

the Manifesto a 'piece of chest-thumping' – he was one of the few non-signers immediately to issue a statement explaining his decision, a feisty unapologetic document remorselessly demonstrating the futility of the Manifesto. The reaction was strong from his constituents: 'Man', he recalled 'that was like jumping off the Brooklyn Bridge at high noon. I took my life in my hands'. But he survived: he already knew that filing date had passed and that he would face no opposition in the Democratic primary.²³

IV

The evidence from Texas, Tennessee, and Florida suggests that there might have been more room for manoeuvre than Southern moderates were prepared to credit. The evidence from North Carolina is more ambiguous. First, it highlights what an idiosyncratic and personal matter taking a moderate stand on racial matters was. Second, the fate of the congressmen who did not sign suggests that the political perils were not imaginary.

There was considerable unease in the North Carolina congressional delegation about signing the Manifesto. At first, only Hubert Bonner and Graham Barden from the rural east signed. In the end, however, only three congressmen refused to sign. All faced immediate primary battles for re-election in which their failure to sign was a salient issue. Two of the three were defeated.²⁴ It is difficult to imagine three more disparate congressmen than Charles Deane, Harold Cooley, and Thurmond Chatham and three more diverse routes to racial moderation.

Harold Cooley had not entirely lost the vestiges of the liberalism which saw him elected to the House as a New Dealer in 1934. As chairman of the House Agriculture Committee, he saw himself as part of the national Democratic leadership; he had to work with Northern and Western representatives of other farm commodities to ensure favourable treatment for tobacco; and he may have had thoughts of his own of the vice-presidential nomination in 1956. Not lacking in the sense of his own importance, Cooley resented being presented with the Manifesto by the senators as a sort of *fait accompli*, when House members had been kept out of the discussions which led to its drafting.²⁵

Thurmond Chatham was the millionaire chairman of the board of directors of the family Chatham mills. In the 1930s he was a Roosevelt-hating member of the Liberty League. In 1940 he supported Republican Wendell Willkie. Elected to Congress on an anti-union platform in 1948, he remained firmly

²³ Interview with Dante Fascell, 27 Feb. 1997. *Miami Herald*, 11, 12 Mar. 1956. Taylor, *Fascell*, p. 9.

²⁴ *Raleigh News and Observer*, 13 Mar. 1956. Howard W. Smith was the congressional leader responsible for securing signatures from the North Carolina delegation. The successive lists in his papers show the order in which the North Carolina delegation signed up, Howard W. Smith papers, University of Virginia, Charlottesville.

²⁵ Clipping, Henderson *Times-News* 14 Mar. 1956, Harold D. Cooley to H. Q. Dorsett, 13 Mar. 1956, Harold Dunbar Cooley papers, Southern Historical Collection, Chapel Hill.

opposed to unionization, particularly of his own mill, and he opposed raising the minimum wage. As a student at Yale, however, in 1916 he had sat next to a black student in two of his classes and become friendly with him; in the Navy in the Second World War he had seen desegregation in operation; on the House Foreign Affairs Committee he had become friendly with younger liberals, Abraham Ribicoff and Lloyd Bentsen. His support for national Democrats on foreign policy began to spill over into the domestic field. He favoured recognition of Red China. When the Supreme Court decision came in 1954 he said he had been expecting it; he was confident that the South would take it in its stride; and he was pleased that the decision was out of the way. America would be able to turn its attention to 'the greater problems which face us in the international sphere'.²⁶

By contrast, Charles B. Deane was an unequivocal liberal on domestic economic and social affairs. He had been elected in 1946 with the backing of the textile and railroad unions in his eighth district. He could be relied on by both the national Democratic leadership and by national union leaders. He was also a staunch Baptist, a former secretary of the state Baptist Convention.²⁷

Both Deane's religion and his economic liberalism led him to a liberal stand on civil rights. But there was another compelling impetus. Deane had become a member of Moral ReArmament (MRA), the movement for moral uplift known earlier as the Oxford Movement and led by Frank Buchman. In 1951 Deane had been to one of MRA's plays in Washington. As he told a former congressman, the consequences were startling: 'revolutionary things have taken place in our family... I saw myself as I really was, wrapped up in a cloud of self-righteousness going round with a mask and there were a good many iron curtains within the family circle'. His daughter sacrificed a legacy that was to pay her way through college, gave it to MRA, went to work for MRA full time, and went round the world as part of the integrated cast of 'The Vanishing Island', a musical in rhyming verse written by Peter Howard. Deane himself accompanied the play part of the time.²⁸

The message MRA put across was one of absolute personal standards: absolute honesty, absolute purity, absolute unselfishness, absolute love. People imbued with these standards could resolve all the conflicts in society either in the international sphere, in labour relations, or in racial matters.²⁹

MRA was wholeheartedly anti-Communist, but it was convinced that military spending could not contain Communism, especially in the Third

²⁶ Ralph J. Christian, 'The Folger-Chatham congressional primary of 1946', *North Carolina Historical Review*, 53 (1976), pp. 25-53. *Raleigh News and Observer*, 18 May 1954. *Winston-Salem Journal*, 18 May 1954.

²⁷ *Greensboro Daily News*, 2 Sept. 1955. *Winston-Salem Journal*, 12 Sept. 1955. Comment, James L. Sundquist, 8 Apr. 1987. John A. Long to Charles B. Deane, 23 Apr. 1956, John A. Lang papers, East Carolina Manuscript Collection, East Carolina University, Greenville.

²⁸ Charles B. Deane to Walter Lambeth, 22 Oct. 1952, Deane papers. Interview with Charles B. Deane Jr, 12 Sept. 1989.

²⁹ Charles B. Deane to Fay Allen, 21 Nov. 1951, Deane papers.

World. Rather, as Deane himself passionately believed, Americans needed to win the battle for the hearts and minds. The battle could not be won by the picture of American capitalism as 'half-dressed women, debased youth, effeminate heroes, gangsters and cowboys'. It could not be won by 'Big talk coupled with low living'. Victory needed young people 'as thoroughly trained and disciplined in living the ideology of freedom' as the Communists and 'honest about the places where change will come if the faith of our fathers is to be fulfilled'.³⁰

Race relations was one of the areas where change would have to come. Deane's religious and political concern for the dispossessed re-enforced his conviction that racial change at home was essential if America was to have success overseas. This conviction was strengthened by an MRA visit to Kenya where he visited the prison camps for the Mau Mau fighting the British. He was acutely conscious of the potential black hatred for the white race.³¹

In the primaries that followed it is difficult to disentangle the race issue from other local issues. But the issue was unambiguously joined in Charles Deane's case. Deane had not faced serious opposition in 1952 and 1954. No opponent filed against him in 1956 until he failed to sign the Manifesto. Two days later a local school superintendent told him 'it is clear to a number of people that if any average candidate ran against you that you would not be able to secure 30 per cent of the votes in your district at the present time'. Then a retired FBI agent and law partner of a former lieutenant-governor announced against Deane. The first two items in all Paul Kitchen's literature were that the candidate would have signed the Manifesto and that he opposed race-mixing. Deane's daughter was smeared by the distribution of a cropped photograph showing her at a MRA camp next to two blacks. Blacks were paid to ring up white voters and ask them to support Deane. A textile union leader sadly reported that his members would no longer support the congressman. As a result a congressman who had had powerful support in his district and had assiduously catered to his constituents' patronage and pork barrel needs found himself comfortably beaten. He lost all the counties bordering on the South Carolina black belt with the highest percentage of blacks in their population. He even lost his home county of Richmond by a three to one vote, with the opposition forces, including black votes, marshalled by the local sheriff.³²

In the case of Chatham and Cooley the evidence is more mixed. The first letter Chatham received after not signing the Manifesto told the congressman 'you express yourself like a Damn Yankee. If you like the Negro you can have him but I think you are a dead duck'. Two days after not signing the Manifesto, Chatham was told 'your not signing along with the rest of the

³⁰ Notes for schools and colleges [n.d.], notes, 22 Nov. 1956, Deane papers.

³¹ Charles B. Deane to Herman Hardison, 27 Mar. 1956, Deane papers.

³² Interview with Charles B. Deane Jr, 12 Sept. 1989. Charles B. Deane to Mrs P. A. Wood, 28 July 1956, Lang papers. Lewis Cannon to Charles B. Deane, 15 Mar. 1956, leaflet [n.d.], Deane to James E. Griffin, 7 May 1956, J. B. Hood to Deane, 24 Apr. 1956, Nina Duke Wood to Deane, 26 July 1956, Deane papers.

Southern congressmen in opposition of [sic] desegregation (mongrelizing) will I'm sure place you in favour with senator [sic] Hubert Humphrey and his Negro worshippers'. The North Carolina Patriots targeted Chatham for special opposition with particular success in two counties in his district.³³

Cooley had no opposition until he refused to sign the Declaration. Then he was opposed by local broadcaster Waldemar Eros Debnam, who had written the popular racist tract, *Then My Old Kentucky Home, Good Night*. Debnam labelled Cooley the NAACP candidate. Debnam claims he resisted attempts to buy his candidacy off. 'I regarded the Manifesto as a recall issue and it was my intention to play the fact that Cooley had attacked the document to the hilt, letting the people draw their own conclusions ... I made it plain that I regard this segregation business as of tremendous importance to our people and the duty of every man to stand up and fight by every legal means forced racial integration.'³⁴

But there were local and personal factors in the elections as well. Chatham had faced surprisingly stiff opposition in 1952 and 1954 from political unknowns who had capitalized on his absentee record in Congress. In 1956, irrespective of the Manifesto, he was going to face opposition from a substantial local politician, a county solicitor who represented part of the constituency that felt that it had been overlooked historically in terms of congressional representation. Chatham's opponent stressed his absenteeism, his foreign trips, and his earlier support of Republican candidates. There was also a whispering campaign about Chatham's alcoholism (and indeed Chatham died of cirrhosis of the liver in 1957).³⁵

Cooley had long since ceased to keep his political fences mended and he too enjoyed foreign junkets. He was attacked as the 'globe-trotting gadfly'. Voters were told 'the district needs a full time congressman'. There were even deeper personal factors. The first person to denounce Cooley for not signing the Manifesto, and to consider running himself, was Pou Bailey, the man who later persuaded Jesse Helms to run for the Senate. Bailey's cousin was the man Cooley defeated to get into Congress twenty-two years earlier: Bailey's uncle had defeated Cooley's father for the same congressional seat in 1916.³⁶

Chatham remained unapologetic for his refusal to sign the Manifesto. He ran best in high-income wards and in black wards in Winston-Salem, an early forerunner of the cross-class, bi-racial alliance that would play an important

³³ Anon. to Thurmond Chatham [n.d.], Dallas Gwynn to Chatham, 24 Mar. 1956; I. F. Young to Chatham, 13 May 1956, Thurmond Chatham papers, North Carolina Division of Archives and History, Raleigh.

³⁴ Debnam adverts, Cooley papers. Raleigh *News and Observer*, 17 Mar. 1956. Memorandum, 19 Mar. 1956, Waldemar Eros Debnam papers, East Carolina Manuscript Collection, East Carolina University, Greenville.

³⁵ L. van Noppen to Thurmond Chatham, 8 Mar. 1956, Ralph Scott adverts, Chatham papers. Greensboro *Daily News*, 10, 13 Apr. 1956. Winston-Salem *Journal*, 19 Apr. 1956.

³⁶ Ermine B. Hampton to Barbara Dearing [n.d.], Debnam adverts, Cooley papers. Raleigh *News and Observer*, 14 Mar., 6 Apr. 1956. Anthony J. Badger, *North Carolina and the New Deal* (Raleigh, 1981), p. 89.

part in Southern politics in the 1960s. Cooley won – but he race-baited the race-baiter to do so. He started off the campaign by stressing the false hopes that the Manifesto aroused and the fact that as a lawyer he could not attack the Supreme Court in the language of the Manifesto. While he still asserted that he was proud of his decision not to sign, by the end of the campaign he was proclaiming that he hated and despised the *Brown* decision. Then he counter-attacked by accusing Debnam of advocating desegregation of public transport and for having eaten a meal with the NAACP's Roy Wilkins in Wilkins's home in New York City. His opponent, said Cooley, had said 'let the Negro eat where he pleases, sit where he pleases and sleep where he pleases. This is exactly what Debnam's friend Roy Wilkins has been advocating for years'. Flanked by Senator Sam Ervin, Cooley flooded the district with his segregationist propaganda and overwhelmed Debnam by a two to one margin.³⁷

V

The wide diversity of political opinion amongst the non-signers – from New Deal liberal to Democratic party stalwart to right-wing ideologue – highlights the personal and fragmented nature of the forces of Southern racial moderation in the 1950s. A variety of factors led to their decision not to bow to segregationist pressure in 1956: experience in World War, national political ambitions, concerns for party unity, Cold War fears, religious belief, an urban political base. But all these factors were also compatible with the defence of white supremacy.

Did their experience suggest there was an alternative to defiance, a road not taken by most of their moderate and liberal colleagues in the South in the mid-1950s? None of these politicians came from the Deep South, black majority districts. A historian second-guesses a Frank Smith, a Hale Boggs, or a Carl Elliott at his peril. In the absence of detailed public opinion polls, a historian needs to be careful of confident assertions about what their constituents might have tolerated in the 1950s. To argue that the politician on the ground knew less about constituency sentiment in their own districts than someone from the comfortable vantage point of Britain in the 1990s is clearly fraught with dangers. The fate, outside the Deep South, of Chatham and Deane in their primary elections is, in any case, enough to give the presumptuous historian pause. It is important, however, to note that conservatives at the time were much less confident than their moderate protagonists that public opinion was overwhelmingly in the massive resistance camp. The irony was that conservatives and liberals both believed that public opinion was on the other side. Most moderates believed that whites were so stirred up on the race issues that they had no alternative but to retreat and become 'closet moderates'.

³⁷ Harold Cooley to E. L. Cannon, 3 Apr. 1956, Nashville (NC) speech, 7 Apr. 1956, Henderson speech, 17 May 1956; WTVD speech, Cooley papers. Thurmond Chatham to Hiden Ramsay, 31 May 1956, Chatham to Ralph Howland, 5 June 1956, Chatham papers.