallup poll published by the New York Times on September 12\(^{th}\) 1971 showed that only 45 percent of blacks favoured busing. In comparison, only 15 percent of whites favoured busing\(^{36}\). This demonstrates the great feeling of unease, by both blacks and whites, to busing policies. The evidence presented in chapter clearly demonstrates that from before Brown to the 1970s, there was a significant, complex and continuous opposition to desegregation measures in America from black Americans.

\(^{35}\) Ibid

Chapter Two: ‘We don’t want niggers in our schools’- White resistance to desegregation.

_We don’t want niggers in our schools we’re not for integration,_
_Keep those niggers in their place we’ll have a better nation,_
_We must prove to Martin Luther we stand for what is right,_
_No court or left wing liberals can ever make him white._

The Coon Hunters, _We don’t want niggers in our schools_37

Plato warns in the Republic that,

Any musical innovation is full of danger to the whole state, and ought to be prohibited, because it imperceptivity penetrates into the manners and customs, whence, issuing with greater force, it invades contacts between man and man and...goes onto laws and constitutions, in utter recklessness, ending at last by an overthrow of all rights, private as well as public.38

Although Plato is dramatically overstating the subversive power of music in society, one cannot deny the subversive nature of music, particularly when one listens to the segregationist music that emerged from Crowley, Louisiana. David Rosen argues that ‘protest, in many different forms, pervaded life in the sixties. It was everywhere. It compelled our attention. There was no escape from it’.39 The rise of protest music was a significant development in popular culture in the United States. Rosen suggests that the protest song materialised from nothing, shocking a generation, seemingly unprepared from it. In fact, the ‘protest song’ was only officially recognised as a form of song in the music index in 1963.40 This was a new type of protest to emerge out of the South, a protest that can described as the politicisation of country music. Unlike the music of the of the folk revival and artists such as Bob Dylan and Phil Ochs who were marshalling their protest songs towards issues of racial struggle and America’s growing involvement in Vietnam, country music had remained relatively apolitical. If country music was identified as the ‘music of the silent majority in the mid 1960s, it

37The Coon Hunters, We don’t want niggers in our schools, For Segregationists Only, (Crawley Louisiana, 1970).
38Plato, _The Republic_, Book IV, 424.
39Rosen, David, _Protest Songs in America_, (California 1972), p.21
40Ibid., p.21
was the consequence of at least twenty years of growing disquiet in the United States about the sweeping and bewildering changes that occurred in the wake of the Second World War’. Whereas the urban folk revival and its audience were self consciously political and ideological, country music was seen by many, in a society ‘swept successively by racial, youth and sexual revolutions’, and in an increasingly hostile international order characterised by ideologically ‘cold’ and ‘hot’ wars, as ‘comfortable, reassuring and representing a predictable world, in which they could safely escape…country music represented the bedrock of American values of solidarity, respect for authority, old time religion, home based virtues and patriotism’.  

This is not to say that country music stayed entirely away from the realm of politics. Topical songs did emerge in the 1950s commenting on the Korean War, atomic energy and the domestic implications of the Cold War. Songs such as Bill Monroe’s “Rotation Blues” (1951), the Louvin Brothers “From mothers arms to Korea” (1952) and Elton Britt’s “The red we want is the one we’ve got (in the old red, white and blue)” (1950) are all examples of country music’s experimentation will politics, both nationally and internationally. However, it was the civil rights movement that did the most to energise and politicise some country musicians. Indeed, it was this politicisation that is responsible for the most unpleasant chapter in country music’s history. The civil rights movement precipitated an outpouring of racist and segregationist music, praising the Klu Klux Klan and attacking blacks in the most viscous and stereotypical terms. This is not to say that racist music did not exist before. Minstrelsy and the ‘coon’ song had been both a popular form of

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entertainment, and a form of propaganda, against the interests of black Americans. And although many of these were comic in their persuasion, many were dark, exposing the worst prejudices of hillbilly songmanship. What distinguished the segregationist music of the 1960s however was the ‘grotesque sophistry’ of the songs aimed at those who were now pursuing avenues of freedom after Brown vs. the Board of Education that had never before seemed open to them. Just as sinister was the exploitation of country as a vernacular musical form, to appeal to the basest instincts of the listener. Because of this, I will now explore how these musical decisions were made, and why we need to distinguish between the traditional and the vernacular.

The main distributor of segregationist music was Reb Rebel Records, based in Crowley Louisiana. Founded by J.D Miller, who would also produce the recordings, Reb Rebel Records released a series of records in the 1960s. Its first release, Happy Fats’ ‘Dear Mr President’ (1966) mocked Lyndon B Johnson’s civil rights programs, with Happy Fats complaining that his white coon dog won’t hunt with his black bird dog, and finally asking, “could I get an injunction to make them hunt together?” The song is reported to have sold more than 200,000 copies. Reb Rebels greatest success came with its second release, ‘NAACP Flight 105’. Recorded by Joe Norris under the name ‘Son of Mississippi’, it also reportedly sold more than 200,000 copies. The numbers suggested here go to demonstrate the commercial viability of these records. The album For Segregationists Only however provided the most infamous of segregationist recordings. Containing the recordings of C.J. Trahan, who went by the recording name Johnny Rebel, these recordings moved beyond the darkly humorous recordings offered by Reb Rebels previous releases and offered much more

subversive material, graphically revealing the extent to which desegregation was opposed, and the depth of racial hatred that existed within this music. And if we agree with Hughson Mooney, that ‘Sheet music and phonograph records are among the few artefacts that afford insight into the inarticulate Americans of the twentieth century’  

then these records, and their sales, provide us with an invaluable insight. A re-release of the album ‘For Segregationists Only’ contained the Coon Hunters song ‘We don’t want niggers in our schools’. This track is of particular use to this thesis for two reasons. Firstly, it is a demonstration of how music was used as a protest tool to oppose the Supreme Court ruling Brown vs. the Board of Education. But secondly, and more importantly, it can be used to distinguish between the approaches of the segregationists and the revival folk singers of the 1960s, for this thesis specifically Bob Dylan and Phil Ochs.

In his song ‘Oxford Town’ (Appendix 5), Dylan eloquently captures the events concerning the entry of James Meredith into the University of Mississippi. From his second album, *The Freewheelin’ Bob Dylan* (1962), it marked a departure from his first, as this contained primarily original recordings. It also demonstrated the beginnings of a political awareness and consciousness in Dylan’s music, marking him as the ‘voice of a generation’- a label he would later resent. Dylan sings,

> Oxford Town around the bend,  
> Come to the door, couldn’t get in,  
> All because the colour of his skin,  
> What do you think about that my friend?"  

Another singer/songwriter, inspired by the events of Oxford Mississippi in 1961 was folk musician Phil Ochs. In 1986, Rhino records released ‘A toast to all those who are

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gone’, a compilation of his recordings when he was between Elektra Records and A&M records in the early to mid 1960s. What is immediately striking about this album is the recurrence of civil rights themed tracks. Containing such songs as ‘Going down to Mississippi’, ‘Coloured Town’ and, his ode to James Meredith ‘The ballad of Oxford (James Meredith). Although Ochs preferred to be called a topical singer rather than a protest singer, the characteristics of protest are evident in this song. In the fourth stanza he sings,

So listen Mr Barnet, and Mr Walker, too,
The times are a changing mighty fast, they’ll roll right over you,
But someday you’ll head for the South, to the southern tip of hell,
And it’s hot down there, white hot down there,
Let’s hear your rebel yell!47

These two songs by folk revivalists Dylan and Ochs could not contrast more with the Coon Hunters ‘we don’t want niggers in our schools’. But these songs, in many respects, represent the polar extremes of the dichotomy that was taking place between those who were fiercely segregationist and those passionate about the cause of the civil rights agenda. What they also demonstrate is how the different musical formats help us understand why the songs were delivered in the particular format they were, and how we can build a conceptual framework to understand the differences between the them. It would be easy to use the terms traditional and vernacular interchangeably when discussing music, particularly music that can be broadly described as ‘folk’. However, it is important to distinguish between the two within the context of civil rights historiography, as I will argue that they were used differently. It is possible to argue that those musicians who were sympathetic to the civil rights movement considered themselves, self consciously, as performing music within a ‘traditional’

47 Ochs, Phil, ‘the ballad of Oxford (James Meredith), on ‘a toast to those who have gone’, Rhino Records, 1986.
context, whereas, one can argue the music of opposition to desegregation used a deliberately vernacular musical format to exploit their political and ideological position. The musical exchange between Dylan, Ochs and the Coon Hunters help exemplify this point.

This has many complex roots, involving class, culture and politics. When Dylan and Ochs performed their Oxford Ballads, they were drawing upon a long tradition of protest music that had its antecedents not only in American protest music, but also in European folk traditions. It is well understood that Dylan spent a lot of time studying the Anglo folk tradition. Before Dylan released the *Freewheelin Bob Dylan* in 1963, he had made his first visit to London in 1962, where he studied the Anglo folk tradition under the tutorage of Martin Carthy. In this period of Dylan’s career, before the infamous ‘going electric’ controversy at the Newport folk festival in the summer of 1965, Dylan was greatly influenced by other American topical songwriters, Woody Guthrie and Pete Seeger, himself an important musician in the civil rights movement. In fact, the folk ‘communities’ negative response to Dylan’s Newport performance helps exemplify the traditional roots within which these musicians associated themselves. The style of Dylan’s and Ochs protest songs clearly emanate from a long tradition of protest in American music. The folk revival protest songs clearly ‘borrowed a page out of the labour movement book’\(^\text{48}\). David Rosen argues that, examined in detail, these protest songs form ‘a continuous thread of musical protest in America, personified by such personalities as Bob Dylan’\(^\text{49}\). But in their musical choices, we can understand why the folk revival used this form of music; because it was successful. The reason traditional musical forms were embraced is because they

\(^{48}\) Rosen, *Protest Songs in America*, p.21
had a long legacy of success. Singer/songwriters such as Dylan and Ochs borrowed from these traditions, and used these traditional musical roots to inform the contemporary. This differs greatly from the segregationist musical form of protest, on which I will now elaborate.

The decision to use country music as the musical devise within which to deliver the segregationist message was not coincidental. J.D. Miller, the owner and producer of the segregationist music discussed thus far, is an interesting character in that over his long career, he produced many artists in many genres, most notably black blues men such as Lightnin’ Slim and Slim Harpo. Louisiana had a unique musical culture that celebrated Cajun, rockabilly, swampablily, swamp blues, blues and country. The paradox in Miller is that he stated that African American blues music was his preferred musical genre. He was recording with interracial bands in the ‘Jim Crow’ era, when musicians of different races were not supposed to mix. Paradoxically, although he claimed to be a segregationist, he penned blues tracks under the pseudonym Jay West, in order to disguise his race, as many black disk jockeys would not play white music on their stations. What this does demonstrate however is that, as a producer of many forms of musical genre, it was his decision to use country as the vehicle with which to spread the segregationist message. We can further demonstrate this deliberate decision for analysing the purpose of the ‘For Segregationists Only’ LP. In the liner notes of the album the expressed purpose was to ‘express the feeling, anxiety, confusion and problems of many of our people during the political transformation of our way of life’. This phrasing perfectly captures the thesis of Malone, that country music was representative of an American way of life,

whether real or perceived. And Miller, I argue, deliberately manipulated country music and its audiences, using a vernacular musical language that's its targeted audiences would understand. However, the connection between the vernacular character of country music and segregationist politics was not only manipulated by musicians and music producers such as Miller, but politicians, most notably, George Wallace.

Although these records found a wide audience base, for the most part they were seen as ‘underground’, not played on radio, but duke box favourites and records, that according to Floyd Soileau, ‘sold pretty well’.\(^{52}\) However, the link between country music as being racist or reactionary became a dynamic force in the media’s discovery of the genre when in the 1960s an alliance was formed between the controversial governor of Alabama, George Wallace. Notable country singers, such as Autry Inman, Hank Snow and the Wilburn Brothers, participated in his political campaigns for the governorship of Alabama and the Presidency. The success of Wallace certainly had a strong racial element, but another reason that can also account for his popularity is that his,

Southern/rural populist roots also made him appealing to many of the good old boys and girls who picked up guitars and sung. Wallace identified with country music, but he also spoke the same language, ate the same foods, and responded to the same cultural traditions (both good and bad) that most country musicians understood.\(^{53}\)

What this demonstrates is that Wallace was exploiting a vernacular southern culture, including its music, to meet his own political ends. This expression of vernacular music provides a powerful indication of the reasons why these


segregationist’s records were purchased and listened to, and also helps account for the political support of such policies. By viewing the listeners of this music in this light, we can begin too much more fully appreciate the Lewis hypothesis concerning the complexity of the resistance movement towards desegregation. I will build upon this foundation concerning the complexities of resistance to further elaborate on this, and why music can help us understand this more deeply.

It would be easy to assume that the South offered a unified response of opposition to the Supreme Court decision to integrate schools with Brown vs. the Board of Education. Obviously, given the protests and demonstrations that followed, in such places as Little Rock in Arkansas, there was clearly deep felt frustration and resentment towards the Supreme Court’s ruling. However, even though Brown vs. the Board of Education threatened to ‘overturn the social structure of a region that had clung to racial separation through centuries of slavery and over fifty years of separate but equal’\textsuperscript{54}, such a unified response did not materialise. Although the South’s leadership expressed their regret at the decision, they failed to take decisive action. In fact, after Brown, the response was largely met by indecisiveness as there was ‘little solidarity to the segregationist position and even less sign of the emergence of a coherent and solidified intellectual response to the problem of desegregation’\textsuperscript{55}. This incoherent and indecisive approach directly after Brown marks the first of three distinct phases in development of an intellectual rationale for the segregationist cause. The second of these phases, emerging at the end of the 1950s, presents a very different picture. At this point, a plethora of resistance arguments existed, and most resisters of the time found

\textsuperscript{54} Lewis, \textit{Massive Resistance}, p.27.
\textsuperscript{55} Ibid, p.122.
themselves drawn to a single argument, or set of arguments that they found to be most convincing. By the early 1960s however, the intellectual confidence of the resistance movement had dissipated, and this third stage of development much reflected the response immediately after Brown. Lewis argues that this regression occurred as the result of growing federal pressure for the civil rights movement, and the movements increasingly sophisticated and dignified methods of civil and political activism.\(^{56}\)

Lewis’s argument is compelling. But there are other tangible reasons why the resistance movement struggled to find a coherent approach to Brown. Michael Klarman, discussing Brown, identifies several factors that help elucidate the complex nature of the Southern approach desegregation, and how racial attitudes in the south were being fundamentally changed by higher education levels and a changing scientific consensus on the nature of race. Rising standards of education seems to be a particularly important issue that complicated the arguments of the segregationists. Southern state spending on education, as a percentage of non-southern state spending, rose from 41.1% in 1929-1930 to 58.1% in 1949-1950 to 69.2% in 1968-1969. Klarman argues that, higher levels of white education, from the mid twentieth century, have correlated with greater racial tolerance, and as such, ‘boded ill for the long term survival of Jim Crow’.\(^{57}\) The development in black education also had a powerful effect. As less black labour was needed in agriculture through mechanical developments, black Americans remained in education for much longer. Black illiteracy for ages ten and over in the south fell from 76.2% in 1880 to 26% in 1920. By 1950, black illiteracy had fallen

\(^{56}\) Ibid, p.122.

somewhere between 8.9 and 12%. These advances had grave repercussions for Jim Crow as the segregationists struggles to defend reasons for separation became increasingly difficult once ‘educational and skill differentials had greatly narrowed’\textsuperscript{58}. This development in advancement of black education played an important part of the legal reasoning behind Brown. Justice Robert Jackson’s draft concurrence in Brown, although never published observed that ‘segregation had outlived whatever justification it may have had’\textsuperscript{59}. Further to this, and inextricably linked, was the growing rejection amongst an increasing number of white southerners of one of segregations basic premises- ‘fundamental differences between white and black races’. In the South, as in the North, changing attitudes to race are reflected in polls conducted that demonstrate that whites believing that blacks were equally intelligent rose by 30 percent between 1944 and 1956\textsuperscript{60}.

Another reason why I would suggest that segregationists need to be more closely examined beyond the simple labelling of ‘racist’ exists on the contradictions inherent in southern religious identity. Prior to the civil rights movement, the vast majority of southern Baptists had supported racial segregation. In his book ‘Getting Right With God’ (2001), Mark Newman argues that Baptists, by far the largest religious denomination in the South, whatever their views towards segregation, held primary commitments to evangelism, law and order and public education. In particular public education, as this was essential for producing an educated citizenry that could read and understand biblical teachings and also provide the maintenance for ‘democratic and free society’ conditions under

\textsuperscript{58} Ibid, p.68.  
\textsuperscript{59} Ibid, p.68.  
\textsuperscript{60} Ibid, p.71.
which, they believed, Christianity prospered\textsuperscript{61}. The Brown ruling therefore, and the South’s resistance to it, created a conflict between ‘segregation and the primary commitments of the southern Baptists’\textsuperscript{62}. This conflict also suggests that, despite their segregationist beliefs, they were also in a position, due to their Christian beliefs, to change. In research conducted at the Appalachian Sound Archives in Berea Kentucky, this southern religious paradox became a common theme that demonstrates the complexities of the segregationist. In 1954, after the Brown decision, the Southern Regional Council under the executive directorship of George Sinclair Mitchell, commissioned a report to be investigated in the Appalachian region, to understand ‘segregated schools and the implications of desegregation’\textsuperscript{63}. Robert Menefee, an academic from Berea, familiar with the Appalachian region, undertook this project, and spent a lot of time in churches as they ‘were concerned about the community and its schools’\textsuperscript{64}. Although many examples exist that demonstrate this conflict, several stood out for Menefee. Menefee recalled,

Charley Boy in Appalachia, Virginia. He is a man in his late sixties, a railroader with little formal schooling…he is a man who takes the principles of Christ and constantly tries to see what they mean in everyday life. He has been reared with all the prejudices of the area but even now is modifying and yielding and changing. He has just attended a Methodists Layman’s conference which met interracially and the experience had a great impact on his thinking\textsuperscript{65}.

By contrast, Menefee recall a meeting with a Methodist minister,

The reverend is the Old South at its worse. He is well educated and conscious of clothes and language and books. His attitude towards

\textsuperscript{62} \textit{Ibid}, p.21.
\textsuperscript{63} Letter from Robert Menefee to Cameron F. McRae, M.D, 6\textsuperscript{th} July 1954.
\textsuperscript{64} \textit{Ibid}, 6\textsuperscript{th} July 1954.
\textsuperscript{65} Folder 8- Southern Regional Council Study: Personal Notes and Impressions: Some Ideas, Individuals and Impressions dredged up from the swamp known as the Menefee memory
Negroes is an affectionate, belittling paternalism…I believe he is one of the most carefully elegant men of evil I have ever known.\textsuperscript{66}

These examples demonstrate the complexity of the segregationist character and position. On one hand there is the Methodist minister, who is completely at odds with Brown. Menefee suggests, although this particular minister does not apply, that the majority of southern ministers face a dilemma:

On the one hand, there is the strong compulsion to right the wrong; on the other hand, they recognise the need to carry their people along with them. However, all too few are giving proper leadership\textsuperscript{67}

This dilemma is not only applied to the clergy. When discussing the role of George Wallace in exploiting the vernacular culture of the South, it would be easy to assume he was always a hard line segregationist. This would not be quite right however. George Wallace was not by nature a ‘fire-eating white supremacist’, in fact in his early political career, Klarman argues that Wallace had been a ‘little soft’ on segregation, and unlike Bull Connor, was not one half of the Alabama delegation at the Democratic Convention in 1948 to walk out of the adoption of ‘liberal’ civil rights measures\textsuperscript{68}. Even when making moves to the right on race, such as threatening to arrest any FBI officer entering Cobb County, Georgia, who were being sent to investigate charges of race discrimination in grand jury selection, Wallace found it was not enough politically against much a much more hard-line segregationist position. This is evident in his loss of the democratic gubernatorial nomination in 1958 against Attorney General John Patterson, who had banned the NAACP from Alabama, and received an endorsement from the Klu Klux Klan, an organisation Wallace had ‘gently repudiated’\textsuperscript{69}. It was a result of this incident that one can locate

\textsuperscript{66} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{67} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{68} Klarman, Racial Change, and the Civil Rights Movement, p. 125.
\textsuperscript{69} Ibid, p.127.
the moment that Wallace learnt the value of federal defiance in the face of desegregation laws, and cemented his reputation as one of America’s most ardent segregationists. Even if we examine the role of J.D Miller in the making of segregationist records we find an abundance of contradictions. As has already been stated, Miller recorded with many black artists in Crowley Louisiana, and stated his musical preference for was black blues music. Miller certainly claimed to be a segregationist, and as he was responsible for setting up Reb Rebel records I would not dispute this. However, an interview with C.J. Trahan, or Johnny Rebel, one of Reb Rebels most successful recording artists, he claims that Miller was motivated primarily by the financial and commercial implications of selling segregationist records. He states that in his opinion, ‘it was to make money. I don’t know if he had a statement to make then, but at that time he was recording a lot of blacks, most of his artists were blacks’.

In this chapter I have tried to demonstrate how and why segregationists appropriated country music to disseminate their racial ideology, and how the producer, J.D. Miller, and such politicians like George Wallace, exploited this particular genre of music because of its vernacular appeal. In doing so I would suggest that this reveals a greater complexity to the segregationist character than the racist stereotype often applied to them. As has been demonstrated, Miller and Wallace both had commercial and political motivations respectively for their segregationist positions. This is however, not to suggest that they did not, at various times, buy into this segregationist ideology. It does seem insidious that they could manipulate music in this way to achieve a successful campaign of propaganda against the cause of desegregation. But

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music, to its general audience, offered something different and something far more important in the battle against desegregation. If Lewis is correct and there was a lack of a cohesive argument for why segregation was necessary, as I believe he is; and if Klarman is correct in suggesting that developing education levels African Americans and a changing scientific consensus on the nature of blacks was changing, making the segregationist argument fundamental more difficult, as I believe he is; and if there is a southern religious paradox that meant a continuing belief in the segregation of the school system conflicted with the teachings of the Christian church, then what was left in the South was an intellectual and ideological vacuum. A vacuum that existed as the segregationist arguments became weaker, and as the sophistication of the civil rights movement became stronger, and to fill that vacuum, was for some audiences, a vernacular musical form that spoke to their traditions and old way of life that was much easier to comprehend and understand, as it is much easier to hear in a comfortable musical format, ‘we don’t want niggers in our schools’ than it was to try and make sense of the enormous societal changes taking place during the civil rights era.
Conclusion

When I began writing this dissertation it seemed that the most important factor to emerge from the research was how the vernacular musical decisions of the artists involved were calculated. It became clear that the musical decisions made were not accidental and that for political, ideological and commercial reasons, a grassroots, localised and vernacular musical form of dissent emerged to challenge the desegregation of the American school system. Although this is important to recognise, it has now become apparent that this is just one aspect of a far more reaching and challenging narrative. The evidence presented in this dissertation now leads me to conclude that, although music is an important means of understanding opposition to desegregation, it is more important at exposing a new cultural and periodic narrative that has so far not been greatly explored. The works of George Lewis have provided an important and necessary framework for understanding the complexity of ‘massive resistance’, and I hope that I have been able to contribute to this line of investigation by exploring the segregationist music to emerge from Crowley, Louisiana. Although this is important, two factors have emerged since I began writing this dissertation: firstly, that Brown vs. the Board of Education is more than a political landmark, it is also a cultural landmark that precipitated music both in support and opposition to desegregation. And secondly, that the periodisation of the Brown decision needs to be readdressed. Although Brown is a landmark event, political, socially and culturally, it is important to understand that the opposition to desegregation begins along time before the eventual decision, and this is particularly important when analysing the black opposition to desegregation.
Although Zora Neale Hurston, because of her conservative political philosophy, was ostracised, and relegated to obscurity until the rediscovery of her works in 1975, she represents an important figure in understanding the long line of continuous opposition to desegregation. It also appears that her cultural relativism, inspired by teacher and mentor Franz Boaz, is a significant factor in her opposition to desegregation, and much more will need to be done in this particular area of research. For this dissertation, her use of black vernacular language in her works is very significant. Not only do her ideas demonstrate a political continuity, but her writing style represents a cultural continuity. The use of vernacular language, stylistically, lyrically and musically by those who opposed desegregation demonstrates a convergence of political tactics by both white and black detractors of desegregation. It would not be obvious to suggest that a black female author writing in 1937, white supremacist country musicians in the 1960s and black ‘kid funk’ bands of the 1970s would have much in common. But the focus on a localised, grassroots language demonstrates an important connection, particularly when their contemporaries who supported desegregation appeared to stay away from the vernacular tradition. On Saturday 31st 1953, William Vastine observed that Dr. Brimm, of the Carver School of Missions at the Southern Baptist Seminary, was an ‘astute and stimulating person doing a perfectly magnificent job of training his young people in the area of racial and cultural relations’. This insight regarding racial and cultural relations is important. As well as Brown being a cultural landmark, it also suggests that cultural desegregation is as significant as racial desegregation. And by using a strongly vernacular language to disseminate their political and racial philosophies, the

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segregationists, both black and white, were using cultural devices as powerful tools in trying maintaining the status quo in the American education system, segregation.
Appendix and CD

My primary methodological approach in this dissertation has been the synthesis of the vast academic literature on the civil rights movement and racial identity and the listening to thousands of musical recordings from both popular and commercial sources, as well as specialist music archives, to explore the opposition to the civil rights movement. Contained in the appendix CD are five selected tracks that help elucidate my arguments. I could have included many more, but these five are the most significant in the context of this paper.

Appendix 1 – Track 1: ‘We don’t want Niggers in our schools’ by the Coon Hunters, from the album ‘For Segregationists Only’ (1970).

As well as an audible demonstration of the deep-seated racism and opposition to school desegregation, this track also elucidates my argument concerning the appropriation of country music as a vernacular musical format in disseminating a fiercely racial ideological message.

Appendix 2 – Track 2: ‘We don’t dig no busing’ by the Greer Brothers (1973).

From ‘kid funk’ band the Greer Brothers comes this rousing retort to *Swann vs. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Board of Education* (1971). Employing the new musical genre of funk, as made commercially successful by James Brown, this track is again a demonstration of a vernacular musical format being used to disseminate a political message. In this case it is this vernacular approach that provides the connective tissue between the Greer Brothers and the Coon Hunters.


A track used to demonstrate not only the differences between the traditional and vernacular approaches of the music of the civil rights movement, but also an interesting expose of the development of ‘folk’ traditions to fit contemporary circumstances.

Appendix 4 – Track 4: ‘We’ve got a rope that’s a Berlin Wall’ (1963).

Set to the hymn ‘Joshua fit the Battle of Jericho’, this song aptly demonstrates both the differences in traditional and vernacular approaches, as well as the intelligence and self-conscious decision making of the singers and songwriters of the civil rights movement. In this case, using a traditional hymn to set the Cold War situation against the civil rights campaign.


This is what we know about the music of civil rights. Bob Dylan’s song about James Meredith sits in complete contrast, in both ideology and musical format, to the Coon Hunters ‘we don’t want niggers in our schools’.
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