

SAMUEL WOODROW WILLIAMS, CATALYST FOR BLACK ATLANTANS, 1946-1970

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## INTRODUCTION

Much has been written about the oppression and struggles of Afro-Americans, and many Black leaders have gained national attention for their work in the Civil Rights Movement. However, the work done by men of wisdom, energy, and courage on local levels has often been by-passed. In view of this fact, a full account of the Civil Rights Movement has not yet been written; therefore, the movement is not fully understood. This drama, however, could be better understood if the roles played by men on the local stage were included. It is, therefore, the intent of this research to present a biographical profile of Samuel Woodrow Williams and analyze the outstanding work he did in civil rights in Atlanta from 1946 to his death in 1970. He worked through the church, and through social and community organizations to build a better community in Atlanta. Prior to this study, the account of the work done by Williams was available only in scattered form in newspapers and magazines. This study proposes to present a condensed compilation of the work done by Williams in civil rights as he earnestly and unselfishly endeavored to improve human conditions for Black Atlantans.

Most of the material used for this research came from sermons, speeches, and other materials found in the Sam Williams Collection located in the Interdenominational Theological Seminary Archives, Atlanta, Georgia. A relatively new innovation in research, oral history, mostly taped interviews, furnished much valuable information. Among those interviewed were students, colleagues, church members and community leaders. The

students include Dr. Robert L. Smothers, Dr. Robert Perdue, Rev. William Guy, Dr. Samuel Cook and Mr. Preston Yancy. Church members were Arthur Richardson, Dr. C. A. Bacote, Mr. Clarence Coleman, and Dr. Linwood Graves. Community leaders include Rev. William Holmes Border, Rev. B. J. Johnson, Sr., Nathaniel Welch, Mr. Ivan Allen, Mr. John Calhoun, Mrs. Eliza Paschall, Rev. Howard Creecy, Sr., Mr. Jesse Hill, Mr. Q. V. Williamson, and Mrs. Eunice Cooper.

The research is divided into four chapters. The first contains an account of Sam Williams' life and introduces him as one of the catalysts for Black Atlantans. "Catalyst" is defined as a substance which changes reaction rate but remains chemically unaffected throughout the reaction. "Catalyst" is a fitting description for Williams because in the midst of violence, hatred, segregation and discrimination, Sam Williams remained steadfast in his love and Christian faith as he worked unstintingly to improve race relations in Atlanta. His work through the church, the NAACP, the Atlanta Summit Leadership Conference, and the Community Relations Commission will be found in chapters two, three and four.

## CHAPTER I

The achievements of Samuel Woodrow Williams span the areas of religion, education and social service. A Baptist Minister, professor of philosophy and religion, and a community leader, Williams used his talents of leadership, reasoning and organization for the improvement of the conditions of deprived and oppressed people. He worked unceasingly in Atlanta to build a community based on honesty and truth and contributed much to the struggle for black equality and the elimination of white racism from 1946 to his untimely death in 1970.

By Williams' birth in 1912 the chains of slavery had long been broken, yet the rights and privileges of blacks were still denied them due to disenfranchisement, lynching and Jim Crow legislation. In that year some bewildered Blacks turned to the Democratic Party for hope since its Presidential candidate, Woodrow Wilson, promised them fair treatment if elected.<sup>1</sup> While many Blacks were confident that Wilson would support their cause, others opposed this white Southerner; among them was William E. B. DuBois, the most capable spokesman of militant Negro opinion. Despite this, an unprecedented number of Blacks voted for Wilson. After Wilson's inauguration, however, conditions only grew worse: segregation was introduced into several federal departments, most Blacks were phased out of civil service, and lynching increased.<sup>2</sup> Blacks throughout the United States clamored with

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<sup>1</sup>C. G. Woodson, review of Wilson, the Road to the White House, by Arthur S. Link, in Journal of Negro History, July 1947, p. 368.

<sup>2</sup>Kathleen L. Wolgemuth, "Woodrow Wilson and Federal Segregation," The Journal of Negro History 44 (April, 1959): 158; Arthur S. Link, "The Negro as a Factor in the Campaign of 1912," The Journal of Negro History 32 (January, 1947): 87.

disappointment, for their hopes had been shattered. In this atmosphere of widespread segregation, discrimination and frustration, Samuel Woodrow Williams was born in Sparkman, Arkansas, on February 20, 1912, the first born of Arthur Williams and the former Annie Willie Butler.<sup>3</sup>

Samuel Williams grew up in Sparkman, Little Rock, and Chicot County, Arkansas. He was an all American boy, who loved to fish and hunt. As a young boy, Sam's one ambition was to become a better marksman than his father. At the age of 15 his mission was accomplished.<sup>4</sup> Williams remained an avid huntsman throughout his adult life and his friends knew it. The day that Sam Williams departed this life he received a gift, The Outdoorsman, from one of his former students, Dr. Robert L. Smothers.<sup>5</sup> His most treasured hobby, however, was reading. Young Sam owned a vast collection of books that numbered in the thousands, and he read all of them. The boy tried to play baseball and when he was in high school, he made the basketball team. But young Sam did not pursue athletics because extensive practice time would prevent him from reading books.<sup>6</sup>

Born into a family which supported and encouraged him as he struggled to adjust to an environment which did not, Williams evidenced in his family traits which would later characterize his work in the Black community. Samuel Williams' family consisted of a father, mother, four brothers and three sisters. He was truly a "Big Brother," and all of his brothers and

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<sup>3</sup>Rev. Samuel Williams, "Letter to Rev. E. Butler," 2 July 1969, The Sam Williams Collection, Interdenominational Theological Seminary Archives, Atlanta, Georgia.

<sup>4</sup>S. B. Williams, to Rosa Wells, Atlanta, 19 March 1975, personal letter about Samuel Williams, Chicago, Illinois.

<sup>5</sup>Robert L. Smothers, Professor of Educational Psychology, Atlanta University, interview held 50 Chestnut Street SW, Atlanta, Georgia, 2 May 1975.

<sup>6</sup>S. B. Williams to Rosa Wells, 19 March 1975.

and sisters respected him. Young Sam never ran away from a fight nor did he ever start one. His mother always called him to verify any decisions because he never lied for himself or anyone else. "His word was like that of the Meads and Persians (with his parents and the town people both Black and White); it altered not." Samuel Williams was destined to be a minister from the very beginning. He loved, lived and died by his Bible.<sup>7</sup>

Young Sam encountered much segregation during his early years in Sparkman, Little Rock, and Chicot County, Arkansas. In Sparkman, when he was less than 10 years of age, his parents sent him to the drugstore for some needed items. After he had ordered the items, the clerk asked if that was all he wanted. He replied, "yes, that is all I want." The clerk insisted that the boy say, "yes sir," or he would kick him out of the store. Refusing to adhere to the clerk's demands, Young Sam left the drugstore without uttering a word. When he related this incident to his parents, he was amazed that they approved of his action.<sup>8</sup>

Another "awakening experience" of segregation came in the same community when Williams realized that he was attending school in the same building that he attended church. The children used their laps for writing; the school term ran from three to four months; and there was only one teacher in the school. Young Sam's father, Arthur Williams, was a very concerned and sensitive father who wanted the best for his children. He moved his family, therefore, to Little Rock in search of an improved system of education for his children and a job in order to support his family. Failing to secure a sufficient job in Little Rock, Arthur Williams and his family migrated to

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<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

<sup>8</sup>Rev. Samuel Williams, "We Are Involved," The Sam Williams Collection.

Chicot County, Arkansas within a year.<sup>9</sup>

Unlike Dallas County there was a school building for Negroes in Chicot County, even though it was poorly equipped with approximately six teachers employed. This school was definitely unequal to the one whites attended. The white children were transported to and from school at public expense while the "Negro" children walked. Speaking of his school in Chicot County, Williams stated that:

The Negro children's school building was located in a low place and often we had to wade water knee deep after rains to reach the building. I can remember having carried many smaller children to the building myself. In terms of the courses offered, there was no comparison to be made. We had no manual arts shop, equipment or teachers. We had no science department, laboratory, or teacher. The Latin teacher taught me my high school science. What was the science equipment? We had to use a textbook, a magnifying glass purchased at the dime store and insects we caught in the fields. This was the "Science" taught in the school that was said to be the best "for Negroes" in that county.<sup>10</sup>

Sam Williams completed high school in Chicot County under the system of segregation, and he had another shocking experience upon his return there after having attended Philander Smith College in Little Rock, Arkansas for the 1932-33 school year. Sam Williams recalled that: "I had lived here for eight years and there is not one white boy whom I knew personally--know in the sense that I can call him by his first name and he can call me by mine."<sup>11</sup>

Blacks and Whites in this little town had been living in complete spiritual and psychological isolation. Sam Williams wished to remove the barrier, but he knew not what to do. After seriously thinking of possibilities, he tried the following: Williams had seen the photograph and address of Billy, a white boy, in the local newspaper, so he wrote a letter to

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<sup>9</sup>Ibid.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid.



him, expressing how their living in isolation had troubled him. Since both Williams and Billy worked in the youth departments of their respective churches, Sam Williams suggested that at a scheduled time the two youth groups assemble together and discuss common problems of youth. The letter brought only the threat of lynching to Sam Williams, but no serious trouble developed.

In 1934 Williams came to Atlanta, Georgia and enrolled in the Morehouse College. While a student at Morehouse, he affiliated with the Greater Mount Calvary Baptist Church pastored by Rev. B. J. Johnson, Sr. Sam Williams resided in the home of the Pastor for the three years he studied at Morehouse College. He worked faithfully in Rev. Johnson's church; in fact, Williams was licensed to preach and ordained at the Greater Mount Calvary Baptist Church. Johnson described Williams as a "provocative minister" who was well versed in the scripture and believed that the gospel of Jesus Christ was supreme and that it had its meaning in society.<sup>13</sup>

Believing that if man is to become a good leader and statesman knowledge was the major prerequisite, Rev. Sam Williams worked hard and he received a Bachelor of Arts Degree in Philosophy from Morehouse College in 1937. He continued his studies at Howard University from 1938-1942, studying under two noted Black men, Drs. Alain Locke and Benjamin E. Mays. Dr. Locke, an eminent philosopher and educator, was the first Black to receive a Rhodes Scholarship. The Rhodes Scholarship is to the academic world what the Nobel Peace Prize is to international peace. Dr. Benjamin E. Mays, minister,

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<sup>12</sup>Ibid.

<sup>13</sup>Rev. B. J. Johnson, Sr., Pastor of Greater Mount Calvary Baptist Church, taped interview held 1211 Hunter Street NW, Atlanta, Georgia, 10 May 1975.

educator and leader, served as President of Morehouse College for 27 years. It was during Mays' Administration that Morehouse became known as the "Oxford of the South," because of the quality of leadership and academic demands Mays placed on both the faculty and the student body. The achievements of these two men are illustrative of the caliber of training Sam Williams received. The Bachelor of Divinity and the Master of Arts Degrees were conferred upon Williams by the faculty and administration of Howard University in 1941 and 1942 respectively. Post graduate work was done by Rev. Sam Williams at the University of Chicago.<sup>14</sup> In recognition of his outstanding work in education and religion, the Arkansas Baptist College bestowed an honorary Doctorate of Divinity Degree upon him in 1960.

Once Williams became equipped for leadership, he worked as Chaplain and Professor of Philosophy and Sociology at Alcorn College from 1942-1944 and served as Chaplain and Professor of Social Science at Alabama A & M College in Normal, Alabama, from 1944-1946. In 1946 Sam Williams returned to Atlanta and assumed the role of Chairman of the Department of Philosophy at Morehouse.<sup>15</sup>

Samuel Williams made an indelible impression on everyone with whom he came in contact while at Morehouse. Commenting on Williams' efforts in higher education, Dr. Benjamin Mays, President Emeritus of Morehouse College, pointed out that Williams' performance as an instructor at Morehouse was not unique in that any good teacher should work cooperatively with his colleagues in an effort to produce contributing, quality leaders of society.<sup>16</sup> He added, however, that the distinguishing features of Sam Williams, the educator,

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<sup>14</sup>Rev. Samuel W. Williams, "Biographical Data," The Sam Williams Collection.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid.

<sup>16</sup>Dr. Benjamin E. Mays, President of Atlanta Board of Education, taped interview held 3316 Pamlico Drive SW, Atlanta, Georgia, 23 November 1974.

were:

--His preciseness and exactness, requiring the students to define what they had in mind and developing it into a very fine point! He was so meticulous that many Morehouse students wanted to duck his class. He trained his students to develop their minds to the point of precision, so that in discussions, the student could defend himself or protect himself in any intellectual combat or debate.<sup>17</sup>

The great demands that Sam Williams put on his students did not make him the most popular professor at Morehouse College, but his students recognized the fact that Williams had a brilliant mind. Even though "his tongue could be sharp and biting, his commitment to the life of the mind and social justice was inexhaustible."<sup>18</sup> They respected and admired this educational giant. His former students, whether they received good grades or poor grades, concurred with Dr. Mays' contention of Williams' efficiency and his demanding nature. The students gained much from this lover of Plato, Aristotle, Kant, and Socrates, and many of them have successfully achieved their goals and are now holders of positions which require the serious analytical thinking their mentor tried to develop.

In education, religion, government or social service, as Rev. Williams before them, many of his students in their own way contributed tremendously to the cause of human justice, brotherly love, and quality living for all men. Among his noted students are Dr. Samuel DuBois Cook, President of Dillard University, Rev. William Guy, Pastor of Friendship Baptist Church, Preston Yancy, Instructor of English and Humanities, Virginia Union University, Dr. Robert L. Smothers, Professor of Psychology, Atlanta University, Dr. Robert S. Perdue, Chairman of the History Department at Spelman College, Dr.

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<sup>17</sup>Ibid.

<sup>18</sup>Dr. Samuel DuBois Cook, President of Dillard University, New Orleans, Louisiana, to Rosa Wells, 20 June 1975, personal letter.

B. J. Johnson, Sr., Pastor of Greater Mount Calvary Baptist Church, the Honorable Maynard Jackson, Mayor of Atlanta, and the late Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., leader of the successful Montgomery Bus Boycott, founder of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, an organization Sam Williams helped to organize, and youngest recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize.

Many of Williams' former students were quick to point out that it is difficult for one to assess the influence an individual has over another, and they realized that "influence" is intangible and impalpable. Despite these careful observations, the students attested to the influence Sam Williams had on them either in a philosophy class, community activities, or both. Dr. Robert S. Perdue declared that:

When he talked so much about truth, good, value, devotion to excellence, a knowledge of the great things that the Greeks had contributed, unconsciously he caused you to become instilled with the same ideas; and I think they are even functioning now. So that as I go about my daily tasks in terms of teaching students, developing relationships with people around me, always I have a sense, I think, of evaluation of those people, students, the world around me, in terms of the same values that he instilled in us when we were at Morehouse.-----<sup>19</sup>

Another student of Sam Williams was Rev. William Guy, who commented that:

As a student, my having him as a teacher broadened my appreciation for the great thinkers of history and the great issues of life. Secondly, my experience as his student deepened my appreciation for the ability to discern issues and to express oneself articulately and forthrightly.

Even though Rev. B. J. Johnson licensed Sam Williams to preach, Williams tutored him in philosophy at Morehouse College. Johnson described Sam Williams as an "exceptional teacher with a rare ability, who brings the best out of the student." Johnson declared that it was a result of Williams' teaching

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<sup>19</sup>Dr. Robert S. Perdue, taped interview held Room 327 Giles Hall, Spelman College, Atlanta, Georgia, 9 May 1975.

<sup>20</sup>Rev. William Guy, interview held by telephone, Atlanta, Georgia, 2 May 1975.

that he obtained a Bachelor of Divinity Degree in Religion from Morehouse.<sup>21</sup>

Another student, Dr. Robert L. Smothers, Chairman of the Departments of Educational Psychology, Visiting Teacher, and Guidance and Counseling, referred to his former philosophy teacher as an "iconoclast," who opened up a whole new world for him. Smothers called it "a world of ideals."<sup>22</sup>

Some of Williams' students worked with him not only in the classroom but in community activities. Preston Yancy and Sam Cook were two such students. Yancy was one of the three philosophy minors at Morehouse from 1957-1959; there were no majors. Speaking as a former student, Yancy recalled that:

Rev. Williams had considerable influence on me. It was because of him that I switched from an economics minor to a philosophy minor. Even today in the classroom I imitate his teaching methods in trying to provoke discussion and in trying to get students to think and express thoughts. While his influence was principally intangible and abstract, he more than anyone, convinced me to think critically and to speak my mind.<sup>23</sup>

Yancy was also a "watch care" member of Friendship Baptist Church where Williams was the minister, and he often saw Williams in his office and in his home. Yancy and a few other students rode with Sam Williams to the federal court hearing of his suit involving the desegregation of the public transit system here in Atlanta.<sup>24</sup>

Samuel DuBois Cook, one of Williams' philosophy students also had much contact with Williams outside the classroom. Cook remarked that "He was my pastor, colleague, civic mentor, and friend."<sup>25</sup> Sam Cook has become a noted scholar, and reflecting on the influence Williams had on his intellectual interests and development, Cook stated that:

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<sup>22</sup>Dr. Robert L. Smothers, interview.

<sup>23</sup>Mr. Preston M. Yancy, instructor of English and Humanities, Virginia Union University, to Rosa Wells, 2 May 1975, personal letter.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid.

<sup>25</sup>Dr. Samuel DuBois Cook to Rosa Wells, 20 June 1975.

In graduate school and in my professional life, political philosophy has been my specialization. I have taught political philosophy on both the graduate and undergraduate levels since 1955, when I began my teaching career at Southern University. The major portion of my published works has been in the area of political thought. I am not saying that Sam Williams was the only reason that I decided to concentrate in political philosophy, but he was surely one of the principal reasons.---- All of my postdoctoral work has been in philosophy.----Let me simply add that Sam Williams taught me the virtue, vitality, grace, and creative and redemptive power of integrity, commitment to the life of reason, and logical analysis and thought. ----Intellectual integrity was perhaps his major influence on my life.<sup>26</sup>

Some students evaded Williams, the distiller of the mind, but they were often challenged by him in chapel or forum discussions. In fact Williams challenged every person with whom he came in contact to "expand his mind and his realm of thought."<sup>27</sup> Supporting this contention, Rev. William Guy, Chaplain of Morehouse at the time of Rev. Williams' death, stated that, "we'll miss his way of making you think, of keeping you intellectually alert in a classroom or in a public forum."<sup>28</sup>

Sam Williams encouraged all men to develop completely their minds and to accept any challenge, and he, himself, refused to allow his own mind to become idle or to shun challenges, no matter how difficult. Dr. Clarence A. Bacote, a member of Friendship Baptist Church and Chairman of the History Department of Atlanta University, described Rev. Sam Williams as a "fearless, unique individual who harbored complete confidence and was equipped for any intellectual battle."<sup>29</sup> This was demonstrated at Clark College in the Atlanta University Center in February 1967, when Sam Williams accepted the challenge

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<sup>26</sup>Ibid.

<sup>27</sup>Dr. Mays, taped interview.

<sup>28</sup>"Death Takes Sam Williams," The Morehouse College Bulletin, Fall 1970, p. 4.

<sup>29</sup>Dr. Clarence Bacote, interview held Room 201 Harkness Hall, Atlanta University, 21 November 1974.

of debating Stokeley Carmichael, Chairman of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee. According to Dr. Robert S. Brisbane, director of the monthly Town Meetings, he "could not find anyone else that would take on Stokeley."<sup>30</sup>

The debate was well publicized and the night of the debate there was standing room only at the Davage Auditorium at Clark College. Carmichael and Williams debated 99 minutes on the topic, "Black Power and the Future of Negro Americans." The two men agreed on one thing, which was that the United States was a racist nation, but they differed as to the strategy necessary for eliminating racism. Williams proposed an integrationist approach, and Carmichael advocated a separatist approach. Carmichael emphatically stated that: "The Negro is trapped by self-hatred, and that his interests are entirely divorced from those of this damn country."<sup>31</sup> The statement was followed by an overwhelming applause by the students.

Although Rev. Sam Williams' integrationist views were not welcomed by the students during the turbulent period of racial tension, two noted Black intellectuals, Dr. Robert S. Brisbane, author of The Black Vanguard and Black Activism, and Dr. Benjamin Mays, President of the Atlanta School Board, felt that Sam Williams did a good job "talking as a logical man, talking to a situation while Carmichael eschewed logic with phrases."<sup>32</sup> Dr. Brisbane added that Carmichael won the popularity contest, but "he didn't answer Sam with argument but with rhetoric, and you can't debate a person who uses rhetoric

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<sup>30</sup>Dr. Robert S. Brisbane, Chairman of Political Science Department of Morehouse College, taped interview held in Room 201 Brawley Hall, Atlanta, Georgia, 13 March 1975.

<sup>31</sup>"Carmichael and Williams Debate 99 Minutes at Clark," Atlanta Daily World, 11 February 1967, p. 1.

<sup>32</sup>Dr. Benjamin Mays, taped interview.

on you."<sup>33</sup>

Students throughout the United States were losing faith in the American system, but Sam Williams' comprehension of the depth of Christian love commanded him to continue to fight against segregation with all his powers. He refused to hate as he did it.<sup>34</sup> Williams believed that because he understood what Christian love meant, it prevented him from harboring any hate inside.

The majority of the students opposed Williams' "love doctrine," but the students respected him and valued his assistance in the Student Movement at Morehouse. State Representative Julian Bond recalled that:

He was the one adult most trusted by Atlanta's fledgling student movement in the 1960's. We went to him for advice and he gave freely of his wisdom and experience. Wherever there was a struggle of Black people in Atlanta he was there, offering his counsel, his philosophy and his energy.<sup>35</sup>

Williams' final awakening to the cruel and inhuman character of the system of segregation appeared when as a father he had to explain to his son, Sam Golar, why he could not go to a drive-in movie. He avoided telling his son the ugly truth about segregation for a while, but finally he explained to him:

There are people who do not like for other people to be in the same places where they are because they have a different color of skin. Here in Georgia this is true. Laws have been passed which are to prohibit Negroes and whites from meeting together in public places because the Negro's skin is not white. God created all people and he does not make any difference among them because of their skin. We are all the same before him. Do not forget this, my son!<sup>36</sup>

Sam Williams held tenaciously to this belief as long as he lived, and even though he may have been the intellectually "arrogant" man that many said

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<sup>33</sup>Dr. Robert S. Brisbane, taped interview.

<sup>34</sup>Rev. Samuel W. Williams, "We Are Involved," The Sam Williams Collection.

<sup>35</sup>"Moving Tributes to Rev. Williams," Atlanta Inquirer, 17 October 1970, p. 6.

<sup>36</sup>Rev. Samuel Williams, "We Are Involved," The Sam Williams Collection.



he was, he was highly sensitive to the needs and concerns of the "folk."

"If you wanted to raise Sam's ire and bring out all of the intellectual anger in him, use your educated and sophisticated mind to try to embarrass 'little' or 'common' people, or show contempt in conversation for the unlearned."<sup>37</sup>

Sam Williams did not simply use his verbal ability to talk about injustice, but he used his energy of reasoning and his skills of organization as he worked to rid Atlanta of social ills through numerous social and community organizations. The organizations included Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity, the Georgia Philosophical Society, which he helped to organize, the Metaphysical Society of America, which he also helped to organize, the Southern Society for Philosophy and Psychology, Delta Sigma Rho Forensic Society, Alpha Kappa Delta Honorary Sociological Society, the Institute of Religion, and the Greater Council on Human Relations. As Pastor of Friendship Baptist Church, Professor of Philosophy and Religion at Morehouse College, President of the NAACP, Co-chairman of the Atlanta Summit Leadership Conference, which he helped to organize, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, which he also helped to organize, and Chairman of the Community Relations Commission, Samuel Woodrow Williams labored to elevate his race and to build a unified community in this "progressive, capital city, Atlanta."

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<sup>37</sup>Dr. Samuel Cook to Rosa Wells, 20 June 1975, personal letter.

## CHAPTER II

A year following the close of World War II, Rev. Sam Williams returned to Atlanta to assume a teaching position at Morehouse College. Atlanta, located in the Piedmont Plateau region of Georgia in southeastern United States, consisted of 104,533 Blacks and 197,686 Whites. Economically, socially, and politically the portrait of Atlanta's Blacks was stained with segregation and iniquities. The majority of the working Blacks were assigned to menial tasks such as domestics, garbage collectors, street sweepers, ditch diggers and other service work, while the Whites were engaged in sales, clerical work, crafts and supervision. For example, in the areas of transportation, communication and other public utilities, only 2,967 Blacks were employed compared to 9,581 Whites.<sup>1</sup> Even though many Atlanta Blacks as jobholders performed menial tasks, some were in comfortable positions. The Black bank, Citizen Trust Company, built confidence in the hearts of Blacks and helped to unite the Black community. The Black citizenry was encouraged by their ministers to patronize the bank and as a result large numbers of Blacks had accounts there.<sup>2</sup>

Socially, Atlanta was a segregated city. Segregation was deeply rooted in all forms of public transportation, in recreation, in schools, in the

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<sup>1</sup>U. S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, Sixteenth Census of the United States, 1940: Population, vol. 2, Characteristics of the Population, pt. 2, Florida-Iowa.

<sup>2</sup>William Holmes Borders, Pastor of Wheat Street Baptist Church, taped interview held 24 Yonge Street NE, Atlanta, Georgia, 5 June 1975.

churches, in City Hall, in the court houses, and even in the cemeteries.<sup>3</sup>

Concurrently with Sam Williams' return to Atlanta in 1946, the United States Supreme Court handed down a decision that was to have a momentuous effect on the political life of Blacks. A Columbus Black, Primeus King, challenged the closed White Democratic primary in the Supreme Court. Blacks, anticipating a favorable decision by the court, formed an All-Citizens Registration Committee, chaired by Dr. Clarence A. Bacote, Chairman of the History Department of Atlanta University. After skillful planning and community organization, Blacks waged a vigorous voter registration campaign officially starting on March 6, 1946. At the time of the official opening, less than 7,000 Blacks were on registration books. When the campaign officially closed on May 4, 1946, 24,137 Blacks were registered in Fulton County, and of whom 21,244 lived in Atlanta. On the other hand, 56,854 Whites were eligible to vote.<sup>4</sup> As was expected by the Blacks in Atlanta and throughout Georgia, the court declared that the primary was illegal, and Atlanta's Blacks found themselves suddenly with a decisive, political voice in their city's affairs. Refusing to search for other ways of disenfranchising Blacks as neighboring states had done, Governor Ellis Arnall vowed to enforce the court's decision.<sup>5</sup>

Changes occurred gradually in Atlanta after the U. S. Supreme Court ruling. Police Chief Herbert Jenkins hired six "Negro" policemen in 1948, and in 1954 Dr. Rufus Clement, President of Atlanta University, became the first Black to obtain a seat on the Atlanta School Board.<sup>6</sup> Yet, in spite

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<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>C. A. Bacote, "The Negro in Atlanta Politics," Phylon 16 (1955): 346, 348.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 347.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

of the token positions Blacks obtained, the majority of the Blacks in Atlanta and throughout the United States were still denied first class citizenship. Therefore courageous and astute leaders from Black communities throughout the nation waged vigorous campaigns for freedom and equality. The late Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., began a bus boycott in Montgomery, Alabama in 1955, and the next year he joined the thousands of citizens who rejoiced when the U. S. Supreme Court affirmed a lower court decision, declaring illegal segregation on public transportation.

Following the successful Montgomery bus boycott, ministers in Atlanta and throughout the nation and particularly in the South, coalesced their energies and skills as they provided leadership for Blacks in their respective communities. Reverend Samuel Woodrow Williams was among the active leaders in Atlanta who vehemently opposed the pliant roles and downtrodden conditions imposed on Black Americans. The task was a difficult one, but according to Dr. Robert S. Brisbane, Chairman of the Department of Political Science at Morehouse College and at the time a colleague of Dr. Sam Williams, Williams realized that the work was "important at the time because it was a question of race adjustment." Continuing, Dr. Brisbane recalled that Blacks were moving into neighborhoods that were all white; there was desegregation in the city; whites were still resisting; and Mayor Allen was not sure of himself. In these surroundings, "Sam acted as a kind of catalyst in this whole thing."<sup>7</sup>

Even though all catalytic reactions are not always understood, the "catalyst" apparently changes the reaction in such a way that the activation

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<sup>7</sup>Dr. Robert S. Brisbane, taped interview held Room 202 Brawley Hall, Morehouse College, Atlanta, Georgia, 13 March 1975.

energy required is less than in the uncatalyzed reaction.<sup>8</sup> Because of the oppression and discrimination confronting Black Americans, Blacks desired and needed to be activated, and Williams was one of the activators in Atlanta who worked in many ways as he assumed his numerous roles as community leader. One of the very effective ways in which he served and urged others to serve was through his sermons in churches where he spoke as guest minister, at religious conventions and in his own pulpit, Friendship Baptist Church, to foster brotherhood and human justice.

Rev. Sam Williams assumed the pastorate of Friendship Baptist Church on June 9, 1954, after having served as its acting pastor following the death of Dr. Maynard Holbrook Jackson, the father of the present Mayor of Atlanta. Williams provided the congregation, many professionals and businessmen, with the same quality of leadership that his predecessors had done. The church, located on Mitchell Street in the Southwestern section of Atlanta, was established during the Confederate Regime in 1862 with 25 members. After the Confederacy failed in 1865, Friendship Baptist Church emerged from a freight car that was purchased in Chattanooga and brought to Atlanta. The church membership increased and within a few years, three institutions of higher learning were nurtured at historic Friendship Baptist Church. They include Atlanta University, established in the freight car, and Spelman and Morehouse in the basement of Friendship's present structure.<sup>9</sup>

Under Rev. Sam Williams' leadership Friendship Baptist Church expanded and improved its facilities in order to meet the challenges of an urban community. A tract of land to be used for a parking lot was purchased at

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<sup>8</sup>D. Hussey Horton, teacher of Mathematics and Chemistry at North Lenoir High School, interview held 1108 Lincoln Street, Kinston, North Carolina, 22 May 1975.

<sup>9</sup>Friendship Baptist Church Centennial Bulletin 1862-1962, p. 6, The Sam Williams Collection.

a cost of \$12,500, and the bill was paid in full in 18 months; the basement was renovated; the heating system was improved; the Edward Randolph Carter Memorial Sermon Series in honor of the late Dr. E. R. Carter, a former pastor of Friendship Baptist Church, was established; the interior of the church was remodeled; and a three manual pipe organ (Casavant) was purchased at approximately \$54,000. Moreover, many members of Friendship point to the construction of the comfortable, air-conditioned Friendship Apartments with pride and list this as the church's most outstanding project of community outreach that Rev. Sam Williams and the church instituted.

The 208 low cost housing units, ready for occupancy in 1969, were constructed by the Celotex Corporation of Tampa, Florida; the Federal Housing Authority financed the 2½ million dollar construction; and Friendship Baptist Church, sponsor of the low rent housing project, will eventually own them. The Friendship Apartments, conveniently located a few minutes drive from downtown Atlanta, were constructed for low income to medium-ranged salaried families. These apartments provide some of Atlanta's Blacks with attractive, comfortable and convenient living accommodations which they are enjoying for the first time.<sup>11</sup>

The many achievements of Rev. Sam Williams as pastor of Friendship Baptist Church support his members' contention that Williams was an effective minister. One of his members, Deacon Arthur Richardson, remarked that:

--in addition to his preparing an interesting, enlightening and inspiring sermon for our regular church sessions, he was with families in any disaster--anything that pertained

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<sup>11</sup>Mr. Carter Coleman, Sr., Trustee of Friendship Baptist Church, interview held 140½ Chestnut Street SW, Atlanta, Georgia, 25 November 1974.

to family life. He was a part of it! As many families of the Church that he knew who needed him.<sup>12</sup>

Sam Williams preached the gospel as he saw it, and he "included in his sermons certain ways of life, certain things man could do."<sup>13</sup> Williams often cautioned his members of possible "evil embodied in their character" in the midst of racial unrest and the intensification of the Black Power Movement. He warned them that "color does not make one good or wise; nor does it cure one of evil."<sup>14</sup> Williams taught that worshipping God and doing right by one's fellowman are inseparable. "We cannot worship God until we do right by our brothers."<sup>15</sup> Sam Williams, a man of deep convictions, preached that "God is love," and as one of God's children, it was his responsibility to share that love by reaching out to his neighbors. Therefore he boldly and freely proclaimed this teaching when speaking to anyone or anywhere, because he contended that preaching of the gospel should not be fettered.

Speaking to the white congregation of All Saints Episcopal Church in Atlanta on June 30, 1968 at the morning worship service, he chose as a theme, "A Message to the Privileged." He warned them from the beginning that he was going to speak forthrightly and precisely since he might not get invited back. Posing the question, "what is your responsibility for justice?" Williams reminded them that the power of deciding was in their hands. He urged them to rethink their philosophies and be ready to replace them with "fresh ideas and

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<sup>12</sup>Mr. Arthur Richardson, Chairman of Deacon Board at Friendship, taped interview held 50 Chestnut Street SW, Atlanta, Georgia, 21 November 1974.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid.

<sup>14</sup>Rev. Samuel W. Williams, "On Evil Embodied in Character," 3 November 1968, The Sam Williams Collection.

<sup>15</sup>Rev. Samuel W. Williams, "How Men Try to Bribe God," 11 October 1969, The Sam Williams Collection.

thoughts of race, poverty, war and peace." He continued saying that:

--when we ask that poverty be abolished, what are we asking the nation to abolish? We are asking to abolish the imprisonment of millions of human beings in squalid slums and taxpayer shacks and shanties, rat and vermin infested hovels. Chronic unemployment and the specter of permanent unemployability; the hurt of parents having to see their children condemned to set out upon the same dead end road by being consigned to decrepit, ill-equipped, overcrowded, understaffed schools. The school boards do what they do, because of you! Because they feel they are carrying out your wishes. An inescapable cause of poverty is the system. Unless you re-evaluate your priorities, re-examine your commitment to life, poverty will continue to run rampant in this land of plenty. And the woes of injustice will make mockery of democracy in a country that proclaims liberty and justice for all.<sup>16</sup>

Believing that mankind badly needed the good news of salvation and that was what the church purported to be about or at least should be about, Rev. Sam Williams often criticized the church because he maintained that the church of God was not relevant by and through either its preaching or the doing of God's word.<sup>17</sup> Addressing the Christian Council of Metropolitan Atlanta, Williams described the church's action of refusing to take a stand on controversial issues or social problems as a "kind of moral pussyfooting."<sup>18</sup> He accused the church of waiting for social and political institutions to announce the clearance signal, and then the church would speak out fervently. "Once the decisions are made by the community, the church makes them holy."<sup>19</sup>

Advancing the same theme at a Southern Baptist Convention, Rev. Sam Williams told the Executive Board that listening was not enough, because racial prejudices and injustices would not disappear that way. He stated

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<sup>16</sup>Rev. Samuel W. Williams, "A Message to the Privileged," 30 June 1968, The Sam Williams Collection.

<sup>17</sup>Rev. Samuel W. Williams, "The Burden of Freedom," 8 June 1969, The Sam Williams Collection.

<sup>18</sup>"Speak Out or Shut Up, Churches Told," Atlanta Constitution, 10 January 1970, p. 69.

<sup>19</sup>"Williams on Religion," The Sam Williams Collection.



that the church and the government make statements that they do not back up with action. For example, in the 1954 Supreme Court Decision in the case of Brown vs. Board of Education in Topeka, Kansas, segregated education ended "with all deliberate speed"; the U. S. Congress passed the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and a subsequent one in 1965. "Justice said nothing! Justice is doing."<sup>20</sup> Sam Williams had learned from Greek philosophers that justice involves equal participation by every citizen in his government, and that a fear grows out of one knowing that he is committing an unjust act. Therefore in the churches, Williams contended that "we must teach a fear of unconsciously committing wrongdoing because it destroys society. No society can survive if it does injustice."<sup>21</sup>

Even though he often warned listeners of the destructiveness of injustice, Williams worried that men in positions of power and decision-making continued to exploit their brothers and contain them in positions of poverty. When he became worried and pessimistic, he realized that he was permitting his mind to be directed by a "thought pattern controlled by a wrong set of presuppositions."<sup>22</sup> Williams was cognizant of the fact that if this thought pattern was prolonged, it would diminish the velocity of his attempts to help annihilate injustices. Williams was often asked, "why keep trying?" and his response would be:

If the Christian faith is an affirmation of what we hope God has done and will do, in cooperation with man, to renew the world, then the future becomes terribly important to and for every believing Christian. It is my faith that sustains me. Faith is both conviction and confidence.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>20</sup>"Justice is Something You Do," Home Missions, December 1969, pp. 17-19, The Sam Williams Collection.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid.

<sup>22</sup>Rev. Samuel W. Williams, "Why Keep Trying," 23 June 1968, The Sam Williams Collection.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid.

Williams' Christian faith was unquenchable, and both his faith and his hope in the city of Atlanta were tremendous. He conceived of Atlanta as having the possibilities of being the greatest city in the United States, but by 1969 he worried about this possibility becoming a reality. There were two things that worried Sam Williams about Atlanta. One was Sam Massell, a Jew, running for mayor, and Maynard Jackson, a Black man, seeking the vice mayoralty. The second thing that worried Williams about Atlanta was the two Congressmen, who "ought to be put in the Chattahoochee. They are not good for us."<sup>24</sup>

Despite Williams' bold and straightforward criticism of whites in their churches and other gatherings, racism remained in Atlanta by the end of the 1960's. By 1970 Sam Williams confessed that he expected very little from whites because "white America would rather see this nation destroyed than give up white racism." He viewed the white church as the worst institution in America. On the other hand, Williams saw the Black church as the redeeming agent in the racist society. "The Black man has understood in a manner and depth that the white has not, that worship is a lie if justice is not done."<sup>25</sup> Williams reasoned that this understanding had compelled Black Americans to press diligently for justice.

Justice for Blacks did not come during Rev. Sam Williams' abbreviated stay on earth, but while he lived he fought with courage and determination, often reminding them that:

Life itself we must endure. I mean living a life. To live

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<sup>24</sup>Rev. Sam Williams, "Southern Baptist Convention, Transcript of Minutes of the Board, December 1969, The Sam Williams Collection.

<sup>25</sup>Sam Williams, "Religion is Justice," Time, 6 April 1970, pp. 72-73.

involves conflict, frustrations and disappointments. Living is not only or merely joy, peace, contentment and happiness. We have to face tribulations, persecutions, peril and the sword (war) death! He promised never to leave us alone, no never alone.<sup>26</sup>

Rev. Sam Williams "saw the community as a laboratory to practice those things talked about among his flock."<sup>27</sup> Perusing the pages to follow, an account of the community activities in which Williams participated will indicate that he made religion practical through his efforts and achievements in Atlanta's branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, the Atlanta Summit Leadership Conference and the Community Relations Commission.

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<sup>26</sup>Rev. Samuel W. Williams, "The Strength to Endure," 19 October 1969, The Sam Williams Collection.

<sup>27</sup>Deacon Arthur Richardson, taped interview.

### CHAPTER III

Roy Wilkins once stated that: "the whole gamut of Negro life is an adventure if you can roll with the punches and not let it get you into the valley of bitterness."<sup>1</sup> The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and the Atlanta Summit Leadership Conference, two organizations that proposed to aid Afro-Americans to roll with the punches of segregation and discrimination, provided effective leadership in the Black community during the turbulent years of struggle for equality. The NAACP from its inception in 1909 addressed itself to the equal protection of Blacks through legal channels, and the Atlanta Summit Leadership Conference, initiated in 1963, concerned itself with issues of social equality.

The Association, a bi-racial group, had its beginning in New York, but within five years after its founding, the Association had spread throughout the United States. Even though at its inception the NAACP was considered a radical group, the organization challenged only the inferior status of Afro-Americans.<sup>2</sup>

The Atlanta Summit Leadership Conference, organized in 1963, stated as its purposes:

1. To thoroughly consider the crucial community issues facing the Negro citizens of Atlanta and to consider the most effective and timely approaches toward their solutions.

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<sup>1</sup>John A. Adams and Joan Burke, Civil Rights (New York: R. R. Bowker Company, 1970), p. 2.

<sup>2</sup>Robert S. Brisbane, The Black Vanguard (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1970), p. 47.

2. To carefully weigh and rate in priority fashion the important issues considered by the Conference.
3. To consider ways and means to improve communications between organizational and grass-root leaders.
4. To consider the establishment of some machinery for clearing information between organizations particularly regarding unilaterally planned activity that might require community-wide support.
5. To consider ways and means of securing and maintaining continuous lines of communication between the Negro and white leaders of Atlanta who have a commonality of interest.
6. To consider the preparation and adoption of certain resolutions and other documents that express the will of the conferees for presentation to certain "centers of authority and influence" requesting corrective measures toward constructive changes for a progressive Atlanta.
7. To work for unity of spirit, community understanding, compassion and brotherly love for all Atlanta citizens.<sup>3</sup>

The Conference is a coalition of civic and civil rights organizations, including the NAACP, the National Urban League, the Atlanta Negro Voters League, Operation Breadbasket, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, the Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee, All Citizens Registration Committee, the Northwest Council of Clubs, the Westside Voters Leagues, and other neighborhood organizations.<sup>4</sup>

Reverend Samuel Williams served as President of the Atlanta Branch of the NAACP and Co-Chairman of the Atlanta Summit Leadership Conference simultaneously.

Sam Williams became President of the local branch of the NAACP in 1957, filling the unexpired term of John Calhoun. It was during this term as

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<sup>3</sup>Clarence D. Coleman, "Statement of Purpose of Leadership Conference," to Jesse Hill, Atlanta, Personal Files of Jesse Hill, Atlanta, Georgia.

<sup>4</sup>Q. V. Williamson, Co-Chairman of Atlanta Summit Leadership Conference, interview held in transient, Atlanta, Georgia, 13 March 1975.

President that Rev. Sam Williams engaged in his first legal battle involving the elimination of segregation on the public transit system in Atlanta. He and the Reverend John Porter filed suit in the federal district court in June 1957 against the Georgia Public Service Commission for "declaratory judgment and injunctive relief operating the electric trolley buses in Atlanta."<sup>5</sup> The plaintiffs alleged that Atlanta's city ordinances and Georgia statutes which empowered the drivers of the public transportation to assign passengers to cars, compartments or seats, and remain in their assigned seat were unconstitutional. The statutes also gave the operators or drivers police power, which the plaintiffs alleged were unconstitutional and void by reason of a decision by a three judge court in the case of Browder, et al vs. W. A. Gayle et al, 142 U. S. 707 (1956), affirmed by a unanimous vote of the United States Supreme Court, 352 U. S. 903. The federal court contended that even though the Plessy vs. Ferguson, 163 U. S. 537 (1896) had upheld separate but equal accommodations, that holding had been reversed in the case of Morgan vs. Virginia, 328 U. S. 373 (1946) and in Henderson vs. United States, 393 U. S. 816 (1950). Therefore in January 1959, Jim Crow legislation, governing Blacks on public transportation, was repudiated and Blacks were permitted to sit any place they desired on public transportation in Atlanta.<sup>6</sup> Speaking at an NAACP meeting, Williams advised his listeners about riding the buses. He said, "behave as normal human beings and sit where you please. Do it like everybody else does."<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>Rev. Samuel Williams and Rev. John Porter vs. Georgia Public Service Commission et al, 6067, 1-4 (U. S. Fed. Dist. Ct., 1957).

<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

<sup>7</sup>Rev. Sam Williams, "What Does Desegregation Mean?" 27 May 1959, The Sam Williams Collection, Interdenominational Theological Seminary, Atlanta, Georgia.

Williams was elected President of the Atlanta Branch of the NAACP in 1959, 1960, and again in 1965. His administration's priorities were poverty, employment, and education. Through the Association, Williams' greatest achievements were probably in the area of education on both the higher and lower levels. He was instrumental in the desegregation of the Georgia State College of Business Administration.

On June 15, 1956, four Black students, Barbara Hunt, Iris Mae Welch, Myra Elliott Dinsmore, and Russell T. Roberts, attempted to register for the Summer Quarter in the Georgia State School of Business Administration but were refused admittance. The refusal was based on the alleged reason that the students had not obtained from members of the Georgia State Alumni certification of their good moral character, favorable reputation in the community, and their fitness and ability to successfully pursue courses in the School of Business Administration.<sup>8</sup>

After appealing to the President of the College and the Board of Regents, the plaintiffs' attorneys, E. E. Moore, Robert L. Carter, and Thurgood Marshall, formally charged the Business School at Georgia State with discriminatory practices for the purpose of maintaining a "private" state college, when all citizens' taxes were supporting the school. Following preliminaries, the trial began December 6, 1958, and Rev. Samuel Williams was one of the chief witnesses in the case. The most dramatic segment of Williams' testimony was given on the third day, December 9, 1958. Defense Attorney Buck Murphey tried unsuccessfully to discredit the witness, Williams, with his line of questioning. For example:

Defense Attorney: Are you a member of the Communist Party?

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<sup>8</sup>Rev. Samuel Williams and Rev. John Porter vs. Georgia Public Service Commission, et al, 6067, 1-4 (U.S. Fed. Dist. Ct., 1957).

Williams: (Indignantly responded) Why no! (He wheeled around to face the judge, insulted and in a voice that clearly showed his anger said), Your Honor, I suppose the prosecuting attorney can ask me anything he wishes, but I would like to ask him if he is a member of the Ku Klux Klan?

Defense Attorney: (Later) Are you a member of the NAACP?

Williams: I once said that any man in his right mind would be a member of the NAACP, and I believe I am in my right mind.<sup>9</sup>

This portion of Williams' testimony is indicative of Dr. Clarence A. Bacote's description of Sam Williams. Dr. Bacote, a former companion of Williams and a member of Friendship Baptist Church of which he was pastor, contended that Williams was a fearless, unique individual who harbored complete confidence and was equipped for any battle.<sup>10</sup>

In January 1959 Judge Boyd Sloan ruled in favor of the plaintiffs, and the movants, the defenders, were ordered to open the university to Blacks and to pay \$250.00 court cost.<sup>11</sup>

After the legal battle for school desegregation on the higher level had been won, Rev. Sam Williams aided the Black community in its struggle to repudiate the ills of segregation in the public schools on the lower level. The 1954 Supreme Court Decision in the case of Brown vs. Board of Education in Topeka, Kansas was hailed a victory by Afro-Americans, but the "all deliberate speed" clause delayed the implementation of this milestone in the educational process of Afro-Americans in Atlanta until 1961.

In the spring of 1960 the federal district court approved the "Atlanta Plan" that was submitted by the Atlanta Board of Education for school

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<sup>9</sup>Rev. Samuel Williams, "Transcript of Williams Testimony," The Sam Williams Collection.

<sup>10</sup>Dr. Clarence Bacote, History Departmental Chairman, Atlanta University, interview held in Harkness Hall, Atlanta University, Atlanta, 21 November 1974.

<sup>11</sup>Williams and Porter vs. Georgia Public Service Commission.



desegregation. The "Atlanta Plan" provided for integration of one grade at a time, beginning with the 12th grade and working down.<sup>12</sup> Under Williams' leadership, the NAACP assumed the responsibility of explaining the mechanics of the plan to students and parents, and urging them to take advantage of the provisions outlined in it. "Integration" for the first year consisted of the transfer of about 10 Negroes to formerly all white schools. All the transferees were above the median in test scores for the white classes which they entered.<sup>13</sup>

The Atlanta Plan was amended in 1964 because integration was too incomplete and slow, due to criteria for "unfair transfers." As amended the Plan allowed the integration of grade schools two grades at a time beginning with the kindergarden and working upward. The Board during 1964 also adopted the free-choice plan, which allowed integration in all grades.<sup>14</sup>

In spite of the new plan, by 1965 little improvement had been made in the educational facilities in the Black community. Williams spoke out against overcrowded conditions in the Black schools, while almost empty classrooms existed in previously all white schools. Black students were not receiving textbooks and other materials on time, and no top level Black administrators had been appointed despite the fact that 60 per cent of the school population was Black.<sup>15</sup>

At the request of depressed citizens in Atlanta, Williams, working through the NAACP and serving as co-chairman of the Atlanta Summit Leadership

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<sup>12</sup>"History of School Desegregation in Atlanta," Eliza Paschall Papers, Cullen-Jackman Collection, Trevor Arnett Library, Atlanta, Georgia.

<sup>13</sup>"Atlanta NAACP Explains Pupil Placement Plan," Atlanta Inquirer, 22 April 1961, p. 1.

<sup>14</sup>"History of School Desegregation in Atlanta," Eliza Paschall Papers.

<sup>15</sup>"School Crises Faces Atlanta," Atlanta Journal, 12 September 1967, p. 1.

Conference with Jesse Hill and Q. V. Williamson, presented a list of proposals to the Atlanta School Board in an effort to improve the quality of education for Black Atlantans. The proposals urged the Board to appoint Blacks to top level positions on the staff, provide students with textbooks promptly, re-evaluate the students' textbooks, use Black banking institutions for depositing school funds and discontinue the double sessions. The Board responded to the demands by appointing only one Negro to a top ranking staff position, promising to consider the use of Black banking institutions and agreeing to arrange a monthly forum for citizens to discuss problems with the Board.<sup>16</sup>

Because Rev. Sam Williams firmly believed that the Atlanta School Board should be a forum for the Christian's demand for justice, he attended the Board meetings regularly and challenged the members to use their power in alleviating the undesirable conditions confronting Blacks in Atlanta's Public Schools. At one of the Board meetings, he stated that:

This Board cannot afford to keep on its merry way spending most of its time attempting to justify its actions, rather than trying to muster enough moral energy and courage to solve the problem. Institutions, Boards as well as individuals are known by their fruits rather than by their words. Negro citizens are demanding fruits, not words of explanation of how present policy is the best that can be done when it is obvious for all whose eyes are not suffering from moral myopia to see that present policy is short of righteousness.<sup>17</sup>

Rev. Sam Williams, wanting the Board to map out a plan that would embrace the entire city, was dissatisfied with the Board, especially Superintendent Letson, for not taking the initiative in school desegregation and for doing only what the court required.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup>Ibid.

<sup>17</sup>Rev. Samuel Williams, "Speech to the Board," The Sam Williams Collection.

<sup>18</sup>Dr. Benjamin E. Mays, President of Atlanta School Board, taped interview held at 3316 Pamlico Drive, Atlanta, Georgia, 23 November 1974.

Even though education was an issue on which the NAACP under Williams exerted outstanding efforts, employment and desegregation of public accommodations were also concerns to which the Atlanta Branch addressed itself. In August 1961, urged by Williams the local branch aided physicians in their fight for equal employment at Grady Memorial Hospital when Dr. R. C. Bell, a dentist, alleged that a conspiracy existed to keep Blacks out of the hospital.<sup>19</sup> By August 1966 Williams was still speaking out against the continued patterns of discrimination in hospital services on all levels. He remarked that "HEW finds it excruciatingly painful to get hospitals to obey the law. Funds are to be discontinued, yet HEW cannot or will not do that."<sup>20</sup> Williams warned the city that Blacks in Atlanta were considering confrontation with those individuals responsible for the perpetuation of discrimination in hospital services.<sup>21</sup>

During Williams' Administration as President of the NAACP, negotiations for hotel and restaurant desegregation were also concerted efforts of the Association. The local branch was spurred to increased activity in the desegregation of public facilities when the National NAACP met in Atlanta in July, 1962, under discriminatory conditions. Joining with other community leaders in calling for an end to this "deplorable" situation immediately, Williams advocated and led protests against local restaurants and hotels.<sup>22</sup>

The NAACP provided significant services for the Blacks in Atlanta during the years of Williams' leadership. Being one of the spokesmen for Afro-

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<sup>19</sup>"Dr. Bell to Get National Support," Atlanta Inquirer, 19 August 1961, p. 1.

<sup>20</sup>Rev. Sam Williams, "Press Release," 19 August 1966, The Sam Williams Collection.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid.

<sup>22</sup>"NAACP Delegates Work, Play, Boycott, Picket and File Suit," Atlanta Inquirer, 7 July 1962, p. 1.

Americans, Williams urged Atlanta to become an open city whereby every person, regardless of his social, racial, or economic status would have an opportunity to better his life.

The Atlanta Summit Leadership Conference, an organization which Sam Williams helped to found, also attacked injustices and discrimination wherever it existed. Aside from its concerted action against school segregation mentioned earlier, the Summit also worked to ward off segregation and discrimination in housing. For example, in 1963 Rev. Williams and the Atlanta Summit Leadership Conference led a "pray-in" after church in the Peyton Forest section of Atlanta. This was an all white section for a while, but one of the residents got in deep financial difficulties and was forced to sell his property. A prominent Black physician purchased the property, and the white exodus commenced. As fast as "for sale" signs were displayed, Blacks purchased the homes. The whites who remained in the Peyton Forest section appealed to Atlanta's Mayor Ivan Allen. The Mayor was advised to put up a barricade on Peyton Road in an effort to keep Blacks out, and he did. After the Atlanta Summit held its pray-in, it was later the plaintiff in court. The result of the suit was an order from the court to remove the barricade.

The barricade incident was given much attention and publicity in the news media. When former Atlanta Mayor William B. Hartsfield was asked by newsmen to comment on the action, he responded thusly: "I've been Mayor of Atlanta for 24 years, and I made a lot of mistakes, but I never made one you could photograph." Of course this angered Mayor Allen a great deal.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup>Q. V. Williamson, realtor, interview held in transient, Atlanta, Georgia, 13 March 1975.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid.

By 1968 there was stepped-up desegregation in housing, but the Summit was very concerned about the people who lived in public housing projects. Persons who lived in the projects sought the help of the Summit's co-chairmen, Jesse Hill, Sam Williams and Q. V. Williamson. The bewildered tenants candidly discussed their grievances against the Atlanta Housing Authority. Justifiable complaints included opposition to raising the rent without proper notification to the tenants, inadequate services rendered by the Authority, intoxicated superintendent on the job, leaking gas in the projects, especially Perry Homes, and the Atlanta Housing Authority setting itself up as the "custodian of the morals of the inhabitants."<sup>25</sup>

The Atlanta Summit Leadership Conference urgently requested the Director of Atlanta Housing Authority, Mr. M. B. Satterfield, to take the following steps:

1. Arrange for the immediate inspection of the gas heating system equipment in each of the Perry Homes apartment units, by competent inspectors. ----
2. Arrange for a continuous safety education program among tenants regarding their gas heating system and ventilating procedures.
3. Arrange also for preventive maintenance programs for safety of tenants in all Public Housing Projects. We are calling for emergency action regarding Perry Homes because in this particular project almost on an annual basis tenants have died directly or indirectly as a result of faulty gas heating system and negligence on someone's part. Less than a year ago, February 23, 1967, Mrs. Josie Callier, a daughter age 9, and two sons ages 6 and 7 were fatal victims of carbon monoxide poisoning. A little over a year prior to the death of this family, Mr. and Mrs. Claude Bates and his wife died in the same manner. Other tenants of Perry Homes in prior years met similar tragic deaths.
4. We respectfully request a report of inspection procedures and other safety measures taken. We understand that in September,

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<sup>25</sup>Atlanta Summit Leadership Conference, "Press Release," 3 January 1968, personal file of Jesse Hill, Atlanta Life Insurance Company, Atlanta.

some inspections and maintenance were performed. However, in view of complaints of recent days and the fact that we experienced a relatively warm fall with maximum use and testing of equipment coming in recent weeks, we are requesting a complete current inspection as a small price to pay to possibly save the lives of Atlanta citizens.<sup>26</sup>

The Atlanta Summit Leadership Conference addressed itself not only to education and housing problems but to any issues in Atlanta involving unfair treatment of Blacks. Sincere efforts were made by the Summit to improve the Black man's status in the city. However, conflicts over strategy caused the Atlanta Summit Leadership Conference to split into two groups during 1968. Jesse Hill, Samuel Williams, and Q. V. Williamson were accused of usurping their power in refusing to call an election in two years. Leaders of the two factions now concur that vying for leadership was the major cause of the internal disagreement. The new group organized and adopted the name, Metropolitan Atlanta Summit Leadership Congress and named Joseph Boone, Otis Smith, and Howard Creecy, Sr. Co-chairmen of this organization. The primary objective of the Congress was to assist moderate and low income citizens. This splinter group caused the Atlanta Summit Leadership Conference to name a steering committee to study and review its organizational structure, goals and purposes and to make recommendations on the basis of their findings.<sup>27</sup>

The Atlanta Summit Leadership Conference split presented a portrait of disunity to Atlanta's white community, and eventually the Atlanta Summit Leadership Conference changed its name to the Consortium. The consortium was born after the death of Sam Williams, but today the Consortium nor the Metro Atlanta Summit Leadership Congress possess the momentum each had during the

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<sup>26</sup> Atlanta Summit Leadership Conference, Co-Chairmen Sam Williams, Jesse Hill, and Q. V. Williamson, to Mr. M. B. Satterfield, Atlanta, 1 January 1968, personal files of Jesse Hill.

<sup>27</sup> "Grassroots Negroes Elect New Summit Staff," Atlanta Constitution, 16 January 1968.

decade of the sixties.<sup>28</sup>

Working as one of the Co-chairmen of the Atlanta Summit Leadership Conference and President of the Atlanta Branch of the NAACP, Sam Williams and other community leaders enabled Blacks to sit any place they desired on public transportation, to frequent hotels and restaurants, to enjoy improved public housing and improved education. It would have been impossible for Sam Williams to have achieved the aforementioned solely by his own efforts, but he was representative of the kind of leadership in Atlanta that was/is so vital to the elevation of the race and to the improvement of human conditions for oppressed men everywhere. It is only when man learns of and responds to the harsh injustices and agonizing sufferings individuals encounter as Sam Williams did that he earns the title given Williams by Dr. Howard Creecy, Sr., one of the Co-chairmen of the new organization that broke away from Williams' Atlanta Summit Leadership Conference. Rev. Howard Creecy, Sr. referred to Sam Williams as a "Christian Statesman"<sup>29</sup> in Atlanta who was opposed to any form of segregation and discrimination. And the Atlanta Community Relations Commission, discussed in the next chapter, was another organization in which Sam Williams worked to eliminate racism and discrimination.

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<sup>28</sup>Q. V. Williamson, realtor, interview.

<sup>29</sup>Rev. Howard Creecy, Sr., Minister of Mt. Moriah Baptist Church, taped interview held at the church, Atlanta, Georgia, 17 May 1975.

#### CHAPTER IV

The Community Relations Commission (CRC) provided Samuel Woodrow Williams with an enlarged platform upon which to launch investigations of discriminatory practices in Atlanta due to "race, color, creed, religion, national origin or ancestry." A biracial commission, the CRC was created by the City of Atlanta Municipal Government on November 8, 1966 as a result of expressed concerns of Benny Smith and other Black leaders of the Summerhill/Mechanicsville areas of Atlanta.<sup>1</sup> The CRC outlined its purpose as follows:

To foster mutual understanding, tolerance, and respect among all economic, social, religious, and ethnic groups in the City-----

To aid in permitting the City of Atlanta to benefit from the fullest realization of its human resources---

To investigate, discourage and seek to prevent discriminatory practices against any individual because of race, color, creed, religion, national origin or ancestry---

To attempt to act as conciliator in controversies involving human relations---

To recommend to the Mayor and Board of Aldermen such ordinances as will aid in carrying out the purposes of this Ordinance---<sup>2</sup>

To implement these objectives, Atlanta's Mayor Ivan Allen appointed to the Commission a total of twenty men and women who had exemplified previously an interest in improving race relations in Atlanta. The members, Black and White, were of the business and professional communities. This diverse

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<sup>1</sup>William H. Boone, Sr., "The Atlanta Community Relations Commission," (Masters thesis, Atlanta University, 1969), p. 24.

<sup>2</sup>Atlanta Community Relations Commission, City Hall, Atlanta, Georgia, November 1966, The Sam Williams Collection.



group, representative of deprived people, gave the Commission a dimension which city government often lacked.<sup>3</sup> The Commission was chaired by Irving Kaler, an Atlanta attorney by profession, and Samuel Williams as vice chairman. Mrs. Eliza Paschall led the administrative staff as its first executive director.

Even though the Commission had no real power and could only reason with citizens and convey information, it maintained contact with the entire community, and it performed a valuable service for Atlanta during its first year. The Commission recognized the most ignored Atlantans and allowed them to express their concerns to city officials by bringing City Hall to the economically disadvantaged. Public hearings were held in troubled neighborhoods, and the inhabitants aired an extensive range of complaints including police brutality, inadequate recreational facilities, improper paving and overflowing sewers.<sup>4</sup> A two and one half hours special hearing was held for persons 25 years of age and under during the Commission's first year. Young citizens from Summerhill, Lightning, Peoplestown, Vine City, Pittsburg, Carver Homes, Bowen Homes, Boulevard, College Park, Collier Heights, Perry Homes, West End, and Herndon Homes expressed their concerns of employment, recreation and education. In spite of the fact that many of the young citizens were participating in a public forum for the first time, they were very frank and open. One young lady from Perry Homes exemplified the spirit of these young people when after expressing herself forthrightly, she turned to Chairman Irving Kaler and Vice Chairman Sam Williams and said, "Keep the faith, baby."<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>"Keeping Atlanta's Communication Open," Atlanta Journal, 31 October 1967, p. 18-A.

<sup>4</sup>"CRC: Half Way There," Atlanta Constitution, 11 August 1967, p. 4.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

Keeping the faith was a significant challenge for the Community Relations Commission because if it were to maintain the less affluent's confidence, the Commission knew that it must succeed in its efforts to eliminate discrimination and improve race relations in the city. And in order for the Commission to achieve its goals, it needed to use its power of persuasion and rely on the integrity of the city officials for positive action.<sup>6</sup> This was not an easy task because at times it was necessary for the Commission to make some men in positions of power uncomfortable. Some aldermen quietly but unsuccessfully tried to abolish the Commission on the basis that it often became involved in matters not specified in the ordinance which created it.<sup>7</sup> From the Commission's inception, no guidelines for its operation were given. "The Commission had to chart new waters, to establish its own *modus operandi*."<sup>8</sup> Another target for criticism of the Commission was its director, Eliza Paschall, a "White liberal" who had been involved with many human rights and civil rights organizations for a long time. During the Commission's first controversial year, Sam Williams as vice chairman ably assisted the Commission in all of its projects and programs for the purpose of fostering understanding, respect and cooperation among Atlantans. During the first quarter of 1968, Mayor Ivan Allen appointed Sam Williams as permanent chairman of the Community Relations Commission to succeed Irving Kaler who had resigned because Allen felt that:

. . . . He [Williams] had demonstrated outstanding ability in the Civil Rights Movement and had obtained a stature which I thought was obtained by very few people. . . . and that was I had considered Sam Williams to have reached a point where he had risen above any racial attitudes, Black or White etc. He had actually reached a point where he could

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<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

<sup>7</sup>"An Ordinance to Amend the Charter," 8 November 1966, The Sam Williams Collection.

<sup>8</sup>"More Support, Not Less," Atlanta Constitution, 10 November 1967, p. 1.

see problems of the whole picture from both sides and in the same way. . . . I thought he would make an outstanding leader of this very important body to assist in racial problems.<sup>9</sup>

Under his chairmanship, the Commission forged ahead to remedy the social ills of discrimination that had been disseminated throughout Atlanta. The efforts of the Commission were extensive, including the Town Hall Meetings Program, Human Relations Workshops, in depth studies relative to the grievances of Black firemen, garbage collectors' strike and minority hiring and promotions.

The Town Hall Meetings Program virtually brought City Hall to the citizens in ghetto areas. The meetings held from March through September, were also taken to more affluent areas as attempts were made to improve race relations. These regularly scheduled meetings, especially those in the ghetto areas, gave the inhabitants an opportunity to air their complaints of police brutality, inferior housing, fire hazards, unemployment, and discrimination against Black firemen.<sup>10</sup> The meetings were not just gripe sessions. Following each hearing, members of the Commission carried the complaints to the appropriate City Department for study and action. The department in turn reported back to the community within 30 days, often against their will.<sup>11</sup>

The Commission attempted to aid the city departments by holding Human Relations Workshops for city employees, conducted by Sam Williams. The employees sometimes described Williams as prejudiced against whites and many often walked out in anger. These angry men saw themselves blameless, reason-

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<sup>9</sup>Ivan Allen, former Mayor of Atlanta, taped interview on telephone held 50 Chestnut Street SW, Atlanta, Georgia, 15 November 1974.

<sup>10</sup>"CRC Report," n.d., The Sam Williams Collection.

<sup>11</sup>Eliza Paschall, State and Community Affairs Liason for the Atlanta Region of the Equal Employment Commission, taped interview held Citizen Trust Blds., Atlanta, Georgia, 15 November, 1974.

ing that the governmental system was traditionally discriminatory. To this rationale Sam Williams reacted firmly, saying: "It's your system if you're not working like hell to change it."<sup>12</sup>

Lectures, films and discussions were used at the workshops. Williams attempted to sensitize the participants to the effects of cultural differences by administering a test based upon the Black experience which was often foreign to whites.<sup>13</sup>

In following through on its in-depth study of grievances of Black firemen, Sam Williams and the Commission worked closely with the firemen, encouraging them to unite for strong negotiations and to form an organization known as "Brothers Combined" for the purpose of combating discrimination in the department. Following the official charges of discrimination by the Black firemen, the CRC made an investigation and presented a thirty nine page report to the Board of Fire Masters of Atlanta. The Commission found that a discriminatory hiring policy had existed in Atlanta for over a century and that the "Mental Ability test" given to all applicants was unfair to Blacks due to the inferior schools that Blacks had attended. Eighty two per cent of all Black applicants failed the test whereas only 48 per cent of the whites failed. Williams recommended then that an applicant who had completed 10th grade should be exempted from the test which should be continued for applicants with less formal education. This would be beneficial to those students coming from inferior schools and also would provide an opportunity for an intelligent applicant who failed to complete the 10th grade.

Williams and the Commission further recommended the employment of a

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<sup>12</sup>"CRC Held Sensitivity Talks Describe Taboos," Atlanta Constitution, 30 May 1969.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid.

full time Black recruiter and the expansion of publicity through the news media in order to reach the Black community. At the time of the Commission's study, the Firemen Interview Panel was composed of two members, both white; therefore, the Commission recommended that the membership be increased to include one Black.<sup>14</sup>

In the area of "Promotion," the Commission found that there were 234 officers, none of which were Black. Finding irregularity in the registry, the Commission recommended that it be discarded and that the Fire Department institute a special program for all officer candidates.<sup>15</sup>

To correct the situation with respect to "Personal indignities" alleged by Black firemen, the Commission charged each captain with the maintenance of good human relations on his shift. It further recommended that all captains and firemen attend a human relations course sponsored by the Fire Department with the aid of the Commission. In addition it was recommended that the Black firemen be assigned to the same shift, and that the practice of assigning a single Black fireman to an otherwise all white shift be abandoned. Assigning Black firemen at least in pairs would boost the men's morale.<sup>16</sup>

The Atlanta Firemen's Recreation Club, Inc., a social organization of white firemen, was discriminating on the basis of race. The club had been notified by the United States Corps of Engineers that it must comply with Title VI of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, but it had not done so. The Commission asked the organization to desegregate its facilities and warned it that failure to comply voluntarily in 90 days would result in action by the

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<sup>14</sup>The CRC, "Report on the Grievances of Black Firemen to the Board of Fire Masters," The Sam Williams Collection, Atlanta, Georgia.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., p. 21.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 25.

Commission informing the U. S. Government of this non-compliance and urging that its lease be cancelled.<sup>17</sup>

In the early 1970's two other studies were undertaken by the Community Relations Commission. They were concerned with the City Garbage Collectors' Strike and the City Minority Hiring Practices. The study of the garbage strike was the first made in an American city dealing with the human aspects of waste collection.<sup>18</sup> Some of the findings were startling. For example, the study revealed that the workmen walked from 10 to 12 miles daily, carrying tubs that weigh from 60 to 100 pounds when filled; that the national accident rate among waste collectors was nine times higher than that of industrial workers. In addition, there was a need for a new public image for our waste collection workers. A positive finding was that many Black workers had been promoted in recent years to driver jobs, 130 out of 229. But in supervision and clerical positions only two Blacks carried the pay and authority of a supervisor.<sup>19</sup>

In response to the demand of Williams and the Commission for firm and immediate action, the Sanitation Department began making basic improvements by ordering safety cap shoes for the workers, providing towels at plant showers, increasing allotments of coveralls and gloves, raising starting salaries and assigning Blacks to office positions.

The last major study that Williams and the Commission undertook dealt with minority hiring and promotion practices by the City of Atlanta. Since

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<sup>17</sup>Francine Henderson, "Samuel Woodrow Williams, 1912-1970," (Term Paper, Urban History, Atlanta University, 1974), p. 17.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid.

<sup>19</sup>The CRC, "The Human Aspects of Atlanta's Waste Collection System," 22 May 1970, pp. 9-17, The Sam Williams Collection.

state and local governments rarely perceive a need for affirmative recruiting programs and upgrading minorities for jobs in which they are not properly represented,<sup>21</sup> the Commission urged Atlanta to perceive and act on this need. The Community Relations Commission encouraged Atlanta to establish an affirmative action program incorporating recommendations made by the Commission relating to recruitment, promotion, career development and hiring.

The report revealed some startling statistics concerning the minority work force in the city. It indicated that 70 per cent of the minority work force were laborers or service workers as compared to 14 per cent whites; that 18 per cent of the white labor force were in office and clerical positions as compared to only 9 per cent of the minority workers. Only five departments, the Youth Council, Model Cities, Law Department, Community Relations Commission, and the Mayor's Office had minority representation. The remaining 23 departments had no minorities in the top level jobs.<sup>22</sup>

Sam Williams and the Commission recommended that a stepped-up recruitment program be instituted which would emphasize the fact that Atlanta is an equal opportunity employer and does not tolerate discrimination. It was further recommended that employment agencies, schools and churches be notified by letter of the city's intention to recruit on an equal opportunity basis; that a stepped-up public information program be instituted; that the city advertise in minority-directed newspapers and radio stations.<sup>23</sup>

The Commission advanced numerous recommendations relative to hiring. Williams strongly recommended that the city create a position, Assistant or

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<sup>21</sup>The CRC, "Minority Hiring and Promotion Practices, City of Atlanta," July 1970, The Sam Williams Collection.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid.

Deputy Personnel Director, who would work very closely with department heads and the Mayor's office to achieve equal employment opportunity. Each department head, with the assistance of the Assistant or Deputy Personnel Director, was asked to set specific goals for hiring of minorities within his particular department, and it was suggested that an affirmative action file be established. This would give Atlanta the opportunity to hire qualified minority applicants.<sup>24</sup>

In the area of promotion, Williams and the Commission recommended that the minorities be informed of promotional opportunities; that any applicant be permitted to compete equally for promotions; that a re-evaluation and updating of the City's testing be done; that news releases on minority promotions be made to minority newspapers and radio stations. Each department head should keep records on a quarterly basis of the number of minority promotions in his department.<sup>25</sup>

It was also recommended that a comprehensive career development program be established. Training should be evaluated and employees should be sent to "outside" training institutions. It was also suggested that the city provide basic education which would be available to any employee, and the employees attending training sessions should do so on City time. The Assistant Personnel Director should work closely with departments and divisions to ascertain that minority employees get a "fair shake" in training opportunities.<sup>26</sup>

This four months study was conducted by Thomas Ward, Assistant Director, who was assisted by Judy Knight, an intern, from Michigan State University.

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<sup>24</sup>Ibid., p. 3.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., pp. 3-4.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., p. 5.



However, Sam Williams, Chairman of the Commission, presented the report to the Personnel Board and reminded it that "Atlanta must get its own house in order and be the pace setter for the entire community in providing equal employment for all."<sup>27</sup> He therefore requested from Personnel Board Chairman Rev. J. D. Grier and acting Personnel Director Carl Paul a report to the Commission in December of its action taken, which Grier promised to do. Williams contended that:

We are not going to succeed until department heads are committed. Mr. Paul has neither the spirit nor the intention of closing the gap of Black employment in city government. If he had, he would have been the first to do so--and men are known by their deeds.<sup>28</sup>

Heated words were exchanged by Paul and Williams on this issue, but Mayor Sam Massell cheerfully endorsed the CRC Report and established a 50 per cent goal for Black employment in city government by 1975. He requested all department heads to submit an action plan for attaining that goal.<sup>29</sup>

Responding to the request of the Commission, Personnel Board Chairman J. D. Grier and Acting Director Carl Paul reported to the Commission at its December meeting on actions taken in implementing the Commission's recommendations. Some progress had been made but the Commission promised to review the whole matter again in six months.<sup>30</sup>

In an effort to further improve communication between the races, the Commission under Williams' chairmanship launched a program, "Project Dialogue," in 1970 by encouraging all predominantly white civic and service clubs to invite more Black speakers and the Black clubs invite more White speakers.

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<sup>27</sup>"Put Your Own House in Order First, CRC Tells City," Atlanta Inquirer, 3 August 1970, p. 1.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., p. 16.

<sup>29</sup>The CRC, Annual Report for 1970, p. 10, The Sam Williams Collection.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid.

Lists of prominent Atlantans for the Black and White clubs were compiled by the Commission. "Project Dialogue" got off to a good start. Commission member T. M. Alexander, noted Black business leader, was invited by the Northwest Kiwanis Club as the kick-off speaker for the project. Following that initial attempt many Atlanta civic, service, and women's clubs have followed Northwest Kiwanis Club members,<sup>31</sup> but the program did not have the impact hoped for. The interaction between the Blacks and Whites was unbalanced.<sup>32</sup>

A final act of Chairman Williams was the appointment of an 80-person "Grassroots" Advisory Committee for more "people involvement." This committee was to advise the Commission of concerns and problems of poor people, but policies and priorities for programs were still the responsibility of the Commission. At its first meeting in September, 1970, the Committee requested that its name be changed to Citizens Advisory Committee and that membership be increased by 20 so that city-wide representation would be on the Committee. At its November meeting, Chairman Sam Williams had succumbed, the Committee's name was changed, and New Chairman Andrew Young appointed 20 additional members.<sup>33</sup>

Executive Director Nathaniel Welch, recalled that 1970 was one of the most meaningful and important years of the Commission. This was the last year Williams served as its chairman. He was an "able and resourceful leader who knew the city and had strong indignations against the wrongs of segregation. He molded the Commission into an effective instrument to deal with the injustices of segregation and to improve human relations in the city."<sup>34</sup>

On building new committees, Rev. Sam Williams once said that: "People

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<sup>31</sup>Ibid., p. 11.

<sup>32</sup>Francine Henderson, "Samuel Woodrow Williams, 1912-1970," p. 19.

<sup>33</sup>The CRC Annual Report for 1970, p. 12, The Sam Williams Collection.

<sup>34</sup>Nat Welch, former Executive Director, Community Relations Commission, taped telephone interview, Atlanta, Georgia, 13 November 1974.

with brains and who have compassion and are committed to the building of a community of equals, are pleasing in Thou sight."<sup>35</sup> If the words spoken by Williams have any validity, his efforts to eliminate racism and improve race relations in Atlanta through the Community Relations Commission, rooted in the Christian faith, certainly made him most pleasing in the sight of Almighty God.

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<sup>35</sup>Rev. Sam Williams, "On Building New Communities," The Sam Williams Collection.

## EPILOGUE

Sam Williams dedicated his abbreviated life to the elimination of racism and the improvement of human conditions in Atlanta from 1946 to his untimely death in 1970. The quality of Sam Williams' work in Atlanta the last 24 years of his life is supportive of Dr. Benjamin E. Mays' contention that:

Man is not responsible for the mind he is born with. --The quality of one's mind comes from his parents and from God. But man is responsible for the use he makes of his mind, for how he develops his mind. Sam Williams inherited a good mind and he used it to good ends and developed it for constructive purposes.--<sup>1</sup>

Williams worked through the church, the school, and numerous organizations in an attempt to check the ills of discrimination and injustice. At the time of his death, October 10, 1970, Samuel Woodrow Williams was the Second Vice President of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, a civil rights organization he helped to organize; Co-Chairman of the Atlanta Summit Leadership Conference, which he also helped to organize; Chairman of the Atlanta Community Relations Commission; Member of the Boards of Directors of the Atlanta Branch of the NAACP, the Greater Atlanta Council on Human Relations and the Georgia Council on Human Relations; and Pastor of Friendship Baptist Church.<sup>2</sup>

Because Sam Williams strongly opposed injustices committed by anyone, regardless of color, he was often described as dauntless, cutting, intelligent,

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<sup>1</sup>"Eulogy," The Morehouse College Bulletin, Fall 1970, p. 5, The Sam Williams Collection.

<sup>2</sup>"Tributes From Memorial Service," The Morehouse College Bulletin, Fall 1970, p. 4, The Sam Williams Collection.

brave and honest, both by those who agreed with him often and by those who opposed him. Moreover, Samuel Williams was often called "Tom" by Black radicals, especially when he openly supported Sam Massell, a Jew, for Mayor of Atlanta over Black candidate Dr. Horace Tate. Williams believed that the day of Black protest vote was over, and he felt that Blacks should vote for the best candidate whom they thought could win. Massell, a two-time vice-mayor, had always been sympathetic to the Black cause, and Williams believed that Massell was the best candidate who could win the election.<sup>3</sup> Fearful whites sometimes called Williams a "belligerent militant," especially when he lectured them in a very firm and cutting manner. But Sam Williams was not bothered by these epithets. His response to this harassment and name-calling was:

I don't worry about that. What troubles me is whether or not I am doing what I think the Lord wants me to do now. I let God worry about consequences. What I try to find out is whether or not I have some direction from him and if I think I have, I move whether it is going to affect you or someone else.<sup>4</sup>

Sam Williams only wanted Blacks to shun evil and hatred, and he wanted whites to address themselves to all injustices. Whenever the opportunity arose, Sam Williams warned them that their reticence and inaudibility were supportive of the racists' attempts to deprive Blacks of their dignity, respect, and integrity. For example, when he addressed a group at Emory University as Chairman of the Community Relations Commission, Williams stated that "good people are good for nothing, because they shun controversy, won't take stands and therefore impede progress."<sup>5</sup> Williams believed that brotherhood

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<sup>3</sup>Rev. Samuel W. Williams, "On Politics," The Sam Williams Collection.

<sup>4</sup>"Justice is Something You Do," Thrusts Toward Renewal - Home Missions, December, 1969, p. 17, The Sam Williams Collection.

<sup>5</sup>"Editorial," Atlanta Constitution, 22 April 1968.

worked only when it was practiced.

Sam Williams was convinced that "God is love" and as one of God's children it was his responsibility to share that love by reaching out to his neighbors, and he toiled in that spirit to rid the city of the racist, discriminatory practices that prevailed therein. He preached to Black and White congregations, conducted human relations workshops, lectured to students at Morehouse, other colleges, universities and high schools throughout the United States, and he worked through various organizations as member, office holder, or executive board member in an earnest attempt to elevate his race and change the social attitudes of whites.

Sam Williams' achievements included the improvement of public housing for Blacks, broadening students' thinking ability, promotion of brotherly love, and advancement of quality education, self-respect and self-pride among Black Atlantans. His life was short, but progress in education, politics, and civil rights was realized. Sam Williams worked successfully to aid Black students to secure enrollment in the Georgia State School of Business Administration; he aided in the desegregation of public transportation and public accommodations in Atlanta; and he worked to eliminate overcrowded classrooms, double sessions, inferior textbooks and other materials in the predominantly or all-Black schools. Williams also encouraged Blacks to register, to get acquainted with the candidates, and to vote for the candidate whom they felt would best serve them.

For his untiring efforts to ward off discrimination and racism in the fields of education, religion, politics and social service, Sam Williams received numerous awards from religious, social, and community organizations. Because of his efforts in the successful Atlanta bus desegregation case and the successful desegregation of the Georgia State School of Business Adminis-

tration, both in 1959, Williams was the recipient of plaques from the Twenty Seventh Club, his Greek fraternity, Phi Beta Sigma, the Atlanta Morehouse Club, the Senior Usher Board of Friendship Baptist Church, the General Missionary Baptist Convention, the NAACP, and the Georgia Conference on Social Welfare.

For his work in religion, Sam Williams was named "Clergyman of the Year" in 1969 by the Georgia Region of the National Conference of Christians and Jews, and he was presented the Herman L. Turner Award and the Harry Dwoskin Award. The Herman L. Turner Award, named in honor of Dr. Turner, a minister of the United Presbyterian Church, was created in 1967 by the Georgia Region. The Award is presented to an individual for distinguished service in the field of religion. The recipient should have exemplified concern and served generously all Americans. The Harry Dwoskin Award was created in 1969 by the Georgia Region. This award, named in honor of an Atlanta business and civic leader, provides a ten-day trip to the Holy Land for "The Clergyman of the Year" and his wife. Williams and his wife toured the historical sites of the Holy Land and they were guests of the Government of Israel. In response to receiving these awards, Sam Williams stated that he wanted only two things for Atlanta. They were: "A city where justice rules and fear that guarantees righteousness, fear that arises out of knowing one is contemplating doing a wrong and disgraceful act or deed."<sup>6</sup>

Sam Williams departed this life October 10, 1970, after complications arose following routine surgery in the Hughes Spalding Pavilion of Grady Hospital. One of Atlanta's active catalysts had become inactive, but his work and the spirit in which he moved about his tasks to prick the consciences

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<sup>6</sup>Rev. Samuel W. Williams, "Response of Williams at Clergyman of the Year Banquet," 30 September 1969, The Sam Williams Collection.

of racists and wrongdoers live among us. In November 1970 the Board of Trustees of the Atlanta Public Library named its Black book collection in Williams' memory, and Mayor Sam Massell officially presented the collection to the library. The purpose of the collection is to furnish reference and research materials in considerable depth. The same year the Community Relations Commission presented posthumously the Temple Award to Samuel Woodrow Williams, making him the first individual to receive it. The Temple Award was created in 1967 by the Hebrew Benevolent Congregation as they commemorated their 100th Anniversary. The Award is presented to an organization or individual whom the Commission feels made the most meaningful contribution to the improvement of human relations in Atlanta.<sup>7</sup> A Scholarship Fund in Williams' memory has been established at Morehouse College, and Friendship Baptist Church plans to establish another. In September 1973 a portrait of Sam Williams was unveiled at City Hall, making Sam Williams the first Black to have a portrait hanging in Atlanta's City Hall.

One of his students, Maynard Jackson, Mayor of Atlanta, capsuled the efforts of Samuel Woodrow Williams in Atlanta as follows:

I think everybody in Atlanta should reflect soberly on the premature death of this remarkable man. We should understand that he was absolutely and totally dedicated to the elimination of racism wherever it reared its ugly head. Racism has survived Dr. Williams. It would be a fitting memorial to his name and to his memory to insure that it does not survive us.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Roger Dottin, Assistant Director, Community Relations Commission, interview held by telephone, Atlanta, Georgia, 30 June 1975.

<sup>8</sup> "Moving Tribute to Rev. Williams," Atlanta Inquirer, 17 October 1970, p. 10.



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