

## “The Dream Is Lost”

### *Henry Marsh and Black Governance in an Era of White Political Resistance*

On Friday, August 20, 1982, members of the Crusade and a handful of Richmond’s most prominent African American political figures assembled for a private retreat at the Roslyn Conference Center in Henrico County, Virginia. Shortly after Ellen D. Pearson called the meeting to order, the state director of the NAACP, Jack Gravely, interjected, “What the hell is going on in Richmond? What is the Crusade doing”? Gravely would not have asked that question in 1977. Had he, not a member in attendance would have struggled to answer the question. Even fewer would have scrambled to defend the Crusade’s legacy. Yet in 1982 the Crusade called the closed session to address a crisis of black political leadership. It appeared that African American city council newcomer, Dr. Roy West, had clandestinely negotiated with white members of the city council to appoint himself mayor. West’s appointment to the mayoralty was the biggest threat the Crusade had faced since the annexation of Chesterfield County—and few people saw West coming. Roslyn became a referendum on the future of the black body politic. The city’s district system may have ensured a five-to-four BMC, but it did little to safeguard the character of candidates. Majority–minority districts did even less to shield black communities from intensifying economic vulnerability or impede the persistence of white obstructionism. Shortly after the election of the BMC, Atlanta mayor Maynard Jackson commented, “The politics of Richmond are now controlled by Afro-Americans, [but its] economics [are] still controlled by white Americans. It is a question now of whether there will be a standoff or a standing up together.” Richmond had answered Jackson’s

query by the early 1980s. In the years following 1977, African Americans came to realize that it would take more than majority–minority districts to bring about broad-based racial equality. Sa’ad El-Amin (formerly Jeroyd Greene), a political consultant to the Crusade, had Roy West and the state of Richmond’s black communities in mind when he lamented at Roslyn, “The dream is lost.”<sup>1</sup>

The rise of black governance eventually proved to be one of the civil rights movement’s most enduring legacies. The election of the BMC in 1977 represented nearly a decade of unprecedented African American political empowerment. African American voters elected hundreds of local and county-level officials, namely in cities with black-majority populations or cities that were on the verge of becoming majority black. By April 1974, the total number of black elected officials in the seven states covered by the VRA reached 963: including one member of the U.S. Congress, 36 state legislators, 429 county officials, and 497 municipal officials. Not only had the spirit of electoral politics led to a cascade of rising black expectations in the South, but the belief that African American involvement in local electoral politics would lead to greater community control also characterized politics beyond the region. African Americans during the 1970s and 1980s elected more than half of the country’s black mayors in cities where blacks were not the majority. Carl Stokes of Cleveland, Ohio, and Richard Hatcher of Gary, Indiana, led the way when they were elected in 1968. A number of black mayors followed Stokes and Hatcher’s lead—Kenneth Gibson in Newark, New Jersey, in 1970; Tom Bradley in Los Angeles in 1973; and Coleman Young in Detroit in 1974. Many of these northern (and western) mayors were elected to office by forging interracial coalitions with white Democrats and liberals. Some of them garnered a considerable amount of white votes by de-emphasizing race and racially polarized language. In many ways, these mayors’ electoral strategies became a blueprint for black governance in Richmond after 1977, and they portended the conflict that precipitated the meeting at the Roslyn Conference Center.<sup>2</sup>

The federal government also played a critical role in the process of black political empowerment and governance during the 1970s. Black governance in that decade was the result of a calculated alliance between African Americans and Washington that dated back to the 1930s and cul-

minated in the civil rights acts—African Americans, like whites during the New Deal, cast their lot with the liberal state. For a brief moment in twentieth-century history, it appeared that the Great Society would raise the standard of living for African Americans, much like the New Deal had for white ethnic communities. In fact, the American civil rights movement, the consummate era of possibility, seemed to be followed by an era of real material changes. The reapportionment lawsuits of the 1970s had eliminated racially discriminatory multimember district systems in a majority of southern states. Majority–minority district systems gave rise to an unprecedented number of black legislators and in many ways instigated a durable shift toward a racial democracy. Governing bodies that finally reflected the diversity of the American experience characterized this racial democracy. It also appeared that federal officials were committed to defending the legacy of the Voting Rights Act. Although voting and electoral politics continued to be contested matters during and after the 1970s, African Americans had allies in Washington. Jurisdictions covered by the VRA, for instance, submitted 30,332 potential changes to voting practices and procedures under section 5 between 1975 and 1980. In response to these potential changes—in many of these cases, policy makers made electoral changes with no discriminatory intent—the DOJ issued more than 700 rejections. Of the changes that federal officials rejected, however, the vast majority pertained to minority-vote dilution. Annexations accounted for 30.5 percent of the rejected changes, the highest percentage among dilution tactics recorded by the USCCR. By the early 1990s, federal officials made hundreds of American cities and state-level jurisdictions switch from at-large to single-member district systems. These districts, it turned out, had ominous implications for urban America.<sup>3</sup>

Richmond’s majority–minority district system was also the product of demographic and structural developments. For the first time in Richmond’s history, black council members—three of them with virtually no previous experience as public officials—numerically outnumbered white city council members. There were, however, worrying consequences to this symbolic political victory. Predominantly minority districts and precincts were the product of the undemocratic face of Jim Crow. Richmond’s BMC was not just the culmination of black voter mobilization

and the district system. In the mid-twentieth century, the capital city also witnessed an increase in the number of nonwhite residents, an out-migration of whites to surrounding counties, and the fixity of municipal boundaries. The furtherance of residential segregation and the compression of poorer African Americans into a handful of densely populated, racially homogeneous precincts worsened white flight and the situation of fixed city-county boundaries. In the late 1970s, African Americans made up approximately 48 percent of Richmond's total population (nearly 70 percent of that number were of voting age) and occupied five council seats. These council seats were in many ways contingent upon larger troublesome demographic trends. Of Richmond's seventy census tracts in 1970 (the district system was derived from the 1970 census), twenty-seven were more than 90 percent white, and nineteen were more than 90 percent African American. Put another way, well more than half of Richmond precincts were almost entirely racially homogenous. Many of Richmond's racially mixed neighborhoods were only temporarily integrated as blacks moved in and whites moved away. A few of these areas existed on what was once Richmond's periphery, so that after whites moved away during the postwar period, these areas became the equivalent of African Americans' suburbs. In fact, the black middle-class area of Highland Park on Richmond's north side, known for its historic Queen Anne homes, was one such neighborhood. The census tracts in Highland Park that eventually voted for Roy West in 1982 were overwhelmingly African American. Two tracts, numbers 106 and 108, with the highest median annual household income, \$14,197 and \$15,720, respectively, were more than 90 percent black. Census tract 105, which was roughly 87 percent African American, had a median household income of \$17,379. In 1980, Richmond's average median household income was \$13,606, and the Commonwealth of Virginia's was \$17,475. These Highland Park census tracts were eventually instrumental in changing the nature of black governance in Richmond.<sup>4</sup>

Richmond's neighborhoods were divided as much by class as by race. In 1970, the U.S. Census Bureau reported that only 8.3 percent of Richmond's whites lived below the poverty line. That number was nearly triple for African Americans, with 25.2 percent living below the poverty line. The vast majority of Richmond's most economically vulner-

able residents resided in densely clustered public-housing complexes on the city’s East End and south side—particularly in the districts of Henry Marsh, Claudette McDaniel, and Walter Kenney. Walter Kenney’s district was home to the Gilpin Court housing projects. In Gilpin Court’s precinct, census tract 301, 67.6 percent of the people lived below the poverty line. In Henry Marsh’s East End district, census tracts 204, 201, and 202 were home to Mosby, Fairfield, and Whitcomb Courts, respectively. These tracts were also decidedly poor and overwhelmingly black. Census tract 204 was 99 percent African American, and 31 percent of its inhabitants fell below the poverty line; census tract 202 was also more than 99 percent African American, with 41.9 percent of the tract’s residents below the poverty line; and, last, census tract 201 was 97.3 percent African American, with nearly 45 percent its residents below the poverty line. In 1970, 33.6 percent of African Americans across the United States lived below the poverty level. In fiscal year 1977–1978, the City of Richmond averaged roughly 6,800 households and 20,400 individuals on the Food Stamp Program—roughly 11 percent of the city’s total population. African Americans elected the BMC in 1977 to address issues of this nature.<sup>5</sup>

All five members of Richmond’s BMC had campaigned on a civil rights agenda. African Americans’ success in electoral politics during the 1970s led to mounting expectations throughout America’s black communities. The same was true in Richmond. These candidates had very openly addressed the desire to bring material resources to black communities, ultimately to make good on the symbolism of their elections. During his campaign, Henry Marsh expressed Richmond’s need to “launch an attack on poverty” and argued not only that economic vulnerability was a major cause of Richmond’s social problems but also that city officials needed “to get away from having a little department in the city fighting poverty.” These candidates’ principle goals were to “attack poverty,” achieve “greater racial understanding,” forge stronger commitments to “excellence in education,” establish “greater community involvement in municipal affairs,” and, finally, extend a “hand of friendship and cooperation to the business community.” Each one also campaigned on solving unemployment (especially for African American youth), defending communities from crime and police brutality, and addressing the problem of increasingly segregated city schools. Their election to city council

was evidence that people believed them. The *Richmond Afro-American* contended on March 5, 1977: “When the new Council takes office next Tuesday, March 8, it will not only have a new look—but undoubtedly will have a new philosophy. All the winning black candidates ran on a power-to-the-people philosophy. . . . Therefore philosophically, it is expected that there will be a shift to people-oriented programs with less emphasis on programs designed to largely benefit the business community.” Five days after the council’s election, the Afro-American Corporation’s chief editor, Raymond Boone, suggested that because African American candidates ran and were subsequently elected on civil rights platforms, the community expected a movement toward empowerment programs that would emphasize social welfare and affirmative action.<sup>6</sup>

Of the five-member BMC, commonly referred to as “the Team,” incumbents Willie Dell and Henry Marsh came equipped with civil rights legacies. These two, decidedly more so than Walter Kenney, Chuck Richardson, or Claudette McDaniel, had been integral to Richmond’s fight for political, social, and economic justice. Marsh had been an early and passionate supporter of Jimmy Carter in 1976. Not long after being appointed mayor, he turned down an appointment to a federal judgeship by the Carter administration. Unlike other African American mayors such as Marion Barry, who often marched in “blue jeans and dashikis,” Marsh had earned a reputation as a soft-spoken legal and political strategist. In 1979, Tim Smith, who directed Jimmy Carter’s Virginia reelection campaign, stated, “[Marsh is] clearly a politician who is perceived as having influence with a national black constituency.” Shortly after the election and his appointment as mayor, Marsh emerged as the Team’s unofficial leader. If Marsh was the BMC’s tactician, Willie Dell was the fire.<sup>7</sup>

Dell, who was the first African American councilwoman in Richmond’s history, had been on the city council since 1973. During the enjoinder, when no city council elections could be held by order of the Supreme Court, council members had appointed Dell to replace Jim Carpenter. Dell, whose husband was the pastor of the East End’s Woodville Presbyterian Church, did not emerge on the political scene out of thin air. She had earned a bachelor’s degree from St. Augustine College, a historically black college, in Raleigh, North Carolina (now St. Augustine University) and had gone on to earn a master’s degree from Vir-

ginia Commonwealth University in 1960. Dell was a caseworker for the Richmond Department of Public Welfare between 1956 and 1961. By 1969, she headed that department’s maternal and infant care project. In the same year, she left public service to work as an assistant professor in the Virginia Commonwealth Graduate School of Social Work. When she decided to run for city council in 1972 (just prior to the enjoinder), Dell had the full support of Henry Marsh, Curtis Holt, the Creighton Court Civic Association, Edwina Hall, and the Crusade. Marsh put Dell’s name forward to replace Carpenter, and the Crusade argued years later that both black and white leaders made an agreement to appoint Dell to the city council. The Crusade, which “did not want the white establishment to anoint its own black leadership,” put pressure on the city council to appoint her. She came to epitomize what sociologist Belinda Corbett later called a “bridge leader”—her supporters realized that she had a knack for negotiating the space between communities and official leadership.<sup>8</sup>

Gendered expectations about female leadership also shaped Willie Dell’s political career. Historian Laurie B. Green argues that African American women, not just men, during the civil rights movement invested “in their own roles as protectors . . . against racial violence and other hardships.” Marsh and the Crusade put Dell’s name forward in 1973 precisely because of her dedication to the fight against poverty. Dell not only diversified the Social Work School’s curriculum by emphasizing economic vulnerability in black communities but also taught courses such as “Authenticity Techniques and the Black Experience.” If Sonny Cephas and Winfred Mundle had struggled to accommodate the politics of black empowerment in the 1960s, Dell was one of the first black councilpersons to emphasize racial politics. For instance, Dell and Marsh instigated the redevelopment of Jackson Ward during the mid-1970s (discussed later in this chapter). They eventually funneled thousands of dollars in block grant funds from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development to Jackson Ward and the George Mason area of Church Hill. It was also Dell, like Curtis Holt before her, who sought more community control in Richmond public housing by trying (although failing) to appoint a female public-housing resident to the RRHA’s board. Dell also resisted assumptions about how black female public officials were supposed to

dress and behave. As common as African-style clothing and Afros were to black style in the 1970s, it was extremely rare to see black leaders and public officials in Richmond dress in this fashion. Although respectability politics had long since fizzled out by the 1970s, members of Richmond's black establishment, especially women, continued to dress conventionally. Dell, however, dressed in the then popular image of cultural nationalism. She was the first member of Woodville Presbyterian Church to openly wear an Afro. Many whites and middle-class blacks often considered Dell too outspoken, but she came to embody Black Power's artistic renaissance in dress and spirit. Dell often wore a dashiki, a loose-fitting West African tunic decorated with colorful patterns, and unapologetically spoke in what experts would later call "Ebonics." Although she later came to believe that politicized African Americans detested her for these very reasons, she was one of the Crusade's most relevant members in the late 1970s.<sup>9</sup>

The Crusade was still an electoral force during the late 1970s. By 1977, this 1,200-member political action group continued to exercise considerable influence over local electoral politics. In 1977, the organization elected Norvell Robinson, a banquet manager for the downtown Holiday Inn, as its president. The *Richmond Afro-American*, whose circulation ranged from 10,000 to 15,000 in the late 1970s, continued to be the organization's chief ally and outlet. During the late 1970s, the Crusade had come to terms not merely with its success in helping implement a ward system and the election of a BMC but also with the fact that many of its 1,200 members were younger and more progressive than the professionals who had dominated the organization since 1956. These new members had come of age during the civil rights movement. The spirit of civil rights reforms, not Jim Crow, motivated these younger members to join the Crusade. Robinson argued, "The professionals had the time and the expertise to get things done." For nearly twenty years, some of Richmond's most influential African Americans had directed the Crusade, including Henry Marsh, Ethel Overby, podiatrist William S. Thornton, optometrist M. Philmore Howlett, Lola Hamilton, physician Frank Royal, John Brooks, physician William Ferguson Reid, Union Mutual Savings and Loan president Garfield F. Childs, and lawyer L. Douglas Wilder. By 1977, the Crusade's membership included an even



wider-cross section of the city’s black communities. Robinson argued further: “We have what we call young Turks, fire and brimstone preachers. And the teachers, we have them, they’re young. They want us to abandon the practical politics of yesterday. They want to be sure that if there are blacks running, they will get Crusade support. They don’t feel whites have ever really done anything to help the black community, the lower elements of the black community.” By the late 1970s, even Sa’ad El-Amin, a chief critic of the black political establishment in the late 1960s, was active in the Crusade, and by the early 1980s he was a chief political consultant to the Crusade. The diversification of the Crusade challenged the organization during the mid-1980s, but on the heels of the election in 1977 these cleavages were not yet apparent. What did seem apparent, however, was the fact that although African Americans had a numerical advantage at city hall and majority–minority districts had shifted the balance of power toward Richmond’s African American voters, the capital city’s economic powerbrokers were still exclusively white. Indeed, Robinson recognized this problem when he told Shelley Rolfe of the *Richmond Times-Dispatch* that black Americans needed to establish dialogue with “Richmond’s white financial establishment” and “search for an end to almost total black dependency on it.”<sup>10</sup>

African Americans’ political victories at the local level belied a more menacing reality: whites were still the gatekeepers to Richmond’s business community. After the election of 1977, two competing strains came to dominate Richmond politics—African Americans, who held the balance of political power yet had little economic muscle, and whites, who maintained a monopoly over the city’s business sector. The symbolism of blacks’ transition from protest to politics often obscured a harsh truth. Decades of institutional bigotry meant that African Americans’ wealth and influence paled in comparison to that of their white counterparts. In time, black politicians, black voters, and black political organizations came to view winning control over city halls as a vital bargaining chip. The Crusade and the BMC, which were previously skeptical of Richmond’s private sector because it was dominated by racist white elites, believed that elected office gave minority communities the leverage they needed to negotiate with local powerbrokers. Wealthy white powerbrokers also had strong ties to the council minority and were often among

the richest men not just in Richmond but also in Virginia. Although some of these powerbrokers had been elected to city council, most of them were not elected officials. They were most often appointed to the boards of civic agencies and held sway over the informal business relationships between city hall and Richmond's powerful business sector.<sup>11</sup>

Tension between politicized African Americans and well-heeled white elites became a defining characteristic of municipal politics in Richmond after 1977. In an article titled "Richmond's Silent Decision Makers," published in February 1978, Bill Miller of the *Richmond Times-Dispatch* was one of the few reporters from Richmond's daily newspapers to acknowledge this dichotomy. He argued, "Within the black community, leaders tend to be less financially endowed than their white counterparts, but they are generally professional or self-employed business leaders, just as is true for the white establishment. The black community leaders also tend to be major figures in organizations such as the city's major black political force, the Crusade for Voters." Miller was right—African Americans' political power derived almost exclusively from their associations with civic organizations. Yet, Miller pointed out, membership in Richmond's white elite establishment carried "a requisite of successful business community membership. . . . The city's power structure tends to be oriented toward its business and financial community and the leaders of the establishment can be found generally in the executive offices of the major businesses, corporations, and law firms." The white establishment occupied not just the same business-oriented groups but also the same social and political circles. These elites, Miller demonstrated, tended "to share moneyed lifestyles that accompany business success. Homes are located in the fashionable sections. Children are enrolled in private schools. The men are members of *the* downtown clubs." Members of Richmond's moneyed establishment most often lived in the exclusively white West End. Of the twenty-one men whom the *Dispatch* associated with Richmond's moneyed establishment, all but four lived in the West End, and more than half were Richmond natives.<sup>12</sup>

Even after African Americans assumed control of the city council, a decidedly paternalistic culture continued to characterize municipal politics. "Naturally," argued Robert Martin, the Richmond Chamber of Commerce vice president, "there was going to be some question in whites'

minds about the relationship between black council members and Richmond’s business community.” One month following the BMC’s election, council member Wayland Rennie argued in the *Richmond Times-Dispatch* that if Marsh and the BMC were not careful, they “could start the second major wave of white flight from the city.” Councilman Henry Valentine, a West Ender and president of a Richmond brokerage firm whose old family home had been converted into a museum of history and art, echoed Rennie’s incredulity. It was Valentine who openly expressed to McDaniel, the daughter of a chauffeur and a housewife, that blacks were incapable of running the city. As African Americans pushed for full equality over the mid-twentieth century, Richmond’s white elites often struggled to maintain the long-standing practice of restricting and granting freedoms on their own terms. Informal social and business relationships often crept into local politics. These informal arrangements, urban historians and political scientists argue, assume special priority in local government—particularly because political tradition, constitutional law, and private autonomy limit the formal workings of municipal governance. The representatives of white elites had dominated not merely city council but also the relationships between the city council and local economic life: “Like every other city, Richmond has a group of people who are influential with those who make major decisions—an establishment. In some cities, the establishment members are the conspicuous kingmakers who can deliver voters and are regularly in the headlines. But in Richmond, the power structure is made up of a more subtle network of business-oriented leaders,” explained Miller.<sup>13</sup>

Many, but not all, of these white powerbrokers—led by former councilman James C. Wheat Jr., businessman Thomas C. Boushall, and attorney Andrew J. Brent—were extremely reluctant to share power with African Americans. For instance, it was Brent, a lawyer with one of Richmond’s most established legal firms, who helped lead the way on the construction of Richmond’s Downtown Expressway and headed up the RMA in the late 1970s. Brent, Boushall, and Wheat were also active in the establishment of RF, TOP, and Richmond’s downtown-redevelopment plans—what became known as Project One. They were also closely affiliated with some of Richmond’s most influential and wealthy businessmen in the commonwealth, including pharmaceutical entrepreneur

E. Claiborne Robins of A. H. Robins Company (of Robitussin fame), department store owner William C. Thalhimer Jr., and Phillip Morris vice president B. A. Soyers. These local business elites had grown accustomed to working with close white associates at city hall. Mayor Marsh argued, "I am not privy to many of the situations where leaders of the white community meet. A lot of this is done in socializing and a lot of socializing is done where blacks are not present." Marsh could have easily argued that a great deal of this socializing and decision making took place in spaces where blacks were not just "not present" but in truth not welcome.<sup>14</sup>

Unlike the economy of a number of black cities in the Rust Belt with sizeable African American populations, Richmond's economy was in relatively decent shape during the 1970s. African Americans did not inherit a dying city, but Richmond's local economy underwent a dramatic transition from manufacturing to service, semiprofessional, and professional employment. The commonwealth's capital, just five hundred miles from nearly 50 percent of the entire U.S. population, trailed only Atlanta among southern cities that headquartered national and international firms.

During the late 1970s, Richmond had a double-A bond rating and was the leading producer of cigarettes and tobacco products. The Reynolds Corporation (formerly the Reynolds Metal Company) led America in synthetic fibers production, and the commonwealth's capital headquartered the Fifth District Federal Reserve Bank. Because Richmond was the capital, there were approximately 30,000 state jobs in and around the greater Richmond area during the late 1970s and 1980s. Most of its government jobs required not only semiprofessional and professional skills but also a high school diploma. In time, this movement toward specialized employment and professionalism proved to be Richmond's equivalent to Rust Belt deindustrialization.<sup>15</sup>

The trend toward professionalization and specialized employment did not bode well for many of the city's African Americans. Few manufacturing-based cities were exempt from the economic malaise of the 1970s. As economic stagnation and inflation slowed American manufacturing and middle-class black people entered the professional labor force, many working-class African Americans fell back into poverty. Just as Richmonders elected the BMC to city hall, the city began to lose the types of

**Table 4.1.** Employment Losses and Gains in Richmond, 1973–1976

Industry	Number of Jobs Lost (Total 8,031)	Number of Jobs Gained (Total 7,975)
Furniture	236	
Stone, Clay, and Glass	276	
Primary Metal	270	
Fabricated Metal Production	120	
Electrical Machinery	335	
Misc. Manufacturing	152	
Food	619	
Apparel	501	
Paper	515	
Printing	546	
Rubber, Plastics	100	
Mining	30	
Contract Construction	1,506	
Transportation and Public Utilities	1,418	
Wholesale and Retail	580	
Finance, Insurance, and Real Estate	257	
Local Government	570	
Federal and State Government		3,717
Service		2,870
Tobacco		1,049
Miscellaneous		339

Source: Data from *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, July 30, 1978, B2.

jobs that kept most African Americans above the poverty line—unskilled and semiskilled labor. At the same time, however, the metropolitan area gained jobs that required clerical, semiprofessional, and professional skill sets. In fact, the number of manufacturing establishments in Richmond proper fell from 418 in 1967 to 376 in 1976—nine major manufacturing plants closed between 1970 and 1976. Between 1954 and 1973, Richmond, like many American cities, witnessed the rise of the suburbanization of retail shopping. The city’s share of regional retail sales within the metropolitan area also fell from 89 percent to 57 percent, and the num-

ber of retail establishments fell by 665. Tobacco production remained the cornerstone of Richmond's manufacturing base. Those African Americans who did not work in tobacco production or other manufacturing jobs—outside of a handful of growing technocratic elites—often found it difficult to deal with the professionalization of Richmond's workforce and the suburbanization of retail and service jobs. African Americans who struggled in public school did not transition to professional employment.<sup>16</sup>

Even as early as the 1970s, census data demonstrated that an alarming number of African Americans not only failed to graduate from high school but were also unskilled and semiskilled workers. For instance, the U.S. Census Bureau recorded that there were 140,401 white and black Richmonders twenty-five years of age and older. Of that total number, 36.4 percent of the African Americans older than twenty-five (51,105) had an elementary education or slightly higher; 20.3 percent (28,461) had finished high school or had attended some high school; and 3.8 percent (5,285, roughly 15 percent lower than whites) had attended or graduated from college. Of Richmond's sixteen- to twenty-one-year-old African Americans, 24.7 percent had either dropped out of high school or were not enrolled in 1970. The remainder of African Americans had finished middle school and attended some high school. Clerical work (21 percent), professional work (roughly 15 percent), manufacturing (12.3 percent), and service work (14 percent) made up the largest percentage of Richmond's occupations in 1970. Over the course of the late 1970s and throughout the 1980s, many of these jobs moved into outlying counties. Between 1972 and 1977, the amount of taxable income from businesses in downtown Richmond decreased by 3 percent, from 14 percent to 11 percent—a sizeable portion of that revenue stayed in the Richmond metropolitan area but moved beyond county lines. The suburbanization of work was often made worse by the fact that the Greater Richmond Transit Company, which was initially wholly owned by the City of Richmond, only sporadically serviced suburban counties (another casualty of the city-county independence).<sup>17</sup>

Marsh and the four other black council members spent their first year in office running a campaign of reassurance. African American political leaders needed to convince business groups and private lobbies that blacks could keep the city above water. To do this, they needed to work

with the very business elites who were skeptical of blacks' ability to run city hall. On the eve of the special election in 1977, most Richmonders believed Marsh was a “force for good.” Marsh argued: “Our interdependence is obvious. We recognize the vital role that business must play if our city is to realize its potential. If we are to obtain resources to satisfy our human needs, we must expand our economic base and create the jobs needed by our citizens for dignity.” The new majority did not institute any policy changes that appeared to be too radical. If whites had any fears about a black agenda, such an agenda failed to materialize during the first year. Mayor Marsh and Vice Mayor Valentine spent the majority of their first year in office trying to solidify plans to revitalize downtown. The plan was to build a \$12 million convention and exhibition center to attract nearly \$30 million worth of surrounding private investments. The so-called Project One development plan became a point of deep contention.<sup>18</sup>

### **On the Horns of a Dilemma**

If majority–minority districts allowed African Americans to obtain some (though not nearly enough) political power in Richmond, whites officials and elites continued to resist blacks' claims to full citizenship. Unable to cap the wellspring of African Americans' electoral victories with vote-dilution techniques, whites attempted to delegitimize black elected officials in the court of public opinion. Resistance to black governance and suspicions about African American mayors and predominantly black city councils, unfortunately, was not specific to Richmond. Political scientist and urban planner J. Phillip Thompson argues, “Business and middle-class allies often had unrealistic expectations that black mayors could maintain racial peace despite popular racial hostility.” In many cases, these detractors knew that African Americans lacked the types of economic ties that were essential to maintaining cities' viability. In *The Voting Rights Act: Ten Years After*, a study of voting rights in 1975, the USCCR recognized that America's legacy of economic subordination—namely of African Americans, Mexican Americans, Puerto Ricans, and Native Americans—often impinged upon minority officials' abilities to govern. The commission reported, “Underlying many issues of the abuses reported here is the

economic dependence of minorities.” The polarization of politics along racial divisions occurred in a handful of cities that elected black mayors and BMCs or that contained black-majority electorates or both.<sup>19</sup>

As African American officials challenged their positions as political cue takers, they struggled to negotiate the tension among rising black expectations, the maintenance of racial harmony, and outright racial hostility. The highest-profile instances of this trend were black mayors. In Cleveland, for instance, whites—particularly a white city councilman named James Stanton—used the media to shell Carl Stokes after black nationalists engaged in a gun battle with law enforcement in the Glenville Community on July 23, 1968. Stanton and a number of white politicians associated Stokes with the very radicalism that he tried to restrain. Whites challenged mayor Richard Arrington Jr.’s legitimacy in Birmingham after he endorsed a uniformly black ticket for five city council vacancies. Atlanta’s whites erupted when Maynard Jackson—in response to blacks’ cries for police accountability—attempted to fire an overtly racist white police chief. Even Los Angeles mayor Tom Bradley was not exempt from the association between black governance and black nationalism. During Bradley’s campaign for mayor, his Democratic opponent, Sam Yorty, contended that his election would bring about a radical takeover of city government. Richmond’s political elites—like white political leaders across the United States—were convinced that governance by blacks was synonymous with governance for blacks exclusively. The Richmond BMC, like black mayors and councilpersons in many of America’s black-majority cities, had to consistently defend against charges that they were race leaders rather than city managers. Resistance of this nature characterized the first terms of most black mayors; detractors often manufactured crises that intensified whites’ skepticism of black political leadership. In Richmond, this hostility did not emerge until after the regularly scheduled city council election in 1978. In fact, Richmond’s daily newspapers and the white council minority appeared to have conceded defeat because they believed that they could return a white-majority council in 1978.<sup>20</sup>

Racial tension at city hall reemerged during the election of 1978. The City of Richmond followed up the special election of 1977 with a regularly scheduled council contest in 1978. In the early months of 1978, TOP maneuvered to regain a city council majority, while the Cru-



sade endorsed all five black council members. In Richmond’s second district-based election, the council’s racial composition was “very much an underlying—if not the only—issue” of the election. Chuck Richardson’s Fifth District, which had the most diverse racial population of the nine wards (61 percent African American), and Claudette McDaniel’s Eighth District (63 percent African American) proved to be most pivotal. Willie Dell and Walter Kenney ran unopposed: blacks made up 88 percent of the voters in Kenney’s Sixth District, and Willie Dell’s Third District was 86 percent black. Curtis Holt Sr., not yet convinced that he was unelectable, challenged Henry Marsh in the Seventh District. Marsh’s district was 89 percent African American, but the mayor also held sway over most of the Seventh District’s voters. Challenges to Wayland Rennie of the Second District, George Stevenson Kemp of the First District, Aubrey Thompson of the Fourth District, and Raymond Royall of the Ninth District came from white opposition.<sup>21</sup>

TOP believed that it could win a council majority by outspending the Crusade. It had reorganized after 1977, briefly changed its name to “Teams for Progress,” and planned to preclude another Crusade victory by hiring consultants from Washington. It also spent roughly \$33,000 (roughly \$108,000 in 2015 dollars) on the election. It eventually concentrated on the Eighth District and its only nonincumbent hopeful, G. Richard Wainwright. Of the \$33,000 in campaign donations, the Teams for Progress spent \$21,600 in McDaniel’s district, including \$4,400 that went directly to Wainwright. Wainwright not only outspent McDaniel but also spoke openly about the need to return a white-majority council. In the Fifth District, the rumor mill alleged that Teams for Progress had encouraged Richardson’s challenger, an African American named William R. “Randy” Johnson, to run. The Crusade believed that Johnson ran simply to split the vote so that a third candidate, a white man named F. Wilson Craigie Jr., might win. Richardson, who had won in 1977 by just twelve votes, was particularly vulnerable. The Crusade campaigned heavily in the Fifth District and eventually brought Richardson’s brother-in-law, Atlanta mayor Maynard Jackson, to speak on the incumbent’s behalf. Jackson may have saved Richardson’s then nascent political career. Fewer than 30,000 of more than 98,312 total registered voters showed for the May 2 election. Dell and Kenney ran unopposed, and Marsh beat Cur-

tis Holt 2,011 to 422. Richardson beat his nearest competitor by nearly 1,500 votes, and McDaniel won by roughly 1,000 votes. (For the full election results, see table 11 in the appendix.) The election of 1978 was less of a mandate on the Crusade's ascendancy over the black electorate than it was a referendum on the power of majority-minority districts. In fact, whites outvoted African Americans—particularly in predominantly white districts. Teams for Progress candidates, all told, garnered roughly 12,600 votes, whereas the Crusade's candidates received approximately 10,300 votes. Given the nature of majority-minority district systems, the ratio of black-to-white voters at large was of little consequence to the election's results. In time, however, low black voter turnout eventually proved vital to future backlash against the district system.<sup>22</sup>

Just as things cooled down from the election, however, the BMC, seeking to make up for lost time, fired Richmond's white city manager, William J. "Bill" Leidinger. The council-manager model in Richmond's city charter delegated that managers had control over administrative affairs, economic directives, the city budget, and the day-to-day financial undertaking of running the city. If Richmond's mayors were the symbolic, titular leaders of the city, city managers were the chief operating officers. In many ways, Marsh's and the BMC's ability to redirect resources to their districts was contingent upon the city manager's will. Council members had appointed Leidinger as assistant city manager in 1971 and had promoted him to city manager in 1972. The Chicago native had become integral to developments in Richmond's expressway system, which was still under construction in the 1970s, and to city hall's attempts to revitalize the downtown business section. During the mid-1970s, Leidinger, the city council, and Richmond's Downtown Development Commission spearheaded the city's revitalization plans for downtown, published as *A Strategy for Action in Downtown Richmond, 1976–2000*. This plan revitalized the downtown riverfront area and Broad Street corridor near downtown. Kanawha Square, a plaza that overlooked the James River area of downtown and the historic Kanawha Canal, was also completed. Over the course of the 1970s, Leidinger's career as city manager was inextricably linked to downtown redevelopment. Despite his accomplishments, the BMC felt that Leidinger was unresponsive to its demands.<sup>23</sup>

During the first week of August 1978, the BMC followed through

on the threat to remove Leidinger. After three hours of heated debate and bitter exchanges between white and black council members, the city council voted along strict racial lines, five to four, to ask for Leidinger’s resignation. An article in the *Washington Post* in June 1979 stated not only that Leidinger and the council majority clashed but that Marsh exerted “more influence over Richmond’s government” with Leidinger gone. Indeed, Henry Marsh wanted to be more than a ribbon-cutting mayor: he aspired to take on managerial responsibilities. He knew that the city manager position, as the charter mandated, was the most powerful administrative position at city hall. Yet Leidinger’s removal was evidence that members of the BMC also wanted more control over the city’s financial and administrative apparatus. Within the council–manager model, it was difficult to control the flow of service deliverables without the city manager’s support. If the BMC were going to make good on the symbolism of its members’ elections by addressing “the plight of Richmond’s decaying neighborhoods, its impoverished residents, and its pockets of high unemployment,” it needed to replace Leidinger with its own man.<sup>24</sup>

Leidinger’s dismissal stunned Richmond and flattened the BMC’s momentum. Leidinger told the *Richmond Times-Dispatch* that his career and the City of Richmond were “on the horns of a dilemma.” Even *Afro* contributor Preston Yancy initially appealed to fairness over the city manager’s removal:

But Mr. Leidinger deserves fair treatment. If he is to be fired, it should be on the basis of issues and it should be open and above board. . . . If, in fact, the reports are true about his situation, Mayor Henry L. Marsh and Councilman Walter Kenney have demonstrated gross inconsistency and deceptiveness and all the black councilmembers have shown a bush league, crude approach to the political process. . . . For the Council members to praise Mr. Leidinger . . . then turn around and fire him simply because they want their own man is incredible.

In fact, Marsh had only briefly discussed his plans with Leidinger, and he refused to broach the issue with the council minority. Members of the majority council also took a “no comment” approach to questions by

local media. Leidinger's removal gave Marsh's detractors the ammunition they needed to scrutinize the BMC's decision-making capabilities. "The Leidinger Affair," one Richmonder contended in the *Times-Dispatch* editorial section, "has been brewing since federal government interference forced a ward system of government on Richmond, thereby racially dividing the white voting majority four ways and the black voting minority five ways." Councilman Richardson, nearly forty years later, recalled that some of the "richest white men in Richmond" raked Marsh over the proverbial coals for firing Leidinger. Even county officials, who were reluctant to speak openly about city affairs because they were in the process of working with Richmond to expand the Interstate 95 beltway, rapped Marsh over the matter. The chairman of the Henrico County Board of Supervisors, George W. Jenkins Jr., believed that incident had "racial overtones" and might influence city-county relations.<sup>25</sup>

Blacks came to view Leidinger's firing as a natural prerogative of power, whereas whites believed that it represented the raw exercise of power. The council minority—with the exception of Wayland Rennie's replacement, Muriel Smith—and the editorial sections of the daily newspapers believed that Leidinger's firing was tantamount not merely to reverse racism but also to minority rule. *Times-Dispatch* readers were quick to point out that whites had actually outvoted blacks in the election of 1978 and that had it not been for the district system, whites would have regained a majority on council. That contention is debatable, but the Crusade members' assertion that the election of 1978 was their "greatest political victory" belied the data—the organization registered more black voters in the late 1960s than the total number of voters who cast ballots in 1978. "If the fate of William Leidinger were to be left up to the popular vote," one editorial claimed, "then the matter would cease to be an issue. When there was an at-large system of municipal government in Richmond, the voting, tax-paying majority was in control. Under the ward system it is just the opposite." By the fall of 1978, the council minority and white power structure came to associate Leidinger's firing with the emergence of a black agenda. Council members Kemp, Thompson, and recent appointee Carolyn Wake (who replaced William Golding Sr.) agreed that the black council members had fired Leidinger simply because he was white. Even Cabell Venable, Curtis Holt's lawyer during the deannexation suits, claimed that

Marsh privately referred to Leidinger as a “honky.” Although the truth of Venable’s contention is questionable, the white establishment’s belief that Marsh fired Leidinger unfairly is not. Henry Valentine put the matter in its proper historical context: “They have done to us exactly what they said we used to do to them.”<sup>26</sup>

The BMC answered the question of who ran Richmond when it declined to annul Leidinger’s dismissal and hired an African American city manager. If blacks were initially apprehensive about Leidinger’s removal, community support swelled after a thirty-seven-year-old African American was hired to replace him. After reviewing eighty-four potential candidates to replace Leidinger, Marsh and city clerk E. A. Duffy swore Manuel Deese into office on January 23, 1979. Deese, a native of Toombsboro, Georgia, and a graduate of Morgan State University and American University (where he earned a master’s degree in public administration), had been Richmond’s assistant of operations for four years under Leidinger. Prior to that, he had also worked in Alexandria, Virginia, as assistant city manager. Deese, who described himself as a “fiscal conservative,” was in many ways different from Leidinger in race and temperament only. In the wake of Leidinger’s removal and Deese’s appointment, council minority members threatened—for the first time—to bring downtown revitalization to a standstill.<sup>27</sup>

Leidinger’s firing definitely complicated downtown revitalization. By the late 1970s, many black-led cities suffered from structural and demographic constraints such as deep population, income, and employment losses. The commonwealth’s moratorium on new annexations in cities with populations larger than 125,000 and county–city independence meant that Richmond, like many American cities in the 1970s and 1980s, needed to lure investors into the central city area to stimulate the local economy. Mayors such as Henry Marsh (and later Roy West) of Richmond; Kenneth Gibson of Newark, New Jersey; Richard Hatcher of Gary, Indiana; and Coleman Young of Detroit had to counterbalance civil rights agendas with economic pragmatism, and they came to believe that building malls, shopping centers, conventions centers, stadiums, and skyscrapers was synonymous with economic growth. These endeavors in high-profile politics, policy makers believed, would reverse the course of urban retrenchment by stimulating tax bases. Despite crit-

icism from downtown business owners, most African Americans—who sought to solidify stronger relationships with business elites—fully supported efforts to develop downtown Richmond.<sup>28</sup>

The BMC's support of Project One, for instance, represented black officials' commitment to revitalization and redevelopment. Marsh, Deese, and the BMC often approached fiscal matters much like their white counterparts. City hall hoped that Project One, a mixed-use development project originally introduced in the 1950s and revamped by the *Strategy for Action* plan, would revitalize Richmond's retail and business core. The objective was, in Leiding's estimation, to "eliminate . . . blight in the downtown area," secure nearly 3,000 jobs, and assure millions of dollars for the city's property and tax base. As it stood, the area slotted for redevelopment accounted for only \$89,000 in property taxes annually; the new revitalization effort would bring in a minimum of \$450,000. Planners estimated that the project would eventually occupy a six-block area bound by the Richmond Coliseum (another controversial undertaking) and Broad Street on two ends and by Fourth and Seventh Streets on the other two. The first phase of the \$15 million project included a new convention center, a 375-room hotel, a fifteen-story office building, 800 parking spaces, 30,000 feet of retail space, and an atrium-plaza. Project One's second phase, slated to cost another \$36.9 million, would eventually add another 600 parking spaces, a second fifteen-story building, and expansions to the hotel and retail sections proposed in phase one.<sup>29</sup>

In the wake of the Leiding affair, white council members used Project One as a bargaining chip. Contention over these plans arose when members of the black majority recommended a hotel be built and operated by the Marriot Company, whereas whites favored a hotel from the Hilton Corporation. The bickering between black and white council factions stooped to new lows over the issue of hotel construction. The black council members insisted that building the hotel north of Broad Street would influence economic development in Jackson Ward. The white council members, however, were certain that no respectable individual would patronize a hotel built on "the wrong side of Broad." Conflict intensified when the BMC passed an ordinance to protect the Marriot Company's bid by requiring private developers to pay a fee based on their potential impact on Project One. When whites and the Hilton Corpora-

tion objected, the BMC—in another five-to-four vote—denied two parcels of undeveloped land to Hilton. Again, the white council members threatened not merely to pull development out of the city but also to stall downtown construction if blacks refused to reverse the decision. It took nearly two years and a Hilton lawsuit, which culminated in a \$5 million dollar settlement in favor of the Hilton Corporation, to resolve the issue. Reflecting on the Leidinger and Project One incidents, Councilman Wayland Rennie stated, “It boiled down to a white vs. black issue and it was resolved on that basis. I was disappointed . . . I still haven’t gotten over that.” To this day, two hotels sit directly across from one another on the 500 block of Broad Street, one a Hilton on the Monument Avenue side and the other a Marriot on the Jackson Ward side. Both hotels are a living testimony to Richmond’s contested racial history and the conflict between council factions.<sup>30</sup>

By the end of 1978, distrust of the BMC had given way to open hostility. The contention between black and white council members grew so bad that *Richmond Times-Dispatch* reporter Bill Miller referred to city politics as “an embattled ship” that “survived the shells of 1978.” The white establishment considered the Leidinger incident, Deese’s appointment, and Project One evidence of a growing black agenda. They found an ally in the *Richmond News-Leader*, whose editorial pages began to routinely lambaste the BMC. These editorials were also often laced with racial overtones, referring to the BMC as “a bunch of clowns in a Chinese fire-drill” and, on one occasion, as the “monkey-see, monkey-do leaders of a banana republic.” Richmond’s dailies began to refer to Marsh as “Boss Henry,” “Empire Builder,” and “Controversy Man”—critics charging that Marsh used the council majority to pervert the council-manager model and emphasizing the mayor’s merely ceremonial authority. The daily editorials argued that Marsh “flagrantly disregarded the intent of the City Charter” and that “the majority members of Council have united to give Mayor Marsh far more power than he is supposed to exercise.” In 1978, Norvell Robinson actually took time out of the Crusade’s annual banquet, a celebratory occasion, to address this barrage of criticism. He argued, “As painful as it may be, I feel impelled to touch upon one force in Richmond that has been everything except fair . . . the Richmond newspapers[,] which has [*sic*] been cited on many occa-

sions for their unabated editorial attacks and one-sided reporting of our leadership.”<sup>31</sup>

The issue of redistricting further polarized race relations at city hall. The problem of redistricting proved to be one of the inherent disadvantages of Washington’s solution to vote dilution. Local and federal officials conducted a trial census of Richmond, Henrico County, and Chesterfield County during the first week of April 1978. Although the Census Bureau placed administrative restrictions on the use of data obtained from this trial census, it released some of its findings to city officials and local media. In the fall of 1978, the *Times-Dispatch* published some of those early results. Between 1970 and 1978, the capital city lost 11.6 percent of its residents, while Chesterfield County’s population rose by 64 percent (from 77,045 in 1970 to 126,124). Henrico County showed an increase in population of 12.3 percent. The mock census also showed that African Americans had a slight population advantage over whites, outnumbering whites 109,130 to 108,983. The city’s white population had also decreased from 143,854 in 1970. Experts and city officials knew that white flight had continued apace and that many of Richmond’s districts showed no trace of diversification. These districts were also severely malapportioned. Richmond’s initial district system contained roughly 27,700 people. Marsh believed that the data legally required new boundaries, and he immediately made plans to draw new districts.<sup>32</sup>

The disparities in Richmond’s districts led to even wider differences between white and black council members. The dilemma, council minority members held, was that Marsh and the BMC sat on the rest of the census data for a year, until August 1979. They also believed that drawing new boundaries before the results of the 1980 census placed a “burden on the people” that violated the city charter. Minority council members felt as if they had been frozen out of the process. In reality, Marsh not only believed that federal law trumped the city charter but also approached the trial census like a lawyer rather than like a mayor. He thought that the city was obligated to redistrict when it was aware of malapportioned wards and argued further that both state and federal law called for “one man, one vote.” Councilperson Carolyn Wake, who represented the annexed portion of Chesterfield County, was Marsh’s harshest critic on the redistricting matter. She was convinced that Marsh had planned to draw new



**Table 4.2.** Estimates of Richmond District Demographics after Trial Census, 1978

District	Council Member	Location	Population	Percentage	
				African American	Percentage White
District 1	George Kemp	Northwest End	23,708	4	96
District 2	Wayland Rennie	north side	23,441	21	79
District 3	Willie Dell	northeast side	27,438	86	14
District 4	Aubrey Thompson	West End	27,564	8	92
District 5	Chuck Richardson	The Fan— Central City	18,401	61	39
District 6	Walter Kenney	Jackson Ward— Central City	24,060	88	12
District 7	Henry Marsh III	East End	19,644	89	11
District 8	Claudette McDaniel	south side	27,564	63	37
District 9	Carolyn Wake	Former Chesterfield County— Southwest	28,180	17	83

Source: Data from *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, August 22, 1979, A1.

district boundaries months before releasing the census findings to the public. Wake also argued at a city council meeting in the fall of 1979, “I feel very strongly a decision [months ago] was made to redistrict this city. I can go out and get counsel that can be just as convincing that we don’t need to redistrict.” Wake’s comments epitomized the deep skepticism between black and white council members. Not to be outdone, the *Richmond News-Leader* embarked on a nearly two-month tirade against the mayor, whose mayoralty it labeled “Marshgate.” It was during this period that the *Leader* charged the mayor with misrepresenting the council–manager model of city government. All parties to the dispute—the *Leader*, the BMC, and the white minority—knew what was on the line: if officials reapportioned the city’s district system, it was possible that certain districts could dictate local elections for the next decade.<sup>33</sup>

Conflict over the trial census eventually landed city hall in court. If whites believed Marsh’s firing of Leidinger signaled an emerging black

agenda, African Americans' demographic advantages and Marsh's willingness to maximize them provided the wherewithal to realize that agenda. Council members also correctly contended that plans to devise new district boundaries violated section 24.1–40.3 (B) of the city charter. This section mandated new districts once every ten years and thus prohibited redistricting until the summer of 1981. In October 1979, three white council members and a Richmond resident from the Ninth District, Meade C. Folts, filed a suit to counter Marsh's plans to redistrict. Folts argued that state law required redistricting *only* after the decennial census. The circuit court judge, Frank Wright, agreed. He concluded in December 1979 that Richmond had no constitutional duty or obligation to draw new district boundaries until June 1, 1981. Wright's decision immediately tabled the issue in the short run. Marsh, however, struggled to rehabilitate his reputation.<sup>34</sup>

The seriousness of anti-Marsh sentiment cannot be understated. Hatred for the mayor reached fever pitch during the late 1970s. After Leidinger and the trial census incidents, Marsh found himself in a precarious position. After receiving death threats months before the fall of 1979, Marsh requested plainclothes protection. He and his staff also had to contend with regular bomb threats, and they often chose not to appear in public for safety reasons. In a poll conducted in 1981, only 47 percent of white Richmonders gave Marsh satisfactory or good ratings. One-third of the whites polled put Marsh in the "poor" category. In August 1979, Marsh used the daily newspapers to make a broad appeal for cooperation. The BMC and the mayor released a statement asserting, "We call upon the three councilmembers (Aubrey H. Thompson, G. S. Kemp, and Carolyn Wake) involved and the Richmond Newspapers to lower their voices and to end this campaign of accusation and suspicion." Marsh and the four black council members also implored "the Teams for Progress-supported members of council of the city of Richmond to lower their rhetoric and terminate their campaign of wild accusations in order that Council of the City of Richmond may devote itself full time and wholeheartedly to its duties as members of council and in providing effective leadership to and for the city of Richmond." In reality, some African Americans and the *Afro* had anticipated the blowback against Marsh and the BMC. Preston Yancy had warned in his appeal to be fair with Leidinger that firing Leidinger might

have severe implications for black governance. History proved Yancy correct. By the end of the 1970s, relations between black and white leaders eroded, and the trial-census controversy seemed to ensure that redistricting after the census in 1980 would be even more contentious.<sup>35</sup>

The election of 1980 again split voters along racial lines. The *Times-Dispatch* believed it would be difficult to change the five-to-four BMC, but TOP (which dropped the name “Teams for Progress” in 1980 in favor of its original name) again poured considerable resources into the city’s most diverse districts. By the spring of 1980, the most heated battles occurred between Bill Leidinger and Muriel Smith in the Second District and between Claudette McDaniel and Andrew J. “Drew” Gillespie in the Eighth District. TOP very openly argued that it aspired to return a white-majority council to city hall. Leidinger maintained that he was not seeking office to exact revenge on Marsh, a contention that later developments proved to be untrue. On the south side, Marsh called the Eighth District campaign one of the dirtiest he had seen in years. In April 1980, a *Richmond Times-Dispatch* editorial entitled “The Last Chance” typified whites’ frustration not merely with redistricting but also with the composition of the city council:

Councilmembers who are elected next month will be responsible for redistricting Richmond on the basis of 1980 census results, and the district lines they will draw will influence—if not actually determine—the philosophy and quality of the city’s government for a decade. Richmond will face a bleak future if it is condemned to continue to endure the kind of government that Mayor Marsh and the Council clique that controls have provided for the past few years, for it has been a government characterized by racism, by arrogant use of power and by contempt for the views and money of Richmond’s taxpayers. . . . The city’s future rests with voters in the First, Second, Fourth, Eight, and Ninth Districts who will have the chance to vote for candidates dedicated to the principles of fair and responsible government.

Of the five BMC members, opponents challenged only McDaniel and Kenney. Kenney’s opponent, Frederick C. Williams, was a twenty-nine-

year-old VUU student whom most experts recognized as posing little threat to the incumbent.<sup>36</sup>

The Second and Eighth Districts were the key battleground districts. During her brief stint on city council, Muriel Smith, a former missionary, had actually defended the BMC against white criticism. Although the Richmond Black Police Officers Association, the Richmond Regional Labor Council, and the Richmond Education Association endorsed her campaign, she faced an uphill battle against Leidinger. Smith eventually proved ill equipped to handle the former city manager's anti-Marsh momentum. On the other side of town, TOP knew that it needed only one district to overturn the BMC. Although African Americans constituted roughly 63 percent of McDaniel's district, that district, located on Richmond's south side, had a diverse collection of blue-collar and middle- to upper-middle-class whites. McDaniel actually faced a viable challenger in Phillip Morris engineer Drew Gillespie. Gillespie campaigned not only on bringing an end to racism at city hall but also on ending residency requirements for city employees (critics charged that this proposal would further expedite white flight). Black leaders and the Crusade again claimed that TOP attempted to split blacks' votes by putting forward an African American, Frank J. Wilkins Sr., who campaigned on bringing an end to racial polarization on the council but drew heavy criticism from the black electorate for suspicions of being financed by wealthy whites.<sup>37</sup>

The white establishment, led by TOP, campaigned on restoring normalcy to city hall. TOP rallied behind what the *Times-Dispatch* called "the Best Five" and threw much of its support behind Drew Gillespie. Gillespie ran the longest and best-funded campaign of the nine districts, and TOP donated \$9,000 to his campaign alone (roughly \$25,000 in today's money). *Richmond Times-Dispatch* editorialists argued: "Without doubt, the council-manic election to be held next Tuesday will be one of the most important in Richmond's history. The City Council members elected will be responsible for redrawing the city's ward lines on the basis of the 1980 census results and those lines will have a profound influence on the quality and philosophy of Richmond's municipal government for a decade. It is imperative that voters choose a majority—five members—that would be dedicated to the city as a whole and that would be committed to the principles of responsible and efficient government." Despite

whites’ efforts, African Americans won another majority on the council. The Crusade and McDaniel generated enough support to eke out a victory against Gillespie. Both Henry Marsh and Dale Wiley, former president of TOP, argued that the *Richmond News-Leader* editorial attacks on McDaniel and Marsh had galvanized black voters in the Eighth District. Voters reelected the city’s black incumbents, and McDaniel beat Gillespie 3,183 votes to 2,913. Kenney walloped his closest contender 1,890 votes to 146. Thompson and Kemp soundly defeated their opponents, and Carolyn Wake beat out William Golding and Tyrone Gaines. Smith’s inability to fend off Leidinger proved pivotal in the coming years as the former city manager emerged as the council minority’s leader.<sup>38</sup> (For the election results in 1980, see table 12 in the appendix.)

Council factionalism often obscured just how much the BMC accomplished in its first three years. Under Marsh, the percentage of capital budget allocations directed at neighborhoods increased from 48 percent to 57 percent after 1977. Marsh traveled to the nation’s capital about twice a month and directly lobbied federal agencies for money “for housing, jobs, and other programs.” In 1979, he secured a \$4 million Department of Housing and Urban Development grant with the help of his associate, Secretary Patricia Harris, to renovate the aging Jefferson Hotel in downtown Richmond. Marsh and the BMC also made good on their promises to address blight. He pumped millions of federal block grant dollars into rebuilding Jackson Ward during the 1970s. In 1970, Jackson Ward—which residents referred to as “Central Richmond”—had roughly 2,800 residents, and nearly 100 percent of them were African American. Most of the area’s residents (84 percent) earned less than \$8,000 annually, and of those 2,800 residents 35 percent were older than fifty-five, and approximately 82 percent were older than forty-four. In 1975, 201 of 606 families in Jackson Ward received Social Security benefits, and 139 received public assistance. By the end of the 1970s, absentee landlords (only 20 percent of Jackson Ward’s residents owned homes), poverty, and shoddy building inspections had left the neighborhood in shambles. City officials recognized that the viability of the convention center and downtown revitalization was contingent upon addressing years of institutional and physical neglect in Jackson Ward. In 1976, civic groups and the city council began to transform the area with the help of federal Community

Development Block Grant funds. Dell, Marsh, Leidinger, and Jackson Ward residents not only blocked out 261 structures for restoration but also filed to have the area recognized on the National Register of Historic Places. The RRHA provided low-income loans of \$35,000 and \$18,000 to eligible residents in 1976, and two years later the area was awarded national Historic Landmark Status.<sup>39</sup>

Despite these improvements, when it came to people's perceptions of local politics and politicians, media mattered. After the minicensus incident, whites' apprehensions about a federally mandated ward system deepened. As fewer African Americans voted and blacks maintained a solid five-to-four council majority, whites organized new ways to return a white-majority council. Over the duration of the early 1980s, they took these grievances to Washington and found newfangled ways to end African Americans' majority at city hall. Although the *Richmond News-Leader's* and *Richmond Times-Dispatch's* criticisms of Marsh electrified black voters in the Eighth District during the 1980 election, the white establishment's criticism of black leadership in general had the opposite effect two years later.

### “Setting Aside Negative Differences”

The year 1980 proved to be the high-water mark of the Crusade's electoral strategies. Shelley Rolfe of the *Times-Dispatch* wrote, “Telling of an election night visit to a Church Hill precinct where a Crusade-based candidate outdistanced a rival by something like 1,000 to 48, Del. Franklin P. Hall, D–Richmond, recalled that he told a Crusade poll worker, ‘Not even [Chicago's late] Mayor [Richard] Daley could get this kind of support. And she told me, ‘Just wait until I find out who the 48 are.’” That is discipline.” As African Americans continued to rack up victories in Richmond's city council elections, their white counterparts came to view majority–minority districts as inherently undemocratic. After the city council election of 1980, whites openly criticized districts as an affirmative-action remedy and grew increasingly disillusioned by the strategic political alliance between African Americans and Washington. The struggle over local political power reached fever pitch after the U.S. Census Bureau released its report for 1980. Redistricting, the *Times-Dispatch*

held, became “perhaps the most important development in Richmond since the court decision in 1976 that imposed single-member districts on the city made a black majority politically possible.” By the early 1980s, disgruntlement over federal voting rights mandates gave rise to another populist revolt in Richmond. This revolt not only rivaled resistance to public-school integration in its intensity but was also strictly political. It just so happened that redistricting in Richmond coincided with the renewal of the VRA in 1980. Resistance to the BMC and the city’s district system became a bellwether for anti-VRA sentiment. Richmond’s officials settled redistricting along strict racial lines, and the debate over drawing district boundaries further heightened animosity between white and black council members.<sup>40</sup>

The U.S. Census Bureau released its report for 1980 in March 1981, and the data again demonstrated that Richmond’s districts were significantly malapportioned. Between 1970 and 1980, the City of Richmond’s total population declined by more than 30,000: from 249,332 to 219,214. From 1950 to 1980, the capital city lost residents at a rate of 3,000 persons per year. Richmond’s white population dropped from 143,857 to 104,743, whereas the number of African American residents rose from 104,766 to 112,357. Blacks made up a majority of the city’s population at slightly more than 51 percent. According to the census, African Americans narrowly outnumbered whites by 7,600 people (down moderately from 10,000 in 1978). Under a legal nine-member district system, Richmond’s nine districts needed an equal number of people in each district, near 24,350 based on the total population. Of the nine districts, the Fourth, Eighth, and Ninth were the most severely malapportioned: Carolyn Wake’s Ninth District had 28,529 residents; McDaniel’s Eighth District and Aubrey Thompson’s Fourth District were nearly dead even at 27,972 and 27,974. If the VRA now required newly drawn districts “to demonstrate sensitivity to minority voter areas” with a history of political discrimination, the decennial need to redistrict was not without conflict.<sup>41</sup>

The need to reapportion Richmond’s districts led to another wave of council factionalism. Both the BMC, led by Marsh, and the council minority, led by Leidinger, understood that any districting scheme in 1981 would dictate the tempo of local elections until the next census in

**Table 4.3.** Population and Family Income of Richmond, Henrico County, and Chesterfield County, 1980

Location	Richmond		Henrico County		Chesterfield County	
Total Population	219,214		180,735		141,372	
White	104,743	47.8%	151,187	83.7%	125,841	89.0%
Black	112,357	51.3%	27,096	15.0%	13,910	9.8%
Median Annual Family Income	\$16,820		\$22,685		\$25,753	
Average Annual Family Income	\$20,881		\$25,617		\$27,763	

*Source:* Data from U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Census of Population and Housing* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1980).

1990. To this end, both Marsh's plan and Leidinger's plan twisted and contorted district lines in a manner that favored their respective factions. Marsh, under the instruction of Washington, D.C., districting lawyer Armand Derfner, proposed Ordinance 81-118, referred to as the "Marsh Plan" or "Citizen Marsh." Leidinger and Drew Gillespie, with the support of the white minority, drew up Ordinance 81-119, commonly referred to as the "Fair Play Act." The contention began in Richardson's Fifth District (or District E under Marsh's plan) and spread to the remaining eight. Richardson's district was the least populated (17,580 residents) and most diverse of all the districts, so both whites and blacks seized opportunities to swing it in their favor. They also recognized that McDaniel's district was, by Richmond's standards, relatively diverse and particularly vulnerable. Historical patterns of residential segregation meant that Kenney and Marsh's districts, both of which were removed from pockets of white residents, were the safest. The Third, Fifth, and Eighth Districts contained just enough racial integration to change the balance of power.<sup>42</sup>

The Marsh Plan for redistricting pivoted on the racial composition of Chuck Richardson's district. It designed boundary lines from Richardson's district outward in a counterclockwise manner. Federal law mandated that districts needed to contain a roughly equal number of inhabitants—that number was 24,357 based on the census of Richmond. According to the Marsh Plan, the numbers went as followed: District A, 25,086; District B, 24,867; District C, 24,279; District D, 24,405;



District E, 23,772; District F, 23,632; District G, 24,604; District H, 24,505; and District I, 24,604. Architects of the Marsh Plan attempted to pack Richardson’s district with more blacks, which they achieved by extending the district’s boundary past Belvedere Street into the central-western (Highland Park) portions of Kenney’s district. Marsh, Derfner, and City Registrar May Alan Lynch, designed the district to give African Americans a 17,000 to 7,163 advantage over whites. Marsh’s plan compensated Kenney by extending into the northeastern (north side) portion of Willie Dell’s district. The plan also extended Dell’s district into a predominantly white portion of Leidinger’s district. This section of Leidinger’s district contained an upper-middle-class white neighborhood, just to the west of Chamberlayne Avenue, known as Imperial Plaza. At the time, Marsh seemed to believe that redrawing Dell’s district was a benign maneuver, particularly because blacks maintained a sizeable numerical advantage in District C. On the other side of town, south of the James River, Marsh also planned to remove Gillespie’s precinct out of McDaniel’s district (District H in the Marsh Plan) by creating District D. This district extended from the southwestern portion of the former Chesterfield County to the southern border of what had been the mostly white section of McDaniel’s district. Marsh’s plan also created a District A out of portions of Aubrey Thompson’s district and Steve Kemp’s district. In an age-old gerrymandering maneuver, the plan placed two opposition incumbents in the same district.<sup>43</sup>

The Fair Play Act was as committed to restoring a white-majority council as Marsh’s plan was to maintaining the BMC. Leidinger designed Fair Play—also referred to as “Patrons Leidinger, Thompson, Wake, and Kemp”—to shrink the gap in districts where blacks had a marginal numerical advantage in registered voters. Although Fair Play manipulated fewer boundaries, it apportioned the districts in a manner that produced four-to-four parity and one swing ward. Leidinger, Drew Gillespie, and the council minority proposed to extend Richardson’s ward across the James River—a natural boundary—into a decidedly white section of the city called Woodland Heights; this predominantly white collection of precincts voted in favor of Andrew Gillespie in 1980. Leidinger found powerful allies. Along with the council’s white-minority members, a number of highly influential local business elites publicly supported Fair Play, includ-

ing Thomas P. Bryan Jr., vice president of the local department store Miller & Rhoads; J. Harwood Cochrane, chairman of Overtine Transportation Company; Virginius Dabney, retired *Times-Dispatch* editor; Howard B. Cone, vice president of Universal Leaf Tobacco; and Charles E. Moore, vice president of United Virginia Bank. Leidinger's ultimate objective was to "crack," or dehomogenize, certain portions of Richardson's Fifth District. Moving Richardson's boundary across the James River and into the predominantly white Woodland Heights area evened the ratio of blacks (13,500) to whites (11,085). Leidinger also proposed to move portions of McDaniel's district past Terminal Avenue into a predominantly white portion of what was once Chesterfield County. The Fair Play Act thus apportioned its districts as such: first, 23,880; second, 24,106; third, 24,181; fourth, 24,245; fifth, 24,595; sixth, 24,405; seventh, 24,075; eighth, 24,452; and ninth, 25,275. Even the *Times-Dispatch* argued that although the minority's plan contained fewer changes than Marsh's proposal, its objective was to give the minority a chance at regaining control of city council. Claudette McDaniel was more blunt. "They're trying to screw Chuck [Richardson]," she argued.<sup>44</sup>

Redistricting in Richmond was bitterly contested, and it reached a boiling point during the council's public hearings on June 23 and 24, 1981. Richmond's black leadership stood uniformly behind the Marsh Plan. Just prior to the meetings, Marsh tried to put the fight over redistricting in its proper historical context. He ran a two-page editorial in the *Richmond News-Leader* urging readers to remember Richmond's disreputable legacy of disenfranchisement. On the evening of June 23, Oliver Hill, who was now head of Richmond's chapter of the NAACP, Crusade member Willie Williams III, and Crusade president Norvell Robinson argued that African Americans needed to do everything in their power to maintain a council majority for as long as possible. Hill's position spoke volumes about the possibility of returning to a white-majority council:

The real issue as I see it and as it is perceived by a large body of citizenry . . . is whether or not the minority bloc on council, the Richmond power structure, and white citizens generally . . . have reached the level of maturity where they are able to accept the fact that blacks have a right to exercise the symbols of power and

to cooperate in the development of a state of affairs where skin color will no longer be a factor in the election, selection or evaluation of the performance of persons performing public service. . . . For centuries the city of Richmond was governed with very little, if any, regard for the sensibilities of its black citizens. While in more recent years some constructive efforts have been made . . . the local response is still unending resistance.

Hill's reference to the legacy of institutionalized racism and the persistence of white resistance also spoke volumes about African Americans' commitment to majority–minority districts. Williams, Hill, and Robinson were keenly aware of the ways whites had used federal and state resources to stunt the development of black neighborhoods and businesses in the mid–twentieth century. In this way, many African Americans, given the resilience of white resistance, feared deeper marginalization should whites recapture a council majority. Politics ensured that African Americans, who had little economic power but made up more than half of Richmond's population, could exercise some power. To the surprise of few, Willie Dell spoke most frankly about the relationship between white skepticism and black governance: “White folks have problems being niggers. That is, not niggers in terms of race but in terms of position. There are persons in this town who—[even] if we could part the James, if we could instantly make the economic picture in Richmond more favorable, if we could solve all the crime problems—would still question black leadership.” Districts were not only a way to rectify the political discrimination that characterized black life in Richmond for most of the twentieth century but also a defense against the continuation of racist trends in Richmond's political and economic culture.<sup>45</sup>

Whites made no apologies about their desire to reclaim a council majority or their disdain for majority–minority districts. If wards were in part implemented to offset blacks' population and political disadvantages in at-large systems, why, whites wondered, were districts still relevant if blacks made up more than half of the city's population? The *Richmond News-Leader* and *Richmond Times-Dispatch* continually argued that wards encouraged political provincialism. Although the dailies refused to acknowledge the city's history of disenfranchisement, their critiques of

the district system in some ways had merit. Majority–minority districts all but ensured that council members were loyal not merely to particular racial constituencies but also, in essence, to portions of the city. On June 28, just before the city council was scheduled to vote on the districting plans, Councilman Steve Kemp continued to leverage whites’ ties to the private sector. He argued that if blacks continued to use districts to centralize political power and perpetuate Hill’s type of rhetoric, white flight would continue apace, and their businesses would follow closely behind. Kemp, a long-standing partner of Paine Webber, Inc., and former president of CFA (Chartered Financial Analyst) Virginia, argued that Hill’s statements were “disgusting” given the fact that Richmond’s corporate community had recently saved and continued to sponsor many of Richmond’s black institutions. Kemp was not just referring to the legacy of benefaction in Richmond but also specifically indicating a recent donation to the tune of \$600,000 to bail out VUU from a possible loss of accreditation.<sup>46</sup>

Just as local officials began to vote on a redistricting plan, the council minority embarked on yet another campaign of obstructionism. The DOJ, as was commensurate with VRA section 5, reviewed and approved the Marsh Plan on August 29, 1981. In its approval of the plan, the DOJ also admonished the Fair Plan Act. The assistant attorney general of the CRD, William Bradford Reynolds, argued that Leidinger’s plan “would . . . result in significant retrogression in the opportunities of black voters” in Chuck Richardson’s district, so it turned out that McDaniel’s assessment was right all along. Marsh’s plan, Reynolds held, “did not appear to have been drawn with an invidious purpose. . . . [T]he net effect . . . is a maintenance of the status quo.” It was this new status quo that whites had a problem with. Just prior to the council’s and the DOJ’s approval of the Marsh Plan, members of the council minority resolved to withhold the two-thirds majority of votes necessary to release city bonds for capital improvements in 1982. Although Leidinger argued that he influenced the minority’s vote against the budget because he disliked the majority’s last-minute decision to add \$1.9 million for Main Street capital improvements, black leaders were convinced that the maneuver was retribution for Marsh’s redistricting plan. The minority members stressed that if the BMC accepted Leidinger’s “four–four and one” plan, they would vote

to release capital funds for city improvements in 1982. Marsh explicitly referred to the minority’s threats as “white-mail.” Although the minority’s threats over bond authorization proved idle after the BMC passed the Marsh Plan, disgruntlement about voting rights continued.<sup>47</sup>

The BMC’s attempt to fashion safer districts and use those districts to consolidate political power fanned the flames of white Richmonders’ interpositionist and anti-Washington proclivities. The issue of redistricting gave rise to yet another people’s revolt—this revolt, however, was not about public-school integration but about court-ordered majority–minority districts. White Richmonders were at the vanguard of anti-VRA movements, and their resistance to majority–minority districts became a defining characteristic of conservative politics in the early 1980s. Just prior to the summer of 1981, as the redistricting debate began to gain steam, whites put the VRA in the proverbial crosshairs—the act was currently in the process of being renewed by Congress. On May 20, 1981, Marsh and state senator Doug Wilder spoke in front of Congress about the urgent need for voting rights mandates. They argued that Richmond’s history of recent vote dilution confirmed the need for an extension of the VRA, including the extension of sections 5 and 2. On the same day, Virginia’s Third District congressman and former Richmond mayor Thomas Bliley (R) went before the same House Judiciary Subcommittee to argue against the act’s extension and the creation of what experts call “the Senate factors.” Bliley, in fact, attempted not just to strike down the bill but, in Congressman Barney Frank’s (D–Mass.) words, to “gut the bill fairly effectively” by attacking section 2. More specifically, Bliley lobbied against the creation of stronger criteria—the “Senate factors”—for the courts to consider when assessing the “totality of circumstances” test. In total, nine of Virginia’s ten congressmen voted against the VRA’s extension in 1981. These congressmen, with the help of Councilman Kemp, found likeminded allies in Richmond.<sup>48</sup>

Resistance to majority–minority districts and the VRA eventually trickled down to Richmond—whites attempted to deny preclearance of the Marsh Plan on the grounds that *they* were the population minority. Immediately following submission of the Marsh Plan to the DOJ, the minority council encouraged whites in the Fifth District to bombard Attorney General William Bradford Reynolds and Assistant Attorney

General James P. Turner with letters urging the federal government to deny preclearance on grounds of reverse discrimination. At the height of the redistricting controversy, the *Richmond Times-Dispatch* editorial page ran several columns about the unconstitutionality of majority-minority districts and section 5. These editorials were not just about local politics but were part of the broader national debate about the VRA's extension. The paper cited a Republican think tank's examination of the post-1965 developments in voting rights. It placed a portion of this study on its editorial page: "The right to vote does not mean the right to be elected. Democracy is based on the rights of individuals, not groups. The logical conclusion concerning proportional representation in regards to the Voting Rights Act would be to establish a quota system concerning the election of minorities to office. Any quota system for elected officials will destroy a democratic government." Councilman Kemp applied further pressure. He eventually sent out a series of letters to influential whites in Richmond's Fifth District urging them to contest the Marsh Plan with the DOJ. Kemp also sent out a memorandum that instructed white citizens on how to write letters to the DOJ. He argued that as the employers of major companies, whites needed to "solicit vigorously officers and employees who may have the same concerns." Kemp's letter also implied that white business owners should motivate their white employees to petition the attorney general about the nature of the Marsh Plan.<sup>49</sup>

Kemp's constituency argued that the Marsh Plan denied and abridged whites' right to vote on account of race. At the time, African Americans composed 50 percent of Richmond's population but were in the process of submitting a ward-based system that guaranteed them 55 percent of the city council's seats. In 1980, one editorial argued, "In my opinion, the ward system should be changed so that the white vote will not be diluted, and then we will have a fair election by all the people for council members." In August 1981, a group of white citizens traveled to Washington to demonstrate how the Marsh Plan discriminated against white voters. Although no record exists of the conversation, the council minority's effort in this instance was the first time in the sixteen-year history of the VRA that a group of white citizens made such an argument. Whites found little sanctuary in Washington, however. The Marsh Plan, according to the DOJ, apportioned Richmond's districts in accordance

with federal law, and the attorney general explicitly argued that the VRA and single-member district systems were meant to protect minority voting rights. The *Afro* found it quite ironic that Richmond’s whites, whose annexation had facilitated the ward system in the first place, were now arguing that districts diluted white votes. Although no one knew it at the time, Kemp’s revolt did not bode well for the BMC. The city’s white voters were as determined as ever to return a white-majority council. They eventually overcame their aversion to the district system by tapping African Americans’ discontent with Henry Marsh.<sup>50</sup>

The conflict over district boundaries eventually culminated in a precinct-level assault against Willie Dell. Marsh, it turned out, believed that Dell’s district was one of the least politically vulnerable of the five black districts. As such, his plan deposited a large bloc of highly organized white voters into the district from the northernmost part of the city—Leidinger’s district. These whites came into Dell’s district armed with a deep disdain for the mayor. After the DOJ approved the Marsh Plan, Dell’s district contained not only a contingent of anti-Marsh whites but about 20 percent more white voters in general. On the eve of the election in 1982, it appeared that Dell still had enough black voters to stem the tide of resistance from the Imperial Plaza contingent. These white voters alone did not have the electoral muscle to defeat the incumbent should a majority of the district’s blacks vote for Dell. But in a strange twist of fate some black voters communicated their contempt for Marsh by organizing strategies with the district’s recently incorporated white voters.<sup>51</sup>

Dr. Roy West, a Richmond native, announced his candidacy in early February 1982. By 1982, West had been affiliated with Richmond’s public-education system for thirty-two years in various capacities, as a teacher, administrator, and ultimately a principal at Albert H. Hill Middle School. West attended Maggie Walker High School and earned a bachelor’s of science degree from VUU. Upon graduating, he earned a master’s degree in education from New York University and a doctorate in education from George Washington University. During his work with Richmond’s public schools, West had also taught as an adjunct professor at VUU. Although few knew it at the time, it was West’s appointment as the principle of Hill Middle School that eventually gave rise to his political career and his mayoralty. Superintendent Richard C. Hunter, who was Richmond’s

first African American school superintendent, was indirectly responsible for that rise. In an attempt to rectify underenrollment in RPS during the early 1980s, Hunter consolidated the city's high schools. "Plan G," as it became known, met the challenges of declining high school enrollment by grouping all of the city's high schools into three complexes. West, who publicly opposed Hunter's plan, eventually became a casualty of the consolidation. School board officials demoted West in 1980 from his position as principle of John Marshall High School and moved him to Hill Middle School. During his opposition to Hunter's plans, West became somewhat of a cause célèbre. His criticism of the plan and RPS were in keeping with people's skepticism of local government and the public-school system. In 1982, West decided to parlay his populist approval into political office. Fifty-two years old in 1982, he had virtually no experience in official politics and had never been heavily committed to Richmond's political struggle for civil rights.<sup>52</sup>

West's campaign slogan, "A New Direction for Richmond," eventually became a referendum on his approach to politics. West quickly distanced himself from the BMC, set out to prove that he was not the Crusade's candidate, and established that he planned to run a campaign of reassurance. He also stressed that he was philosophically independent of the black body politic and that he would also help bring an end to race-based power struggles. His campaign pamphlet emphasized interracial unity for the sake of "setting aside the negative differences that plagued City Council and for council to be truly representative as it establishes policy and passes ordinances in the best interests of the *entire* city." African Americans were immediately concerned that West might actually pose a threat to Dell's incumbency. Kenney was extremely frank about what West represented; "it is ironic," the councilman argued, "that we have a black running a negative campaign against the black majority. Yet, I hear nothing negative about those who have tried to stop the accomplishments of the majority." West capitalized on the racial division at city hall by blaming Marsh rather than the white council minority for the conflict. Dell, who had not faced a formidable political opponent in nearly a decade and was a staunch defender of Mayor Marsh, proved ill equipped to defend herself against West's assault.<sup>53</sup>

Willie Dell ran as a candidate of continuity but became a victim of



the district system. It is impossible to talk about her political career without mentioning how gendered expectations influenced the development of that career. By 1982, Dell had fallen out of favor with some black residents of her district in the Highland Park area. These Highland Park voters argued that she was generally inaccessible. A sizeable number of those voters also believed that the incumbent, who had become a poor folks’ champion, had it in for the middle-class residents of the Highland Park area. According to these voters, Dell did not carry herself in a manner that was commensurate with a black female public representative—she was “too black,” they believed. These were the very people who had rejected Curtis Holt and openly criticized Dell for sporting an Afro, wearing African regalia, and speaking in so-called black English. Reports later confirmed that a number of these African Americans very quietly worked to undermine Dell’s campaign. Many of the Crusade’s long-standing members and allies had backed away from Dell’s campaign behind the scenes. The grapevine had it that Senator Wilder, who lived in Dell’s district, had actually encouraged Roy West to run in 1982, a suggestion that Wilder vehemently disputed in court.<sup>54</sup>

Although Dell resisted gendered and class-based attacks on her character, voters believed that ousting her was the safest way to undermine Henry Marsh’s control over the mayoralty. Dell argued that ministers’ wives should “maintain their own identity”: “I’m not going to be what other people want me to be. I go barefoot if I’m in the mood.” Dell had spent much of her career before politics working with economically vulnerable communities, and she remained committed to these issues throughout her career. She very openly held that her adversaries had little interest in understanding the way she carried herself in public and approached politics. She knew, for instance, that middle-class African Americans were critical of her strong southern accent and Afro. They may have further resented that she refused to concede to the pressures placed on her. Over the course of the 1970s, however, the number of middle-class African Americans grew in the Highland Park area, and these middle-class voters were not as committed to the fight against poverty as Dell continued to be. Dell’s greatest problem with the Imperial Plaza and Highland Park coalition may have been that charges of unresponsiveness in reality meant that she failed to secure business relationships for a class

of people uniquely positioned to take advantage of having blacks on the city council.<sup>55</sup>

The face-off in District C represented a contest between two distinct approaches to local government—the desire to build the way to a better Richmond through entrepreneurship and the commitment to raising poorer blacks’ standard of living. Some black leaders believed that in trying to secure safer seats, the BMC obstructed African Americans’ abilities to get in on the redevelopment plans taking place throughout Richmond. These black voters associated Dell and BMC members with the Project One debacle and nearly five years of council factionalism. The conflict between Dell and West was not unique to Richmond—it epitomized a struggle in black politics that emerged in general in the early 1980s. Technocratic politicians, who represented a growing black middle class, began to directly challenge the first wave of civil rights-era politicians. The contest between Roy West and Willie Dell was, in essence, a battle between those who promoted race-based, affirmative-action initiatives (West) and those who championed targeted programs for vulnerable African American communities (Dell). Dell had argued nearly a decade earlier, “I’m . . . working at the grassroots level about the importance of people priorities and their problems over bricks and mortar.” As Sister Helen Legeay of the Catholic Diocese of Richmond stated during Dell’s council appointment in 1973, Dell had “insight into the welfare system and social aspects of urban life” that diversified the city council’s interests. She refused to compromise over her commitment to social issues—even at the expense of losing the middle-class vote. In an April debate against Dell, West argued that “the issues . . . of non-responsiveness to the needs of the district, on the district level, and on the citywide level, the perennial conflict on City Council,” had become synonymous with Dell’s tenure on the city council. West’s appeals to good government and responsiveness were another way of articulating that he could solidify coalitions with whites. The white council minority’s threats to sever connections between Richmond’s private and public sector also led groups of middle-class African Americans to believe that the BMC cared more about exercising power for its own sake than about interracial coalition building. Dell held that “what other folks promise you, I can and have delivered and I will continue.” The people in Imperial Plaza and Highland Park disagreed.<sup>56</sup>

The contest in District C in 1982 took its toll on both Dell’s campaign and her political career. Dell, who had been appointed to the council during the enjoinder, actually had minimal experience organizing campaigns. Even her campaign manager, Sandra Mitchell, admitted that the campaign struggled to organize strategies against West in the early stages. It also suffered because Dell refused to distance herself from Marsh. West continually put forward the idea that he was a “free thinker,” and, given his run-ins with RPS administration, voters seemed to believe him. Marsh’s critics argued that the mayor spent more time campaigning in Dell’s district than in his own. On May 5, 1982, election day, Peter Bacque of the *Richmond Times-Dispatch* wrote, “It was a fine day in Richmond, a fine day for an election, a fine day for anything, for everything. Grass-roots politics, the politics of friends and sidewalks, of rights and in-betweens, politics bloomed in the city’s streets.” The *Dispatch* knew what West represented. He defeated Dell by 497 votes, 3,858 to 3,361, and in five out of nine precincts. In the three white precincts west of Chamberlayne Avenue, West picked up 2,202 votes: 91 percent of the vote in Precincts 307, 308, and 309 and 30 percent of the vote for the entire district. He also garnered 34 percent of the African American vote. He won Precincts 301 and 302, which were made up largely of middle- and upper-class blacks. West also grabbed a decent chunk of Dell’s votes in precincts that vocalized overwhelming support for the incumbent. The rest of Richmond’s incumbents decisively overwhelmed their opponents, and Andrew Gillespie, a chief architect of Fair Play, joined them on the council. (For full election results in 1982, see table 13 in the appendix.)<sup>57</sup>

Richmond’s majority–minority district system may have secured African Americans seats on the city council, but it also had unintended consequences. Black mayors and councilpersons had little time to celebrate their historic victories. They quickly realized that political power alone was not enough—their white counterparts were still the gatekeepers to local political economies. Whites also carried on the politics of obstructionism and anti-VRA sentiment well into (and beyond) the 1980s. Factors beyond the realm of politics also tempered the symbolism of black governance. At the very moment black Americans assumed control over the symbols of local political power, their communities began to suffer from deepening economic vulnerability. Marsh, McDaniel, Richardson,

and Kenney rode out this storm, but Dell refused to succumb to gendered expectations about female elected officials, and her devotion to poverty and principle cost her a council seat in 1982. Roy West fancied himself a solution to racial conflict at city hall—voters agreed. The conflict between Roy West and Willie Dell typified a much larger problem within the Crusade—they represented two distinct approaches to local government. In the coming years, the Crusade failed to reconcile these differences.