

CIVIL RIGHTS IN THE 1960'S: HOW BLACK BECAME THE NEW RED

A multimodal essay highlighting the intersection of the civil rights movement and cold war, leading to the rise of right-wing conspiracies.



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The Intersection of Civil Rights and the Red Scare

As the Cold War, between the United States and the Soviet Union, reached a climactic era, the civil rights movement in America had picked up steam in parallel. The “Red Scare” stemmed by the Cold War, gave rise to many unfounded conspiracies which associated the civil rights movement and communism. Prominent examples of these conspiracies were displayed in Atlanta during Ivan Allen, Jr.’s administration, specifically with the election between Allen and Lester Maddox, Summerhill riots, and general animosity towards the civil rights movement. This propaganda undercut needed progress by insisting that such efforts threatened American ideals and were communist supported. In modern politics we see subtle references toward this era, with the attacks of having communist beliefs.



Red Scare propaganda propelled in the 1960's to stoke fear in the general public

Brown v. Board of Education Decision



A Postwar Mindset : Communism on the Rise?



This map shows the range of the Soviet nuclear missiles that were placed on Cuba in 1962. The missiles could easily reach any major city in the United States

Cold War tensions were high following the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis, a near-miss with communist Cuba that could have launched Soviet nuclear missiles toward the United States. Alongside the cold war, the United States had just passed a revolutionary law, in the Brown vs Board of Education case, outlawing discrimination in public school across the nation; this was a huge step for the Civil Rights Movement. The intersection of the Cold War and the Civil Rights Movement created an atmosphere that cultivated conservative conspiracies against the black community. In some cases, the nationwide fear of communism as a political transformation, that would fracture “American values”, was made synonymous with the political and social transformations sought by the Civil Rights Movement. These imagined narratives of anti-American Soviet infiltration were used, like conspiracy theories still are today, by politicians, leaders, and everyday citizens, to create doubt and prompt violence. In the 1960s, many of these theories were aimed directly at the Black community in their fight for civil rights. It could be explained that, "American racism suddenly took on international significance as an effective propaganda weapon of the Communists. (238)" These conspiracies were not meant to prove anything, but instead to provoke doubt and fear among white Americans sympathetic to the established racial hierarchy. The racial barriers solidified by the uprising of the civil rights movement became evident immediately following the Supreme Court's Brown v. Board of Education decision. Many demonstrators reverted to accusations that African Americans were Anti-American and, thus, “communist.” White Americans were eager to deflect their fear of war onto the black community.



The *Brown v. Board of Education* Supreme Court ruling marked the **beginning of a new era**--the civil rights movement. In this era the **black community** was accused of **practicing communism**.

Mayor Ivan Allen Jr.: The Rise of the New South

As the intensity of the Cold War climbed to its apex with the Cuban missile crisis, and the civil rights movement making great strides with the landmark decision of *Brown v. Board of Education*, it was time for the South to pivot in a new direction. In Atlanta, a moderate businessman, Ivan Allen, Jr., decided to take a stand as mayor and help create the new “moderate South”. As mayor, Allen’s main objective was to carry on the momentum of the civil rights movement and bridge the equality gap between the African American and white communities. His legacy is best known for “[speaking] up for civil rights long before commentators heralded the rise of a moderate new South... and challenging Atlantans to live up to what was best in their heritage.” (7). However, with the intense environment of the Cold War, the civil rights movement that Allen championed in Atlanta was at times deteriorated by right-wing conspiracies that associated the movement with communism.



Ivan Allen's Congressional Testimony on Civil Rights in front of the Senate Commerce Committee

The Rise of Conspiracies In Atlanta

Angry southerners coined the term “communist” as a means of expressing their prejudice against anyone believed to neglect traditional American values. The hypertension of the Red Scare was used as a political weapon to dismantle the civil rights movement across America, most notably in Atlanta during Allen’s time as mayor. For example, when the Community Relations Commission was established to help sew racial divisions by Mayor Allen, the Ku Klux Klan chapter in Atlanta immediately spread false propaganda in attempt to link Allen and the Communist cause. For example, Calvin Craig, the Grand Dragon of the Atlanta chapter, stated in his response: “While American Soldiers die fighting communism in Vietnam, who has created this red network in Atlanta? Mayor Allen, and his puppets.” These malicious attacks thrown at Allen represented the unfounded conspiracies that the white community stirred up to ventilate their fears about how social progress was anti-American.

CITIZENS OF ATLANTA,
The Community Relations Commission (CRC) of Atlanta, has been created by Mayor Allen and all the Board of Alderman. This commission has been created supposedly for the purpose of promoting better race relations and better understanding between the citizens of Atlanta. However, the excessive power granted to this commission and particularly, the questionable affiliations of some of its members, causes us to question its real purpose (the commission is empowered to hold hearings and put citizens under oath. They are already demanding that every other house in the Atlanta area be opened for occupancy by Negroes.)

Who believes that all religious exercises and programs, Bible devotions and prayers should be barred from public schools? The ACLU.

Who believes that racial discrimination in private housing should be prohibited by law? The ACLU.

Who believes that anyone should have the right to join the Communist Party and make public speeches in behalf of Communist causes? The ACLU.

Who believes that students receiving financial aid from the U.S. Government (even though such "aid" is financed by taxpayers' dollars) should not be required to swear that they are not members of the Communist Party? The ACLU.

Who supports racists who refuse to serve in the Armed Forces and who refuse to take the loyalty oath? The ACLU.

Report 2290, U.S. House of Representatives Special Committee to investigate communist propaganda stated:
The American Civil Liberties Union is closely affiliated with the communist movement in the United States.

A report from The California Senate Fact-Finding Committee; on Un-American Activities (page 92) describes the ACLU in the following language:
The American Civil Liberties Union may be definitely classed as a Communist Front Organization.

Rev. Sam Williams stated in The Atlanta Constitution March 2, 1967, "I don't see how a decent Christian can be a Capitalist (Capitalism-Private ownership of property or business-free enterprise) at the same time.

Three members of The Community Relations Commission are known members of the red-front American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) They are: Mrs. Eliza Paschall, Rev. Sam Williams and Mr. T. M. Alexander, Sr. Mrs. Paschall has been named as the executive director of this committee and will receive a salary of \$12,500.00 per year, plus expenses to be payed by taxes from the citizens of Atlanta.

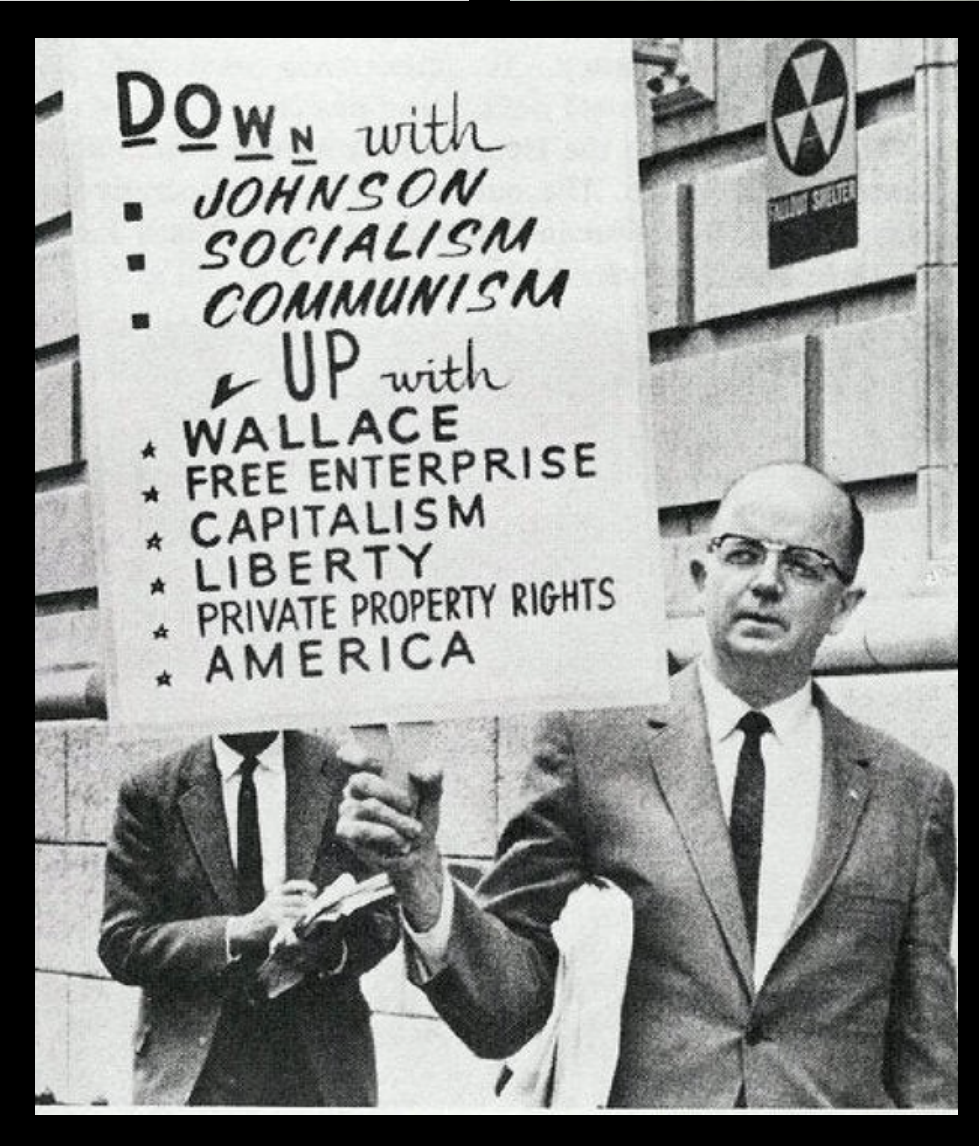
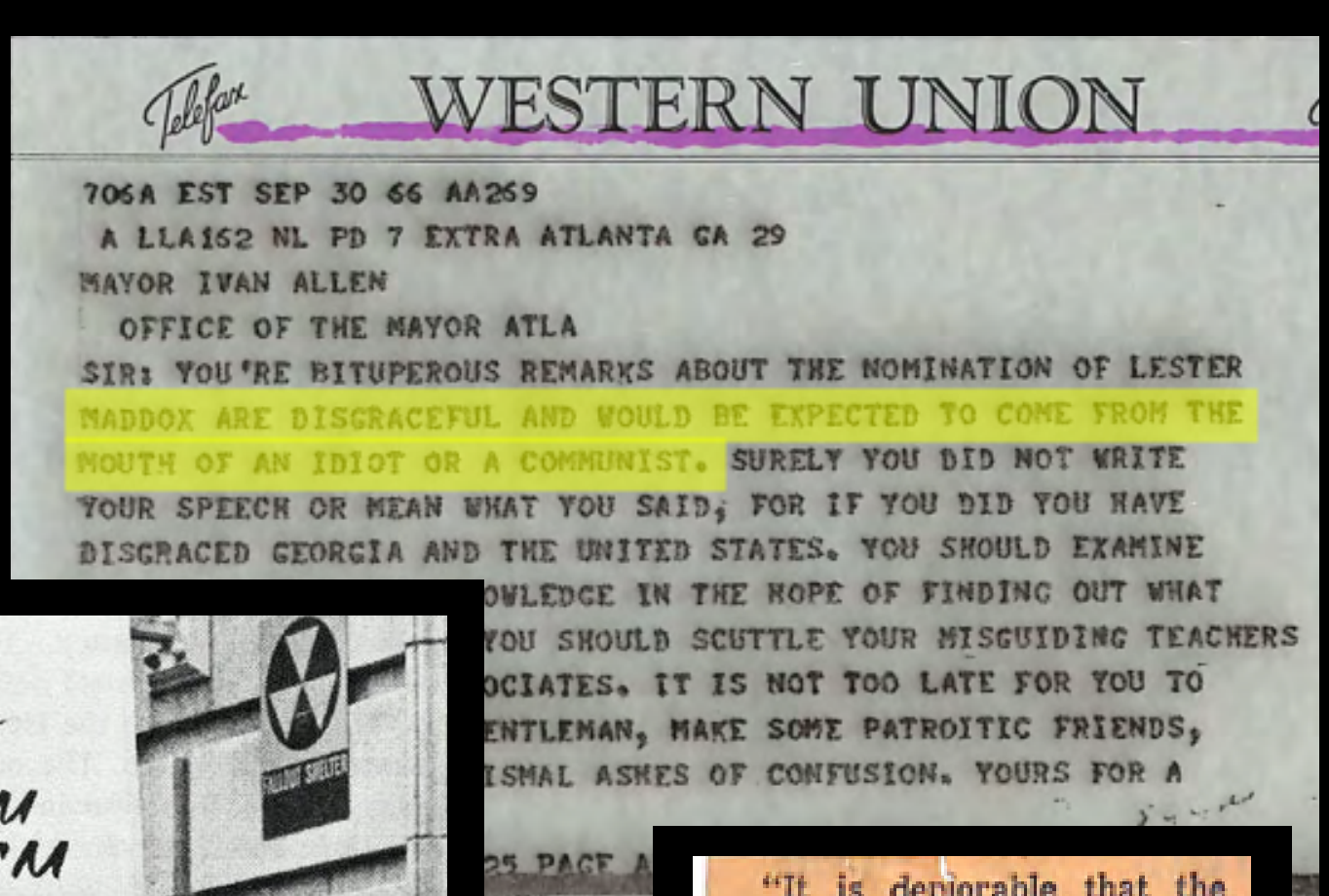
WHILE AMERICAN SOLDIERS DIE FIGHTING COMMUNISM IN VIET NAM, WHO HAS CREATED THIS RED NETWORK IN ATLANTA? MAYOR ALLEN AND HIS PUPPETS, THE BOARD OF ALDERMAN.

You can help the United Klans of America in our fight to abolish the CRC by informing your friends and neighbors about the establishment of this committee by the City Fathers of Atlanta.

Ku Klux Klan Response to the Creation of the Community Relations Commission (CRC)

Lester Maddox, a prominent southern democrat In Georgia, was a fierce opponent to Allen. During the mayoral race Maddox ran on an openly segregationist platform against Allen. His candidacy was rooted in stoking fear about the civil rights movement, and conserving the "ideals" of southern society. Allen, a moderate candidate, made his opposition to Maddox clear to the public. In an Interview with a local newspaper he stated that "it is deplorable that the combined forces of ignorance, prejudice, reactionism, and the duplicity of many Republican voters have thrust upon the State of Georgia Lester Maddox, a totally unqualified Individual." In response, Maddox continued to push the narrative that Allen and the civil rights movement were communist and anti-American. Many supporters of Maddox wrote to Allen stating that his criticisms "would be expected to come from the mouth of an Idiot or a communist." These perpetual attacks against Allen, from Lester Maddox are another prime example of the unfounded conspiracies that were perpetuated in the 1960's.

Letter written to Allen from Maddox supporter, criticizing him



Lester Maddox protesting desegregation

"It is deplorable that the combined forces of ignorance, prejudice, reactionism and the duplicity of many Republican voters have thrust upon the state of Georgia Lester Maddox, a totally unqualified individual, as the Democratic nominee for governor.

"For the past quarter century our state has been outstanding in our region as the advocate of sanity and reason, and as the champion of progress.

"The seal of the great state of Georgia lies tarnished."

—Atlanta Mayor
 Ivan Allen Jr.

Ivan Allen, Jr. Interview on Maddox



"If it had not been for the race issue we probably would have never heard of Lester Maddox, because he had no administrative capabilities. But he *did* have the race issue in the fifties and sixties, and at a time when cool heads and pragmatic decisions were needed he was busily inflaming an already heated situation by ranting and raving about Communists and left-wingers and race-mixers--all of it mixed, curiously with quotations from the Bible and righteous talk about how he didn't hate the negro. (138)"

IVAN ALLEN

Lester Maddox closing his Cafeteria as a result of integration movements

Summerhill Riot

"The politicians do not want civil war, but that is what they are promoting. The **civil rights** movement was conceived by **communists** for the purpose of creating racial violence that would turn into a civil war - civil war on a racial basis. In such a war, should they succeed in fomenting it, communists hope to undermine the government and social structure of America so that they can **seize power**."

DAN SMOOT



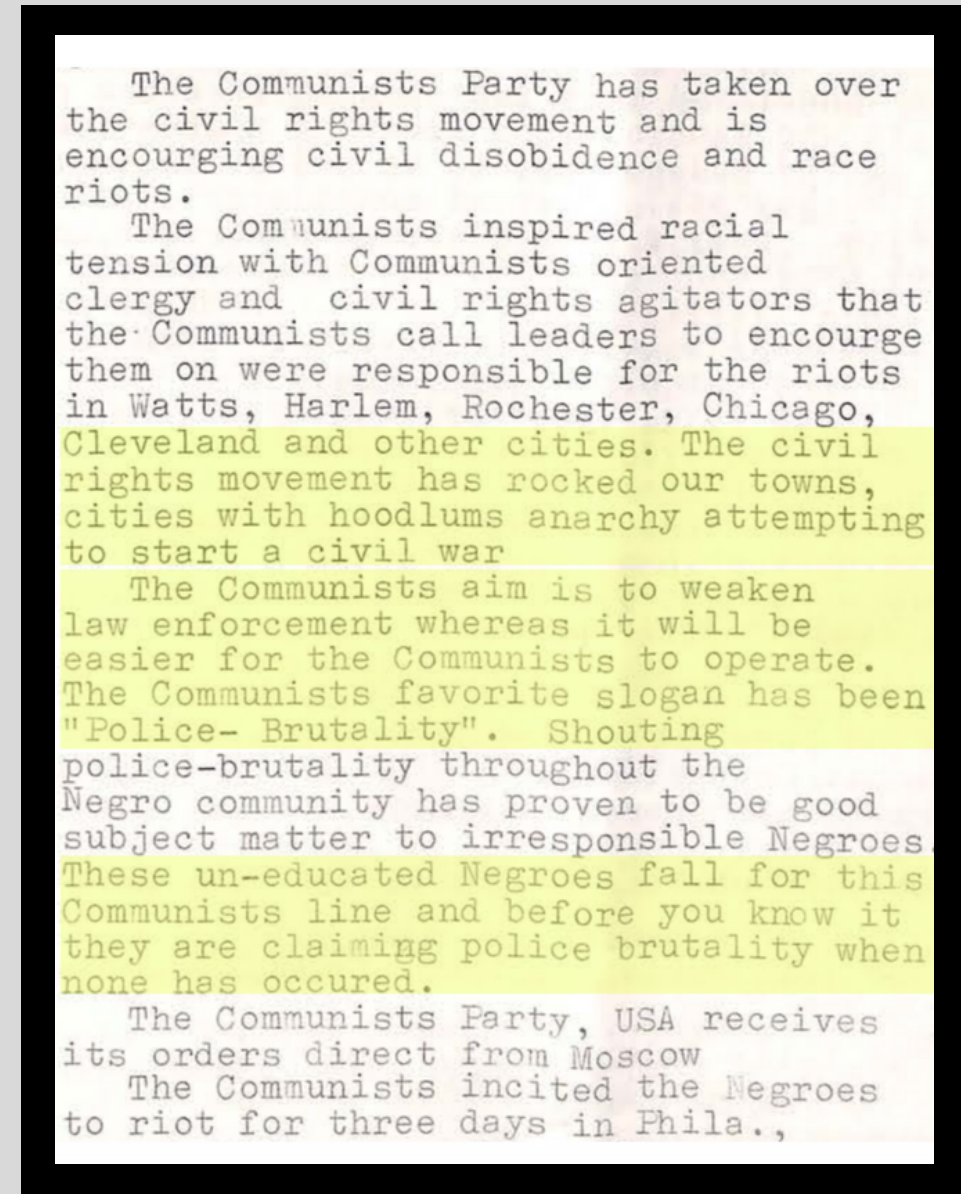
Mayor Allen attempting to appease the crowd (and failing) during the Summerhill Riot.

Summerhill Riot

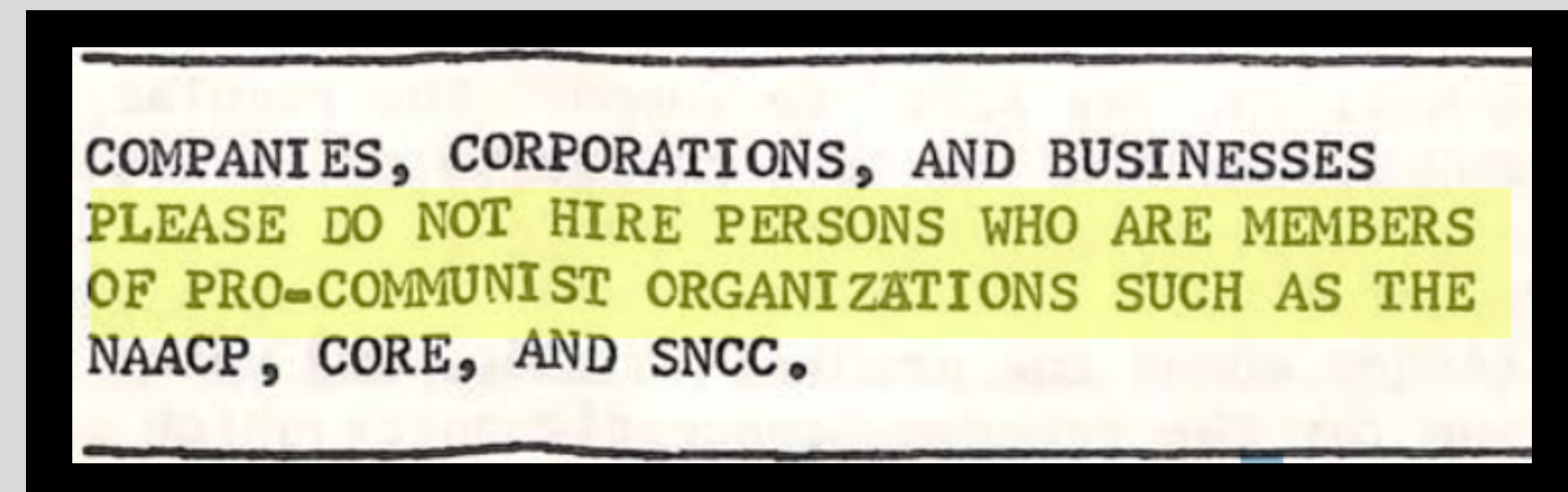
In October of 1966, an African American car thief was shot which led to a four-day police brutality protest in Summerhill. The media quickly labeled the protest as a riot, thus denoting the people of Summerhill as uncivilized savages. The Wire Magazine, a local publisher in Atlanta, claimed that "The communist party has taken over the civil rights movement and is encouraging civil disobedience and race riots." The white power structure in Atlanta quick to claim that the civil rights movement was hijacked by communism. Because of this, they encouraged businesses "not to hire persons who are members of Pro-Communist Organizations such as the NAACP, CORE, and SNCC". The backlash towards the Black community claiming that the protest was inspired by communists, and that African Americans were only interested in propagating civil unrest are prominent examples of the conspiracy theories hurdled at the civil rights movement.



Newspaper headline after Summerhill



Wire Magazine column describing the riots that took place in Summerhill.



Wire Magazine, a local publisher in Atlanta, PSA to business owners

Feedback Allen Received as Mayor

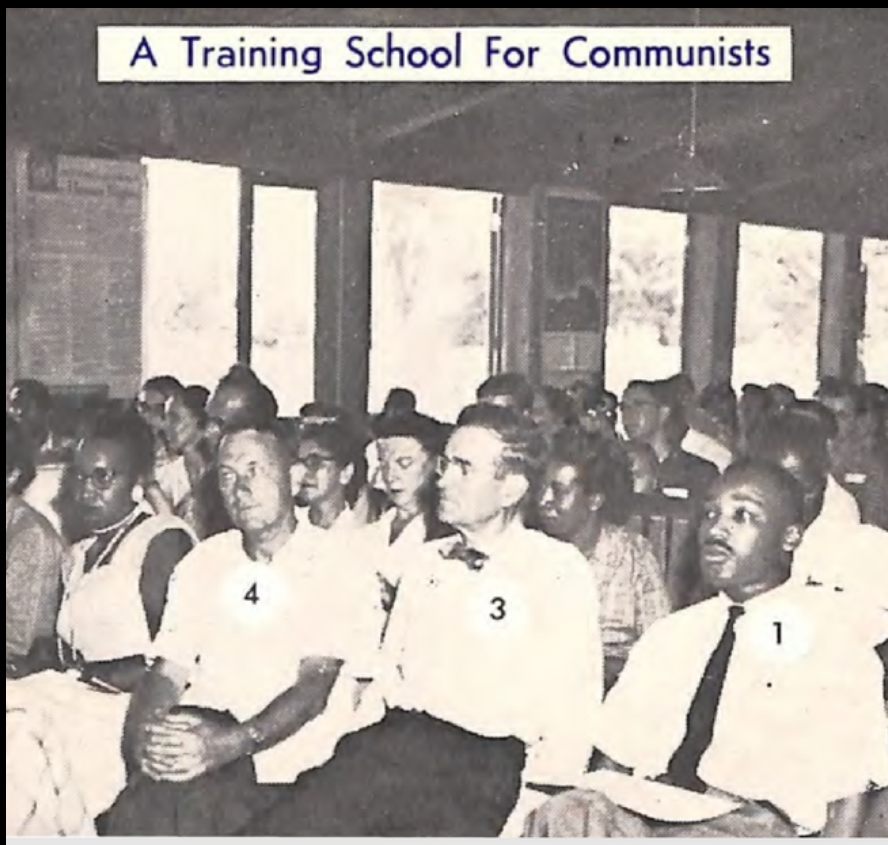
Ivan Allen's secretary organized the letters that he received from his constituents. Intentionally, she labeled a folder, "Crackpot Letters," to emphasize the illogical conspiracies formulated by right-wing Atlantans in their attempt to halt desegregation. Many of the responses to Allen received were accusations that he was a communist or was associated with communists due to his presence in the black community. The reasoning behind these letters was often flawed and illogical, thus the name of the folder. For instance, one specific letter links Martin Luther King Jr, Abner W. Berry, Aubrey Williams, and Myles Horton as members of the communist party in Atlanta. More specifically, one of Allen's constituents accuses Myles Horton, the director of Highlander Folk School, of running a communist training camp (the school for blacks). Included in this letter is a photo of the four men among a crowd of black students. Because of their physical proximity to the black community in this photo, these leaders were suspected of conspiring with members of the communist party, giving blacks power. Allen never addressed these accusatory letters in his book, *Mayor: Notes on the Sixties*. It is likely that Allen never read these letters (only his secretary) due to the outlandish ideas and accusations.

Identifications

The picture on the other side was made at Highlander Folk School during the Labor Day week-end of 1957. Attentive pupils identified by the numbers are:

1. Martin Luther King, Jr. The association indicated here is not unusual for Dr. King, who belongs to several important Communist front organizations, and who regularly employs or affiliates with known Communists.
2. Abner W. Berry, of the Central Committee of the Communist Party.
3. Aubrey Williams, President of the Communist front, the Southern Conference Education Fund.
4. Myles Horton, Director of the Highlander Folk School (for Communist Training), Monteagle, Tennessee. This school was later abolished by an act of the Legislature of the State of

A Training School For Communists

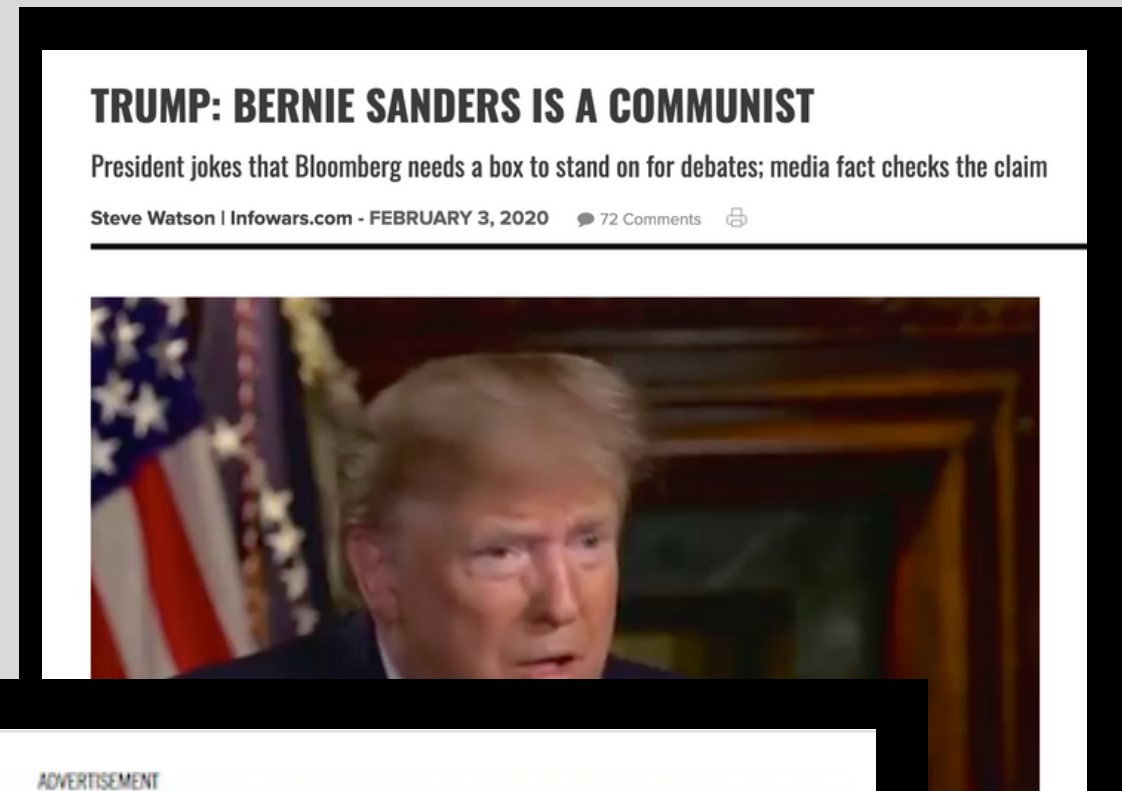


Allen's secretary filed this document under "crackpot letters" due to its deranged message claiming black leaders' (and whites associated) support of communism

Conclusion

Although race relations are not as severe as they were in the 1960's, conspiracy theories about the progressive left have been at an all time high. Right-wing publications have pushed many conspiracies about current politicians. For example, during the Presidency of Barack Obama, the first African American President, many right-wing pundits were quick to question his true citizenship. A documentary, "Dreams From My Real Father," suggested that Obama's father was a propagandist for the Communist party, and that Obama was not even born in this country but in Kenya. More recently, President Donald Trump attempted to associate Bernie Sanders, a popular progressive democrat, with the communist movement. Many right-wing pundits have attempted to do the same. These modern attacks highly resemble the conspiracies that were hurled at the civil rights movement during the 1960's.

President Donald Trump's most recent Interview on the 2020 democratic frontrunner: Bernie Sanders



Advertisement for the Documentary: "Dreams From my Real Father"

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All other quotes , images, and documents not cited are from the Ivan Allen Digital Archive. Georgia Institute of Technology.