

In March of 1960, students of the six institutions of the Atlanta University Center – Atlanta University, Clark college, Morehouse College, Morris Brown College, Spelman College and the Interdenominational Theological Seminary, joined with students across the south in taking up the battle of civil rights. The Atlanta Student Movement began with the publishing of a full- page advertisement in the Atlanta newspapers, entitled “An Appeal for Human Rights”. In this “Appeal”, students set forth certain grievances, rights and aspirations. They made clear their dissatisfaction with the status quo conditions of segregation and discrimination, and the slow pace at which inherent human and civil rights were being meted out to blacks. On March 15, 1960, the students put into action their declaration “... to use every legal and non-violent means at our disposal to secure full citizenship rights in this great society ...”.

Atlanta soon became the sit-in center of the south. The technique of mass action couched in a texture of non-violence quickened the pace of racial desegregation, and changed the course of history in Atlanta, Georgia, the South and this nation. The Atlanta students brought innovations to their protest movement. In addition to sit-ins at eating facilities, they held kneel-ins at churches on Sundays and sit-ins at theatrical performances. They organized picket lines at retail stores to promote hiring of blacks in other than menial capacities. Student leaders in Atlanta, serving as their own attorney, filed and won a lawsuit desegregating public recreational facilities in Atlanta. The Atlanta students actually initiated the first “Freedom Rides” in December, 1960 when they tested segregation laws in a demonstration using public transportation to travel simultaneously to four southern states. The student leaders published a newsletter, “The Student Movement and You” which was distributed to the community at large. In fact, it was the superb journalistic skills of some students and the newsworthiness of the student’s activities that sustained the Atlanta Inquirer newspaper in its formative years.

During the struggle in the early sixties, many students made supreme sacrifices. These included delays in completing education, physical beatings and sometimes, isolation from family and friends. Through it all, they persevered, and the victory was won. Atlanta now enjoys a reputation as an international city and is the economic, political and social capital of the South.

It has been 40 years since the publication of “An Appeal for Human Rights” and the beginning of the Atlanta Student Movement. These images and memorabilia will certainly serve as a reminder of our past. Hopefully, they will also serve as a catalyst for reflection and acknowledgement that the struggle for economic, political and social parity continues on a new level with unforeseen battles and ramifications. For this reason, we present a second “Appeal”, to stimulate, provoke and challenge this generation of students and community leaders to examine the current issues and heed the call to action for positive change.



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