

THE RIGHT TO BE SERVED: Oklahoma City's Lunch Counter Sit-ins, 1958–1964

*By Carl R. Graves**

On a hot day in August, 1958, thirteen black children led by Clara M. Luper entered Katz Drugstore in downtown Oklahoma City, sat down at the food counter, and waited to be served. They waited in vain. The group returned the next day but received the same treatment.¹ White customers who watched this confrontation perhaps failed to realize that they were witnessing the start of a six-year campaign of sit-ins, picketing, store boycotts, arrests, and legal disputes. Also, the waitresses presumably failed to foresee that the blacks would keep coming back until all of the city's lunch counters were integrated. The demonstrators themselves no doubt had little idea of the long struggle that lay ahead of them. Unlike later sit-ins in the South, their campaign would be marked by relative peacefulness and in many ways would become a typical example of the border state sit-ins of the 1950s.

It was not surprising that the young blacks faced discrimination in the capital city's eating facilities; segregation had been the rule in Oklahoma for the major part of its history. Since the early 1900s all public accommodations in Oklahoma City outside the black community were closed to blacks. Although there were no city ordinances demanding segregated public facilities, white owners could use simple trespass laws to evict any black who entered.²

In the late 1940s an attack was launched on Oklahoma's segregation laws and practices; in 1955 the Oklahoma City School Board officially desegregated all public schools.³ Despite such progress, blacks in Oklahoma City were still systematically excluded from most of its theaters, restaurants, barber and beauty shops, and amusements.⁴ Thus the demonstrations can be seen as part of a general campaign to end Jim Crow practices in the Sooner State, a campaign which was already well underway. Yet one might ask: Why did the demonstrations take place here and why so early? There was lunch counter segregation elsewhere in Oklahoma. The answer is found in the actions of the city's NAACP Youth Council and its adult advisor, Clara Luper.



Downtown Oklahoma City during the late 1950s and early 1960s became the scene of numerous sit-ins by young blacks protesting segregation in eating establishments (Oklahoma County Metropolitan Library).

She had taught history at Dunjee High School in the city area since 1951.⁵ Deeply influenced by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., she had written a play about him which the Youth Council was asked to perform in New York City. She and the Council players went there by way of a northern route, along which they received lunch counter service on an equal basis with whites. Enjoying a hamburger at an integrated restaurant was a new experience for most of the youngsters. On the return trip they traveled a southern route, where they faced discrimination once again. After returning the Youth Council voted to integrate the city's downtown eating establishments. The experience of being served was fresh in their minds, and they were aware of the peaceful integration that had already taken place in Oklahoma's schools, buses, and theaters.⁶

They first tried negotiation. A committee began unpublicized talks in May, 1957, with the individual managers and owners of each city eating establishment to persuade them to serve blacks on an equal basis. Youth Council members aided Clara Luper and others who were on the committee.⁷ Going downtown in groups of two or three, they tried to convince the owners, but the latter explained that they would not serve

THE CHRONICLES OF OKLAHOMA



Black youths in Katz Department Store occupied every seat at the lunch counter to protest segregation (Courtesy Clara Luper).

blacks for fear of losing their white customers. After more than a year of unsuccessful talks, the Youth Council decided to stage its first sit-in.⁸ Phase one of the struggle to be served (August 19–September 1, 1958) was at hand.

The Youth Council spent over fifteen months planning the sit-ins. They chose the five major downtown lunch counters—John A. Brown's, Veazey's Drug, Katz Drug, Kress', and Green's Variety Store. The Green's management cordially gave the demonstrators service, making a sit-in unnecessary there. Veazey's was also integrated without a sit-in.⁹ It was a different story elsewhere.

Katz Drug was the scene of sit-ins from August 19 until August 21, when the children were finally served. The youths occupied most of the soda fountain seats and patiently waited to be served. Police remained close by to prevent disorders but there were none.¹⁰

The day after the group was served at Katz they went to Kress', where they won service—after a fashion. Although served refreshments, the

youngsters had to stand up to eat because the management had removed the counter stools.¹¹ This incident bore a striking similarity to what Southern newspaper editor Harry Golden once called the phenomenon of the "vertical Negro."¹² Nevertheless the Youth Council had successfully desegregated another lunch counter.

Brown's management put up far more resistance. One day the protesters found no seats because all had been taken (before the store opened) by white youths, who yielded their places only to other white customers.¹³ There were other incidents, the most serious being the arrest of a white youth after he struck a black youngster. Fortunately such incidents were rare due in part to preventive action by police, who were on hand during all demonstrations and who were ordered to remain impartial while warning or arresting anyone creating a disturbance.¹⁴

Yet the sit-ins were losing momentum. Brown's remained adamant, and school was approaching, which meant that most protesters might have to be replaced with older blacks. The Youth Council finally suspended the sit-ins on September 1. Luper called it a tactical maneuver. Barbara Posey, fifteen-year-old spokeswoman for the Council, explained that the moratorium was ordered so that members of such city groups as the United Church Women, which had contacted the youths and pledged their support, could use their influence on the business owners.¹⁵

At first glance the suspension seemed a tacit admission of defeat. But the young blacks had opened four of the five downtown stores on their list, and Posey claimed that over a dozen other eating places had either opened their doors or had pledged to do so at a later date. This amazing group of youngsters had also attracted the attention of reporters from *The New York Times*, which printed five separate stories about the Oklahoma City demonstrations.¹⁶

More striking than the publicity was the relatively tranquil atmosphere during the protests. Oklahoma City stood in contrast to Montgomery, Alabama, where a few days after the Oklahoma sit-in suspension, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., was arrested, jailed, and kicked by city police. Similarly in Miami, Florida, in 1959 several sit-in leaders were either beaten or threatened.¹⁷

The presentation of a plan for integrating all the city's eating facilities represented the first event of any significance after the September moratorium. It was written by a citizens' group representing churches, educational leaders, and other agencies. The plan called upon the public to patronize restaurants that served blacks. Although it was submitted to the Oklahoma City Council of Churches, the group gave it only indirect support. But the second stage of the civil rights campaign had begun. It was to last

THE CHRONICLES OF OKLAHOMA

twenty-three months and would be marked by negotiations and more demonstrations.¹⁸

While talks proceeded, the Youth Council constantly reminded restaurant owners of their desire for service. They did this either through "popcorn sit-ins,"—small, brief student protests during school lunch hours—or through telephone calls to lunch counters. The blacks would simply ask: "May we eat today?"¹⁹ The answer was usually no. According to Youth Council files, only ten establishments were desegregated by the year's end.²⁰

In contrast to the last three months of 1958, Youth Council members in 1959 were back on the street testing eating facilities, although they staged few formal sit-ins. Four Council members were refused service at Adair's Cafeteria in February. Its owner, Ralph Adair, told a group of NAACP leaders that he was for blacks and had voted to integrate eating facilities at the county courthouse but would not serve them at his establishments: "I cannot make money serving Negroes because I will lose my white customers."²¹ Manager J. B. Masoner of Katz, a recently integrated drug store, stated that serving black people had not hurt his business, but Adair's argument was repeated by the vast majority of store owners whenever they tried to justify their policies.²²

Judging by the newspaper accounts of unsuccessful demonstrations, the Youth Council did not make significant headway in 1959. For example, members of the Youth Council were refused service at Brown's in June, July, September, and December. Also discouraging were the first few months of 1960, the year which marked the start of the involvement of the city council and the governor in the lunch counter controversy. E. C. Moon of the NAACP and Wayne B. Snow of the Oklahoma City Council of Churches urged the city council at the March 1 meeting to pass an ordinance outlawing segregation in places of public accommodation. But the city council agreed with Municipal Counselor E. H. Moler, who stated in a legal opinion that the council lacked such power.²³

In protest the black community laid plans for a massive downtown sit-in, but local NAACP leaders called it off at the request of Governor J. Howard Edmondson. He issued a statement which mildly criticized the recalcitrant restaurant owners and announced the creation of a Governor's Committee on Human Relations. In place of the downtown sit-in, blacks staged a "goodwill march" to the state capitol. March leaders said they would end token sit-ins (the type that had been going on at Brown's) to allow the governor's group time to act. Meeting several times, the Governor's Committee tried unsuccessfully to reach agreement with restaurant owners.²⁴

Nearly two years had passed since the first wave of sit-ins had been

cancelled. Many eating establishments refused to serve black people in spite of the efforts of various groups to negotiate a settlement. The time had come for a new action—the boycott. On August 10, 1960, black city physician Dr. Charles N. Atkins announced that a boycott of downtown stores would take place if blacks were not permitted lunch counter service within five days. Because black youths failed to gain service, there was a mass meeting of members of the black community, who decided to begin the downtown boycott. The action was to be a general, not selective, boycott of downtown stores, but protest leaders exempted nine places which had previously opened their doors to blacks.²⁵

Behind the scenes, important activities were in progress. Over the radio Luper and others informed the black community about the boycott; volunteers with cameras took pictures of black people who still shopped downtown. Telephone committees would identify these people and call them up to discourage them from patronizing downtown stores. The picketing and similar tactics had their effect on restaurant owners. The NAACP Youth Council files reveal that by the end of 1960, the number of food service facilities open to blacks had risen to 100—an increase of over 100 percent from the year before.²⁶

During the boycott black demonstrators were the target of the first legal action taken against them since the campaign's onset in 1958. Nine were arrested for disorderly conduct at the Cravens Building, the halls of which they had blocked while trying to obtain service at Anna Maude's Cafeteria in January of 1961. Two months later a request for a court injunction was filed to prevent further demonstrations at the Cravens Building, but by the time the judge made a ruling, which allowed some protests to occur, the boycott was over. On July 6, 1961, Harvey Everest of the Governor's Committee on Human Relations had announced the lowering of racial barriers at three major downtown eating facilities, including Brown's. As a result black leaders announced an end to the boycott.²⁷

The role of the boycott in the overall struggle to be served is a matter of controversy, with some people claiming it was effective while others asserting the opposite conclusion. A city police lieutenant present at almost all of the sit-ins claimed monetary pressure was not the major reason many owners ended their resistance. He said they feared that some of the black children might be hurt, which could cause a violent confrontation. The monetary effect of the boycott remains uncertain because store owners have died, moved away, or are reluctant to give information from their records. During the boycott merchants claimed that they saw no drop in black customers and total sales.²⁸ But one high official at Brown's, when reached in 1972, admitted, "It had a depressing effect on business."²⁹ And Luper,

THE CHRONICLES OF OKLAHOMA

who maintained that the resulting economic pinch was instrumental in opening eating facilities, said that serious talks with owners did not really begin until the boycott. As evidence she claimed that hundreds of city blacks who had charge accounts at downtown stores gave them up and shopped elsewhere. Her statements are indirectly supported by an October, 1960, Youth Council survey, which found that most blacks shopping downtown were from outside Oklahoma City.³⁰

The eleven month boycott had been accompanied by the absence of violence. This was in sharp contrast to many Southern cities. For example, a series of sit-ins in Jacksonville, Florida, around the onset of Oklahoma City's boycott, led to a race riot. But three long years of protest lay between the NAACP Youth Council and total victory. The last phase of the demonstrations, which lasted from July, 1961, to July, 1964, would be marked by surges of direct action followed by periods of inactivity. During these latter times the protesters would try more negotiations, and if they failed, rebuild support for further demonstrations.³¹

During the remainder of 1961 Luper led demonstrations at a restaurant called the Pink Kitchen. In this instance the protests led to the arrest of several demonstrators and the filing of an injunction suit which halted further protests there. But negotiations with other Oklahoma City eating places led to the opening of some of them; according to the Youth Council's desegregation progress report, 115 eating establishments were open to blacks as of December, 1961.³²

During 1962 and the first five months of 1963 the Youth Council conducted almost no sit-ins, presumably devoting their main energies to rebuilding their morale and talking to more store owners. City government was aware, however, that the lull would not last indefinitely. At Mayor Jack Wilkes' request, the city council created a Community Relations Committee in May to help solve the city's racial problems and head off the renewal of sit-ins by acting as mediators for both sides in a dispute. The committee did not, however, prevent new protests.³³

There were sit-ins every day from May 31 to June 4 at such places as Bishops and the Skirvin Hotel, resulting in a quick series of victories. More than twenty businesses began to serve blacks as a result of these protests. Mayor Wilkes played an important role in the talks during this time by serving as an arbiter between restaurant owners and blacks. Other people involved in the talks were the NAACP's Jimmie Stewart and Frank Carey of the recently formed city human relations committee.³⁴

The black community was jubilant over the string of sit-in successes. Clara Luper commented that the agreements "pretty well complete" the downtown integration goals and that outlying segregated eating places



Holding placards proclaiming “We are Americans too” and “Is Democracy for whites only,” these young civil rights protestors were seen frequently in Oklahoma City from 1958 to 1964 (Oklahoma Publishing Company).

would be among future targets. But there was to be another year of protests and legal squabbles before the city’s eating facilities would be fully integrated.³⁵

For nearly six months there were no sit-ins. Then in November Calvin Luper (Clara Luper’s son) of the Youth Council issued a call to action at the state NAACP convention. He said that blacks should “demonstrate, demonstrate, and demonstrate with sit-ins, lay-ins, or smoke-ins to end segregation of public accommodations.”³⁶ That same day pickets from the city chapter of the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), later joined by the veteran Youth Council members, began demonstrations at Ralph’s Drug Store.³⁷

Then followed a period of moves and countermoves. Ralph’s owners obtained an injunction halting sit-ins, though a visiting judge dismissed the order in early 1964. The black protesters chose to negotiate rather than renew the sit-ins at Ralph’s. Meanwhile in March, the Community Relations Committee recommended that a public accommodations ordinance be passed, but the city council voted to table the motion. In May Clara Luper

THE CHRONICLES OF OKLAHOMA



By the early 1960s sit-ins and peaceful demonstrations had effectively ended segregation in the city's restaurants (Oklahoma Publishing Company).

led forty blacks in a sit-in at the Split-T Restaurant, but the management obtained an injunction and forced the young blacks to leave. Action once again shifted to the conference table as the Mayor's Human Relations Committee sponsored a series of hearings on the proposed public accommodations law. To underscore their continued determination, the Youth Council held another sit-in, this time at Ned's Steak House. As with so many other demonstrations in the past six years, "there was no violence and police made no arrests."³⁸

The demonstrators' resolve, plus the likelihood of changes in national racial policy, pushed the city council to action. On June 2 it passed a public accommodations ordinance forbidding operators of such establishments from refusing to serve anyone because of race, religion, or color. The law included restaurants, swimming pools, and theaters. Its wording was similar to the 1964 Civil Rights Act, which went into effect on July 2, 1964, only two days before Oklahoma City's ordinance did. On July 4 two

groups of Oklahoma City blacks tested four eating facilities which had previously refused them service. They were served at all four locations. The struggle to be served had ended successfully.³⁹

With the passage of time and the cooling of tempers, the task of analyzing the demonstrations has become easier. Two questions can be answered with some degree of accuracy. First, what did the young blacks accomplish? By staging these protests, Clara Luper and the NAACP Youth Council successfully integrated Oklahoma City's lunch counters, providing another defeat for Jim Crow. The Youth Council also became a civil rights information center; its efforts stimulated a wave of sit-ins that integrated lunch counters across the state. Clara Luper mentioned another important result of the protests: "They proved that change could come non-violently under the present form of government."⁴⁰

Second, why did they succeed and why were they so peaceful? The reasons are many. The age of the protesters, for example, was very important. Unlike adults, the black youths—many of whom were elementary school students—seemed much less threatening to whites; in addition, violent action against children would be more likely open to censure by whites as well as blacks.⁴¹ Second, the discipline of the demonstrators was a factor. They were so committed to non-violence that when sporadic confrontations did occur, they did not retaliate. Of course also important was the restraint of the police, who did not harass the demonstrators, watched closely to make sure white hecklers were warned or arrested, and arrested civil rights protesters only when they were instructed to do so—usually when a court order was involved. Certainly the generally sympathetic attitudes of such city and state officials as Mayor Wilkes and Governor Edmondson was a factor, as was the persistence of the Youth Council, which stubbornly pursued its objectives for many years. Also important was the absence of segregation laws; for the most part the Youth Council had to change customary policies, not statutes. Another reason for success was the boycott, which demonstrated to owners that blacks did indeed possess the economic power to back up their demands.

Important though these factors may be, the social change which had been going on in the state and nation for over a decade was also significant. The sit-ins were but a part of changes in racial policy—such as school desegregation—which convinced many whites that future changes were inevitable. The editorial cartoons of *The Daily Oklahoman* reflect the shift in white attitudes. In 1958 one cartoon portrays a white city lunch counter owner saying "Sorry" to a demonstrator and pointing to a sign on his counter wall that says, "I reserve the right to refuse service!" In contrast to this is the cartoon of June 9, 1963, after the Youth Council opened up several

THE CHRONICLES OF OKLAHOMA

restaurants. The picture is of "Jim Crow" flying down a shadowy path toward a sign marked "Extinction."⁴²

The Oklahoma City sit-ins must be put in proper historical perspective. They were not the first black-led civil rights sit-ins in America. Indeed they were preceded by a number of protests which began during World War II. In 1942 and 1943 various chapters of the newly formed CORE held sit-ins in Chicago, Detroit, and Denver which opened up movie theaters and restaurants to blacks. In addition the Howard University NAACP sponsored similar demonstrations in Washington, D.C. Shortly after the war, CORE representatives led protests in such towns as Lawrence, Kansas, and Columbia, Missouri.⁴³

Oklahoma City's protests are worth noting because in many respects they were typical of the border state sit-ins of the 1950s which took place in such cities as Baltimore and St. Louis. They were black-led, non-violent direct action campaigns to eliminate Jim Crow practices by dramatizing their undemocratic nature. The protesters used negotiations before resorting to sit-ins, and they had some success in persuading owners to change their policies without use of demonstrations. The sit-in campaigns continued on and off for a long time; those in St. Louis and Oklahoma City, for example, lasted approximately six years, and they finally led to the desegregation of amusement parks, swimming pools, and theaters, as well as lunch counters. In contrast to Southern sit-ins, those in the border states were marked by a minimum of violence, and they were in part so successful in speeding up changes in race relations because of the absence of discriminatory laws.⁴⁴

In some ways the Oklahoma City protests were unusual. The leading organization involved was the NAACP, not CORE, even though their tactics were similar. The boycott played a larger role in the Sooner State sit-ins than elsewhere. The age of the demonstrators was another distinctive feature. Youth Council participants were elementary and high school students, while in St. Louis most protesters were adults. These differences should not be exaggerated, however. The tactics were the same, the Oklahoma City CORE chapter later joined the protests, and in Baltimore, at least, it was the young people (in that case college students) who deserved major credit for the victories, even though they sometimes exasperated the adult leadership in the process.⁴⁵

Besides being typical examples of border state protests of the 1950s, the Oklahoma sit-ins are useful in another way. They are another reminder to historians that the so-called Civil Rights Revolution did not suddenly arise in 1960. Typical of older historical viewpoints is John Hope Franklin, who begins his chapter on the "Black Revolution" by stating that student sit-ins in Greensboro, North Carolina, February, 1960, were "the beginning of

the sit-in movement which spread through the South and to numerous places in the North."⁴⁶ Although technically correct, Franklin is misleading because he fails to mention the importance of the sit-ins of the 1940s and 1950s. Even historian Richard Dalfiume, who rightfully stresses that the March on Washington Movement (MOWM) of the 1940s was a precursor of the modern Civil Rights Movement, does not mention an equally important phenomenon—the sit-ins.⁴⁷

More accurate statements on the role of sit-ins are found in August Meier and Elliott Rudwick's book, *From Plantation to Ghetto*. They at least briefly mention CORE and the border state sit-ins of the 1950s. There is some indication that recent American history scholars as well as students of black history are beginning to realize the extent and significance of such protests. Richard Polenberg's work on domestic America during World War II, for example, mentions the sit-ins as well as the MOWM. And with the publication in 1973 of Meier and Rudwick's study of CORE, historians now have at their disposal the most complete account to date of sit-ins during the 1940s and 1950s. They give further proof that the Southern college student demonstrations of the early 1960s were but larger manifestations of two earlier decades of black protest.⁴⁸

The Oklahoma City demonstrations raise one question, however, to which few of these and other recent historical studies have addressed themselves. Why did these sit-ins, or those in St. Louis or Baltimore, fail to spread as did those in Greensboro? It is easy to see why a nation in the midst of total war would not be captivated by the protests of the early 1940s. But it is not so obvious why many black and white Americans responded in 1960 and not in the 1950s. Perhaps black Americans, especially those in the South, had not yet reached the level of militancy necessary for the protests to catch on. Or perhaps the American public paid little attention to the border states, since they expected black-white confrontations to come only from the Deep South. Perhaps the reason is something completely different. These are hypotheses which historians might profitably explore in their future studies of the black American's struggle for equality in the twentieth century.

ENDNOTES

* Dr. Carl Graves is a visiting assistant professor at the University of Kansas in Lawrence, Kansas.

¹ *The Daily Oklahoman* (Oklahoma City), August 21, 1958, p. 17. This newspaper, including the Sunday edition, will hereafter be cited as *Oklahoman*.

² Alan Saxe, "Protest and Reform: The Desegregation of Oklahoma City" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Oklahoma, 1969), pp. 16-19, 49, 162.

THE CHRONICLES OF OKLAHOMA

³ *Ibid.*, p. 136; Peter M. Bergman and Mort N. Bergman, *The Chronological History of the Negro in America* (New York: A Mentor Book, 1969), pp. 516–517, 524.

⁴ Saxe, "Protest and Reform," p. 158.

⁵ She is a graduate of Langston University (a predominantly black Oklahoma college) with a math major and history minor who received a Master of Arts degree in secondary education at the University of Oklahoma. In 1968 she became an instructor of American and Oklahoma history at Oklahoma City's Northwest Classen High School. This "long-time Oklahoma City civil rights leader" was to receive her greatest fame for her role in the sit-ins, but she has remained active, directing the NAACP Youth Council, leading demonstrations during the 1969 city garbage workers' strike and editing the black-oriented, state-based magazine, *Black Voices. Oklahoman*, August 14, 1968, p. 1, August 16, 1969, p. 1.

⁶ Mrs. Clara M. Luper, private interview, July 17, 1972; *The Black Dispatch* (Oklahoma City), September 26, 1958, p.2. This newspaper will hereafter be cited as *Dispatch*.

⁷ Kaye M. Teall, *Black History in Oklahoma: A Resource Book* (Oklahoma City: Oklahoma City Public Schools, 1971), p. 241.

⁸ Luper interview; Barbara Posey and Gwendolyn Fuller, "Protest Drug Counter Discrimination," *Crisis*, December, 1958, p. 612.

⁹ *Dispatch*, August 29, 1958, p. 1, *Oklahoman*, August 25, 1958, p. 2.

¹⁰ *Oklahoman*, August 21, 1958, p. 17, August 22, p. 5.

¹¹ *Oklahoman*, August 23, 1958, p. 1.

¹² He observed that "vertical segregation" has almost been eliminated: Blacks and whites now stood at the same grocery counters and shopped in the same department stores. "The fur begins to fly" quipped Golden, only when blacks sit down next to whites. He jokingly suggested that the way to solve the problem was to remove the seats. Little did the editor of the North Carolina *Israelite* know that someone would actually try such a thing. *Only in America* (Cleveland: World Publishing Company, 1958), pp. 121–122.

¹³ *Oklahoman*, August 25, 1958, p. 2.

¹⁴ *Oklahoman*, September 2, 1958, p. 1, August 24, pp. 1–2, August 27, p. 6; Lieutenant Don Rogers, private interview, July 19, 1972.

¹⁵ *Oklahoman*, August 30, 1958, p. 5, August 31, p. 8A; Luper interview; *Dispatch*, September 5, 1958, p. 1.

¹⁶ *Dispatch*, September 5, 1958, p. 1; *New York Times*, August 22, 1958, p. 11, August 23, p. 16, August 24, p. 24, August 26, p. 18, August 28, p. 25.

¹⁷ Congress of Racial Equality, *Cracking the Color Line* (Pamphlet; New York: CORE, 1962), pp. 18–20; *Dispatch*, September 5, 1958, p. 1.

¹⁸ *Oklahoman*, September 10, 1958, p. 7, September 16, p. 13.

¹⁹ Luper interview.

²⁰ Saxe, "Protest and Reform," p. 168.

²¹ *Dispatch*, February 6, 1959, p. 1.

²² *New York Times*, September 12, 1958, p. 12.

²³ *Dispatch*, June 19, 1959, p. 1, July 31, p. 1; Luper interview; *Oklahoman*, September 20, 1959, p. 12A; *Dispatch*, January 1, 1960, p. 5; *Oklahoma City Council Journal*, Vol. 34-A, pp. 401–403, 429–434; *Dispatch*, March 4, 1960, p. 1, *Oklahoman*, March 9, 1960, p. 13.

²⁴ *Dispatch*, April 1, 1960, p. 1, August 19, p. 1; *Oklahoman*, April 1, 1960, p. 20, April 3, p. 1, August 19, p. 1.

²⁵ Atkins later became the city's first black city councilman in 1966. *Oklahoman*, October 4, 1966, p. N4, December 31, p. 1, August 7, 1960, p. 1A, August 20, p. 1, August 11, p. 2, August 13, p. 7.

²⁶ Luper interview; Saxe, "Protest and Reform," pp. 168–169; the Youth Council files

were destroyed in 1968 when a fire bomb gutted the Freedom Center in which they were stored. But Saxe had seen the files before the fire and included yearly figures, quoted here, from them in his dissertation.

²⁷ *Oklaboman*, January 15, 1961, p. 1, February 5, p. 4A, March 19, p. 1A, March 12, p. 1A, July 7, p. 1; *Dispatch*, November 10, 1961, p. 1, March 24, p. 1.

²⁸ Rogers Interview; *Oklaboman*, August 24, 1960, p. 1.

²⁹ Interview with unnamed employee of Brown's Department Store, December 16, 1972; this official knew the daily sales figures during the boycott; he asked that his name and position be kept confidential.

³⁰ Luper interview; *Dispatch*, August 26, 1960, p. 1, October 14, p. 6.

³¹ Bergman and Bergman, *Chronological History*, p. 570; August Meier suggests that the alternating periods of action and inaction in Oklahoma City were similar to those occurring in Southern civil rights protests of the early 1960s. He contends that the summer, 1963, "revival of direct action in Oklahoma City came in the wake of the Birmingham demonstration that same spring." August Meier to the author, February 1, 1974.

³² *Dispatch*, November 3, 1961, p. 1; November 10, p. 1; Saxe, "Protest and Reform," p. 168.

³³ *Dispatch*, September 7, 1962, p. 1; *Oklahoma City Council Journal*, Vol. 37-B, pp. 979-980; *Oklaboman*, May 29, 1963, p. 13; *Dispatch*, May 31, 1963, p. 1.

³⁴ *Oklaboman*, June 1, 1963, p. 1, June 2, pp. 1-2, June 3, pp. 1-2, June 4, pp. 1-2, June 5, p. 11; *Dispatch*, June 7, 1963, p. 1.

³⁵ *Dispatch*, June 7, 1963, p. 1.

³⁶ *Oklaboman*, November 17, 1963, p. 1.

³⁷ *Oklaboman*, November 19, 1963, p. 13.

³⁸ *Oklahoma City Council Journal*, Vol. 38-A, p. 327; *Oklaboman*, November 21, 1963, p. 1; *Dispatch*, January 24, 1964, p. 4, May 15, p. 1, June 5, p. 1, *Oklaboman*, May 7, 1964, p. 5, May 19, p. 2.

³⁹ *Oklahoma City Council Journal*, Vol. 38-A, pp. 698-699; Bergman and Bergman, *Chronological History*, p. 583; *Oklaboman*, July 5, 1964, p. A13.

⁴⁰ Luper interview.

⁴¹ One black man, who was 18 in 1958 when he began his participation in the sit-ins, estimated that the protesters averaged 10 years of age. Though some of the youngest demonstrators did not completely understand the protests in which they took part, he felt that the vast majority knew what they were doing and were dedicated to their cause. Mr. Willard C. Pitts, private interview, June 8, 1977. Thus the Oklahoma City sit-ins were not a case of adults using children for tactical advantage, but of activist youths—such as Barbara Posey—taking most of the initiative. Clara Luper's inspirational role, however, should not be forgotten.

⁴² *Oklaboman*, September 12, 1958, p. 10, June 9, 1963, p. 16A.

⁴³ CORE, *Cracking the Color Line*, pp. 1-4; Richard Polenberg, *War and Society: The United States, 1941-1945* (Philadelphia: J. P. Lippincott Company, 1972), p. 107; August Meier, Elliott Rudwick, and Francis L. Broderick, eds., *Black Protest Thought in the Twentieth Century* (2nd ed; Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1971), p. 246; August Meier and Elliott Rudwick, *CORE: A Study of the Civil Rights Movement* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), pp. 56-57.

⁴⁴ CORE, *Cracking the Color Line*, pp. 5-12; an account of one phase of the Baltimore sit-ins which provides many comparisons to the Oklahoma City protests is August Meier's, "The Successful Sit-Ins in a Border City: A Study in Social Causation," *Journal of Intergroup Relations*, II (Summer, 1961), pp. 231-237.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

THE CHRONICLES OF OKLAHOMA

⁴⁶ John Hope Franklin, *From Slavery to Freedom: A History of Negro Americans* (4th ed; New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1974), p. 476.

⁴⁷ Richard M. Dalfiume, "The 'Forgotten Years' of the Negro Revolution," *Journal of American History*, Vol. LV (June, 1968), pp. 90–116.

⁴⁸ August Meier and Elliott Rudwick, *From Plantation to Ghetto* (Revised ed., New York: Hill and Wang, 1970), pp. 252–254; Polenberg, *War and Society*, pp. 102–107; Meier and Rudwick, *CORE*, pp. 3–100.