

BOSTON UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY AND THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT

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The history of the Civil Rights movement features contributions by specific colleges and universities. In this essay I consider the unique role of Boston University School of Theology in the movement. Established in 1839, Boston University School of Theology is the oldest Methodist seminary in the United States.¹ On the basis of the Wesleyan tradition, the university admitted all members of society regardless of their race, gender, social class, or creed. In the 1950s, Boston University recruited African American students for graduate studies, when other universities refused to admit them, particularly when they came out of historically black colleges in the American south. Many of the southern black colleges were unaccredited due to a lack of funding and support. However, "Boston University's great moral leadership provided nearly 100 percent of the Ph.D.s in religion awarded to black scholars in that period."² The university pioneered in what a later generation would call affirmative action, and the policy created the leadership for the Civil Rights movement. Hereafter, Boston University is designated as BU, and participants' affiliations are indicated by school initials and years of graduation.

Beloved Community

The most well-known BU graduate in the Civil Rights movement was Martin Luther King, Jr. (GRS'55, Hon'59). Although Baptist by upbringing and prior education, King's life and thought were influenced by Methodist professors at BU and were consistent with Wesleyan theology. King enrolled in the Ph.D. program in philosophy and theology in 1951, but he took most of his courses in the School of Theology. He chose BU for two reasons. One was to study with Edgar Sheffield Brightman, a Methodist minister and prominent personalist philosopher, and the other was to join an intellectual community open to and supportive of black students.³

¹ Richard M. Cameron, *Boston University School of Theology, 1839–1968*, Supplement to *Nexus* XI:2/3 (May 1968), 2–3, 16.

² Tom Trotter, "Among Black Scholars at Boston University," *Focus* (Spring 2008), 15.

³ Ira G. Zepp, Jr., *The Social Vision of Martin Luther King, Jr.* (Brooklyn, NY: Carlson, 1989), 75, 174.

*Editor's note: This article contains citation of a BU term paper by Martin Luther King, Jr. Questions have been raised concerning the scholarship of Martin Luther King, Jr. while at BU but are not the focus of Hughes' article.

In his intellectual autobiography King cited Walter G. Muelder and Allan Knight Chalmers as most influential in the School of Theology. Both had “a passion for social justice that stemmed, not from a superficial optimism, but from a deep faith in the possibilities of human beings when they allowed themselves to become co-workers with God.”⁴

Chalmers came to BU in 1948 from a pastorate at Broadway Tabernacle Methodist Church in New York City. While at BU, Chalmers published an important book dealing with race relations and the justice system. He told the story of the “Scottsboro boys,” nine black boys falsely accused of raping two white girls in Alabama on March 25, 1931, and sentenced to die in the electric chair.⁵ In December, 1935, he was appointed the chairman of the Scottsboro Defense Committee, and he helped to secure the acquittals of the boys over a span of more than 19 years.

“For years he took trips almost every weekend to the South or to New York City, to help with the strategy of the struggle for racial equality or for the defense of some person or cause needing help before a court.”⁶ From these trips Chalmers would tell stories in the classroom, and one alumnus recalls that he took every course he could that Chalmers taught, because he exerted such an extraordinary and powerful influence in the school.⁷

Muelder was Dean and Professor of Christian Social Ethics from 1945 until his retirement in 1972. Although King took no courses from Muelder, he was decisively influenced by the latter’s assessment of Reinhold Niebuhr’s critique of perfectionism. In a term paper, entitled “Reinhold Niebuhr’s Ethical Dualism,” King quoted Muelder’s judgment, which I cite in pertinent part:

Niebuhr’s treatment of much historical perfectionism . . . hardly does justice to the constructive historical contributions of the perfectionist sects within the Christian fellowship and even within the secular order. There is a kind of Christian assurance which releases creative energy into the world and which in actual fellowship rises above the conflicts of individual or collective egotism.⁸

Since his seminary days, King had wrestled with Niebuhr’s claim that the New Testament ideal of *agape* love could not be realized in history due to human sin as egotism or pride. By citing Muelder’s evaluation, King understood “the immanence” of *agape* in human nature and history.

While at BU, King took six courses from L. Harold DeWolf, a Methodist minister and Professor of Systematic Theology from 1942 until 1965. DeWolf held the doctrine of the sanctity of human personality, which King

⁴ Martin Luther King, Jr., *Stride Toward Freedom* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1958), 80.

⁵ Allan Knight Chalmers, *They Shall Be Free* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1951), 18–20.

⁶ Cameron, 124.

⁷ Tex Sample, email letter to the author, July 9, 2008.

⁸ “Reinhold Niebuhr’s Ethical Dualism,” *The Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. 2, ed. Clayborne Carson (Berkeley: U of California P, 1994), 150–151; Walter G. Muelder, “Reinhold Niebuhr’s Conception of Man,” *The Personalist* 26 (July 1945), 292.

appropriated as a defense of the dignity and rights of all people.⁹ DeWolf also rejected the doctrine of human depravity, which ascribed goodness exclusively to God and denied the human capacity to do the good. In agreement with DeWolf, King affirmed that the love of God was active in the world, bringing hope to the human struggle against evil.¹⁰

King's theological convictions, as shaped by his Methodist mentors, informed his vision of the beloved community. This term was popular at the School of Theology in the 1950s, and it meant to act in such a way so that the Kingdom of God may come upon the earth, both now and in the future, as an ideal, regenerated society.¹¹ King developed the ideal of the beloved community in the Montgomery bus boycott. He had left Boston in 1954 to become the pastor of Dexter Avenue Baptist Church in Montgomery, Alabama. On December 5, 1955, the black community began the boycott against the segregationist policies of the city bus company. The people organized themselves as the Montgomery Improvement Association (MIA) and elected King as their president. In his address on August 11, 1956, entitled "The Birth of a New Age," King explained that the boycott was a means to an end, and the end was the creation of the beloved community, a society of reconciliation, redemption, and brotherhood.¹²

During the boycott, King read *Jesus and the Disinherited* by Howard Thurman (Hon'67). Thurman was the Dean of Marsh Chapel at BU from 1953 until 1965, and he was the first African-American to hold a deanship in a predominantly white American university. The following statement in Thurman's book decisively influenced King: "The religion of Jesus says to the disinherited: 'Love your enemy. Take the initiative in seeking ways by which you can have the experience of a common sharing of mutual worth and value. It may be hazardous, but you must do it.'"¹³ The themes of forgiveness, reconciliation, and brotherhood in Thurman's book came out of the black church tradition and fundamentally shaped King's conception of the beloved community.¹⁴

On October 3, 1956, King received a letter from Douglas E. Moore (STH'53), who was the pastor of Asbury Temple Methodist Church in Durham, North Carolina. Moore said that he had also desegregated buses in North Carolina and Virginia and explained that "I have consistently refused to move to the back of buses because I was a Christian and I have never used law as a threat against drivers but relied completely upon the force of

⁹ John J. Ansbro, *Martin Luther King, Jr.: The Making of a Mind* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1984), 19.

¹⁰ "L. Harold DeWolf, "Martin Luther King, Jr. as Theologian," *The Journal of the Interdenominational Center* 4 (Spring 1977), 3.

¹¹ John Cartwright, "Foundations of the Beloved Community," *Debate & Understanding* 1:3 (Fall 1977), 172.

¹² "The Birth of a New Age," *The Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. 3, 344.

¹³ Howard Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1949), 100.

¹⁴ Walter E. Fluker, *They Looked For a City* (Lanham, MD: UP of America, 1989), 110, 112.

love and Christian witness.”¹⁵ Moore went on to propose a “regional group which uses the power of nonviolence,” and such “a group would help give us direction on national movements.” He had “maintained for years that one-hundred well disciplined persons could break the backbone of segregated travel in North Carolina in less than a year.”¹⁶

The Montgomery bus boycott ended on December 20, 1956, when the city received the federal order from the Supreme Court to desegregate the bus system in *Gayle v. Browder*, 352 U.S. 903 (1956). As a result of Douglas Moore’s letter, King organized the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) in Montgomery on January 10–11, 1957. The purpose of SCLC was to implement the beloved community by direct, nonviolence action.¹⁷

The Student Sit-in Movement

One of the most important tactics in the Civil Rights movement was the sit-in, and the principal leaders were Methodist ministers and BU graduates. On June 23, 1957 Douglas Moore led a group of three black women and three black men into the Royal Ice Cream Parlor in Durham, where they ordered ice cream and milk shakes. They were all arrested and convicted of trespassing.¹⁸ Moore asked Floyd B. McKissick, a Durham attorney, to help him file a lawsuit against Royal Ice Cream, thereby beginning a six-year struggle to integrate the parlor.

At the same time, Moore and McKissick began planning a nationwide sit-in movement that would begin in Durham. To their surprise, however, on February 1, 1960, four black students from North Carolina A&T College entered Woolworth’s Department Store in downtown Greensboro and, after purchasing a few items, sat at the lunch counter and ordered coffee. Their sit-in was spontaneous and organized the previous evening. McKissick believed that their sit-in was premature, but students in Durham wanted to do the same thing.¹⁹

Both Moore and McKissick realized that the sit-in revolution had already begun, and so on February 8, 1960, they led 54 college students in a sit-in at Woolworth’s lunch counter in Durham, and the manager closed the counter. The students then went to Kress and Walgreen’s lunch counters, and managers in both stores also closed the counters. On the next day students in Charlotte conducted a sit-in, followed by those in other North Carolina cities as well.

During the Durham sit-ins, Moore invited Martin Luther King to come and participate in the new movement. King arrived on February 16, 1960, and with Moore visited the downtown lunch counters which had been closed

¹⁵ “From Douglas E. Moore,” *The Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. 3, 394.

¹⁶ “From Douglas E. Moore,” 395.

¹⁷ Francis L. Broderick and August Meier, eds., *Negro Protest Thought in the Twentieth Century* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1965), 272.

¹⁸ Osha Gray Davidson, *The Best of Enemies* (Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 2007), 88.

¹⁹ Davidson, 99.

in the previous week. In the evening he spoke at White Rock Baptist Church, declaring that the students had made the sit-in “a creative protest that is destined to be one of the glowing epics of our time.”²⁰ He emphasized the need to go to jail and to suffer in a righteous cause in order to arouse the sleepy conscience of the nation. King legitimated the sit-in movement and concluded with a mandate: “Go out with the attitude that God is with us and we have cosmic companionship.”²¹

The most influential leader in the sit-in movement was James M. Lawson, Jr. (STH’60). He was a third generation Methodist minister and a pacifist, who spent more than a year in two federal prisons for violating the Selective Service Act, during the Korean War, and three years as a missionary in India where he immersed himself in the philosophy of nonviolence developed by Mohandas K. Gandhi. Lawson returned home from India in 1956 and in the following year, at the invitation of Martin Luther King, joined the Civil Rights movement. As the southern field secretary of the Fellowship of Reconciliation (FOR), Lawson settled in Nashville, Tennessee and enrolled in Vanderbilt Divinity School as only the second African American student in the history of the school. In the spring of 1958, Lawson toured southern black colleges promoting Gandhian nonviolent action and thereby paving the way for the sit-in movement.²²

In early September, 1958, Lawson began a series of Tuesday night workshops on nonviolence at Clark Memorial Methodist Church in Nashville, and local college students attended. He taught the power of love, as opposed to anger and hatred, and he illustrated with the story of Jesus, refusing to retaliate against a hostile crowd that threatened to throw him off a cliff (Luke 4:29–30). He used “the example of John Wesley, attacked by mobs who wanted to rough him up, who deliberately faced down the leader of his opponents and converted him so that the mob’s rage was stilled, and the leader said, No harm will come to this man.”²³ One student participant has recalled that Lawson emphasized the beloved community as the Kingdom of God on earth whose “movement is as inexorable, as irresistible, as the flow of the river toward the sea.”²⁴

Lawson instructed the students on how to respond to cruelty. When assaulted, they were to resist anger and hatred, and affirm themselves as children of God. Instead of retaliating physically, they were to fall down, roll up to protect their internal organs, and take the blows.²⁵ Their refusal to retaliate would disorient the assailants, provoke their moral insights, and cause them to cease their attacks. These training sessions lasted for more than a year, and the students conducted a test sit-in at Harvey’s Department Store on

²⁰ Clayborne Carson, ed., “A Creative Protest,” *The Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.* vol. 5 (Berkeley: U of California P, 2005), 368.

²¹ “A Creative Protest,” 370.

²² Edwin King, email letter to the author, July 7, 2008.

²³ David Halberstam, *The Children* (New York: Random House, 1998), 78.

²⁴ John Lewis, *Walking with the Wind* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1998), 87.

²⁵ Lewis, 93.

November 28, 1959, followed by another one at Cain-Sloan on December 5.

On February 3, 1960, Douglas Moore spoke with Lawson by telephone and urged him to speed up his plans to desegregate Woolworth, in light of the Greensboro sit-in two days earlier. On Friday evening, February 12, Lawson presided over the first mass meeting of the sit-in movement at First Baptist Church, and he gave instructions to the 575 student volunteers. On the next day the students entered Woolworth's lunch counter, as well as those at other stores, ordered food and beverages, and were denied service. On the following two Saturdays, the students resumed their sit-ins at downtown stores, but on the 27th at Woolworth they were attacked by enraged whites, beating and spitting on them, and putting out cigarettes on their backs.²⁶ A local judge ordered criminal charges for the students' disorderly conduct, and the police arrested 81. The press identified Lawson as the instigator.

On March 3, Vanderbilt University Chancellor Harvie Branscomb expelled Lawson from the Divinity School for eating in the campus dining room, playing intramural football, participating in school activities, and for breaking a rule banning disorderly assemblies—a rule designed to control panty raids.²⁷ The next day Lawson was arrested at First Baptist Church for violating state trade and commerce laws, which justified closing the lunch counters.²⁸ Seventy-five students were also arrested with him.

Even though Lawson had widespread support locally and nationally, and the city dropped its charges two months later, he transferred to BU and finished his ministerial degree in the summer term. In light of the Lawson crisis BU established a Civil Rights Scholarship Fund for any student, black or white, expelled from college for participating in nonviolent protests against racial discrimination. Harold DeWolf informed Martin Luther King of the fund in his letter of May 10, 1960, and on June 16, King replied, stating that he would pass the information on to other expelled students. King also said that "I am very glad to know that Jim Lawson is at Boston University. It is quite a tribute to Boston University that in spite of all of the other offers that came to Jim from other schools he chose to complete his education there. I can assure you that the great role that BU is playing in this whole struggle is most encouraging and consoling."²⁹

In the spring of 1960, the sit-ins spread across all the southern states except Mississippi, leading Douglas Moore to comment: "If Woolworth and other stores think that this is just another panty raid, they haven't had their sociologists in the field recently."³⁰ Ella Baker, SCLC executive director, wanted to organize the students into an independent reform movement, and so she set up the founding conference of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) in Raleigh, North Carolina on April 16–18, 1960. James

²⁶ Paul K. Conkin, *Gone with the Ivy* (Knoxville: U of Tennessee P, 1985), 548.

²⁷ Conkin, 548, 552.

²⁸ Conkin, 554.

²⁹ "To L. Harold DeWolf," in *The Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. 5, 473.

³⁰ "New Trespass Laws Strongly Protested," *The Journal and Guide* March 5, 1960, 2.

Lawson delivered the keynote address, and he portrayed the sit-in movement as a witness against the “intimidation and violence of racial injustice,” and as a means to establish the beloved community.³¹ He also criticized the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) for concentrating on fund raising and lawsuits and not achieving fundamental social change. Inspired by Lawson’s address, the students adopted his philosophy of love and nonviolence in their charter. At the second SNCC conference on October 14, 1960, Lawson spoke on the theme “jail, no bail,” and he argued that the movement should not allow students to be released from jail. He viewed the sit-in movement as a nonviolent revolution against segregation, paternalism, and industrialism, which are dependent upon cheap labor and racial discrimination.³²

On December 5, 1960, the Supreme Court struck down racial segregation in bus terminals and restaurants in *Boynton v. Virginia*, 364 U.S. 454 (1960), and in the following spring the Freedom Rides began as a test of the ruling. On May 4, 1961, the Freedom Riders, most of whom were Lawson’s Nashville students, boarded two buses in Washington, D.C., and headed for New Orleans, Louisiana. At a rest stop in Rock Hill, South Carolina, they were beaten by enraged whites in the bus terminal. In Anniston, Alabama a white mob stopped one bus, firebombed it, and beat up fleeing riders. The other bus arrived in Birmingham, where police allowed whites carrying baseball bats and chains to beat the riders.

Lawson and his students, led by Diane Nash, organized another Freedom Ride, and on May 24, 1961, a double-decker Trailways bus with a police escort departed Montgomery bound for Jackson, Mississippi. On board Lawson conducted a workshop on nonviolence, and he said: “If we get knocked down too often, let’s kneel together where we are.”³³ After arriving in Jackson, the Freedom Riders were arrested, as a second bus was en route to the Mississippi capital where they were arrested as well. Meanwhile, Freedom Riders continued to travel to Jackson, so that the city and county jails were becoming filled. Lawson’s group refused bail and stayed in jail.

On orders of Governor Ross Barnett, 45 Freedom Riders were transferred to Parchman Farm, a 21,000 acre slave plantation and state penitentiary, and placed in the maximum security wing. They were ordered to strip naked and were hit with electric cattle prods and wrist breakers before being given T-shirts and shorts and placed in solitary confinement. Lawson counseled the students on how to survive in prison by relying on their own inner spiritual resources. His BU friend and fellow Methodist minister Edwin King (STH’61, ’63) was the first white clergyman to visit the imprisoned riders. King smuggled in “gift books by Gandhi concealed within Billy Graham jacket covers.”³⁴ Under Lawson’s inspiration, the imprisoned students main-

³¹ Broderick and Meier, 275.

³² Clayborne Carson, *In Struggle* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1981), 28.

³³ John Dittmer, *Local People* (Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1994), 90.

³⁴ Taylor Branch, *Pillar of Fire* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1999), 122.

tained the nonviolent discipline through prayer and freedom songs, until released on July 7, 1961.

The Boston School Desegregation Struggle

In 1954, the Supreme Court struck down the 1896 constitutional standard “separate but equal,” as applied to the public schools, in *Brown v. Board of Education*, 347 U.S. 453 (1954). All of the official agencies of the Methodist Church supported the *Brown* holding on the basis of the Social Creed.³⁵ Although *Brown* established a legal precedent for racial equality, it triggered a white racist backlash in the southern states as evident in the growth of the Ku Klux Klan (KKK), formation of White Citizens’ Councils, and in Mississippi the appointment of the Sovereignty Commission, a state-sponsored anti-civil rights spy agency.

Historically, Boston promoted free, inclusive, public education. In 1784, the city established a common school, and in 1789, Massachusetts required every town to support an elementary school. In the same year Boston created a School Committee to maintain the ideal of a common school for all children, regardless of the circumstances of their parents. However, Irish immigration created an Irish Catholic majority, which led to a class struggle with descendants of the Yankee elite and a minority of southern blacks who had settled in Roxbury and become socially and economically isolated.³⁶ For the Irish, who had mainly attended parochial schools, the School Committee was a means of political dominance, maintained by a patronage system that engaged in discriminatory hiring practices and unequal allocation of resources.³⁷ By 1961 it became clear that Boston had a dual school system.

On June 11, 1963, the NAACP confronted the School Committee and charged that 13 of the city schools were 90% black; most facilities were old, and all were underfunded. The NAACP accused the committee of *de facto* segregation. On June 15, the NAACP presented 14 grievances to the committee, which rejected them and refused to hold a public hearing on the matter. Three days later the NAACP conducted its first boycott of the Boston public schools.

On election day, November 5, 1963, Louise Day Hicks (SED’52, LAW’55), incumbent chairperson of the School Committee, won reelection with 128,000 votes. Hicks interpreted her victory as voter rejection of the NAACP charges. She responded to the NAACP with a commitment to neighborhood schools, as those of whites only, and by a vigorous opposition to “forcible busing.” Hicks said that “Boston schools are a scapegoat for those who have failed to solve the housing, economic, and social problems

³⁵ Walter G. Muelder, *Methodism and Society in the Twentieth Century* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1961), 238–239.

³⁶ George R. Metcalf, *From Little Rock to Boston* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1983), 197.

³⁷ Preston Williams and Robin Lovin, “Rights and Remedies: A Study of Desegregation in Boston,” *The Journal of Religious Ethics* 6:2 (1978), 139.

of the black citizen.”³⁸

Three days after the election BU theological students assembled on Beacon Hill to protest the racist policies of the School Committee. As I reported in a letter to my parents, “We picketed for two-and-a-half hours in front of the school committee building to express, or symbolize, white guilt over segregation.”³⁹ The march took place in a downpour of three inches of rain, and the press labeled our demonstration a “penitential procession.”

In February, 1964, the NAACP planned its second school boycott, and the planning sessions took place at Freedom House in Roxbury. I wrote in another letter that

Last Friday night, I participated in the first planning session for the proposed school stay-out, conducted by the Boston NAACP, which will be scheduled for February 26. Unless the Boston School Committee recognizes the *de facto* segregation in the public schools and negotiates with the NAACP, the sit-out will occur as scheduled. I will probably teach classes on civil rights and education.⁴⁰

On February 26, 1964, twenty thousand black and white students boycotted the public schools. This number was 22% of a total school population of 92,844 and 11,740 more than that of the 1963 boycott. About 12,000 attended freedom schools, where they heard lectures on African American contributions to American society.⁴¹

While the boycott was successful, the struggle against the School Committee continued. In April, 1965, Gilbert H. Caldwell (STH’58), a Methodist minister and Massachusetts member of SCLC, invited Martin Luther King to come to Boston and help protest the racism of the School Committee.⁴² King came and on April 22 he addressed the Massachusetts legislature on school imbalances and *de facto* segregation. He also visited schools in Roxbury and Dorchester with clergy and marched to the Boston Common for a rally led by Caldwell. As King spoke on that cold, rainy day, the crowd sang, “Will you follow Louise Day Hicks or Martin Luther King?”⁴³ In response to King’s speeches and to civil rights protests the legislature passed the Racial Imbalance Act on August 16, 1965, forbidding non-white enrollments of more than 50% and making Massachusetts the only state to outlaw *de facto* segregation in the public schools.

Protest Against White Supremacy

In the major southern campaigns of the Civil Rights movement the critical leadership came from Methodist ministers. The Birmingham campaign aimed to break the city’s rigid segregation with a combination of economic

³⁸ Jerrold Hickey, “Consumed by What Sustained Her,” *Bostonia* (Winter 2003–2004), 9.

³⁹ Richard A. Hughes, “Letters Home: Reflections from Boston University, 1963–1964,” *Focus* (Fall 2003), 6.

⁴⁰ Hughes, 7.

⁴¹ Richard Neff, “Boycott Thins Boston Schools,” *The Christian Science Monitor* (February 27, 1964), 1.

⁴² Gilbert H. Caldwell, “Drum Major for Justice,” *Focus* (Spring 2008), 17.

⁴³ J. Anthony Lukas, *Common Ground* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1985), 129–130.

boycotts and public demonstrations during the 1963 Easter shopping season. James Lawson conducted nonviolence training sessions for volunteers who could survive ten days in jail. If they could, then they had to sign the Birmingham Pledge, which Lawson had prepared. The pledge comprised vows of discipline, nonviolence, and justice. The campaign achieved a settlement on May 10, 1963, when the city agreed to downtown desegregation, non-discriminatory hiring in the business and industrial sectors, release of all protesters from jail, and a black-white communication network.

Two days later in Jackson, Mississippi Medgar Evers, head of the state NAACP, proposed a bi-racial committee to work for goals like those in Birmingham, but Mayor Allen Thompson angrily rejected Evers' idea. Evers' proposal came out of the Jackson Movement, which was a local grass roots organization that had worked to desegregate public facilities.

The most visible and influential member of the Jackson Movement was Edwin King, a native, white Mississippian. Born and raised in Vicksburg, King learned in the Methodist Youth Fellowship (MYF) to question the morality of segregation and white supremacy.⁴⁴ At BU, King was deeply influenced by Allan Chalmers' championing of racial justice and by Howard Thurman's rejection of hatred as death to the mind, spirit, and life with God.⁴⁵ In March, 1960, Paul Deats, Professor of Christian Social Ethics, asked King to take a leave of absence and go to Alabama, where sit-ins had become violent, and set up interracial meetings.⁴⁶ On March 31 and June 7 in Montgomery, King was arrested for his desegregation activities, on the 7th for eating with a black Methodist minister at the all-white Jefferson Davis Hotel. King was convicted of trespassing and sentenced to a week of hard labor.

At the urging of James Lawson, King accepted the chaplaincy at Tougaloo College in January, 1963. On May 28, 1963, Tougaloo students conducted a sit-in at Woolworth's lunch counter in Jackson, when a mob of 300 whites beat the protestors brutally for three hours and poured mustard, ketchup, sugar, and salt on them, while 90 policemen stood outside and watched. King was arrested, but Medgar Evers bailed him out of jail so he could attend the Mississippi Annual Conference on May 31. The conference stripped King of his ministerial credentials on orders of the White Citizens' Council by a vote of 89–85. Many conference delegates believed "that Edwin King had been lured astray temporarily by his Northern religious training at Boston University, where he had been captivated by the Negro pacifist James Lawson, mentor of the Nashville student movement."⁴⁷ At the recommendation of Lawson the Mississippi Conference of the Central Jurisdiction reinstated King's ministerial orders, making him its only white member.

⁴⁴ Edwin King, "Growing Up in Mississippi in a Time of Change," *Mississippi Writers*, vol. 2, ed. Dorothy Abbott (Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 1986), 379.

⁴⁵ Charles Marsh, *God's Long Summer* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1997), 122; Thurman, 88.

⁴⁶ Edwin King email.

⁴⁷ Branch, *Pillar of Fire*, 121–122.

Against the policy of the national NAACP the Jackson Movement continued nonviolent demonstrations, and in the spring of 1963 nearly 1,000 protesters, mainly children and college students, were arrested. They were placed in garbage trucks, transported to the "concentration camp-like" fairgrounds, and confined to animal pens.⁴⁸ Meals were served from large garbage cans. On June 12, Medgar Evers was assassinated, and after his funeral more than 5,000 mourners walked behind the cortege, singing hymns and freedom songs in defiance of the police order of silence. The police, equipped with shotguns, billy clubs, gas masks, dogs, fire trucks, and fire hoses confronted the mourners, who threw rocks and bottles at them. Police responded with beatings and arrests.

The police looked for and found Edwin King on the second floor of a Farish Street building, arresting him and dragging him feet-first down the steps to the street, where they put him in a garbage truck and drove to the fairgrounds with stops and jerks for his further battering. King was placed in the fairgrounds stockade, enclosed by barbed wire and surrounded by dogs.⁴⁹ He was forced to stand and stretch his arms on the wall for long periods of time with great tension and pain. He was bloodied, dirtied, covered with flies, and thirsty in the sweltering heat of 103 degrees, more afraid of pain than death. Unexpectedly, he was bailed out of the stockade.

The national NAACP wanted King expelled from the Jackson Movement for allegedly causing the riot after the Evers funeral march.⁵⁰ Allan Chalmers came to Jackson, and King spoke with him about the need for massive nonviolent action. At the time Chalmers headed the Legal Defense and Educational Fund of the NAACP, and he promised to help. However, the NAACP ended the Jackson demonstrations, preferring order to justice.

In order to resume nonviolent protests King initiated the program of interracial church visits. In Mississippi, the white church was the guardian of the soul of white supremacy. King hoped that the opening of the closed church doors would help open the closed society, and he believed that a Christian must give up white supremacy and live for outsiders and the oppressed.⁵¹ Organized church visits began in June, 1963, and the prime target was Galloway Methodist Church, the so-called "Cathedral of Mississippi Methodism." On June 12, 1961, the Galloway official board had resolved that ushers and greeters were to refuse entrance of any person, black or white, who intended to create "a breach of the peace."⁵² A second resolution had been passed on January 14, 1963, banning blacks from worshipping at Galloway. These resolutions had been passed on orders of the White Citizens' Council in reaction to the 1961 Freedom Rides. Ushers laughingly called themselves "The Color Guard."

⁴⁸ King, "Growing Up in Mississippi in a Time of Change," 380; Anne Moody, *Coming of Age in Mississippi* (New York: Dell, 1968), 281–282.

⁴⁹ King, "Growing Up in Mississippi in a Time of Change," 382.

⁵⁰ John R. Salter, Jr., *Jackson, Mississippi* (Hicksville, NY: Exposition Press, 1979), 219.

⁵¹ Marsh, 130–131.

⁵² W. J. Cunningham, *Agony at Galloway* (Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 1980), 3.

On June 10, two days before his assassination, Medgar Evers brought four black students to worship at Galloway, and they were all rejected. When W. B. Selah, the Galloway pastor of 19 years learned of their rejection, he promptly resigned on the grounds that all were brothers and sisters in Christ. W. J. Cunningham was appointed pastor in late summer, 1963, and on the Saturday before he was to preach his first sermon Edwin King called to say he was bringing blacks to worship either in the morning or on the following Sunday.⁵³

Police arrests began on October 6, 1963, when three black Tougaloo college students tried to worship at Capital Street Methodist Church. The students were charged with disturbing worship and refusing to leave private property. They were convicted and sentenced to one year in prison and fined \$1000, but the Women's Division of the Methodist Board of Missions, which supported the student sit-in movement, posted bond. Church visits and arrests continued, so that by the following spring 40 had been arrested and ushers had prepared statements on segregation as God's design.

The climactic visit occurred on Easter Sunday, March 29, 1964, when James K. Mathews (STH'38), the white Methodist bishop of Boston, and Charles Golden, black bishop of the Central Jurisdiction and Mississippi native, came to Galloway to worship and were turned away. Although the pastor was willing to relax the closed door policy, Nat Rogers, the chairman of the board and chief usher of the morning, defended the all-white form of worship and escorted the bishops off the property. The bishops were not arrested, but they left a statement explaining that "New Testament faith assures us that this God-given privilege [of worship] is open to *all* people, without regard to their race or color."⁵⁴

By June, 1964, Edwin King's church visit program had stalled. Black churches were being burned at a rate of at least one church a week, as a means of white Mississippians to purge the powers of "atheistic communism" that drove the Civil Rights movement.⁵⁵ One of the first to burn was Mt. Zion Methodist Church in Neshoba County, which had answered the request of Bishop Golden that all black churches be open to the movement. Mt. Zion served as a freedom school and black voter registration center. Edwin King channeled his anger over the church fires into the voter registration drive of Freedom Summer 1964, by training volunteers at the Oxford, Ohio training center and preparing them for the possibility of death in Mississippi.

Shortly after the bishops visit to Galloway, Harold DeWolf offered BU's Mugar Memorial Library for Martin Luther King's papers, and King accepted the offer. DeWolf also volunteered to help in the campaigns. Since the St. Augustine, Florida campaign was in progress, and King had been jailed there, he called DeWolf on June 21, 1964, and asked for volunteers.

⁵³ Cunningham, 53.

⁵⁴ Cunningham, 58.

⁵⁵ Edwin King, "Christianity in Mississippi," *To Redeem A Nation*, eds. Thomas R. West and James W. Mooney (St. James, NY: Brandywine Press, 1993), 143.

DeWolf organized a carload of four BU professors to drive a 1,000 miles to St. Augustine. Their endeavor has been reported in the narrative history of the movement but with one error. Neil Richardson is identified as a church historian, posing as an archaeologist.⁵⁶ In reality, H. Neil Richardson was an archaeologist and Professor of Old Testament. The others were Paul Deats and Albert Beisel, Professor of Constitutional Law.

SCLC sought an agreement in St. Augustine like that in Birmingham. DeWolf and his BU colleagues attempted to mediate between white business leaders and civil rights workers and establish a bi-racial committee to resolve black grievances. On one evening a white crowd, frenzied by a KKK rally at the old Slave Market, attacked marchers, who were mostly teen-agers. "Harold DeWolf, too frightened to move or speak, saw in front of him what became an indelible slow-motion memory of a Negro girl slugged to the ground, a foot drawn back, and a boy draping himself over her head in time to absorb the kick."⁵⁷ Martin Luther King complained that the KKK was making a "last-ditch stand against the nonviolent movement" with savage violence.⁵⁸ He wanted a bi-racial committee, but negotiations for it by the BU professors collapsed.

On July 2, 1964, President Lyndon B. Johnson signed into law the Civil Rights Act, which outlawed segregation in schools, public accommodations, federal assistance, and employment. However, the Civil Rights Act did not provide the right to vote, and consequently in mid-December, 1964, SCLC chose Selma, Alabama as the site to achieve that right. SNCC had been conducting voter registration drives in Selma since 1962, and violent resistance had come from Sheriff Jim Clark's "citizens' posse," white racists whom he had deputized and armed with clubs.⁵⁹ The Selma campaign began on January 2, 1965, and culminated in a crisis on February 26, when Jimmy Lee Jackson died as a result of being shot by a state trooper. Martin Luther King announced that a march from Selma to Montgomery would take place on Sunday, March 7 to memorialize Jackson and to present grievances to Governor George Wallace.

Marchers departed from Brown Chapel on that Sunday afternoon and walked toward the Edmund Pettus Bridge, where they were confronted, attacked, and brutally beaten by state troopers, both mounted and on foot, as well as Clark's "posse," carrying clubs, bull whips, and hoses laced with barbed wire, while troopers shot toxic tear gas. King was absent from the march that day, thereafter known as "Bloody Sunday," but in the evening he sent telegrams to religious leaders across the country, asking them to come to Selma and march with him to Montgomery on Tuesday, March 9. That march, consisting of 2,000 with 200 religious leaders, was aborted at the

⁵⁶ Branch, 376.

⁵⁷ Branch, 378.

⁵⁸ Clayborne Carson, ed. *The Autobiography of Martin Luther King, Jr.* (New York: Warner Books, 2001), 240.

⁵⁹ Lewis, 234.

bridge due to a federal injunction issued by Judge Frank M. Johnson, Jr. in Montgomery. His purpose was to conduct a hearing on the protesters' grievances. On Tuesday evening James Reeb, a white Unitarian minister from Boston, who had walked with Gilbert Caldwell in the march earlier that day, was brutally beaten into unconsciousness outside the Silver Moon Café in Selma.⁶⁰ Two days later Reeb died, triggering a national outpouring of grief.

In Boston, BU theological students were making plans to travel to Selma, including nonviolence training at Freedom House in Roxbury. Altogether, 75 students from the Boston area road two buses to Selma. At Brown Chapel we participated in mass meetings, which included preaching, singing, and the Holy Communion. From the chapel we marched downtown to confront Sheriff Clark, wearing a military uniform and holding a billy club, accompanied by heavily armed state troopers, his "posse," and hostile jeering crowds. My partner in the mass meetings and marches was Lila Solomon, a 12-year old girl who had been arrested seven times. In jail Lila and the other black children were beaten with baseball bats and burned with electric cattle prods by the state police.⁶¹

Judge Johnson completed his hearing, ruling that civil disobedience was compatible with law, and approved the march to Montgomery. Tex Sample (STH'60, GRS'64), social action director of the Massachusetts Council of Churches, organized about 200 clergy and laity for the flight to Alabama and participation in the march. Their motivation was grief for their slain colleague and friend James Reeb.⁶² As a result of the Selma campaign, President Johnson signed the Voting Rights Act into law on August 6, 1965.

Poor People's Campaign

Shortly after the signing of the Voting Rights Act, the Watts section of Los Angeles erupted into riots, convincing Martin Luther King that civil rights legislation had ended southern white brutality but not urban black despair.⁶³ He believed that the riots were a revolt of the underprivileged against the privileged, and he began to emphasize the connection between racism and poverty. In January, 1966, he opened the Chicago campaign in order to challenge housing inequality and economic exploitation, which he compared to the internal colonialism of the Belgian Congo.⁶⁴

During the Chicago campaign, King was speaking out against the Vietnam War, and his speeches culminated in his address at Riverside Church in New York City, entitled "A Time to Break Silence," on April 4, 1967. King repudiated the American policy in Vietnam and argued that the war drained

⁶⁰ Jack Mendelsohn, *The Martyrs* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), 167–168.

⁶¹ Richard A. Hughes, "Letters Home: Reflections from Boston University, 1964–1965," *Focus* (Fall 2004), 9.

⁶² Tex Sample, *Earthy Mysticism* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2008), 51–52.

⁶³ Martin Luther King, Jr., *Where Do We Go From Here?* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1967), 41.

⁶⁴ Taylor Branch, *At Canaan's Edge* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2006), 407.

resources from the Johnson administration's War on Poverty. King declared: "When machines and computers, profit motives, and property rights are considered more important than people, the giant triplets of racism, materialism, and militarism are incapable of being conquered."⁶⁵ He called for a true revolution of values based upon fairness and justice, leading to a democratic socialism as an alternative to capitalism and Marxism. A democratic socialism would be the means to implement the beloved community.⁶⁶

In November, 1967, King decided to mount a massive protest in Washington, D.C. on behalf of the poor and disinherited, black and white, Native American and Hispanic. This would be the Poor People's Campaign for an economic bill of rights, guaranteeing a "right to live, to have a job and income." King planned to recruit 3,000 people from ten cities and five rural areas and train them for demonstrations in Washington.

At the invitation of James Lawson, King agreed to support the 1,300 black sanitation workers' strike in Memphis, Tennessee, which had begun on February 12, 1968. Lawson told King that the Poor People's Campaign could begin in Memphis.⁶⁷ Lawson was the pastor of Centenary Methodist Church and chairman of the black churches and community support group called Community on the Move for Equality (COME). He complained that the strikers suffered "low wages, impossible working demands without compensation, racist behavior and plantation politics and economics."⁶⁸ In spite of widespread community support for the strikers, negotiations failed and the city refused to settle.

Martin Luther King arrived in Memphis on March 18 and, speaking to a crowd of 25,000, called for a one-day general strike. He returned on April 3 to speak at the Masonic Temple, and he suggested a strategy for the strikers: "Always anchor our direct action with the power of economic withdrawal."⁶⁹ On the evening of the next day King was assassinated at the Lorraine Motel, and Lawson released the following statement: "It would be a compounding of this death if now Negro people or white people around our country should despair and decide that now is the time to let loose an orgy of violence. It would not be a tribute to Dr. King but a denial of his life and work."⁷⁰

Conclusion

Known as the "School of the Prophets," the BU School of Theology exerted fundamental social change in the Civil Rights movement through the efforts of its students, faculty, and graduates. Throughout its history the

⁶⁵ Martin Luther King, Jr., *A Testament of Hope*, ed. James Washington (San Francisco: Harper, 1986), 240.

⁶⁶ Kenneth L. Smith, "The Radicalization of Martin Luther King, Jr.," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 26:2 (Spring 1989), 278.

⁶⁷ Branch, *At Canaan's Edge*, 718.

⁶⁸ James M. Lawson, Jr., "The Church Organizing for Direct Action," *Journal of the Society for Common Insights* 2:2 (1978), 29.

⁶⁹ King, *A Testament of Hope*, 282.

⁷⁰ Cited in Joan Turner Beifuss, *At the River I Stand* (Brooklyn, NY: Carlson, 1989), 301.

school taught the sanctity of all persons, regardless of their social, racial, gender, or national differences, as well as the love of God at work in the world with the human struggles for freedom and justice. Martin Luther King exemplified those principles clearly, consistently, and effectively.

The school also transmitted a civil rights consciousness in its oral tradition across several student generations. This consciousness was shaped, in particular, by the 1950s affirmative action admissions policy, the charismatic teaching of Allan Knight Chalmers, and the spiritual presence of Howard Thurman. Students, both black and white, internalized the school's civil rights consciousness and willingly volunteered for protests, demonstrations, sit-ins, and related activities. Student participation was motivated by the conviction that social change could be achieved by working together with God in the world.