was a popular address for streetcar drivers and train conductors. But the neighborhood was also teeming with workers and tradespeople of all types, including shoemakers, mechanics, barbers, plasterers, booksellers, upholsterers, and grocers. In the census records of Atlanta's Sixth Ward, where Lummus lived in 1920, one finds blacks and whites living side by side—as well as Christians and Jews, "native-born" Americans and recently arrived immigrants from all over the world. As he walked down Piedmont each morning, heading to the Butler Street yard, Lummus would have passed people chattering in Russian, German, Yiddish, Spanish, Chinese, Turkish, and Italian. And even among his American neighbors, there were people who had come to Atlanta from all over the country. Travis's flophouse may have been only an afternoon's drive south of the "white county" Lummus left behind, but it was, in almost every way, the polar opposite of Forsyth.

Lummus and Harris were once the most visible white allies of the county's black residents, but only a few years after the expulsions, they were gone. And with their exit, the last open opposition to the racial cleansing fell silent. They left behind a place that—unlike other counties that endured episodes of night riding and attempts at racial cleansing—had actually succeeded in closing its borders to African Americans. With no one left to speak out against the bigotry and intimidation, the county went into a kind of Rip Van Winkle sleep, as residents resumed lives that on the surface looked no different from any other rural place in Georgia. White Forsyth's communal crime had been fiery and explosive in 1912, but its erasure would happen slowly, quietly, and one fence post at a time.

15

ERASURE, 1920–1970

In a detailed survey of land transactions, journalist Elliot Jaspin has shown that while a small minority of Forsyth's black property owners got out early and received something close to fair market value for their land, the vast majority either sold at artificially low prices or simply walked away—knowing that their white neighbors would eventually take over their property. Each transaction is "carefully recorded in oversized books . . . in the basement of the Forsyth County Courthouse," Jaspin writes,

> and each sale tells a tale of black people who struggled to build a life [in Forsyth] and were crushed by the terror. . . . In all, twenty-four African-American landowners and seven churches . . . sold their property [and] the timing of these sales gives a sense of the panic people felt. The worst case was Alex Hunter, who, just three months before the expulsions, bought a farm for $1,500. Faced with death or leaving, he sold it in December 1912 for $550.

Jaspin found that even after selling for a third of his land's value, Alex Hunter was still luckier than many others, who simply walked

away and lost everything. "For thirty-four of the black landowners," Jaspin writes,

> there is no record that they ever sold their land. It made no difference. Whites, money in hand, would pay the tax on land they did not own and the clerk would note the transaction . . . simply ignor[ing] the gap in ownership. . . . In the three years after the expulsion, nearly two-thirds of the black-owned farmland that had not been sold was appropriated in this way.

With the racial ban still violently enforced, whites could feel confident that black owners would never appear and try to reclaim the land they had left behind. Even if someone was reckless enough to try, word spread that whites could defend land seizures not just with shotguns and pistols but under a common-law principle known as "adverse possession." If a man went down to the county courthouse, signed an affidavit swearing he had occupied the land "continuously, openly, and notoriously" and had been paying taxes on the lots, then according to state law, the original "adverse possession" would "ripen into title" after seven years, since the owner had taken no steps to repossess his property. In Georgia, this legal right—meant to encourage productive use of abandoned land—included the stipulation that any new claim "must not have originated in fraud [and] must be public, continuous, exclusive, uninterrupted, and peaceable."

Black owners abandoned land in Forsyth for many reasons—from armed invasion, to arson, to dynamite—but everyone in Georgia knew that none of them were remotely "peaceable." Nonetheless, when white residents walked down to the courthouse to register deeds on land they had long ago fenced in as their own, the county clerk rarely even raised an eyebrow. In 1912, the expulsion of Forsyth's black population had made news all over the country, but the thefts that followed were given a legal stamp of approval by the state, and they went unnoticed by anyone but the expelled black property owners themselves. "There was land for the taking," as Jaspin put it, "and in this free-for-all, the [county] tax clerk kept score."

BY THE EARLY 1920S, the elementary schools of Cumming were filled with a generation of white children who had no memory of the black people who once occupied those stolen lots. Most had never seen a black resident of Forsyth, and never would. As the *Macon Telegraph* put it in 1921, "in Forsyth more or less pride is taken that they have run out all the negroes." With the violent raids of 1912 receding into the past, it became possible for civic leaders to boast that while other north Georgia communities continued to suffer episodes of "race trouble," there were no such embarrassments in Forsyth.

The signs that African Americans once lived there had already begun to fade, and the remnants of that old world were visible only to those who knew where to look. A reporter driving north from Atlanta in January of 1921 wrote that "soon after the Chattahoochee has been crossed . . . a lone brick chimney stands amid blackened ruins . . . [and] a mile further on an old stove rises above a pile of stones which once formed the foundations of a little church and school." Many readers must have recalled the year when mobs drove more than a thousand black residents out of Forsyth County, yet the article made no mention of how that abandoned house first turned into "blackened ruins" or who had once occupied that "little church and school" now turning into a pile of mossy stones.

Night riders continued to make headlines in other Georgia counties in the early 1920s, but having once been synonymous with lawlessness, Forsyth found that its "race troubles" were quickly forgotten by many whites, and its reputation was already

being rehabilitated. When, in 1923, the *Atlanta Constitution* asked a north Georgia man named Arnold B. Hall to write a profile of the county, he made no mention of the expulsions and called Forsyth "a far-famed county of grand old Georgia where rich lands, rotation of crops and marked advancement in animal industry and horticultural activity are awakening the people with a new purpose, a dynamic zest, and a vigorous vision!"

Forsyth County's white defenders are quick to point out that the racial purge of 1912 was not, as is often believed, absolute. And records confirm that while nearly all of the 1,098 people listed as black or "mulatto" in 1910 were gone from Forsyth by 1920, when a census taker named Vester Buice made his rounds in February of that year, he did eventually come upon a small group of black families living in the Big Creek section, along Forsyth's southern border with Milton County.

The families of Ed and Bertha Moon, Will and Corrie Strickland, and Marvin and Rubie Rocks were all clustered together at the bottom edge of the county, as far as one could get from Oscarville and still be in Forsyth. The most prosperous of the group was Will Strickland, whose father James had been born a slave on the Strickland plantation in 1850. The Strickland farms were so notorious for their harsh treatment of slaves that Hardy, the family patriarch, had become known far and wide as "Devil Hard" Strickland. But James Strickland stayed in Forsyth even after emancipation, and he was among the young, newly freed black men of the county when in 1867 he signed his oath of allegiance at the Cumming courthouse. Just like Joseph Kellogg, he seems to have been both industrious and patient, for by 1900, after decades of sharecropping and saving, he and his wife Rosanna owned the property they worked in Big Creek. By 1910, James's son Will was farming their land and doing well enough, at least, to support a family with ten children.

Apologists for Forsyth have often pointed to the 1920 census roll, and those twenty-three black residents living around Will Strickland's farm, in an attempt to deny that African Americans were forced out. But it seems clear that twenty-three people returning to the county after more than a thousand have been banished does not mean the purge was any less violent or widespread than was reported in the papers. Instead, it suggests that a kind of exemption, or at least protection, was granted to these employees of the white Strickland family, whose power in the county was unmatched.

There is no way to know exactly where the black Strickland, Moon, and Rocks families went during the first waves of violence, but there is strong evidence that they fled along with the rest of the African American community. When Ed Moon filled out a WWI draft card in 1918, he was living forty miles east of Cumming, in Maysville, a town the white Stricklands had helped found in Jackson County in the nineteenth century. Jackson happened to be the birthplace of Forsyth's largest slave owners—Hardy, Tolbert, and Oliver Strickland—and was still home to many of their kin. One likely scenario is that when the mobs of Forsyth threatened black employees like Ed Moon, the white Stricklands simply relocated them to other family farms in Jackson County. And then, at some point after the violence had died down, and prior to the 1920 census, the Stricklands quietly brought some of their black laborers back into Forsyth, where they were isolated but protected as long as they stayed on Strickland property.

Whether it was the lure of wages, the threat of punishment, or a lack of any better option, at some point after 1918, at great risk, those twenty-three people stepped back across the invisible line and were counted as Forsyth residents in 1920. No mention was made in the papers, no mobs assembled at the edge of the Strickland place, and there is no record of their presence other than those few entries that Vester Buice scrawled in his census ledger.

As enraged as locals had been at the sight of the "Seeing Georgia" chauffeurs, they likely knew better than to test the rich and powerful white Strickland clan. That small cluster of black people at the southern edge of the county still numbered sixteen in the census of 1930. Then, at some point after 1930, they were gone. The Moons to Gainesville. Will and Corrie Strickland just nine miles south, to Milton County, near Alpharetta, and Marvin and Rubie Rocks to some new life of which no traces survived.

ACROSS THE CHATTAHOOCHEE, in Hall County, Jane Daniel was just starting to imagine a more ambitious escape—not just from the lynchers and night riders of Forsyth but out of the South altogether. In the census of 1920, we can still find her, age twenty-nine, pinning white people's damp clothes to the line in her backyard, as somewhere in Gainesville Will Butler gripped the wooden handle of a pair of steel pincers and lugged a fifty-pound block of ice through the back door of a white man's mansion. But when the census taker came back to Atlanta Street in 1930, neighbors said that Will and Jane were gone—having boarded a northbound train at the depot in Gainesville and joined so many other young black people of their generation in the Great Migration.

By the early 1930s, Jane Daniel and Will Butler were renting a house at 467 Theodore Street, in the Paradise Valley neighborhood of Detroit. Having grown up in rural Forsyth and then lived in the small railroad city of Gainesville, Jane suddenly found herself at the center of a booming industrial metropolis. Census records show that Jane and Will's neighborhood was filled with others who had been born to sharecroppers and field hands in Georgia, Alabama, South Carolina, Virginia, and Mississippi—but who now worked as cooks, maids, bricklayers, and night watchmen.

And more than anywhere else, the black residents of Detroit worked in the bustling factories of Motor City: Fisher Body, at

Sign protesting the arrival of black tenants, Sojourner Truth housing project, Detroit, February 1942

the corner of Piquette and St. Antoine; Cadillac's Detroit Assembly, on Clark Street; and the Hudson Motors plant, off Jefferson Avenue. Whereas the backdrop of her youth had been pine forests, cotton fields, and the lazy, deep green waters of the Chattahoochee, the second half of Jane's life would play out amidst smokestacks and glowing steel ingots, in a city whose pulse in its heyday one visitor described as "the sound of a hammer against a steel plate."

One migrant of Jane's generation described the life she left behind in the Jim Crow South as "like sleeping on a volcano which may erupt at any moment," and Jane must have felt a similar kind of relief once she and Will were settled in Detroit—to be out of Georgia, and beyond the reach of the white people who had killed her first husband, Rob, and celebrated the hanging of her brother Oscar and her cousin Ernest. Will and Jane never had children, but the nieces and nephews who knew them in Detroit all understood that Aunt Janie and Uncle Will had begun their lives far away, among

the crackers and Klansmen down in Georgia. "*Georgia,*" they said years later, "was not a place Aunt Janie ever talked too much about."

BUT IF THE Butlers thought they had escaped white terrorism, they and the rest of Detroit got a rude awakening in the summer of 1943, when the white people of the city decided that they, too, would declare a racially cleansed zone and draw an invisible line that blacks could cross only at risk of their lives.

Racial tensions had been building since the first trainloads of migrants began arriving from the South after World War I. The African American population of the city was just 6,000 in 1910, but by 1929 some 120,000 new black residents had settled in Detroit, and a decade later, in 1940, that number had nearly doubled, to 200,000. During that same span of years, European immigrants were also arriving in unprecedented numbers, and for many of the same reasons: the magnetic draw of high wages and low unemployment, and a chance to escape the violence and deprivation they'd suffered in their homelands.

By the early 1940s, there were simmering tensions between whites and blacks in the city, and they boiled over in the winter of 1942. That was the year the federal government opened the new Sojourner Truth housing project, which was built especially for poor black families but located in a predominantly white area north of Paradise Valley. When the first tenants arrived, on February 28th, neighborhood whites burned a cross in a field near the housing complex, and the next morning a mob of twelve hundred armed white men rallied to keep out black residents—many of whom had already signed leases and paid their first month's rent. Whites formed a picket line in front of the building, and when two cars driven by black men tried to force their way through the line, a melee broke out. The violence ended only when mounted police arrived with shotguns and tear gas.

White mob dragging an African American man from a Detroit streetcar, June 21, 1943

In April of 1942, 168 black families finally moved into the housing complex, under the protection of the Detroit Police Department and sixteen hundred troops of the Michigan National Guard. Like Jane and Will Butler, the great majority of those families had migrated to Detroit from the South. As they went to bed on their first night in Sojourner Truth—with the racist taunts of whites rising up past the windows of the new high-rise—many must have wondered if they had simply traded one band of night riders for another.

The chaos at Sojourner Truth was only a prelude to what Jane and Will experienced the following summer, when twenty-five thou-

sand workers at Packard walked off the assembly line because black employees had been promoted to jobs that placed them shoulder to shoulder with whites. As one enraged man said outside the plant, "I'd rather see Hitler and Hirohito win than work beside a nigger."

The shoving and shouting outside Packard turned to more serious violence on the night of June 20th, 1943, when two young black men were expelled from Belle Isle Park, in the middle of the Detroit River. On the bridge linking the park to the city, a skirmish broke out between groups of blacks and whites. In the wake of the clash, a rumor quickly spread across the city: that "blacks had raped and murdered a white woman on the Belle Isle Bridge."

Many people surely recognized this as the "old threadbare lie" that had fueled half a century of lynch law in the South. But once infuriated whites believed that a gang of black men had "violated" and killed a white woman and thrown her body into the river, it hardly mattered that the story was untrue. If Jane dared to venture out into the city during the three days that followed, she would have witnessed a familiar scene: black bodies being dragged through the streets by gangs of white men.

Witnesses told of mobs ambushing and beating black passengers as they stepped down off trolley cars; a fifty-eight-year-old black man named Moses Kiska being shot and killed for waiting at a bus stop in the wrong part of town; and an unnamed black man being bludgeoned on Woodward Avenue as four white police officers looked on. Jane and Will's house was just two blocks from Woodward, in the middle of what quickly became a war zone. By the time military troops arrived to stop the rampage, there were thirty-four confirmed killings. Most of the victims had been beaten to death with wooden clubs.

Langston Hughes wrote that at least in the North he had his own "window to shoot from," and in June of 1943, in Detroit, that's exactly what black residents like Jane and Will Butler did: keep

watch with loaded rifles, stiff-jawed as they waited for the roving mobs. Many of the attackers had European instead of southern accents, but their faces were contorted with the same hatred Jane had seen so many times in Forsyth. All she could do, as so often in her life, was hope that the future might be different. As it said on the flags flying over Detroit's city hall, *Speramus meliora:* "We hope for better things."

DURING THE SAME decades that Jane and Will struggled to build a new life in the North, Forsyth was deep in its sleep of forgetfulness, as all around it the state of Georgia veered even further in the direction of white supremacy. The 1933 governor's race was won by Eugene Talmadge, a south Georgia farmer who proudly grazed a cow on the lawn of the governor's mansion and courted the votes of poor rural whites by casting himself as the last line of defense against a "Nigra takeover." Talmadge held the governorship for three terms between 1933 and 1943 and was, according to writer Gilbert King, "a racial demagogue who presided over a Klan-ridden regime." In a typical campaign speech in 1942, Talmadge answered a question about school integration by reassuring his segregationist base: "Before God, friend, the niggers will never go to a school which is white while I am Governor."

One of the few glimpses from inside Forsyth during this period comes from a white woman named Helen Matthews Lewis, who moved into the county as a ten-year-old in 1934, when her father was hired as a county mail carrier. Lewis remembered a white community still very much in the grips of its original paranoia and still openly proud of having "run the niggers out" in 1912. "I was told stories [as a child]," Lewis said,

> about how they hung blacks around the courthouse. I knew they lynched the guy that they were accusing of [the rape of

> Mae Crow]. Stories were told. I could just see bodies hanging all around the courthouse in my mind.

Lewis sometimes caught sight of frightened black delivery-men passing through the county in 1930s: "[Back] then blacks coming in through town on trucks to deliver stuff to the stores were afraid to get out. . . . They would hide in the back." Lewis also remembered that many Forsyth residents were quick to react to even the slightest trespass across the racial border—from the appearance of a black worker on the back of a truck to an old man who strayed into Forsyth while riding a bicycle north toward Hall County. "My father came home from his mail route one day," Lewis said,

> and he said he saw this old black man bicycling through town on his way to Gainesville. My father said "I'm worried he's got to go through Chestatee" . . . [past] the rowdy boys of Chestatee. [My father] said "He'll never make it," so he gets in his car and he said "I'm going to go find him," then he goes and picks him up and takes him to Gainesville.

Lewis remembered how another outsider violated the unwritten code in the late 1930s—a woman who moved to the county with her long-serving black maid. "When I was in school" at Forsyth County High, Lewis said,

> this teacher comes to town . . . who had this black woman who was a companion, maid, a person who'd always been in their family. And she taught music and the woman lived with her [until] these boys . . . came with torches and surrounded her house and made her get up in the middle of the night and take the black woman back to Alabama.

When an interviewer in 2010 interjected, "Oh, goodness," Lewis said, "These were my experiences in Forsyth" in the 1930s and '40s. "There was a sense of . . . horror."

Lewis was clearly frightened by tales of lynched men hanging from telephone poles, and by the sight of black workers hiding under tarps when they passed through Cumming. But to her schoolmates, "white Forsyth" seemed like the natural and eternal order of things. By 1941, when Lewis graduated from Forsyth County High, most traces of the black community had long since been burned, dismantled, or silently absorbed into the property of whites.

Of that former time, all that was left were fleeting glimpses, visible only to someone who paid very close attention. Not long before she moved out of the county, Lewis remembered, she was walking up to a friend's front door and noticed faint inscriptions in the stepping-stones that led up to the house. It was only when she knelt down for a closer look that Lewis realized the path she'd been walking on was paved with remnants of black Forsyth. "They [were] gravestones," she said, "from a black cemetery. Someone had dug them up, and took them home, and used them for flagstones."

THE CIVIL RIGHTS clashes of the 1950s and '60s came and went without changing much in the lives of Forsyth's quiet country people, who in the decades after World War II had been busy erecting chicken houses in their old corn and cotton fields, as America's expanding poultry industry brought new prosperity to north Georgia. The county seat may have been just a short drive from Ebenezer Baptist—the home church of Martin Luther King Jr. and one of the epicenters of the American civil rights movement—but with no black residents to segregate from whites, there were no "colored" drinking fountains in the Cumming courthouse, and no "whites only" signs in the windows of Cumming's diners and roadside motels. Instead, as segregationists all over the South faced

off against freedom riders, civil rights marches, and lunch-counter sit-ins, Forsyth was a bastion of white supremacy that went almost totally unnoticed.

Even as the nation changed around it, Forsyth's old, unspoken rules remained, and each new generation of enforcers clung to the code their parents and grandparents had handed down. In May of 1968, just a month after King was assassinated, a group of ten black schoolchildren came north from an Atlanta housing project, as part of a church camping trip led by two white Mennonite counselors—who were unaware of Forsyth's racial prohibition. At dusk, as the children pitched their tents in a scenic campground beside Lake Lanier, a gang of white men appeared out of the darkness and forced the group to leave, warning them that "we don't allow niggers in this county after dark." When Atlanta activists returned a week later to protest the intimidation, they had to be protected by the Georgia State Patrol, as whites gathered around the campsite, chanting, "Wait until the night comes!"

Asked about the clash, Roy P. Otwell, president of the Bank of Cumming, assured a reporter that while he was "sorry to read of it . . . this sort of thing does not represent Forsyth. . . . When we have an incident of this kind it is overplayed and much exaggerated [and] the people of Forsyth County [are] greatly misunderstood."

BY THE EARLY 1970S, many of the lynchers and night riders had begun to die off, taking with them the last living memories of the expulsions. The identities of these men will probably remain a mystery forever now. But the account of Marcus Mashburn, a local doctor, leaves little doubt that many of them were well-known residents who—after waging a months-long campaign of terror against their own neighbors—went back to quiet lives as farmers, storekeepers, tradesmen, and God-fearing, churchgoing Christians.

Mashburn was a country doctor who practiced for decades in

Forsyth, and late in his life he told an interviewer that "in traveling over the county to wait on the sick . . . [I] attended many of the men who took part in the riots and lynching on their deathbeds." Mashburn described old men racked with guilt over the events of 1912 and said he watched a number of them "die horrible deaths because of their part in the negro lynching." Even sixty years later, the doctor was careful not to name any names, or to spell out too clearly the obvious conclusion: that Rob Edwards had been murdered not by "parties unknown," and not by Klansmen flooding down out of the hills, but, just as Ruth Jordan remembered, by regular "people of the county."

After a few generations of silence, what began as an open secret had become a carefully guarded one, revealed only at the very end, and only to a select few. "As they grew older, their minds [were] burdened by having had a part in the killing," Dr. Mashburn said, and in their last moments "this thing, they knew, was wrong."

16

THE ATTEMPTED MURDER OF MIGUEL MARCELLI

There were long periods when Forsyth's prohibition went untested, and largely unnoticed, at least by white Georgians. For African Americans, the county's reputation was so well established that it was rare for anyone to make the mistake of straying over the line. Once in a while, a black truck driver from Atlanta or Chattanooga would take the risk of speeding through, and simply pray he didn't run out of gas or get a flat tire. But more often than not, black Georgians went far out of their way to avoid Forsyth, even if it meant hours of extra driving, or switching assignments with a white co-worker, or simply refusing to go into the cracker county they'd been warned about since they were children.

When my family moved to Forsyth, in 1977, my parents saw Cumming as an appealing escape from suburban Atlanta—close enough for them to commute to jobs in the city but far enough away that the county was still pastoral, with its rolling green pastures and quaint town square. Our house on Browns Bridge Road was just a few miles west of Oscarville, and while we had heard rumors that Forsyth was home to plenty of racists and Klansmen, the same could be said of almost any rural county in Georgia in the 1970s.

At age seven, I had only the vaguest sense that something "bad" once happened in Forsyth, and no idea at all that it had begun just a few miles from where we lived. My classmates at Cumming Elementary explained to me, the newcomer, why there were "no niggers in Forsyth County," the same way their elders had once explained it to Helen Matthews Lewis in the 1930s. And when my Little League team piled into the back of a pickup truck and joined Cumming's Fourth of July Parade in 1978, I watched a group of Sawnee Klansmen stroll along behind us, all wearing their pointy hoods and white robes, as they waved and lobbed handfuls of Super Bubble to the crowd.

But for all that, Forsyth still seemed normal to me as a kid. It was a quiet, close-knit community, as locals liked to say, where boys played football and baseball and where girls rode horses and took ballet. My friends' fathers spent their weekends fishing and hunting, and on Friday nights you could find almost everyone in the bleachers of the Forsyth County High football stadium. I learned to sit silently when my friends told "nigger jokes" and to keep my family's liberal views to myself. My parents had grown up in the Birmingham of George Wallace and Bull Connor, and the kind of deep-seated bigotry we found in Forsyth was nothing new to them. My father and mother had fought with their own parents over integration, and they had been taunted by racists as they'd marched in civil rights demonstrations in Birmingham and Atlanta. In the same way, they told me, we were going to help change Forsyth County from within.

BUT THEN IN July of 1980, three years after we arrived, something happened that I knew wasn't normal at all. I first heard about it when my mother, who worked as a freelance reporter for the *Gainesville Times*, got a call from her editor, C. B. Hackworth. Hackworth said that the night before there had been a shooting

not far from our house, and he asked my mother to drive down to Athens Park Road and try to get the full story.

In those days, it wasn't unusual to hear a shotgun blast echoing across Lake Lanier or filtering through the pines when some good ol' boy was hunting whitetail or flushing out quail. So my mother headed toward Athens Park, expecting to learn about a hunting trip gone wrong, or a domestic violence case, or maybe just some redneck taking a potshot at a stray dog.

But after spending the afternoon stopping at one house after another, she began to sense that something very different had happened on Athens Park Road the day before. No one would talk about the shooting, and more than a few people slammed the door in her face when they realized why she'd come. Over the course of the next few weeks, she learned the truth: that whites in Forsyth had once again attacked a black man for stepping across the county line.

ON THE MORNING of July 26th, 1980, Miguel Marcelli and his girlfriend, Shirley Webb, were invited to a company picnic thrown by Sophisticated Data Research, the Atlanta-based computer firm where Webb worked. The organizers had chosen to hold the gathering on Lake Lanier, which was a popular weekend playground for young professionals, particularly after an extension of Highway 400 made the lake an easy drive from northside Atlanta.

Marcelli, a twenty-eight-year-old Atlanta firefighter, had been born and raised in the U.S. Virgin Islands, and his girlfriend, Shirley Webb, thirty-seven, had moved from her hometown of Chicago to take a job at Sophisticated Data. So as they drove over the two-lane country roads to meet Shirley's co-workers for the company party, Marcelli and Webb knew nothing about Forsyth. When they pulled into the public park where employees and guests were laying out their picnics and setting up a volleyball net, the scene

looked idyllic: a shady pavilion set between tall pines and the red-clay banks of the lake.

But soon after they arrived, word started to spread up and down Athens Park Road: there were "a couple of niggers" down at the lake, laughing and frolicking, having a party with a bunch of white friends. As locals at the park watched Marcelli and Webb hit the volleyball back and forth, they were shocked—not just by the appearance of two black faces in Forsyth but by the fact that this man and woman didn't seem to realize where they were, or just how much danger they were in.

MELVIN CROWE'S BRANCH of the family added an *e* at some point, but in Oscarville everybody knew that he was blood kin to Bud, Azzie, and Mae Crow. Melvin's father, Burton, was nine years old in 1912 and had grown up with Obie and Ovie, twin brothers who were among the siblings Mae had been sent to fetch on the day she was attacked. As a son of old Oscarville, born in 1929, Melvin Crowe had learned the story of Mae's death not as a legend but as something his father, uncles, grandparents, and cousins had all witnessed firsthand, and told him about many times.

So when Crowe heard the rumors and drove down to see for himself, he could hardly believe his eyes. There, less than a mile from the spot where Mae had been found with her skull bashed in—where she had sickened and died, and where Ernest Knox had first "confessed his crime"—stood two black people, holding hands and wading knee-deep in the waters of Lake Lanier.

Crowe watched them through somewhat bleary eyes, since, according to his neighbors, he "customarily spent much of Saturday drinking, then driving around the area, sometimes stopping by to see friends." Crowe had been doing exactly that all morning, and after catching sight of Marcelli and Webb, he drove to the house of his friend Bob Davis, and together with a friend of Davis's

named Bryine Williams, they started plotting to "do something" about what they'd seen. Before they drove back down Athens Park Road, Davis grabbed a pistol. The idea, Crowe said later, was to scare the black couple away: "We talked about shooting out their tires." For anyone who'd missed his point, he added, "I don't like colored people."

Marcelli got his first inkling of trouble when he heard the crunch of gravel under the tires of a pickup truck, rolling slowly past the grassy picnic area. The vehicle cruised by several times that afternoon, always disappearing up the dirt road leading out of the park only to return a few minutes later. When at one point Marcelli ran over near the truck to get a volleyball, he said he found the driver "looking at me with a mean face." As a black man living in Georgia, Marcelli had seen scowling white men many times before. "I didn't pay much attention," he said. "I just thought maybe he looked like that all the time."

But around six-fifteen p.m., as Marcelli and Webb were shaking the sand out of their towels and packing the trunk of their car, the same truck appeared again, and this time the driver pulled sideways across the road, blocking their exit from the park. A middle-aged white man sat behind the wheel, glaring at them. Without a word, he gunned the engine and drove off.

With the light fading, Marcelli and Webb said good-bye to the rest of Webb's friends and got in their car, eager to put the whole episode behind them and relieved at the thought of getting back to Atlanta. But as they drove up the hill toward the main highway, Webb noticed a huge dust cloud filling the road ahead. At that same moment, inside Melvin Crowe's truck, Bob Davis raised his hand, nodded at Crowe, and said, "Stop and let me out right here."

As Marcelli and Webb drove up the dusty road, struggling to see, Webb suddenly heard a blunt pop, then another, and watched in horror as Marcelli went limp, his body slumping over the steering

wheel. "I felt a great weakness come over me," Marcelli recalled later. "Then, I felt a 'wiggling' sensation in my head and neck. I heard Shirley scream and the car seemed to be moving on its own."

When she looked over at Marcelli, Webb said, she "thought he was dead . . . the whole left side of his face was covered in blood." She struggled to grab the steering wheel as the car veered, climbed a bank beside the road, then flipped, the engine revving and smoking as the wheels spun. With Marcelli drenched in blood and unconscious in the front seat, Webb dragged herself out through the shattered rear window. As she staggered away from the overturned car and called out for help, she saw "a group of men . . . standing on a hill above the road," and she headed toward them. But when she got closer, Webb was shocked to find that "they were pointing and laughing." Convinced that these were the same men who had just shot Marcelli, a terrified Webb turned and ran back down the road, screaming for someone to help her.

A local man named Keaton was working in his yard when he heard the sound of gunshots, the squeal of car tires, then shattering glass. He ran to look and found what he described as "an extremely distraught black woman" coming up the road toward him.

"Would you help me? Would you protect me?" Shirley Webb pleaded. "And, please, help him," she said, pointing back toward the wrecked car. Keaton told the woman that he would "instruct his wife to call the police." When she begged him to drive her back to the pavilion so she could find her friends, he repeated that his wife was going to call the police. Leaving Shirley Webb standing in the road—still, for all she knew, in the sights of armed white men—Keaton turned back toward his house, shaking his head and saying, "There's nothing more I can do here."

As Melvin Crowe stood in his driveway, staring in the direction from which the shots had come, Bob Davis came crashing through the woods behind his house. Melvin could see that Davis had taken

off his shirt and was wrapping a pistol inside it as he ran deeper into the pines. A few minutes later, Davis walked back empty-handed. Still wild-eyed and gasping for breath, he looked at Crowe and said, "I think I killed the black son of a bitch."

Not even fear of prosecution was enough to quiet Melvin Crowe on the subject, or to dampen his pride when police investigators arrived at his house the day after the shooting. Detective Randy Sims started the investigation at Crowe's front door only because it was the closest house to the spot where glass from a shattered windshield still littered the street. When he and another officer introduced themselves, Crowe blurted out, "I'm not telling [you] anything. . . . Somebody has got to keep the niggers out of Forsyth County. I'm glad it happened."

The exchange convinced investigators that Crowe was not just a run-of-the-mill Georgia racist but saw himself as a defender of the "whites only" rule that had been in effect for nearly seventy years. Having instigated the plot to frighten Marcelli and Webb, and having driven Bob Davis to the scene, Crowe was clearly involved in the crime, and as the officers stood on the lawn listening to what was fast veering toward a confession, they had reason to think that Crowe himself might have been the shooter. But even when Crowe realized that he was a suspect, he didn't tell them about Davis or about how he'd seen his friend hiding a pistol in the woods. Melvin fell silent when asked if he knew who'd pulled the trigger. Having lived in Forsyth all his life, he seemed to fear the consequences of identifying a "person unknown." "I'm not gonna tell who did it," Crowe said to Officer Sims. "I'm not gonna tell . . . because [if I do] I'll get burned out."

The full story of the shooting came to light during the court testimony of Ethel Crowe, an elderly aunt with whom Melvin lived. Born in 1911, Ethel, too, was a child of old Oscarville, and from earliest girlhood she had heard the tale of Mae Crow's rape and murder, with its lesson about the monstrous lust of black men. As a member of

the wary, insular community of farmers in Oscarville, she had seen unimaginable changes come to the county since the 1920s. What she hadn't ever seen, even in 1980, was a black person coming toward her on Athens Park Road and stopping right outside her front door.

But that's what happened in the minutes after Bob Davis raced into the woods to hide the gun with which he'd shot Miguel Marcelli. Called to testify about that day, Ethel Crowe described "seeing and hearing a black woman crying in the road." According to news reports, Crowe's "lips began to quiver and she spoke in between quiet sobs" as a courtroom filled with local whites sat in silence. The lawyer for the prosecution asked her what she'd done to help Shirley Webb.

"Nothing," Ethel Crowe told the jury. "Nothing like that ever happened at our house before."

There, in her own driveway, stood a trembling, blood-spattered woman, presenting Melvin Crowe's aunt with a frightening choice: she could either go out and help the woman and her injured boyfriend or she could turn away and pretend that she had never heard the gunshot, the car crash, or the woman's cry for help. Asked what she did when she found Shirley Webb sobbing outside her kitchen window, Ethel Crowe stared into her lap and shook her head.

"Nothing," she said. "Nothing . . . I was scared."

DR. MICHAEL FARNELL, chief surgeon at Grady Hospital in Atlanta, testified that Miguel Marcelli had been shot "behind the left ear with a .38 caliber bullet" and that the entrance wound was close enough to his brain that "Marcelli may suffer neurological problems in addition to injuries already sustained." After emergency surgery, Marcelli recovered, and he was well enough to testify at the trials of Melvin Crowe and Bob Davis and to tell the story of his trip to Forsyth. All-white juries found both men guilty of two counts of aggravated assault.

After almost a century during which black Georgians had been

lynched, shot at, beaten, and "burned out" of Forsyth, and during which untold acres of black-owned land had been quietly plundered, two whites had finally been arrested and convicted for stalking and shooting a black man. Rather than acknowledging that Crowe and Davis were the first and only men to face such consequences in the county's long history of white terrorism, the *Gainesville Times* congratulated the juries on dispelling the "myth" of Forsyth's bigotry and intolerance. "Twelve men and women . . . exploded that myth" by convicting Davis and Crowe, the paper said, reiterating the old claim that "the county's unusually white complexion is [not] a preoccupation—it is simply a happenstance."

LOCALS WERE RELIEVED when the convictions brought an end to all the media attention and sent news trucks back down Highway 400 to Atlanta. But the peace and quiet didn't last long. Seven years later, a much larger group of African Americans made the trip north, this time crossing the county line not by chance but by choice. They came to publicly protest seventy-five years of segregation in the county and to demand a new era of "peace and brotherhood in Forsyth."

The whole nation soon learned that there were whites in the county who considered themselves exempt from *Brown v. Board of Education,* from the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and from a host of federal laws against racial discrimination in housing and employment. When a double-file line of black and white civil rights marchers appeared on Bethelview Road on January 17th, 1987, and began walking toward the Cumming courthouse, a raucous army of Forsyth residents was waiting to meet them. Just like their grandparents and great-grandparents, they were convinced that they had a right to live in an "all-white" community. As photographers and news crews set up their cameras, the crowd erupted into a chorus of rebel yells and unfurled a long white banner. "RACIAL PURITY," it said, "IS FORSYTH'S SECURITY."

17

THE BROTHERHOOD
MARCH, 1987

Racial violence was making headlines all over the country in December of 1986 after four black men were beaten by a mob of whites in the Howard Beach section of Queens, in New York City. A twenty-three-year-old African/American man named Michael Griffith died after the gang of baseball-bat-wielding white teenagers attacked him for trespassing across an unwritten racial border. Already badly injured and running for his life, Griffith had sprinted across a busy highway, where he was struck by a passing car. In response to the killing, Reverend Al Sharpton led twelve hundred demonstrators through the streets of Howard Beach on December 27th, 1986, as furious local whites screamed racial slurs and demanded that black protesters get out of their neighborhood.

Less than a month after the Howard Beach protests, a man named Chuck Blackburn came up with what he thought was a modest proposal for the people of Forsyth: that all those opposed to "fear and intimidation" gather for a short march along Highway 9, ending at the Blackburn Learning Center, where he taught karate classes and meditation. "Overcoming fear of aggression is a basic theme of martial arts," Blackburn told reporters, and

Cumming, Georgia, January 17th, 1987

with the march he wanted to prove that "racism is on the wane in Forsyth."

Blackburn had moved to Cumming from San Francisco in the early 1980s, and he had been shocked to learn that none of his black friends from Atlanta would set foot across the Forsyth County line. And so in January of 1987, Blackburn announced his plan to protest the situation publicly. He called on like-minded residents to mark the seventy-fifth anniversary of 1912 with what he called a "brotherhood walk," which was timed to coincide with the second annual—and still highly controversial—Martin Luther King Jr. national holiday.

Once local newspapers and radio stations picked up the story, there was widespread opposition to Blackburn's plan. He sent letters to area clergy, in hopes that some of their parishioners might join the walk. But, Blackburn told reporters, "only one minister responded . . . and then he backed down." That minister was Reverend Jim Martin of Shiloh United Methodist, who withdrew his

support after his own congregants objected vehemently. "Chuck was talking about there being a silent majority who favor brotherly love and who think race doesn't really matter," Reverend Martin said in the days leading up to the brotherhood walk. "But I don't think he's right. I think he's realized that's not right. It would take changing the hearts of a lot of people."

Blackburn learned just how naive he'd been when the phones at his office started ringing day and night, with men and women, young and old, calling to warn of the consequences if he went ahead with the demonstration. The mildest was a caller who said, "I just don't think it's a good idea for you to try to get the niggers to come up here. . . . That's why we live in Forsyth County—to get away from them." An old woman's voice echoed the sentiment, and added an overt threat: "You can't change it, no matter how bad or how hard you try," she said. "You're going to have to end up leaving this county. Or leave in a box."

Then there were the men, whose voices were laced with such menace that Blackburn and his students armed themselves and posted round-the-clock guards at his storefront school. "I know [someone] whose house was burned," one caller said. "So you'd better watch out." As Blackburn peered out through the blinds and double-checked the door locks, his office phone rang again, and the answering machine clicked to life. Through its little speaker a man whispered, "I got a thirty-aught-six bullet with your name on it."

Fearing for his life, Blackburn canceled the protest on January 9th, telling the *Forsyth County News* that "the threats . . . were much more violent than I thought they would be, and the good folks [in this community] just aren't ready to stand up for it. . . . Forsyth County is just not ready for it yet."

When he announced his decision, the brotherhood walk was taken up by a friend of Blackburn's named Dean Carter. Carter was a white construction worker and fellow martial arts enthusiast who

lived in Gainesville, where so many of Forsyth's expelled families had resettled. Carter and his wife, Tammy, also received threats, like one from a caller who told them, "After Saturday . . . you're dead." But they were determined to go ahead, and in the week leading up to the protest, Carter joined forces with the veteran Atlanta activist Hosea Williams, who had been a key member of Martin Luther King Jr.'s inner circle during the civil rights battles of the 1950s and '60s. When Williams agreed to lend his name and experience to the cause, the Brotherhood March—and the shocking story of the Forsyth expulsions—started to gain national media attention.

Faced with so much negative coverage, civic leaders in Cumming did what they had always done: rather than acknowledge and confront the county's history, they pointed to racially motivated attacks elsewhere in the state and the country and asked why Forsyth, of all places, was suddenly being singled out. "We haven't had any incidents up here as far as race is concerned that I can remember, and I've been here since 1956," said County Commissioner James Harrington—a surprising claim, given that only six years earlier, Atlanta firefighter Miguel Marcelli had been gunned down by Melvin Crowe and Bob Davis. Harrington must have also read newspaper reports about an attack in November of 1986, when "five Mexican construction workers, in the county [to work for] a Cumming man . . . were beaten by four men and a woman who broke into their house." The Mexican men said the whites "threatened to kill them unless they left the county."

In the days leading up to the march, the dominant tone of the *Forsyth County News* was annoyance, along with an unabashed desire to get the whole thing over with as soon as possible. In a column titled "Let's Get on to Better Things," editor Laura McCullough argued that it was Forsyth residents, not black citizens of Georgia, who were being victimized by the negative attention: "By the time

this newspaper is printed, the march for freedom, or brotherhood, or martial arts, or whatever, will be thankfully over. Maybe then we can become Forsyth County again. You remember, the sleepy town north of Atlanta that has its own problems with land rezoning and bulging schools?"

A similar note of irritation came from Cumming–Forsyth County Chamber of Commerce head Roger Crow—another distant relative to Mae Crow. On the Thursday before the march, as tensions rose all over the county, Crow stood on the steps of the courthouse and made a public statement on behalf of the business owners of Forsyth, decrying the violent threats of "outsiders," as well as the march organizers themselves. "We do not condone needless efforts to create havoc," Crow said, "made by those with questionable motives, particularly those from outside the confines of the county." There are those "who would portray Forsyth County as a lawless, racist anachronism," he said, but "this simply is not so. . . . Forsyth County shall not be maligned by inaccurate aspersions cast by a reckless few."

While politicians and businessmen fretted over the damage being done to Forsyth's reputation, others were busy recruiting members for a group they called the Forsyth County Defense League. They responded to the Brotherhood March not with editorials and news conferences but by loading pistols, tying lengths of rope into nooses, and planning a "White Power Rally" for the day of the march. Signs were posted and flyers tucked under windshield wipers all over Cumming, calling on whites to "PROTEST AGAINST THE RACE MIXERS MARCH ON FORSYTH COUNTY!" While Sheriff Wesley Walraven told reporters that the Defense League represented "a small radical element," the wording of the announcement tapped into much broader currents of fear and anxiety in the white community, which had origins in the steady northward growth of Atlanta.

BY THE 1970S, Georgia's interstate highway system had extended the margins of the state capital farther and farther from its old downtown, and put the Atlanta suburbs right on the doorstep of Forsyth. Just as Charlie Harris's ill-fated railroad had promised to bring new ideas, new people, and new commerce into the foothills at the turn of the twentieth century, by the time Chuck Blackburn proposed his brotherhood walk in 1987, droves of Atlanta professionals—like my parents—were moving to "lake houses" inside the county. Along with all that new energy and new capital, the freeway brought with it the possibility that Forsyth might soon see the arrival of large numbers of black residents.

Organizers of the White Power Rally played on whites' fears of the city and presented the gathering not only as a celebration of "white power," but as a defense of the "racial purity" that had defined Forsyth for as long as anyone could remember:

> We are protesting against racemixers . . . like Chuck Blackburn, the Carters, *The Forsyth County News, The Gainesville Times,* and other OUTSIDE AGITATORS AND COMMUNIST RACEMIXERS [who] want to defile our community.

If such a call to arms was meant to mobilize white residents of the county, it worked. Two days before the Brotherhood March, the editors of the *Gainesville Times* predicted that "about 100 members of each group are expected to demonstrate," but just like local law enforcement, they seriously underestimated the crowd. Appalled by the thought of "racemixers" invading Forsyth, on the morning of January 17th, 1987, more than twenty-five hundred whites gathered at the intersection where the Brotherhood March was to begin.

By ten a.m., a gas station on the corner of Bethelview Road and Highway 9 was teeming with pickup trucks and men in white

sheets, camouflage, and hunting gear. Frank Shirley, a county resident and head of the Committee to Keep Forsyth County White, assured reporters that "most of the demonstrators [are] from Forsyth." As a chartered bus filled with civil rights marchers set out from the King Center in Atlanta and made its way up Highway 400, Shirley took a turn with the megaphone and whipped up the crowd, chanting, "Go home, niggers! Go home, niggers!"

Whites milling around the parking lot were treated to the day's first highlight when a silver-haired man in a suit and trench coat appeared, waving to the crowd as he leaned on a cane and limped up Bethelview Road. His name was J. B. Stoner, and for decades he had been one of the South's most notorious white supremacists. His defense of segregation grew even more legendary in 1977, when he was indicted for the 1958 bombing of Bethel Baptist Church in Birmingham. According to court testimony, Stoner targeted Reverend Fred Shuttlesworth for the leading role he and Bethel members had played in civil rights protests in Alabama, and Stoner had instructed his men to place sixteen sticks of dynamite outside the church in a burning paint can. Before it could detonate, the improvised bomb was noticed by a passerby, and men guarding Reverend Shuttlesworth rushed it into the street. The explosion, seconds later, rattled windows all over North Birmingham and left a crater-sized hole in Twenty-eighth Avenue.

After evading prosecution for years, Stoner was finally convicted in 1980 and sentenced to ten years in prison for ordering the bombing. But after serving six years of his sentence, he was granted early parole in November of 1986—just two months before the White Power Rally in Forsyth. Having made headlines as an unrepentant racial terrorist, the newly freed Stoner arrived on Bethelview Road as a kind of celebrity bigot and was swarmed by young Forsyth men eager to shake his hand and get his autograph. Asked by a reporter why he'd come to Forsyth, Stoner said, "To aid God in

getting rid of the Jew, part-Jew, and nigger. . . . You bring in the niggers and you bring in AIDS and drugs. We don't want AIDS and drugs," he added as the crowd roared its approval, "and we don't want niggers."

To hundreds of people gathered around him, Stoner embodied the "never say die" fight against racial integration, even though by 1987 most segregationists had conceded that battle decades before. Stoner was a walking anachronism to the millions of people who would see his face on the evening news that night—a hate-spewing, church-bombing racist who seemed to have stepped right out of the 1950s. But in the parking lot of Jim Wallace's gas station, where the defenders of white Forsyth waited to do battle with the approaching King Center protesters, J. B. Stoner walked among his kind and was given a hero's welcome.

Once the excitement of Stoner's entrance died down, the crowd

J. B. Stoner handing out flyers that read, "Praise God for AIDS . . . Segregation is necessary because AIDS is a Racial Disease" at the First Brotherhood March, January 17th, 1987

was ready for the real action to begin. County Sheriff Wesley Walraven had roped off a section of a nearby pasture, and he ordered the Defense League's supporters to move their rally into the designated area. As they reluctantly made their way toward the field—waving rebel flags and carrying signs that said, "KEEP FORSYTH WHITE!"—Walraven saw just how much larger the counterprotest was than anyone had predicted. Bonnie Pike, an agent of the Georgia Bureau of Investigation (GBI), later admitted that "as the thing began to swell . . . we realized we didn't have enough manpower."

Just before eleven a.m., a roar rose from the crowd, and Sheriff Walraven turned to see a chartered bus rolling up the ramp from Highway 400, then coming to a stop on the shoulder of Bethelview Road. Inside, Hosea Williams stood on the last step of the little stairwell, gripping a megaphone as his field sergeants called out final instructions to the marchers. These were rules Williams had first learned from Dr. King: partner up, walk two by two, stay in line, no yelling, no fighting back, no responding to anything said or done against you, no matter how crude, racist, threatening, or violent.

Such nonengagement resulted from King's deep Christian faith and his study of Gandhi's nonviolent protests, but it also grew out of experience: a strict code of discipline and unwavering nonviolence would help make clear to the cameras of the press and to the eyes of witnesses that the marchers were the victims, not the aggressors. Williams knew—particularly after the carnage of "Bloody Sunday" in Selma—that an image of a white man attacking peaceful protesters could raise more awareness than all the speeches and sermons combined. If a word was said in anger, Williams's team instructed the marchers on the bus, it would not be the protesters who said it. If a fist was raised or a rock thrown, it must not come from within their line.

Sheriff Walraven instructed the bus driver to continue past the counterprotest area and unload his passengers farther up the

Hosea Williams (front, left) and John Lewis (front, right) leading marchers across the Edmund Pettus Bridge, March 7th, 1965

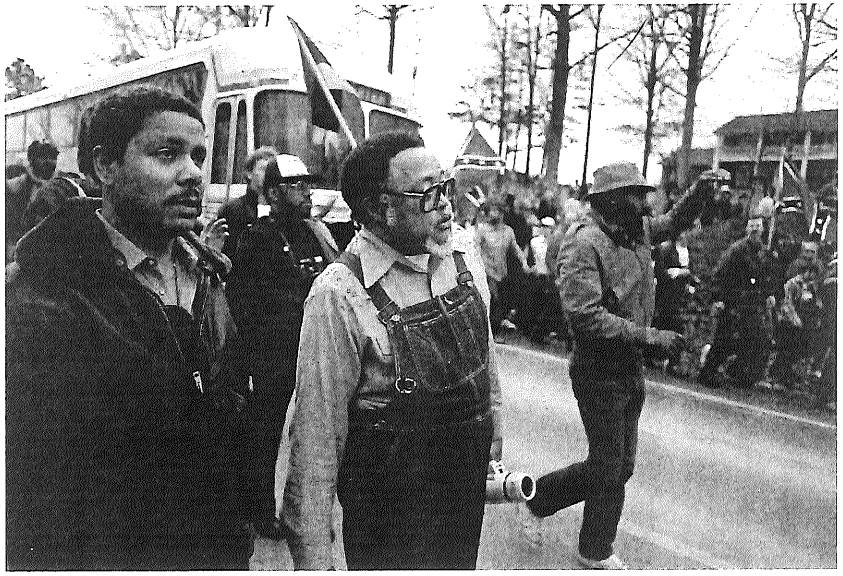
road, in hopes of keeping the two groups as far apart as possible. When the bus doors opened, march leaders stepped down onto the asphalt, and out into the gray light of Georgia's famous "white county." As their eyes adjusted to the glare, it became clear that the crowd of locals gathered in a nearby field were not spectators but something much closer to a mob. When they caught sight of Hosea Williams, hundreds clambered over a barbed-wire fence and ran toward the marchers.

It was commonly believed, and widely reported, that the peace marchers themselves were all from outside the county. The *Forsyth County News* said that "People from Forsyth . . . were conspicuously absent from the group of [Brotherhood] marchers." But while the majority of the activists did come from Atlanta, there were exceptions. For there on Bethelview Road—having waited in our old red Buick half the morning, nervously watching a sea of rebel flags

over at the gas station—were my mother, my father, and my eighteen-year-old sister, Rachel.

My father got out of the car and said enough to march leaders to make it clear that while he was white, southern, and a resident of Forsyth, he had come to walk with them and to add his voice to the calls for change. Although they had sat all morning unnoticed by the crowd of counterprotesters, the minute my parents and my sister took their places in line, whites in the crowd started pointing and yelling. "Nigger lovers!" they screamed as my mother and sister stood stone-faced, waiting for the signal to march. "Go back to Atlanta with the rest of them," spat a man a few feet away from my father. "Back to Niggertown, you white niggers!"

AS THE FIRST March for Brotherhood in Forsyth County finally got under way, the counterprotesters gave up all pretense of obeying the



Hosea Williams (center) leading the First Brotherhood March, Forsyth County, January 17th, 1987

sheriff. Walraven admitted to Williams that he had been caught off guard by the large turnout and had only seventy men—including local deputies, state highway patrolmen, and Georgia Bureau of Investigation officers—to try to control several thousand people from the White Power Rally. Given the size and feverish excitement of the crowd, an attack came to seem almost inevitable, and law officers focused their efforts on guarding the line of marchers themselves, leaving too few police to watch the counterprotesters on the margins. Only a few hundred yards into the planned walk, furious whites lined both sides of the road, forming a gauntlet through which the marchers had to pass. Walraven directed the driver to pull his bus up next to Hosea Williams, and it crept along at walking speed, in an attempt to provide at least some cover.

The marchers needed protection, because while most people lining the road stood chanting, "Go home, niggers!" and "Keep Forsyth White," others started hurling anything and everything they could find, pelting the line of marchers with sticks, clods of dirt, bricks, broken beer bottles, and rocks. After Williams was struck on the side of the head, Sheriff Walraven gathered march organizers and warned them that he could no longer guarantee anyone's safety. Williams, however, was determined to continue, and that night on news channels around the world, people watched in shock as the gray-bearded sixty-one-year-old winced and ducked the flying rocks, shook his head in disbelief, and carried on.

BORN IN ATTAPULGUS, Georgia, in 1926, Hosea Williams grew up under Jim Crow, and as a boy of thirteen he nearly suffered the same fate as Ernest Knox and Oscar Daniel when a mob of whites in Decatur County came to his house and accused him of raping a young white girl. By Williams's own account, his grandfather held them off with a shotgun, until "a friendly white neighbor interceded to prevent further violence."

After serving with an all-black army unit in World War II, Williams was awarded the Purple Heart for injuries sustained during a Nazi bombing. When he came home from the war in 1945, still recovering from his wounds, he was nearly beaten to death in a bus station in Americus, Georgia—for having the audacity to wear his army uniform and for trying to take a drink from the "whites only" water fountain. As Williams put it, "I had watched my best buddies tortured, murdered, and bodies blown to pieces. French battlefields had literally been stained with my blood. . . . So at that moment . . . I realized why God, time after time, had taken me to death's door, then spared my life . . . to be a general in the war for human rights."

Williams went on to become a leader of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), and a close confidant of Martin Luther King Jr., who called Hosea "my wild man, my Castro," for his willingness to defy court orders, stare down club-wielding policemen, and march against even the most dangerous white supremacists. Williams was at the Lorraine Motel in Memphis when James Earl Ray assassinated King in 1968, and in the wake of the murder, he vowed to carry on King's work. More than any other member of the SCLC's leadership, he continued to fight at street level, leading marches and protests throughout the 1970s. Along the way, Williams became a prominent and controversial figure in Atlanta politics, ridiculed by many whites after he was arrested on charges of drunk driving and leaving the scene of an accident.

By 1987, nearly twenty years had passed since King's death, and Williams, far from his glory days, was a frequent punch line to racist jokes on the talk-radio stations of Georgia. But as he walked through a hail of rocks and bottles in Forsyth, he also walked back into the arena of his greatest triumphs and returned to the role where his greatest strength—old-fashioned bravery—had always been on display. The more the mob on Bethelview Road screamed and threatened, the more Williams felt in his element. Just as King

had taught him, and just as they had done in Birmingham and Savannah, St. Augustine and Selma, Williams met the violence in Forsyth with nonviolence. Walking toward the county courthouse of Georgia's last bastion of segregation, Williams clutched a megaphone and, in his raspy, wavering voice, led the marchers in verse after verse of "We Shall Overcome."

ALL AROUND THEM, officers of the county police and the GBI were making arrests, and when they frisked the handcuffed men, they discovered that many had come to the White Power Rally with loaded guns tucked into their jeans and hidden under their jackets. After Walraven told Williams that he feared a shooting if the demonstration continued, the marchers reluctantly agreed to get back on the bus. As soon as the doors opened and marchers began filing on board, the mob let out a howl of celebration.

As a final act of defiance, the bus drove the last few miles to Cumming, and the marchers made a symbolic gesture of walking across the finish line at Blackburn's school, just outside of town. But as journalist Elliot Jaspin put it, "If the gesture was intended to show that the Brotherhood March had triumphed over racism, it persuaded no one." During the long ride back to the King Center, it was clear to everyone involved that they had been defeated by an army of Confederate flag–waving, rock-throwing whites who weren't about to yield territory their ancestors had been defending since 1912. It was going to take more than one afternoon to end seventy-five years of segregation in Forsyth County.

JOURNALISTS COLLECTED REACTIONS to the day's events and spoke with people on all sides in the conflict: dismayed activists, elated white counterprotesters, and county leaders who claimed that the root of the problem was not Forsyth's history of expulsions and racial violence but the media's unfair portrayal of a peaceful community.

Hosea Williams was typically blunt. "I have never seen such hatred," he told a reporter from the *New York Times*. "I have been in the civil rights movement 30 years, and I'm telling you we've got a South Africa in the backyard of Atlanta. . . . There were youngsters 10 and 12 years old screaming their lungs out, 'Kill the niggers.'" Asked if he planned to return for a second march, Williams said, "I think I have to go back." Reverend R. B. Cotton Raeder, another veteran of the civil rights struggle, echoed Williams's shock. "I've been in many such situations," he said, "but never one that was any worse."

Spokesmen for the chamber of commerce, the city of Cumming, and local churches quickly went into damage-control mode. Roger Crow of the chamber admitted that the violence was "an embarrassment," but he characterized the hundreds of locals who had attacked the marchers as "outsiders." "The vast majority of the citizens [of Forsyth] support the rights of everyone," he said. "They're God-fearing, hard-working, and most of them, law-abiding." B. V. Franklin of the First Baptist Church concurred, saying, "I don't think what we saw was indicative of the people here," and County Commissioner James Harrington assured reporters that "people here don't teach their kids to hate anybody"—even as news stations ran footage of children raising their fists and chanting, "Go home, niggers!"

Roy Otwell Sr., the ninety-two-year-old patriarch of one of the county's most prominent families, summed up the wish of most residents, which was that all those demanding an end to segregation in Forsyth—and a reckoning with the county's past—would simply drop the subject. "If they would let us alone," Otwell said, "it would die down and blacks would be more accepted." Otwell had witnessed the events of 1912 with his own eyes as a seventeen-year-old, and he had lived his entire life in a place that showed no signs of changing. Yet even seven and a half decades after night riders had first terrorized the black residents of Forsyth, Otwell still clung

to the idea that the integration of the county was only a matter of time and patience. The march, he believed, had been an unnecessary provocation.

In order to claim that "most people" in Forsyth were innocent bystanders, leaders like Crow and Otwell had to ignore the statements other locals made to reporters. Asked why he had come to the White Power Rally, a thirty-four-year-old Forsyth man named William Griffan said, "I figure they could pick a better place to do it than Cumming. My granddaddy helped run the niggers out of here in 1912. They hanged some." Rayford Grindle, who had lived in the county all his life, told a reporter that "most people here don't want them to move in." His wife, Janice, nodded as they stood outside the Second Baptist Church and added, "This has been our home, and having it all-white is all we know."

Another local man, Ron Seaman, came to the march on horseback, and he made a striking figure at the White Power Rally, galloping back and forth with a rebel flag flowing behind him. Asked what he thought of the protesters, Seaman said, "They ought to have printed up . . . targets and given it to them as they got off the bus."

EVEN AMONG FORSYTH residents who stayed home from the rally, there was plenty of support for the Forsyth County Defense League. Kelly Strickland, who lived only a mile from the scene of the violence, wrote to Governor Joe Frank Harris a few days after the march. "I am tired Governor Harris," she said.

> I just want this to all be over [and] I want everyone to leave us alone. . . . I would, without doubt invite a black person into my home for dinner. I love them and respect them, I just do not prefer to live with them. I am sorry. This is my right.

A Forsyth man named Bill Bolton wrote to the governor to decry not the violence that had greeted the marchers but the suffering whites were enduring as a result:

> We the people of Forsyth County have been used, abused, and criticized without just reason. What ever happened to *our* civil rights? . . . The people in Forsyth County are just trying to carve out a living and build a decent place to raise our families. . . . We have not bothered the rest of the world, so why does the rest of the world want to bother us now?

Others wrote to assure the governor—despite news reports to the contrary—that the "trouble" was the work of outsiders and had nothing to do with Forsyth's history or the majority of residents' feelings toward blacks. As a Mrs. Hartsfield of Cumming put it,

> Most of those arrested were not natives. I knew of no one who even ventured into town that day. . . . Forsyth County is by far the friendliest and safest place we could ever imagine. Everyone waves to everyone on the road. . . . This town has kept a low profile and [we] have been living in peace & harmony. *Until now,* we haven't hurt anyone and certainly don't want the whole country to think badly of us.

The erasure of Forsyth's violent past had been so complete that most residents believed what Mrs. Hartsfield told the governor: that there was no place more peaceful and no place less deserving of the outrage that had followed the attacks on the Brotherhood Marchers. To people who'd spent their whole lives inside the bubble of "racial purity," keeping Forsyth "all white" seemed like the most natural thing in the world.

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SILENCE IS CONSENT

Television viewers around the country were shocked by scenes from the First Brotherhood March: young white women yelling "Nigger!" in the faces of peaceful protesters; children joining chants of "White Power!" from atop their parents' shoulders; civil rights leaders like Hosea Williams dodging rocks and bottles. Within days, there was talk of a second demonstration, as march organizers regrouped. Dean Carter told the *Gainesville Times* that this second march would go all the way to the county courthouse, and Sheriff Wesley Walraven promised to be ready "even if it takes 300 state troopers and every GBI agent in the state." When forecasters called for snow on the proposed date of the protest, Hosea Williams told reporters, "We're going to march [again] in Forsyth County whether it's cold as ice or hot as it is in hell."

I woke to the sound of helicopters passing over our house on the morning of January 24, 1987, and I realized just how different the second march was going to be when we were stopped at a military checkpoint just outside of Cumming and had to wait as bomb-sniffing dogs checked our car. Forsyth's white supremacists might have dominated the headlines on January 17, but a week later it looked as if the whole county was being dragged, kicking

and screaming, into the twentieth century. This time, 1,500 jeering counterprotesters were held in check by 350 state troopers, 185 Georgia Bureau of Investigation agents, and 2,000 soldiers of the Georgia National Guard.

The Second Brotherhood March is the best-known part of Forsyth's story, as it was covered by national and international news outlets, which broadcast images of two hundred chartered buses driving up Highway 400, bringing more than 20,000 peace marchers to Georgia's notorious "white county." Among those who marched were famous veterans of the 1950s and '60s civil rights struggles, including John Lewis, Andrew Young, Julian Bond, Joseph Lowery, and Coretta Scott King, who called the protest "a great coming together of the family, the movement, and the followers of Martin Luther King, Jr." Georgia senators Sam Nunn and Wyche Fowler were near the front of the line, along with NAACP president Benjamin Hooks, U.S. presidential candidate Gary Hart, and dozens of celebrities and media personalities.

Even Miguel Marcelli, the black firefighter shot in Oscarville, made the trip from Atlanta, returning to Forsyth for the first time since he was nearly killed by Melvin Crowe and Bob Davis in 1980. "Seven years ago," he told a reporter, "I could have been dead for no reason and never known what I was killed for. . . . But now I'm going to march for the freedom and the dream of Martin Luther King, Jr." The story of Marcelli's return was typical of the day, which became both a reunion of the American civil rights movement and a repudiation of Forsyth's long history of intolerance. As Reverend Joseph Lowery told locals from the steps of the courthouse, "We did not come to Forsyth County to scare you to death. We came . . . to challenge you to live a life of decency."

When the speeches on the Cumming square were finally over, near dusk, my father, mother, sister, and I walked back to our car and watched dozens of buses, filled with weary peace marchers,

Buses arriving for the Second Brotherhood March, January 24th, 1987

making their way out onto the blue highways of the county and back down the on-ramps toward Atlanta. All around us, national guardsmen were walking toward their operations base in a strip-mall parking lot, where they climbed into troop carriers and left in a long convoy of hulking green trucks. Eventually even the satellite news vans broke down their gear, and the army of journalists disconnected their lapel mikes, closed their notebooks, packed up their cameras, and drove away.

For the second time in a week, we were left alone in Forsyth, and we made the short drive back to our home on Browns Bridge Road just as darkness fell. There, our house on the edge of Lake Lanier, just a few miles west of Oscarville, sat just as it always had: surrounded by pine trees and green pastureland, and ringed with neighbors who came from the old families of Forsyth: Mashburns and Cains, Castleberrys and Stricklands, Whitlows and Bensons and Crows. We knew that these people were, at best, irritated by

all the attention and inconvenience the marches had caused and, at worst, infuriated by the thought of thousands of black faces—and white supporters like us—rallying on the Cumming square. Nonetheless, my parents felt elated, just as they had during protest marches in the 1960s. They were certain that we had done something historic: that by speaking out against the racial segregation of the county, we were changing hearts and minds and leading backward Forsyth toward a more just future.

But even at sixteen, I had my doubts. Could a culture of fear as deeply ingrained as Forsyth's really be changed by a peace march—even one attended by twenty thousand people and broadcast all over the world? After seventy-five years of bigotry and one afternoon of imported racial harmony, was it really time to declare that the county had awakened from the long nightmare of "racial purity"? Could we really say, as white observers had been saying since 1912, "All quiet at Cumming. . . . No further trouble expected"?

Brotherhood Marchers walking to the Forsyth County Courthouse

National Guard troops and counterprotesters, January 24th, 1987

LATE ON THE day of the Second Brotherhood March, Roger Crow, head of the county chamber of commerce, shrugged and told a reporter, "When all these people finish their grandstanding, we'll go back to living . . . just like we always have." Another Forsyth resident, writing to the *Gainesville Times,* agreed that once the marchers went home, things would get back to normal in Forsyth: "Whites don't want the blacks [here]," the letter writer said. "We need to put a halt to it and forget about it, and let it go like it's been going for the past 75 years. . . . Drop the subject, because if you don't, there's just going to be trouble." And in an opinion piece for the *Times,* a Forsyth man named Steve Whitmire summed up the feelings of many locals. The Brotherhood March, Whitmire believed, was part of an "anti-Forsyth movement." Despite hours of news footage to the contrary, he assured readers that "not once [have] I ever observed any Forsyth County folks hassle *anyone.*" Whitmire ended with a response to Hosea Williams's call for whites in Forsyth to formally apologize for

the expulsions of 1912. "Do you think this is a free ride, Hosea? The world in general, and Forsyth in particular, owes you nothing."

THAT SAME BRAND of defiance was broadcast all over the country when Oprah Winfrey, in only her sixth month as a television talk-show host, arrived in early February of 1987 to film an episode of *The Oprah Winfrey Show* on the Cumming square. The goal, Winfrey said, was "simply to ask *why* Forsyth County has not allowed black people to live here in 75 years." In hopes of getting honest answers, Winfrey and her producers decided to admit only residents of Forsyth into the taping—which meant that besides Oprah and her staff, the televised town-hall meeting was an "all-white" affair.

In a restaurant packed with locals, Winfrey passed a microphone from one white guest to another, asking why they still supported the seventy-five-year-old racial ban. Many in the audience said they regretted the recent violence, but most admitted, even to Winfrey, that they preferred to "Keep Forsyth white."

"You don't believe that people of other races have the right to live here?" Winfrey asked a middle-aged woman. "They have the right to live wherever they want to," she replied. "But we have the right to choose if we want a white community."

Winfrey looked from face to face and asked, "What is it you are afraid black people are going to do?" A tall, bearded man in his mid-twenties stood up and said that more than anything he was afraid "of them coming to Forsyth." "I lived down in Atlanta," the man said, but now "it's nothing but a rat infested slum!" As people around him clapped and nodded their heads in agreement, he said, "They don't care. They just don't care!"

Asked if he meant "the entire black race," the man said no, "just the niggers." When Winfrey raised an eyebrow and asked, "What is the difference to you?" the man offered to help her understand the distinction.

"You have blacks and you have niggers," he said. "Black people? They don't want to come up here. They don't wanna cause any trouble. That's a black person. A nigger wants to come up here and cause trouble all the time. That's the difference." Many in the crowd applauded as Winfrey lowered the mike to her side and simply stared into the camera.

By the time it was over, Winfrey had concluded that "a lot of white people are afraid of other white people in this community," and she told a reporter that as a black woman she was "not very comfortable at all in Forsyth." Her crew made a point of packing up before dark, and when she was asked about the next day's plans, Winfrey said, "I'm leaving."

LESS THAN A week after the second march, and emboldened by its success, Hosea Williams formed the Coalition to End Fear and Intimidation in Forsyth County, with an executive committee that consisted of himself, NAACP president Benjamin Hooks, Coretta Scott King from the King Center, Rabbi Alvin Sugarman of the Temple in Atlanta, and SCLC president Joseph Lowery. Now that the Brotherhood Marches had gotten the whole country's attention, Hosea's coalition hoped to turn a symbolic victory into a real one by negotiating with officials in Forsyth.

On January 30th, 1987, Williams sent a letter addressed to Roger Crow and other civic leaders. It listed the coalition's demands and vowed to organize a third Brotherhood March if they did not receive a reply. "We agree that the majority of the citizens of Forsyth County are loyal, patriotic American citizens," Williams began.

> But there is a sizeable crowd that has been possessed with a violent KKK mentality [and] these lost, un-American sisters and brothers must be redeemed. Yes, we know this is a most difficult job, but if good people like yourself and the other responsible leaders of Forsyth County will sit around the "Table of Brotherhood" and work with us. . . . all things are possible in the eyesight of God.

After that conciliatory opening, Williams shifted gears and listed the steps county leaders would have to take if they wanted to avoid a repeat of the previous week's march. Williams demanded, first and foremost, that "persons whose land [was] unlawfully seized be fully and completely compensated." He also demanded an investigation into violations of federal laws regarding equal employment opportunity. Third, he demanded an investigation into violations of the 1968 Fair Housing Act and, fourth, that "blacks be employed in local law enforcement in significant numbers." Finally, Williams demanded that "educational exchange programs for teachers, students, ministers, and law enforcement officers . . . be developed between Forsyth and [Atlanta's] Fulton County."

With his list of demands, Williams made it clear that the coalition would not be satisfied with vague promises and smiling reassurances and, instead, wanted specific, concrete action. Twenty-nine years later, Hosea's letter looks like a blueprint for confronting deeply ingrained bigotry and for combating the kind of institutional racism that persists in so many American communities in the twenty-first century—from Ferguson to Charleston, Baltimore to Staten Island. Instead of lip service, the coalition wanted financial reparations; the enforcement of federal laws; an affirmative action program to recruit and retain black police officers; and a comprehensive plan to break down racial barriers through education. Essentially, they believed that Forsyth's "race trouble" in 1987 could be cured with the same methods that had worked in Hall County in 1912: prosecute crimes committed against black victims and stop treating Forsyth whites as if they were somehow exempt from the United States Constitution and the laws of the United States Congress.

The coalition's list of demands was a bold opening, but what happened next was a repudiation of nearly all their goals. Cumming leaders agreed to the formation of the Cumming/Forsyth County Biracial Committee but disagreed on both its composition and its mission. Hosea had proposed that his own coalition make up half of the committee, with the other half drawn from Forsyth groups. But Cumming's white leaders said that the African American half of the biracial committee should be made up of unspecified "leaders of the black community" and that it should work broadly on the issue of race relations and "respond to issues and questions raised in recent weeks."

After a lifetime of fighting for equal treatment—and after being told throughout the 1950s and '60s that white southerners needed patience and time to change—Hosea smelled a rat. His reply was unequivocal:

> Gentlemen, this is almost unbelievable. . . . Please understand [that in order to] change Forsyth County to a just democratic society . . . we will not accept you going out across this State [and] getting some black "Uncle Toms" who are controlled by other white interests.

Hosea also made it clear that he expected the biracial committee to discuss not broad issues of race in America but the coalition's specific, itemized grievances:

> The primary responsibility of the Bi-Racial Community Relations committee is to *solve the demands* that were stated in our communication. If you are not willing to do this then you leave us no other alternative than to launch the same vigorous kind of movement in Forsyth county that we have implemented in Birmingham, Selma, Savannah . . . and other bastions of racism.

After the Brotherhood March's soaring rhetoric about a new day dawning, by early February this is where things stood: a group of local white leaders were unwilling to accept Williams's group as equal partners, even though the coalition included the widow of Martin Luther King Jr., the head of the NAACP, a leading Atlanta rabbi, and the head of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. Whites in Forsyth were also reluctant to investigate violations of federal employment and housing law or to seriously consider compensating victims of the 1912 expulsions.

Only a week after news cameras recorded shocking scenes of mob violence out on Bethelview Road, the meeting rooms of the Forsyth County Courthouse were also filled with racial strife, as local lawyers and businessmen rebutted the notion that Hosea Williams and the black people he represented deserved anything at all from the county.

GOVERNOR JOE FRANK HARRIS eventually settled the dispute over the makeup of the biracial committee by appointing six members favorable to Cumming whites and six members deemed acceptable by Hosea's coalition. Williams himself was excluded, but his daughter Elisabeth Omilami served instead. This Cumming/Forsyth County Biracial Committee met many times over the next ten months, tasked by the governor with improving race relations in the county.

The most striking thing about the official report the committee submitted to Governor Harris on December 22nd, 1987, is that it contains not one set of findings but two: one position paper written by local white members and another written by the coalition's mostly black, Atlanta-based members. In other words, even after working together for almost a year, the two races were as divided as ever in Forsyth—and above all on the very first issue they discussed: reparations for the victims of 1912.

Not surprisingly, white members of the biracial committee—

many of whom owned large amounts of property in Forsyth—rejected the idea of returning land and paying monetary reparations, and they wrote at length about the fear this demand had stirred up in the local community. Committee co-chairman Phil Bettis, a Cumming title attorney, vehemently denied that land had been stolen in the first place and went on to claim that the exodus of blacks in 1912 could only be "partially attributed" to white violence.

Forsyth members of the biracial committee admitted in their position paper that "racial incidents . . . *allegedly* drove a substantial number of blacks from the confines of Forsyth County," but they claimed that "economics played an instrumental role in the black exodus." They argued that "the advent of the boll weevil, early signs of the depression, and the shifting [of the] black population to Atlanta . . . certainly had an equal impact upon blacks leaving." In their view, most of Forsyth's 1,098 black refugees "voluntarily relocated." It is hard to say whether the authors of the Forsyth position paper knew that the first boll weevil was not introduced into Georgia until 1915. They surely did know, as whites had bragged of it for generations, that the mass exodus of Forsyth's black population was not coincidental with mob violence, but in direct reaction to it.

Despite the denials of men like Phil Bettis and Roger Crow in 1987, when journalist Elliot Jaspin went looking in 2007, he discovered a mountain of evidence that the land of black owners had been plundered—as "abandoned" lots were slowly, quietly absorbed into the property of their former white neighbors. Ironically, the written records of these thefts were housed in the basement of the county courthouse, just below rooms in which the biracial committee met. Nonetheless, the position paper written by Forsyth whites concluded that "the charge of unlawfully taken land . . . is an allegation without sufficient foundation in law or fact."

Today many of those same lots are home not to chicken houses, cow pastures, and hog pens but suburban housing developments, filled with multimillion-dollar homes. What was once stolen with a wink and a nod at the county courthouse has now become some of the most valuable real estate in all of metropolitan Atlanta, in a place that is among the top twenty-five wealthiest counties in America.

AFTER REJECTING HOSEA WILLIAMS'S demands for change, the position paper that white leaders submitted to the governor instead scolded descendants of the expelled families themselves. The report blamed them for "perpetuat[ing] divisive and contrived issues" and for harassing local whites with "an ever-pointing finger of blame" which, the report said, "fosters deep and perhaps volatile resentment."

Having turned the tables and laid the blame on "divisive" African American protesters, the white leaders of Cumming called on blacks to "cast aside confrontational tactics and intimidation." The report ended by declaring that "Forsyth is a thriving, modern suburb of metropolitan Atlanta, with no similarity . . . to 1912. Forsyth County has no apologies to make to anyone. Forsyth County also has no handout, only a welcoming hand for fairness and effort . . . as has built this county for over one hundred and fifty years."

That Bettis and the rest of the white committee members still believed they had "no apologies to make to anyone" suggests the ways in which white Forsyth's denial was not just a product of racism but a primary cause of it. By wiping the crimes of the past out of memory, generations of otherwise decent, law-abiding white citizens could go on believing that each new violent episode was an extraordinary event, for which they bore no real responsibility.

AFRICAN AMERICAN MEMBERS of the biracial committee recognized the role of denial in perpetuating Forsyth's bigotry, and they

said as much in the competing report they sent to Governor Harris. "There seems to be a prevailing philosophy" in Forsyth, wrote committee member Felker Ward,

> that if the undesirable activity . . . of the hatemongers and violence-prone . . . is ignored, it will go away. The fact is, however, that . . . seven of the eight people arrested and charged after the first march were Forsyth residents. [Such] denial and inaction allows for the growth and spread of hate-filled philosophies and activities. Silence is interpreted as consent.

To combat Cumming leaders' long tradition of remaining silent, which had indeed been "interpreted as consent" by generations of violent whites, black committee members recommended that the governor help Forsyth make an "institutional change that clearly enforces a democratic atmosphere."

Their position paper called for the creation of a permanent race relations committee that would "work closely with law enforcement [and] civic, religious and community groups to eliminate the influence and presence of hate groups and those who operate through racially motivated violence." Such a committee, the position paper said, "should be empowered to investigate complaints, hold hearings, gather information . . . provide conflict negotiation, and monitor human relations progress in the county."

In other words, representatives of the African American community called for the establishment of a permanent watchdog group in Cumming, legally empowered to investigate racially motivated crimes, to name names when violent incidents did occur, and to ensure that equal protection under the law was afforded to all people, even inside the lines of Georgia's notorious "white county."

The creation of such a group must have sounded wildly progressive to Governor Joe Frank Harris when the biracial committee

report reached his desk on December 22nd, 1987. Certainly he never acted on the recommendation. Yet it was a much older idea than many people realized. Had Harris used the power of the governor's office to make it a reality, Forsyth would have finally gotten back to the place where it had last been 120 years earlier, in 1867. That was the year Major William J. Bryan packed up the crates and ledgers of the federal Freedmen's Bureau, locked his office on the Cumming square, and left Forsyth County in the hands of the local sheriff.

GO TO CUMMING today, and you will find that time has wrought many of the changes Hosea Williams's coalition fought so hard, and so unsuccessfully, to achieve in 1987. Back then, the biracial committee's competing reports—one black and one white—were received by the governor not as a solution to Forsyth's ongoing segregation but as evidence of just how intractable the problem was. Governor Harris disbanded the committee without any of Williams's original demands having been answered, without serious discussion of reparations by county leaders, and without the creation of the permanent race relations committee that many saw as vital to the future integration of the county.

Instead, Harris—a pro-business, pro-development Democrat—seemed to echo the leaders of white Forsyth when he told a reporter, "There are other Forsyth counties . . . all around the USA. This is not just a Georgia problem. It's a problem that exists wherever people are." Asked if there was anything he could do to stop the violence and intimidation in Forsyth, Harris downplayed legal remedies and emphasized the role of economic development. "People's attitudes are already changing and have been changing for many years," he said. "The growth and momentum that we're having I think attest to that fact."

Both Hosea and white counterprotesters came out again on the one-year anniversary of the Brotherhood March, in January 1988,

but there were fewer demonstrators on both sides this time, and, wary of more negative attention, the people of the county mostly stayed home. Asked if the marches had changed anything in Forsyth, local resident Tom Pruitt shook his head. "It doesn't bother me that they march, but [to some people] it's antagonizing. . . . You can't push yourself on people, they get wild . . . like rattlesnakes."

In 1988, the Southern Poverty Law Center successfully sued Ku Klux Klan organizers for conspiracy to deprive the Brotherhood Marchers of their civil rights, and my mother was a witness at the trial, testifying about her experiences on January 17th, 1987. The class-action civil suit resulted in a judgment that forced Klan leaders to pay nearly a million dollars in damages, and that hobbled both the Invisible Empire and the Southern White Knights.

While it would be nice to think that such victories changed Forsyth overnight, in reality few people of color dared or even wanted to move to the county in the late 1980s and early 1990s, particularly after TV screens all over the country showed crowds of whites chanting "Go home, niggers!" on the Cumming square. For years after the marches, most black Georgians continued to view Forsyth as a place to be avoided at all costs. As Nelson Rivers, the NAACP's regional director, put it, "Forsyth has a negative connotation [for] most African Americans around here. . . . Just like Memphis will forever be the place where Dr. King was assassinated, Cumming will always be known for that march."

IN 1990, CENSUS takers counted a total of fourteen African Americans in Forsyth, out of a total population of more than forty-four thousand. While those fourteen people technically lived within the county's borders, it would be a mistake to conclude that they were part of the cultural or social life of Forsyth or that they felt at home on the streets of Cumming. Instead, these earliest trespasses across the old racial border seem to have occurred as a handful

of blacks who lived in northern Atlanta suburbs like Alpharetta, Johns Creek, and Suwanee moved into homes that lay just across the southernmost county line. It is possible that some were among the hundreds of thousands of new arrivals to the state, who came with no knowledge of where exactly the county line was or that moving onto the Forsyth side put them in danger.

Whatever their reasons, those earliest black families took a tentative first step into the old "whites only" zone, and for the first time in living memory, the arrival of African Americans in Forsyth seems to have been met with silence. By 1997, their number had grown to thirty-nine black residents, out of a total population of 75,739. According to the *New York Times*, this still made Forsyth "the whitest of the country's 600 most populous counties . . . with a white population of 99.3 percent." Three years later, at the turn of the new millennium, census workers counted 684 black Georgians who had chosen to live in Forsyth. This still represented only .7 percent of a total population that was nearing 100,000, but ten years later, in 2010, the African American population had increased to 4,510, or 2.6 percent of county residents.

What these numbers show is that in the twenty years after the Brotherhood Marches, time, money, and economic growth slowly but steadily changed Forsyth—into a place that tolerates a small minority of black residents and no longer violently enforces its century-old racial ban. As tens of thousands of Atlanta commuters and new corporate employees moved into the county—increasing its population from 38,000 in 1987 to more than 200,000 in 2015—the old guard of Forsyth and the traditional defenders of "racial purity" were simply outnumbered by newcomers with no history in the county and only the faintest inkling of its racist past. In the early 2000s, Forsyth was among the fastest-growing counties in the entire nation, and once the great tidal wave of Atlanta's suburban sprawl finally broke and washed over Cumming, the place was

transformed almost beyond recognition. According to University of Georgia sociologist Doug Bachtel, the old racial ban eventually "died a natural death."

IN 2007, ON the twentieth anniversary of the First Brotherhood March, the *Gainesville Times* noted that at the little crossroads where white supremacists attacked civil rights marchers in 1987, there are now "banks [and] eateries, a supermarket, and that true indicator of suburban life: a Starbucks." Where once there were pine forests and green pastures, there are now acres and acres of subdivisions, with invented names like Sawnee Plantation, Chattahoochee Oaks, and Bethelview Downs.

The people living in those manicured neighborhoods and gated communities are still overwhelmingly white, and many work for the multinational corporations that have established headquarters in the county, including Siemens, Tyson Foods, and Lafarge. But whereas in 1987 non-white residents barely registered in census data, today Forsyth is 10 percent Latino and 8 percent Asian. The African American community still accounts for just 3 percent of the total population, but that number rises every year, as the county's old reputation for bigotry fades into the prosperity and anonymity of the Atlanta suburbs, and as middle-class black Atlantans are drawn north by the same features that have attracted so many white transplants: a short commute to northside Atlanta, deep housing stock, and one of the best public school systems in the state. As Alanda Waller, a new African American resident of Forsyth, told a reporter, "I am the treasurer of the PTA. . . . Come on, that should tell you something. They've come a long way."

EPILOGUE

A PACK OF WILD DOGS

If you drive around Cumming today, you will see more than a few black and brown faces among all the white ones—people of color working and shopping in Forsyth County's stores, walking the streets of the town square, and sending their children to the local schools. What you won't find is a single trace of 1912, or any acknowledgment of the racial cleansing that defined the county for most of the twentieth century. Instead, the timeless, placeless veneer of American suburbia has so completely covered over the past that not even the young black men and women working the cash registers of the county seem to realize that Forsyth was "whites only" just a few decades ago, or that the ground under some of its subdivisions, malls, and big-box stores once belonged to earnest, hardworking black farmers.

And how could they know? There is no memorial to the lynching of Rob Edwards. There are no photographs of black leaders like Joseph and Eliza Kellogg, Levi Greenlee, and Byrd Oliver among all the Confederate portraits at the county Historical Society. And no marker anywhere tells new black residents that they are far from the first African Americans to live in Forsyth.

Instead, gazing out over the square is a larger-than-life bronze

statue of Hiram Parks Bell, Confederate Congressman, U.S. Representative, and self-described defender of "white over black domination." Bell is the celebrated native son whose most famous moment in Washington came when King David Kalākaua of Hawaii was received as a visiting head of state in November of 1874. As Kalākaua spoke before Congress, the representative from Georgia was overheard joking to a colleague that in the days of southern slavery, the king "would have brought $1,500 on the block." Bell's caucus of southern Democrats succeeded, by the end of his second term, in reversing nearly all the gains African Americans had made under congressional Reconstruction, and to the end of his days, "Colonel" Bell was proud of having helped quash what he derided as "this attempted social revolution, to place the African upon an equality with the Caucasian."

WALK FROM BELL'S statue to the corner of Main Street and Tribble Gap Road, and you will find signs of the county's newfound wealth everywhere: a towering new courthouse, the glass facade of a new county jail, and gleaming branches of major banks. But nothing will point you to the spot where the corpse of Rob Edwards hung from a telephone pole all through the afternoon of September 10th, 1912. Nowhere is there a photograph of those same streets filled with government troops, sent to stop the mobs of Forsyth and to quell its recurring "state of insurrection."

Turn west and head out Kelly Mill Road, and you'll come to the beautifully restored home of Dr. Ansel Strickland, which now houses the offices of the Cumming–Forsyth County Chamber of Commerce. Walk inside and you will be greeted by the firm handshake and winning smile of Randall Touissant, vice president of economic development, a young African American man who spreads the gospel of Forsyth's pro-business environment around the globe.

Walk south from Strickland's place, past the public housing project at Social Circle and down a grassy ridge, and you will come to an undeveloped lot, its concrete sidewalks and curb cuts prepared and ready for new construction. Gaze up at the green hills rising on three sides, and you might realize where you stand: at the center of the "natural amphitheater" where carpenters once built and then burned Judge Newt Morris's famous fence. It was to those same hillsides that five thousand people brought their blankets and children and spent the morning of October 25th, 1912, celebrating the double hanging of two black teenagers. Drive out Browns Bridge Road to Pleasant Grove Church in Oscarville, and you will find the only visible reminder of 1912 in the entire county: the headstone of Bud and Azzie Crow's oldest daughter, Mae.

If history is written by the victors, a hundred years after the expulsions the victorious white people of Forsyth have successfully written the racial cleansing completely out of mind. And where anyone familiar with the crimes of 1912 might expect to find signs of reflection, apology, even truth and reconciliation, there is only a deafening silence. Now that they have joined the brave new world of Atlanta, and been rewarded with a level of wealth their dirt-farming, hog-killing, mule-driving ancestors could never have imagined, it's clear that most natives of Forsyth would prefer to leave this whole tale of murder, lynching, theft, and terror scattered in the state's dusty archives or safely hidden in plain sight—in places whose significance is known only to the dwindling handful of people who still remember the stories they once heard at some old timer's feet.

INSTEAD, YOU MIGHT head south to Atlanta, to Martin Luther King Jr.'s birthplace on Auburn Avenue, and wait for someone to buzz you into the King Center archives. Fill out a slip requesting the "Forsyth County Box," and you'll find inside it a stack of dusty

old cassette tapes, with names scrawled in pencil on their white labels: "Carl Dickerson," "John Byrd Terry," "Annie Lee Blake."

If you ask to listen to them, a librarian will lead you to a room with a table, a chair, and an old-fashioned tape player. Lean your ear down next to its little silver speaker, and even over the hum of the air-conditioning and the distant drone of a copier, you will hear the faint, frail voices of people who were very old when they were interviewed in the spring of 1987 but only little children in the fall of 1912. Lean down closer, and through the static they will speak of mule carts loaded in the dark, and threadbare quilts thrown over their heads, and the creak of wooden wagon wheels bumping over rocks and muddy ruts, on those dark nights and purple, predawn mornings when their families left Forsyth forever.

KATHLEEN HUTCHINS ANDERSON was eight years old the night her grandmother Catherine Black showed up in Buford, just across the Chattahoochee from Forsyth. A lifetime later, Anderson recalled the shock of seeing her father's mother, always so stoic, suddenly burst into their house in tears.

George and Catherine Black had been born "in slavery times," Anderson remembered, and were almost disbelieving the day in 1911 when their son Alonzo bought them a house and a plot of land out near Sawnee Mountain, not far from their friends Joseph and Eliza Kellogg. There, for the first time in their lives, the Blacks owned a modest cabin, along with thirteen acres of farmland, a horse, and a mule.

This allowed the couple to carve out of the red Georgia clay the kind of quiet, simple life that, according to their granddaughter, was a godsend to two former slaves. Having been the property of white men for much of their lives, they wanted nothing in old age but to be left in peace: to grow the food they ate, pump water from their own well, and do exactly as they pleased. "They were just so

happy to own a house—being enslaved and not having anything . . . they hadn't even had shoes . . . and then having a home—they was just tickled to death," Anderson said. "They had four or five rooms [and] my daddy used to carry us over there on Saturday nights. We'd spend the night with our grandparents. . . . He would put us in the wagon and take us over there—and [I'd] sleep at the foot of their bed."

When an interviewer asked about the night her grandmother fled the terror in Cumming, Anderson said, "When she came to our house it was dusk," and

> I just remember her coming in crying, you know. Mama hugged her and all. . . . They sent us children into the other room, and they sat down and talked. [My grandmother] kept saying she was so hurt. They had to run and leave everything . . . had to leave their home. They had never owned nothing before. I don't think she ever got over what happened . . . I just know she cried. It hurt her so bad.

When eight-year-old Kathleen crept in from another room and climbed into her grandmother's lap, her father tried to shoo her away, saying Grandma was too tired. But what, Kathleen Anderson remembered asking, about the dolly she'd left at Grandma's house?

Catherine Black—who had survived slavery, and Jim Crow, and now a visit from the torch-wielding night riders of Forsyth—turned her granddaughter to face her and said she was sorry but "a pack of wild dogs got into the house" and tore that doll up. "I'm going to buy you a new one," she said, wiping tears from the girl's brown cheeks. "I'll buy you a new one just as soon as we get back."