

THE ATLANTA SIT-IN MOVEMENT, 1960-1961:

AN ORAL STUDY

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ABSTRACT

HISTORY

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In March 1960, Atlanta University Center students began a nonviolent direct action protest campaign designed to break down racial segregation in lunch counters and other public facilities in downtown Atlanta. The students' efforts had an effect within the Center from which their protests emanated,

This thesis is an effort to study those effects. The approach in doing so is intrainstitutional as well as intra-racial. The areas discussed are the students' organization, their efforts to take care of academic responsibilities while protesting, and the pressures between them and their parents, faculty, and college presidents.

The method of the thesis is that of oral history and major sources used in the research were fifteen oral interviews conducted in 1978 and 1979.

INTRODUCTION

This study is an examination of the Atlanta student sit-in movement of 1960-1961 from the inside out. While many articles, dissertations, books, essays, and even one novel¹ have been concerned (either wholly or partially) with certain aspects of the Atlanta student movement none of them has provided a view of how the movement was organized, the effects it had on the students, and on their relations with other groups in the Atlanta University Center from where the movement emanated.² In doing this it has also been necessary to provide a background to explain the influences that made the students eager to protest.

At some points it was necessary to focus on things

¹The Atlanta student sit-in movement was treated in a fictional manner by Milton Machlin, Atlanta (New York: Avon Books, 1979), pp. 47-56.

²The Atlanta University Center is a consortium of predominantly Black schools in Atlanta, Georgia. Those schools are Morehouse College; Spelman College; Clark College; Morris Brown College; Atlanta University, a graduate school; and the Interdenominational Theological Center. Hereafter, it will be designated as the A.U.C.

which occurred outside of the A.U.C. environment, so as to show the relationship between the students and their parents, to give a whole picture of how the sit-ins were organized and, finally, to explain the factors which influenced the students prior to the protests. Still, the emphasis is on what went on in the Center.

To fulfill this emphasis the approach of the study is from an intra-group perspective. The viability of such a direction was reinforced by Conflict and Competition; Studies in the Recent Black Protest Movement, a collection of essays which stresses intragroup and intraracial conflict in civil rights protests.³ An even stronger theoretical basis was found in an unpublished paper prepared by the Social Science Division of the Tuskegee Institute in May, 1960, in which the conflict among students, administrators, and faculty as a result of the student movement at Tuskegee was discussed. It provided an intrainstitutional framework which sharpened the theoretical base for this study.⁴ So,

³John Brace, Jr., August Meier, and Elliot Rudwick, Conflict and Competition; Studies in the Recent Black Protest Movement (Belmont, California: Wadsworth Publishing Company, Inc., 1971), pp. 1-4.

⁴Division of the Social Sciences, Tuskegee Institute, "The Tuskegee Institute Student Movement; A Sociological Analysis," Tuskegee, Alabama, May, 1960. [Mimeographed.]

by definition, this thesis is intragroup and intraracial in that the locale it is concerned with is predominantly Black. More specifically it is intrainstitutional.

Most importantly, this is an oral-based study. Not a great deal of material exists that relates to the events in the A.U.C. during the student movement. More attention was paid to the sit-ins, pickets, marches, kneel-ins, boycotts, and other types of protests that went on in the streets. Less attention was paid to what went on behind closed doors, in classrooms, planning sessions, and discussions on campus among students and their elders. As one scholar of the movement has said, publicity throughout the civil rights movement was more readily given to the march as it came down the street during protests but little to the organizational efforts that went into the march before it turned that corner.⁵ Thus, to research the Atlanta student movement it was necessary to go to the students, faculty members, college presidents, and parents who, in their own unique ways, contributed to it.

⁵Dr. Marcellus Barksdale provided this and other valuable insights on the civil rights movement during a seminar in the fall of 1978 at Atlanta University.

You have taken up the deep
groans of the century. The
students have taken the pas-
sionate longings of the ages
and filtered them in their
souls and fashioned a creative
protest. It is one of the
glowing epics of the time. . .

Martin Luther King, Jr.
to Founder's Day audience
at Spelman College on
April 10, 1960. Spelman
Messenger, May 10, 1960,
p. 13.

CHAPTER I

"WHY IN THE HELL CAN'T I?"

Before the Atlanta sit-ins began in 1960 several events had occurred to create an atmosphere for making protest a valid option for Black students. There were ingredients that combined to form a protest commitment, that is, a dedication and basis for challenging segregation and white supremacy with aggressive nonviolent direct action.

These ingredients varied with each of the student informants giving different observations on the subject. What is unique about the sit-in movement is its spontaneity, but the situation did not exclude certain antecedent factors from playing an important role in making it possible for that spontaneity to come alive.

Julian Bond, a student at Morehouse in 1960, discussed those things he thought to be motivating factors for A.U.C. students. The Montgomery Bus Boycott (1955-1957) was a prominent factor:

. . .The Montgomery Bus Boycott was very much on people's minds. That had been two or three years

before. What was significant about the Bus Boycott, I think, was that for the first time in the civil rights movement which was on everybody's consciousness, but it was a movement of professional people. You had to file a suit. That's what the civil rights movement was about.

So, the ordinary person, a student said, 'Oh, I can't do that. I might give a dollar or something, but I'm not a lawyer. I can't file a suit. I'm not a professional person.'

So, the Montgomery Bus Boycott democratized the civil rights movement. It made it possible for anybody to do anything.¹

Bond went on to say his "real respect and admiration was for the people of Montgomery." The persons he had respect for were the self-sacrificing ones who, despite an aversion to walking, did so during the Bus Boycott. "Here I am a college student, I'm going to be. . .in the elite. Here's this illiterate, uneducated woman and she's making this sacrifice. Why in the hell can't I?"²

James Forman, former Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee chairman, in his autographical treatment of the Black liberation movement, told of a Spelman student's

¹Interview with Julian Bond, Georgia State Capitol, Atlanta, Georgia, 10 April 1979; Martin Luther King, Jr., Stride Toward Freedom; The Montgomery Story (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1964), passim. See James Forman, Freedom-When? (New York: Random House, 1965), p. 81, for comments of an Atlanta student: "I myself desegregated that lunchcounter on Peachtree Street. Nobody else. I did it by sitting-in, by walking the picket line, by marching. I didn't have to wait for any bigshots to do it for me. I did it for me."

²Interview with Julian Bond.

impressions at the time of the Montgomery Bus Boycott: "I remember Ruby Doris [Smith] Robinson. . .[a student at Spelman College when the sit-ins began] saying that when she was thirteen or fourteen and saw those old people walking down there in Montgomery, just walking, walking, it had a tremendous impact." Forman commented that the Bus Boycott "had a particularly important effect on young blacks and helped to generate the student movement of 1960."³

A series of events which stood out in Bond's mind just as much as, if not more than, the democratizing effects of the Montgomery Movement was the struggle to integrate public schools during the late fifties and early sixties in such places as Little Rock, Arkansas and New Orleans, Louisiana. These thrusts against segregated schools produced figures for the sit-in college students to emulate: ". . .we saw these younger students doing these things [and] we said, 'hey, we can't let these burdens fall on our younger brothers and sisters. We can do something.'"

He told of something he watched on television:

I remember watching a girl by the name of Elizabeth Eckford in [Little Rock]. She came home after a day of school and her mother said her dress was so wet with

³James Forman, The Making of Black Revolutionaries (New York: MacMillan Company, 1972), p. 85.

spit she could wring it out. I said, 'my God.' Here is a sixteen year old girl walking through these vicious, vicious white people and letting them spit on her and she's strong enough to take it. Strong enough to take it.⁴

A local newspaper article supports this identification with the struggles of younger students to integrate public schools. A group of students from the A.U.C. was interviewed after the "Appeal for Human Rights" (see below pp. 24, 69) was published on March 9, 1960 but before the first sit-ins of March 15, 1960. The reporter commented that one student believed "total, immediate public school integration is possible." Another student was quoted as saying "I don't feel sorry for the girl who walked through the lines of soldiers and entered Central High School [in Little Rock]. I was proud of her. I'd do it myself, and if I had a daughter I would gladly have her do it."⁵

Farther from home the contact some students had with other countries was a source of discontent among them. Students who had a chance to travel to foreign countries discovered the absence there of the racist segregationist structure they experienced in the United States. When they were accepted on a more just basis abroad, but treated as

⁴Interview with Julian Bond.

⁵Atlanta Journal, 13 March 1960, sec. B, p. 11.

inferiors in Atlanta, they began to question that structure and were ready to protest.

An example of this readiness can be found among males, in Lonnie King of Morehouse, for whom the armed services functioned as a vehicle from which to see another world, an environment which was not dominated by Jim Crow:

". . .there were a number of students who had been in the Korean conflict who had gotten out of the service in '56 and '57, some even as late as '58, and who had come back to the Center and who had the opportunity to see or experience first hand a more open society than was present in Atlanta, Georgia."⁶ King, himself, was stationed in Korea. On his way back to the United States in 1957 he told a friend, "I was coming back to Atlanta when I got out, and this is the corny part. I told him that I believe one thing, that there's going to be a revolution in the South and I want to be there, be a part of it."⁷ When the sit-ins began he had the chance to be one of the most important individual parts of the movement.

⁶Interview with Lonnie King, Onyx Corporation, Atlanta, Georgia, 20 April 1979.

⁷Howell Raines, My Soul is Rested: Movement Days in the Deep South Remembered (New York: Bantam Books, Inc., 1978), p. 84.

Another one of these returning veterans spent one and one-half years in Germany. When he came back to Atlanta he became "depressed when he returned home and encountered the strictures of segregation once again." He decided to leave Atlanta as soon as he could earn enough money. Before he could do so the student movement had begun and he became "one of the most active and militant leaders in town."⁸

At Spelman College, a woman's institution, other students were exposed to foreign countries through the Merrill Scholarship Program which allowed recipients to study and travel in Europe.⁹ While in Europe the Spelman students got insights into what less race conscious societies, where racial segregation was absent, were like. Marian Wright, a Spelman student who returned from Europe in August 1959 wrote of the effects of her time abroad: "I have become an individual--aware of personal and national

⁸Jack Walker, Protest and Negotiation: A Study of Negro Political Leaders in a Southern City (Ann Arbor, Mich.: University Microfilms, Inc., 1964), p. 153.

⁹Charles Merrill, Jr. scholarships were fifteen month foreign travel-study grants. Merrill felt "that the United States is in need of young people with as broad an education as possible to serve the community." "Spelman College Students Receive Scholarships for Study and Travel," Spelman Messenger, May, 1959, p. 17.

shortcomings and determined to correct these in every instance afforded me. I have felt the sufferings of others and gained incentive to alleviate it in my own way."¹⁰

Wright, Roslyn Pope, and Herschelle Sullivan, all leaders of the student movement at Spelman were recipients of Merrill Scholarships. Sullivan became so-chair of the student protest organization, the Committee on Appeal for Human Rights.¹¹

While the Montgomery Bus Boycott, public school integration, and exposure to foreign countries all played an important part in creating the commitment of students to attempt integration of downtown lunchcounters in Atlanta, no factor was more important than the personal experiences of the students themselves. Personal contacts with segregated lunchcounters, restaurants, restrooms, water fountains, theaters, and buses were constant reminders to Atlanta's Black students (and Atlanta's Black community, in general)

¹⁰Roslyn Pope and Marian Wright, "Merrill Scholars Report," Spelman Messenger, November, 1959, p. 6.

¹¹See Howard Zinn, "Finishing School for Pickets," Nation, August 6, 1960, pp. 71-73, for discussion of the impact of international contacts on Spelman students. This was an impact felt on other campuses. A Kentucky State College student wrote that one factor in influencing the Black students to protest was the fact "we have traveled more and we have had more contact with the world." New York Times, 11 April 1960, p. 30.

that they were afforded second-class citizenship, at best, in a white racist society. This created emotional responses among which anger and humiliation were prominent. One very involved student activist, Charles Black, affirmed: "We always had the discontents, I suppose, having been reared and having experienced all the routine indignations you know: bus problems, rest-room problems, downtown lunchcounters. It was just, I suppose, a keg of dynamite waiting for a light on the fuse."¹²

Mary Ann Smith Wilson, a student at Morris Brown College, emphasized the effect of day-to-day living under segregation. More than all the other things, the force of being assaulted by the injustice of Jim Crow left an indelible mark on her.

I can remember some instances of segregation. For the most part I lived in my own world, totally separate from whites and really feeling I had just about everything because I wasn't exposed to what else was out there.

So. . .we had our social activities: the debutante ball, and all those things and I didn't feel deprived at all except for one thing that happened to me when I was in about ninth grade in high school.

I got on the bus and at this time there were mostly students on the bus. The bus was completely filled with [Black] students. You'd get on the bus and you'd just sit just about anywhere.

¹²John Neary, Julian Bond: Black Rebel (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1971), p. 50.

I got on the bus and sat on the first seat which was on the side. I happened to look towards my right . . .and there was this white woman sitting next to me. Out of complete shock I just jumped up. I was petrified that I had sat down next to this white lady.

That was the first realization that I had that segregation was having an effect or what it meant to go downtown and not be able to go to a restaurant. And to go downtown and have to go to a separate water fountain. I think something stuck with me about that incident.¹³

That incident began Ms. Wilson's searching herself for the reasons why she had acted as she did. It created a feeling which engendered a receptivity to protest. Ms. Wilson poignantly explained: "We thought why should we go on living like this, why should I raise children?" So ". . .when the opportunity came that maybe we can fight this thing, that we don't have to live with it, that there is a way to fight against it. . .we all just rallied toward the focal point of--now we can do something about it."¹⁴

Carolyn Long, a student at Clark College, had experiences similar to that of Ms. Wilson:

. . .We were always brought up in a very sheltered family. And we never went downtown shopping. . .very frequently. So, we were not. . .forced to really sit in any particular place.

We always sent shopping at a time when we ate before we went. . .[but] it dawned on us, I guess, what we must have been like in seventh, eighth grade that we couldn't

¹³Interview with Mary Ann Smith Wilson, Southside Community Health Center, Atlanta, Georgia, 13 April 1979.

¹⁴Interview with Mary Ann Smith Wilson.

try on clothes in [the] same places [as whites]. That we couldn't try on clothes at all in some places.

What bugged me more than anything else was the white and Black water fountains. I remember just deliberately going to the white fountain to see what would happen. Nothing ever did.¹⁵

On the way to the Catholic school she was enrolled in, the only white school in Atlanta which would accept Black children, it was necessary for Ms. Long to take the bus downtown and then transfer. While the bus she took to downtown had a mostly Black ridership, the one she transferred to had a mostly white ridership. Then 'we had to go to the back of the bus. Of course I refused to do that. . . . It was like I'm a person, you know. I really didn't feel anything [such as inferiority]." She went on: "I saw signs that said 'colored' and 'white' and that bugged me to no end. And I said, 'I'm going to do something about it in my own quiet way,' never imagining as a child that I would be involved in the student movement."¹⁶ Whether she had expected

¹⁵Interview with Carolyn Long, 1275 Fair Street, S.W., Atlanta, Georgia, 13 July 1979.

¹⁶Interview with Carolyn Long. In the fall of 1962 Howard Zin assigned a class of his at Spelman an essay in which the students were to write of their "first encounters with racial discrimination." Although this was after the phase of the movement I am dealing with, the statements by the Spelman students are relevant in that they powerfully reflect the feelings of Black students in terms of

to or not, Ms. Long later became involved with other Black Atlanta college students "to do something" about racial injustice in Atlanta.

confrontations with racial segregation. These incidents are similar to those discussed above. Howard Zinn, The Southern Mystique (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1974), pp. 139-141.

CHAPTER II

"IT WAS IN THE AIR"

Isolated incidents of protest without organization would have been easily defeated. It is the objective of this and the next chapter to examine how the students organized their protests; succeeding chapters will discuss how their organizing efforts affected their abilities to take care of academic responsibilities, and their relations with parents, faculty members, and college presidents.

On February 1, 1960 four Black freshmen from North Carolina A and T College--Franklin McCain, Ezell Blair, Joseph McNeil, and David Richmond--sat down at a Woolworth lunchcounter in Greensboro. They asked for service, which was promptly denied, with the explanation that Blacks were not served at the counter. By the time the four students returned the next day the media had spread news of the "sit-ins" and other Black students in the South moved quickly to duplicate the Greensboro protests for the rights of all people to be served at lunchcounters and restaurants

regardless of race. Between January, 1960 and August of the next year, 110 cities had desegregated public accommodations as a result of student efforts. Seventy thousand demonstrators participated in various types of protests and some four thousand went to jail.¹

Atlanta was one of those 110 cities. The meeting that began the organization of the Atlanta sit in movement is one of the most storied events in the history of the recent civil rights movement.² From that initial meeting came what an observer has characterized as "one of the largest and best organized sit-in demonstrations of all."³

On February 5, 1960, just four days after the Greensboro sit-ins, Lonnie C. King approached Julian Bond at a

¹Raines, My Soul Is Rested, pp. 73-83; Robert H. Brisbane, Black Activism; Racial Revolution in the United States, 1954-1970 (Valley Forge, Pennsylvania: Judson Press, 1974), pp. 43-45.

²Brisbane, Black Activism, pp. 47-48; Raines, My Soul Is Rested, pp. 84-86; Benjamin E. Mays, Born to Rebel: An Autobiography (New York: Scribner's Sons, 1971), p. 287; C. Eric Lincoln, "Strategy of a Sit-In," The Reporter, July 5, 1961, pp. 20-23; Roger W. Williams, The Bonds: An American Family (New York: Atheneum Press, 1972), pp. 203-04; John Hope Franklin, From Slavery to Freedom: A History of Negro Americans (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1974), p. 476; Neary, Julian Bond: Black Rebel, pp. 53-54.

³Howard Zinn, SNCC: The New Abolitionists (Boston: Beacon Press, 1964), p. 17.

student gathering place to solicit his help in organizing sit-in protests in Atlanta.⁴ Julian Bond said: "I was first approached by a fellow student at Morehouse when I was sitting [in] what was then Yates and Milton Drugstore at the corner of Chestnut and Fair [streets across from the A.U.C. campus]. This guy [Lonnie King] came up to me and argued with me that he and I, together, should call a meeting to organize sit-in demonstrations in Atlanta."⁵ King was carrying a copy of the Atlanta Daily World, the city's Black-owned newspaper. Pointing to the newspaper's headline which announced new developments in the Greensboro sit-ins King asked Bond, "Don't you think something like that ought to happen here?" and "Don't you think. . .that we ought to make it happen?" While cool to King's urgings at first, Bond soon began actively recruiting students at the drugstore along with King and fellow Morehouse student Joe Pierce.⁶

King was fearful that the opportunity which the events in Greensboro offered would be lost if the initiative was not taken advantage of immediately. He had been in

⁴Mays, Born to Rebel, p. 287; Walker, Protest and Negotiation, pp. 69-70.

⁵Interview with Julian Bond; and interview with Lonnie King.

⁶Neary, Julian Bond: Black Rebel, p. 53.

Oklahoma in 1958 when sit-ins had been started there by a NAACP youth chapter. His position "was that the situation in Greensboro would again be another isolated incident in black history, if others didn't join in to make it become something the kids ought to be doing."⁷

Fellow students were asked to meet that day in Sale Hall Annex on the Morehouse campus. In the days following as the sit-in movement grew in intensity throughout the South more and more Black Atlanta college students became aware of the rumblings of protest that were occurring in the region. Mary Ann Smith Wilson remembered that "it was in the air certainly" and the initial discussions about the viability of sit-ins began at Morehouse.⁸ Alton Hornsby, another Morehouse student, gave an indication of the way in which students were thinking at the time:

We. . .began talking about them [sit-ins]. The general reaction, as I recall it, was 'this is a move in the right direction.' Then as the days went on there was some talk of 'why aren't we in it?' That seems to have been pretty widespread at the time.⁹

Hornsby's first "awareness" of anything overt being

⁷Raines, My Soul Is Rested, p. 86.

⁸Interview with Mary Ann Smith Wilson.

⁹Interview with Alton Hornsby, Morehouse College, Atlanta, Georgia, 3 May 1979.

planned was when "they [student leaders] came to the assembly and began outlining the problems and proposals to us. They emphasized pretty much what we knew about the racist segregationist conditions in Atlanta." The student leaders asked for and received voted approval from the student body at Morehouse on "resolutions and demands" to be put to the white establishment. The demands as written suggested "if they were not met we would have to take direct action."¹⁰ After hearing of the North Carolina sit-ins, Carolyn Long remembers the students in Atlanta "wanted ours to be an organized, out-front, combined effort with all the universities involved, the colleges."¹¹ Julian Bond shared Long's view:

There were committees and chairmen and [we] tried to have representation from every school. We really always insisted that this not become a Morehouse-Spelman or Morehouse-Spelman-Clark affair.

Even though Morris Brown was physically separated from the rest of the campus and there wasn't as much back and forth as there is now. And people at Atlanta University were older but we wanted them with us. . . So, we tried deliberately to build that in.¹²

On that first day February 5, 1960, about twenty students came together at the call of King, Bond, and Pierce. From this group came the student organization, the Committee

¹⁰Interview with Alton Hornsby.

¹¹Interview with Carolyn Long.

¹²Interview with Julian Bond.

on Appeal for Human Rights, with Lonnie King as chairman. The most urgent question facing the students was: when would they sit-in? (Dr. Benjamin Mays, President of Morehouse College, maintains the first sit-ins were scheduled for February 12 but "postponed because they wished to involve as many Center students as possible." His source for this is Lonnie King.¹³)

While the sit-ins were being planned, the students took part in "workshops and seminars on the techniques of nonviolence, picketing and sit-ins."¹⁴ On the subject of nonviolence "there was no dispute in anyone's mind about the use of nonviolence. . ."¹⁵ In fact, the Committee on Appeal for Human Rights (COAHR) required all of those who demonstrated to take an oath of nonviolence.¹⁶

If there was no dispute over the use of nonviolence in the Atlanta sit-in movement, there was surely disagreement among the students about who would lead the movement.

¹³Mays, Born to Rebel, p. 287; Walker, Protest and Negotiation, p. 70, gives the same reason and footnotes an interview that was probably with Lonnie King.

¹⁴Brisbane, Black Activism, p. 48.

¹⁵Interview with Julian Bond.

¹⁶George B. Leonard, Jr., "The Second Battle of Atlanta," Look, April 25, 1961, p. 38.

The dispute appears to have been between a graduate student group at Atlanta University and undergraduates at the other institutions which formed the COAHR. The Atlanta University group was advised by Dr. Lonnie Cross, chairman of the A.U. mathematics department. While one scholar suggested that the A.U. group was the more militant, the chairman of the COAHR maintains "I think the A.U. students really did not want to follow undergraduates."¹⁷ Even though the A.U. faction organized after the COAHR they did hold the first sit-ins, which were, for the most part, ignored and ineffectual.¹⁸ Lonnie King recalled the situation:

. . .They didn't have the troops. The troops were behind us. And we took the position that when we did it everybody needs to be in it. It shouldn't be A.U. today and Spelman the next day. 'All of us are niggers' was the expression. So, it didn't make sense for us to go down there and further emphasize the fragmentation in the Black community where every [individual] campus was going to go down there. . . .

¹⁷Interview with Lonnie King. Howard Zinn makes the distinction of one group being more militant than the other. See Zinn, Southern Mystique, p. 108.

¹⁸See Atlanta Constitution, 9 March 1960, p. 3. On Monday seven Black students and one white person sat in at a Rich's lunchcounter and were told to leave, which they promptly did. The article said "informed sources said Tuesday that the seven were a 'maverick' group and their action was not instigated by the organized movement that exists among the city's Negro college students." This group was probably the A. U. faction.

The people at A.U. basically told me to go to hell on that. But the president of A.U., Dr. Clement, supported me. He thought I was right. So, that caused a little conflict.

I remember once we had a big meeting. . .with all the A.U. students wherein Dr. Clement and I spoke and Lonnie Cross and his people spoke. We had a tremendous debate at Bumstead Hall.

I made my position clear to them and Dr. Clement backed me up. Dr. Cross challenged Clement saying that 'we should not stand for another segregated day.'

Nice rhetoric but you're losing sight that if each school had gone down there fighting for the banner then we would have been setting ourselves up for a divide and conquer kind of thing.¹⁹

There were other, more subtle, disagreements between students. Some students objected to the style of some of the student leadership. Alton Hornsby conceded that, as in any social movement, friction between the assumed leaders and the led emerged: "We had. . .a group. . .of very strong activists who took the position that they had a monopoly on what should be done and how it should be done." Hornsby and "several" others were "offended by that particular approach." Hornsby "agreed with most" but "did not agree with all" of the core leadership's mandates or decisions. Thus, he sat in and demonstrated "when I wanted to sit-in. . .I knew where we were going to be. I'd go down and relieve somebody [or picket and march]."²⁰

¹⁹Interview with Lonnie King.

²⁰Interview with Alton Hornsby.

Lonnie King also realized that tensions might arise. At Morehouse the sit-ins allowed for a "different kind of leadership to emerge." Fraternity members, honor students, and student government association officers were not the sit-in leaders who came out of Morehouse, which produced a conflict recognized by King, who explained: "Some of the [established student] leaders [wondered] why were some of us [Julian Bond, King, etc.] in charge rather than them."²¹ At Spelman, Morris Brown, and Clark, by contrast, the "established" student leadership were, for the most part, sit-in leaders.

When the students' plans to take direct action became apparent the A.U.C. presidents became concerned that the students did not take actions which they judged to be dangerous or too radical. They called in the students and advised them to refrain from demonstrations. Subsequently, when the students made it clear that they would take direct action against downtown segregation, the presidents persuaded them to make a unique move before demonstrating, suggesting that the students write "An Appeal for Human Rights" to be published in the Atlanta daily newspapers.²²

²¹Interview with Lonnie King.

²²See Atlanta Constitution, 9 March 1960, p. 13; Atlanta Journal, 9 March 1960, pp. 1, 10, 31; Atlanta Daily

The "Appeal" told of the racist conditions under which Black people in Atlanta suffered in the areas of education, voting, medical care, entertainment, recreation, and justice. It closed by saying, "We must say in all candor that we plan to use every legal and non-violent means at our disposal to secure full citizenship rights as members of this great Democracy." Most important among the members of the student committee writing the document, according to Lonnie King and Julian Bond, was Roslyn Pope of Spelman College.²³ Bond, King, Carolyn Long, Herschelle Sullivan (Spelman), and Morris Dillard (Morehouse), also contributed to its composition.²⁴ Supporting data were based on a pamphlet produced by the Atlanta Council for Cooperative Action, made up of young Black businessmen and professionals, titled Atlanta: A Second Look.²⁵

World, 9 March 1960, p. 8. The Appeal was signed by Willie Mays, president of the A.U. Dormitory Council; James Felder, president of the student government association at Clark; Marion D. Bennet, president of the student government association at ITC; Mary Ann Smith (Wilson), secretary of the student government association at Morris Brown; and Roslyn Pope, president of the student government association at Spelman.

²³Interviews with Julian Bond and Lonnie King.

²⁴Interviews with Lonnie King, Julian Bond, and Carolyn Long.

²⁵Interview with Julian Bond; Walker, Protest and Negotiation, p. 74.

After the "Appeal" was published the students disavowed publicly rumors that they would, as other southern Black students were doing, sit-in and engage in other types of demonstrations. On March 13, 1960 one student told a newspaper reporter: "Don't worry about mass demonstrations. Watch out for something original." Despite this pronouncement students were then preparing themselves for sit-ins by doing such things as counting the number of seats at lunch-counters in downtown businesses for tactical purposes.²⁶

Initially, the students planned to sit-in at private lunchcounters, but there was concern that in a court case they would be more likely to lose a dispute over privately owned segregated lunchcounters.²⁷ Instead, students sat in at downtown lunchcounters directly involved in interstate commerce or leased from the federal government in federal buildings.²⁸

When the students approached a lawyer in Atlanta to represent them, they were discouraged by the high fee quoted.

²⁶Atlanta Constitution and Journal, 13 March 1960, p. 11-B.

²⁷Interviews with Julian Bond; and Donald L. Hollowell, 1389 Peachtree Street, Atlanta, Georgia, 30 November 1979; Raines, My Soul is Rested, pp. 87-88.

²⁸Neary, Julian Bond: Black Rebel, p. 55; Zinn, Southern Mystique, p. 112.

Finally, Attorney Donald L. Hollowell acted as counsel for many of the students.²⁹

With preparations in progress, it was necessary to select those students who would invade downtown Atlanta to sit-in. Ruby Doris Smith of Spelman College remembered: "I began to think about it [sit-ins] happening in Atlanta, but I wasn't ready to act on my own. When the student committee was formed in the Atlanta University Center, I told my sister [Mary Ann Smith], who was in the student council at Morris Brown College, to put me on the list. And when two hundred students were selected for the first demonstration, I was among them."³⁰

The sit-ins began at 11:00 A.M. on March 15, 1960. Seventy-seven students were arrested at City Hall, the State Capitol, Fulton County Courthouse, two office buildings on Peachtree Street where federal employees ate, two railroad stations, and the Trailways and Greyhound bus depots' lunchcounters.³¹

After these initial sit-ins the students wanted to

²⁹See interviews with Julian Bond and Donald L. Hollowell.

³⁰Zinn, SNCC: The New Abolitionists, p. 17.

³¹Atlanta Daily World, 16 March 1960, pp. 1-2; Atlanta Constitution, 16 March 1960, pp. 1, 9.

keep the issue of racial discrimination prominent in the public mind. In order to do this the students began picketing chain grocery stores in April to make them increase the number of Blacks employed and upgrade the types of jobs they held.³² While the picketing of the groceries stores proceeded the students wanted to organize a large demonstration to dramatize their objectives. The result of this planning was a march through downtown Atlanta with a stop at the state capitol.

On May 15, at a NAACP-sponsored "state-wide freedom rally" on Morehouse's campus, King announced that the students were going to march on May 17 through downtown to a rally at the Wheat Street Baptist Church on Auburn Avenue to commemorate the sixth anniversary of the Supreme Court decision in the Brown v. Topeka, Board of Education case, stopping on the way at the state capitol to further publicize their grievances. Newspaper attention to the announcement made it difficult for King, as chairman of the COAHR and leader of the student movement, to cancel or modify the march after Governor Ernest Vandiver made it clear he would have state troopers waiting to "protect" the state capitol from

³²Atlanta Daily World, 26 April 1960, p. 1; Lincoln, "Strategy of a Sit-In," p. 21.

the students. Dr. Mays and the other A.U.C. presidents tried to persuade King to put the march off, fearing violence on the part of the state troopers, but King decided to go ahead as planned.³³

The students left the Trevor-Arnett Library on the A. U. campus for the downtown area on their way to the state capitol. As the contingent of 2,000-3,000 students approached the capital, King, at the head of the march, was stopped by the Chief of Police, Herbert Jenkins, who instructed him either to divert the march or be arrested. In King's words:

What a lot of people haven't understood is that I was out there as the main person on the line. Whereas, the college presidents were concerned about that number of students that were at their schools, I had all the students behind this one young guy [himself].

Hell, I wasn't sure I was always right. . .so I said what happens if. . .hundreds of kids get beaten up down here because I'm the man. . .that faced this monster. So, I made the decision to divert the march.

There were some students, between one and four hundred, who lagged behind the main contingent and actually got to the state capitol. These marchers passed the capitol and the troopers unscathed except for jeers and cursing from

³³Interview with King; Atlanta Journal, 16 May 1960, p. 12; See pp. 72-73 for a discussion of presidents and their reaction to on the May 17 march.

a mob of whites that had gathered.³⁴

After this action the students were faced with the fact that the lunch counters were still segregated and with the possibility that the movement might fall apart as the summer vacation approached and the students dispersed. Mary Ann Smith Wilson told of plans for preventing this: ". . .it was decided we wanted to maintain some kind of intact organization during the summer so we got an office downtown on Auburn [Avenue]."³⁵ The students spoke to various community and church organizations. A liaison committee was organized to set up such contacts and, according to Lonnie King, ". . .we spent the whole summer doing that [organizing student-community relations]."³⁶ The presentation made to community groups was called "The Student Movement and You."³⁷

During the summer, kneel-ins at white Atlanta churches were organized.³⁸ Suits also were filed by

³⁴Interview with Lonnie King; Atlanta Daily World, 18 May 1960, pp. 1, 4; Atlanta Journal, 17 May 1960, pp. 1, 9; Atlanta Constitution, pp. 1, 8; Walker, Protest and Negotiation, p. 89.

³⁵Interview with Mary Ann Smith Wilson.

³⁶Interview with Lonnie King; Lincoln, "Strategy of a Sit-In," p. 21.

³⁷Walker, Protest and Negotiation, p. 92.

³⁸Ibid.; Atlanta Constitution, 8 August 1960, pp. 1, 6; 15 August 1960, p. 10; 22 August 1960, p. 6.

students in Federal District Court attacking segregated cafeterias at the county courthouse, city hall, and the state capitol.³⁹

The students put out a newsletter entitled, as their summer organizing effort was, The Student Movement and You.⁴⁰ This evolved into the Atlanta Inquirer which began publication on July 31, 1961 as a weekly newspaper managed mostly by students in the A.U.C. with the advisement of faculty members, under the editorship of M. Carl Holman, professor of humanities at Clark College. Julian Bond was heavily involved in the newspaper as managing editor, reporter, and columnist and Lonnie King contributed a column entitled "Let Freedom Ring" which was ghostwritten by Bond. The paper was conceived of as an alternative to the Black-owned Atlanta Daily World which urged a cessation to the sit-ins and other protests in editorials after the initial action in March, 1960.⁴¹

The boycott which the spring picketing of grocery

³⁹New York Times, 4 August 1960, p. 25; Atlanta Constitution, 4 August 1960, pp. 1, 11.

⁴⁰Interview with Lonnie King; Raines, My Soul is Rested, p. 90.

⁴¹See Atlanta Inquirer, 31 July 1960 to 25 March 1961; Neary, Julian Bond: Black Rebel, pp. 60-62; Williams, Bonds: An American Family, pp. 207-08.

stores had begun heightened during the summer with Rich's department store, the most prestigious in the city, as its focus. "If we can topple Rich's," was King's theory, "all we have to do is just kind of whisper to the others. . . ." In speaking to people in the community he continued, "we showed 'em where it wan't going to hurt them. We showed them where we were going to the shock troops, we were taking the chances. All we're asking you to do is just stay at home." And it worked. The students impressed upon the community the injustice of segregated eating facilities, water fountains, and restrooms in establishments where they spent money on clothing and other items. The adults were asked to "close out your charge account with segregation, open up your account with freedom."⁴²

When school opened in the fall of 1960 the students were anxious to begin their most extensive assault against segregation in downtown Atlanta. Some, as Lonnie King recounts, were too anxious: "A lot of students wanted to go gung ho in September when we first came back, but we wanted

⁴²Raines, My Soul is Rested, p. 90; See Atlanta Constitution, 24 June 1960, p. 36 where King acknowledged Rich's was the first target in their domino theory; and Atlanta Inquirer, 12 September 1960, p. 3 where King discusses meaning of community support to the sit-in movement.

to stage the thing in the middle of October, because we wanted to influence, if we could, the presidential election of 1960, believe it or not." King and Herschelle Sullivan, co-chair of the COAHR, had decided "in order to dramatize this thing we ought to get Martin Luther King, Jr. arrested, if we could." Bernard Lee and A. D. King, both students at Morris Brown proposed that they go ahead with demonstrations in September, as opposed to waiting until October, as Lonnie King and Herschelle Sullivan planned to do. King and Sullivan sought to get M. L. King arrested during a demonstration and then send telegrams to presidential candidates John Kennedy and Richard Nixon requesting them to take a position on the movement. The COAHR finally approved the King-Sullivan plan.

Sullivan was delegated the responsibility of calling civil rights movement leader Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. who had moved back to Atlanta from Montgomery, Alabama, that year. Initially, M. L. King, Jr. refused Sullivan's request to participate in the Atlanta sit-ins, since he was then on probation for a traffic violation conviction and knew he would be liable to a severe sentence if he were arrested in a sit-in protest. Sullivan located Lonnie King at the Spelman library where he was speaking to other students, and

relayed M. L. King, Jr., 's message. Subsequently, Lonnie King spoke to the minister himself, with the appeal that "you are the spiritual leader of the movement, and you were born in Atlanta, Georgia, and I think it might add tremendous impetus if you would go." The movement leader then agreed to participate and accept arrest.⁴³

During September and October before the sit-ins with Rev. King that began the fall campaign, the students made elaborate logistical preparations. Anywhere from twenty-five to one hundred students arrived daily at COAHR headquarters at the Rush Memorial Church on Chestnut Street near the A.U.C. campus to help either in the office or in the community to gain support for the movement.⁴⁴

⁴³Raines, My Soul is Rested, pp. 91-93.

⁴⁴Students instrumental in the COAHR were: Fred C. Bennet, a Morris Brown pre-theology student who acted as executive director; Robert "Tex" Felder, a second-year student at the ITC was deputy chief of operations; Rev. Otis Moss, an ITC student, was field commander; Morris Dillard and James Felder, students at Morehouse and Clark, respectively, were co-chairs of the public relations committee; Ben Brown of Clark College was Treasurer of the organization and Danny Mitchell, also at Clark, was posted in the downtown area as senior intelligence officer; Julian Bond played an important role in communications. The members of the COAHR were King, Sullivan, Dillard, Robert Felder, James Felder, Carolyn Long, Mary Ann Smith Wilson, Ruby Doris Smith, A. D. King, Albert Brinson, Lenora Tate, Josephine Jackson, Lana Taylor, Frank Smith, Ben Brown, Danny Mitchell, Lydia Tucker, Leon Green, William Hickson, Johnny Parham,

Then, as late October approached the students were prepared to implement the careful planning that had gone on during the summer. They knew it would not be easy but they also knew the alternative was even less easy to live with.

John Mack, Edmond Harper, Kenneth Crooks, John Gibson, J. A. Wilborn, and J. C. Harper. Charles Black was also a prominent member of the student movement. See Lincoln, "Strategy of a Sit-In," p. 22; Mays, Born to Rebel, p. 294; Neary, Julian Bond: Black Rebel, p. 51; Williams, Bonds: An American Family, p. 206.

CHAPTER III

"THE TIME FOR ACTION IS NOW"

The fall sit-ins began on October 19, 1960. As planned, Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. participated and was arrested, along with fifty-one others. All of the arrests were made at the downtown Rich's store, while the other department stores' lunchcounters (Davison's, H. L. Green, Woolworth, Newberry's, Grant's, McCrory's) were closed down. Charges against sixteen of those arrested were dismissed, and the other thirty-six were bound over for trial, including Dr. King. They pleaded innocent and refused to accept bail.¹

The sit-ins continued and were well coordinated. On October 20, twenty-six more students were arrested. In addition to department and drugstores students sat in at a lunch-counter in the railroad station. Estimates vary from several hundred to two to three thousand as to the number of students

¹Atlanta Constitution, 20 October 1960, pp. 1, 7.
See interview with Carolyn Long, also.

who participated.² On October 21, only two arrests were made.³

The organizing efforts of the students were polished with certain students agreeing to remain seated after they were asked to leave during a sit-in. These students were then arrested and refused bail, as stated, to dramatize the situation. Others moved from lunchcounter to lunchcounter after having been refused service, acting as mobile nuisances. Each targeted lunchcounter received a predetermined number of protestors. Six shortwave radios were used to coordinate activities; Ernest Brown, a Morehouse junior, operated the central radio in the church headquarters.⁴ Pickets were given laminated signs so their messages would not be damaged by rain. Girls were given hooded football coats to protect them from projectiles thrown by angry whites.⁵

Using these methods the students were able to crowd Atlanta jails, create a large nuisance for the downtown businessmen, and force Mayor Hartsfield to seek a truce

²Atlanta Constitution, 21 October 1960, pp. 1, 12.

³Atlanta Constitution, 22 October 1960, p. 1.

⁴Lincoln, "Strategy of a Sit-In," p. 23.

⁵Raines, My Soul is Rested, p. 89.

between the students and downtown businessmen.

Over the weekend, beginning Saturday, October 22, Mayor Hartsfield negotiated with the Student-Liaison Committee and agreed to release the students already in jail; in return, the students were to cease demonstrating for thirty days while Hartsfield acted as mediator between the students and businessmen. Rev. King was to remain in jail and face the charges brought against him. King was subsequently sentenced to four months at hard labor at Reidsville State Prison for violation of probation on a traffic charge.

At that point, events occurred to help fulfill Lonnie King's and Herschelle Sullivan's plan to affect the 1960 presidential campaign. Senator John Kennedy called M. L. King's wife, Coretta, and assured her he would do what he could to insure her husband's safety; Robert Kennedy called the judge in M. L. King's case and asked that he review the case and consider leniency. Rev. Martin Luther King, Sr., a Nixon supporter in the presidential campaign, then threw his support to the Kennedy candidacy. The most astute historians of the Kennedy administration attribute Kennedy's close victory to the Black votes he received after his gesture on behalf of M. L. King, Jr. If so, Lonnie King and Herschelle Sullivan were successful in influencing the presidential

campaign as they had hoped.⁶

The truce of late October did not produce a settlement and students resumed sit-ins on November 25 after the truce had been extended two days on November 22. No arrests were made during these demonstrations. Sit-ins continued through December with most department, drug, and dime stores closing lunchcounters or restaurants or just providing stand-up or take-out service.⁷

During January, 1961 the students slowed their activities because of final exams, reducing picketing to Fridays and Saturdays with only occasional sit-ins, while the boycott continued.⁸

On February 7, 1961 seventeen students were arrested at a Sprayberry's lunchcounter, the first arrests since October.⁹ On February 8 thirteen more students were arrested.¹⁰ Then thirty-nine more were arrested on

⁶David L. Lewis, King: A Critical Biography (New York: Praeger Publishers, Inc., 1970), pp. 125-130; Raines, My Soul is Rested, pp. 93-94, 97-99.

⁷Atlanta Constitution, 29 November 1960, p. 7; 30 November 1960, p. 11; 2 December 1960, p. 9.

⁸Walker, Protest and Negotiation, p. 111; Atlanta Inquirer, 28 January 1961, p. 9.

⁹Atlanta Constitution, 8 February 1961, p. 3.

¹⁰Ibid., 9 February 1961, p. 6.

February 9.¹¹ February 10 brought ten more arrests, together with the report that the Fulton County Courthouse jail was overcrowded.¹²

At this point Colonel A. T. Walden, a prominent Black attorney, offered his services as negotiator to the students at a meeting of Black leaders on February 15. Colonel Walden went to Robert Troutman a white attorney with connections to Rich's department store, and the two of them brought together the downtown businessmen and the Student-Adult Liaison Committee. Throughout the sit-in protests, the students had insisted on immediate desegregation of downtown lunchcounters, but the downtown businessmen had refused this change until public schools were desegregated in the fall of 1961. In return for this delayed segregation the students would cease sit-ins, pickets, and call off the boycott. The students' position was reflected in the words of Julian Bond in the Atlanta Inquirer, where he wrote: "It does seem. . .that the time for action is now. Waiting for public school desegregation is like waiting for this year to roll around again. The accommodationists and the settle-for-lessers are willing

¹¹Ibid., 10 February 1961, p. 8.

¹²Ibid., 11 February 1961, p. 3.

to do just that."¹³

In the Troutman-Walden meeting of the opposing sides the student representatives, Lonnie King and Herschelle Sullivan initially remained adamant, refusing to accept desegregation in the fall of 1961 during school desegregation. In the meeting they were pressured to accept desegregation "no later than October 15, 1961." Announcement of the agreement was made on March 6, but significantly no mention was made of the October 15 deadline. When the settlement was announced many students and their supporters expressed shock and dismay since the agreement was substantially what had been proposed by the downtown businessmen since the summer of 1960.¹⁴

Lonnie King remembered: "We went back to the campus [that afternoon] and I gave the report to the kids, and Herschelle and I cried, and I resigned and Herschelle resigned. Because the kids did not want to accept them [terms of the agreement]."¹⁵ Their resignations were refused, and they remained chairman and co-chair of the COAHR. Newspaper reports suggested that the students were, for the most part,

¹³Atlanta Inquirer, 14 January 1961, p. 2.

¹⁴Walker, Protest and Negotiation, pp. 114, 118-19.

¹⁵Raines, My Soul is Rested, p. 95.

against the agreement because no definite date had been announced for desegregation while most adults were for the agreement.¹⁶

The tension between the adults and the students over the disagreement, whether to accept or reject the settlement, came to a head at a mass meeting held at the Warren Memorial Church on March 10. Alton Hornsby recalls:

Lonnie [King] and the students were on stage as well as the adult leadership--Walden and Martin Luther King, Sr. [etc.] So, the outline, the package. . .all seemed, sounded, fairly well except this [desegregation] would take place in the fall.

And that's where the fat was thrown into the fire . . .And these were cries of 'No, no, no!!!!. . .'We've gone from sit-ins to sell-outs!'

So, it became rather disruptive. . . .And each member of the adult [leadership] tried to speak. Walden. . .continuously repeated that we are going to get this desegregation. . .he laid his life on the line for it. . . , in the fall. Martin Luther King, Sr. . . . the same thing--pleading for acceptance of the agreement. It just didn't go over.

The only thing that saved it and pretty much stopped the revolt was when Martin Luther King, Jr. came to the church and pleaded for calm and pretty much. . .pleaded for acceptance of the agreement. . .Now, that didn't stop the division.¹⁷

Although the division was not entirely healed, Dr. King's appeal did prevent the resolution from being scrapped. His appeal to the students said in part:

¹⁶Atlanta Inquirer, 11 March 1960, p. 1.

¹⁷Interview with Alton Hornsby.

We must move out on the road of calm reasonableness. We must come to a mood of mutual trust and mutual confidence. No greater danger exists for the Negro community than to be afflicted with the cancerous disease of disunity. Disagreements and differences there will be, but unity there must be!¹⁸

The Atlanta Inquirer was able to report on March 18 that there were some indications that support for the resolution was growing except for the abandonment of the boycott before desegregation. No more mass sit-ins took place, although the students did seek a concrete timetable for desegregation of the lunchcounters, as rumors persisted that sit-ins would be reinstituted. The lunchcounters were finally desegregated on September 28, 1961.¹⁹

In discussing the sit-ins some attention must be paid to the effect that day-to-day organizing activities had on the students. There is no doubt that most involved students felt as if they had contributed to their city, their people, and their society in no small way. They took pride in what they had accomplished. Still, some individuals felt that they needed a break from the sit-in atmosphere. One such person was Mary Ann Smith Wilson, who confessed:

¹⁸Walker, Protest and Negotiation, p. 124; See Raines, My Soul is Rested for Lonnie King's comments on King's speech and Mays, Born to Rebel, p. 293.

¹⁹Walker, Protest and Negotiation, pp. 124-25; Atlanta Constitution, 29 September 1961, p. 1.

I had become saturated with the whole movement. It was like I was beginning to close in on myself. I knew that I needed to get out of it. . .not to get out of the movement but to open myself again. . . .

During the spring of 1960 Wilson had applied for and received a fellowship to the University of California at Berkeley. She explained:

I had done something I felt very good about and knew there were others who would carry on once I left. . . . At that point I felt totally saturated. . .I really didn't want to stay in Atlanta. I had no qualms about leaving.²⁰

Lonnie King was disappointed in how many of the adult leadership had performed during the conflict:

I was so disillusioned by the thing. . .I decided to go to school at Howard 'cause I had seen people that I had respect for all my life crumble when faced with an awesome decision. I just didn't think I could take it any more, to be quite honest with you.²¹

Thus, it was that desegregation came to downtown Atlanta after eighteen months of struggle. Neither the city or many people would be the same. Egos and ideals were both boosted and bruised while de jure segregation was dealt a blow it was never to recover from.

²⁰Interview with Mary Ann Smith Wilson.

²¹Raines, My Soul is Rested, p. 96.

CHAPTER IV

"SOMETHING WE FEEL WE GOT TO DO"

In view of the type and level of organizing that the Atlanta sit-in students were involved in, one must ask the question of how the sit-ins affected the personal lives of the students. How did the student protestors cope with being actively involved in organizing while at the same time fulfilling their basic purpose of being in school, that is, attending classes, studying, and making the best grades possible in preparing for life after college? Also, how did the sit-in activity of some students affect their relations with their parents? The competing demands of academic life, parents, and protest became most acute when the students were arrested and elected to stay in jail, refusing bail to emphasize their protest.

Many Ann Smith Wilson had this to say about the degree of concern for academics on the part of students:

As the weeks rolled on most of us got so totally involved in that [protesting]. . .I suppose toward the end of the [school] year you began to think and

perhaps some people dropped classes.

They would spend a lot of extra time trying to get it together at the end, but during the time of the peak of the movement everybody was just totally involved in it.¹

An observer of the sit-in students commented that not even "the possibility of failure in academic classes can still the ardor of the keyed up student protestors,"² a judgment supported by Wilson's testimony. Lonnie King expressed similar sentiments:

I never really worried about academics. I wasn't trying to graduate with honors. Although I did make honor roll a couple of times over there. I just decided to prove I could do it.

I never really worried that much about academics in that I really thought I had the abilities to do it [protest and perform well academically]. And never worried about it that much.³

Even though the devotion of the students was substantial, one professor, Dr. Lois Moreland of Spelman, recalls that some students did face an "academic fear" since there was a question among some faculty members and administrators as to whether "the students should even do what they were doing."⁴

¹Interview with Mary Ann Wilson.

²Albert A. Thompson, "The Sit-In Technique: A Behavior Typology," The Negro Education Review 12 (April 1962): 36.

³Interview with Lonnie King.

⁴Interview with Dr. Lois Moreland, Spelman College, Atlanta, Georgia, 1 December 1979.

For their part the college presidents and faculty members were adamant in their belief that academic standards at the Atlanta University Center schools should not be sacrificed because of the organizing efforts in which the students were involved. Dr. Mays told the students: "You're not going to get your grades for sitting in jail. You've got to get your lessons."⁵ Wendell Whalum, professor of music at Morehouse, said: "The student government was made aware by President Mays and, as I recall, Dean Brailsford Brazeal, that their [student's] studies were not to suffer in the face of their fight for human rights, for human equality. That Morehouse had always taken the lead in this and we wouldn't give it up. But Morehouse had taken the lead while training students."⁶

On the Clark campus President James Brawley was just as concerned with letting his students know he expected them to take care of their studies first before boycotts, picketing, or any other protest. He discussed how he let the students know this. He would not allow "a disruption of the educational process. We said 'if you go to jail, we'll

⁵Interview with Dr. Benjamin E. Mays, 3316 Pamlico Drive, Atlanta, Georgia, 29 November 1978.

⁶Interview with Wendell Whalum, Morehouse College, Atlanta, Georgia, 21 November 1978.

understand but classes are going to go on.' When it was asked if classes could be dismissed so more students could participate in the demonstrations, they were told 'no, that would defeat what you are attempting to do, that we would not dismiss classes. But, what you do, you would have to do at your own risk.'" He went on to say that they, the college presidents, would try to protect the demonstrators and get them out of jail if arrested "but the educative process must go on."⁷

It appears that at all the Center schools this attitude was maintained. However much the professors and presidents on the campuses supported the students in their endeavors, they all agreed that the students should study and protest, not protest in lieu of studying. This is not to say that students were not the recipients of much understanding and consideration in their situation; on the contrary, as it developed, allowances, when needed, were given. The respondents, many times, emphasized that allowances were given "not to lower standards" but rather "to make it easier" to make up work they might have missed.⁸ This

⁷ Interview with Dr. James Brawley, Clark College, Atlanta, Georgia, 24 April 1979.

⁸ Interviews with Julian Bond; Carolyn Long; Dr. Benjamin E. Mays; Dr. Lois Moreland; Dr. James Brawley.

took the form of tutoring sessions, rescheduling examinations, and oral examinations.

The student informants varied in their testimony about allowances for sit-in students. Julian Bond saw it mainly as a scheduling problem: "If you couldn't come to class on this day to be able to take the test on the weekend or something."⁹ Carolyn Long said, "while we were in jail we had books and things brought us and studied while we were there." In October of 1960, while in jail with the other students arrested in the sit-ins, Carolyn and her sister Wilma wrote that although their professors might be surprised they were "planning to send out for more books." They went on to say they were requesting the volumes not only to "keep up" with their studies but also to diminish the tedium of imprisonment. Long, in her interview said that when they were not in jail "we never missed classes. It was a matter of everything [such as]. . .planning taking forth at night."¹⁰

Not all the students could take such a positive view of their situation as Long did in October, 1960. Some students were afraid a whole semester might be lost in jail.

⁹Interview with Julian Bond.

¹⁰Interview with Carolyn Long; Atlanta Inquirer, 24 October 1960, p. 1-A.

One writer suggests that this fear heightened the anxiousness of the students in their quest for a resolution to the conflict over desegregation.¹¹

Lonnie King in his assessment leans toward Long's views in deemphasizing the necessity for allowances. "You didn't get a lot of allowances though at Morehouse. . .The only allowances we got at Morehouse--the major allowance--was in being excused from chapel. You could miss so many [classes] and they'll put you in demerits."¹² It appears, most likely, that despite what King contends, Morehouse was not all that much different from other Center schools in this respect. Another student at Morehouse maintained "even the more conservative ones [professors] did show a certain amount of leniency. I mean, in certain instances. . .there was nothing else to do" such as "on the day when most of us marched [May 17, 1960]. . .there were no classes to meet." He added that "on many days you'd go in class and one-fourth of the people would be out and things would go on as best they could."¹³

What the students did not know or remember was that

¹¹Walker, Protest and Negotiation, p. 113.

¹²Interview with Lonnie King.

¹³Interview with Alton Hornsby.

at Morehouse Dr. Mays made it official policy of the school that faculty members would make allowances for involved students. He remembered: "My faculty wasn't quite with me on my stand on that. They were not wholly in my corner. They thought that they should make that decision whether they should be a part of this thing. Well, I didn't think so. I believed that the head of the college [should]. . .and I didn't think it was a faculty matter. I had to take a stand." As time passed he believed his faculty became more amenable to his policies.¹⁴

At Clark, President Brawley believed "all of them [faculty] made allowances." The Clark students were told he felt "all the teachers will understand and give you an opportunity to make up the work."¹⁵ Dr. Harry V. Richardson, President of the Interdenominational Theological Center in 1960, agreed that students were "given an opportunity to make up work where they were out in these [protest] activities. . . .We did, in a number of cases, give students an opportunity to make up for time they spent in these movements."¹⁶

¹⁴Interview with Dr. Benjamin E. Mays.

¹⁵Interview with James P. Brawley.

¹⁶Interview with Harry V. Richardson, Interdenominational Theological Center, Atlanta, Georgia 25 April 1979.

Dr. Margaret Rowley, professor at Morris Brown in 1960, detailed some of the things that were done to help the students. If a student was in jail assignments would be sent to him or her. Make-up tests or incompletes were given instead of failing marks. She was surprised that "very few" of them took advantage of the situation. "They may have missed things but most of them made it up later. They didn't use this as an excuse."¹⁷ Mary Ann Smith Wilson, in agreement with Dr. Rowley's comments, was sure that she received some allowances because "I must have missed a lot of classes, and I was able to make up without asking for a lot of allowances. So, I'm not sure what happened in other instances." She found that professors "didn't put the pressure on" to make her decide which part of her life was most important--school work or the movement. There was one instance when she was concerned about getting a "C" grade in a course when she needed a higher grade to retain her academic scholarship while at Morris Brown, but she was able to get the grade she needed to retain her scholarship.¹⁸

Finally, at Spelman College, Lois Moreland was very

¹⁷ Interview with Dr. Margaret N. Rowley, Atlanta University, Atlanta, Georgia, 22 November 1978.

¹⁸ Interview with Mary Ann Smith Wilson.

close to the students active in the movement. She gave tutoring sessions "all the time" to help students catch up, but "there was opposition within the faculty" about such methods. She would visit the students' dormitories, and "we'd talk about the courses. I would try to make sure that they were not behind [in their classes]." Also, "if I found that most of the class was missing on a particular day an exam was scheduled, I would reschedule the exam. I wasn't punitive in any way."¹⁹

Dr. Clarence A. Bacote, Professor of History at A.U., who taught one course at Spelman at the time of the sit-ins, told of one student and her commitment to the struggle. The student was Ruby Doris Smith.

When I discovered her sincerity, I decided a young woman like this deserves all of the help you can give her. So, what I did was to have conferences with her. I would give special tutoring. Tell her what she missed and suggesting things she should read.²⁰

She was also given oral tests and many absences were overlooked.

The students themselves had to work their schedules so that the demonstrations and jailings would not devastate

¹⁹Interview with Dr. Lois Moreland.

²⁰Interview with Dr. Clarence A. Bacote, Morehouse College, Atlanta, Georgia, 21 November 1978.

their academic endeavors. Near the end of the fall semester in January, 1960, picketing was cut back to accommodate final examination schedules. Class attendance was also taken into consideration, as the number of pickets on a particular day was determined on the basis of class schedules as well as the "day's [protest] objectives."²¹

Through these different methods most of the sit-in students were able to remain in good standing academically, but a small minority, in Lonnie King's terms, became "academic casualties." He commented:

A lot of us though, actually, dropped out so we wouldn't have that kind of burden. It was a conflict trying to score on the exams, at the same time fight folks downtown.

There are some people who dropped out who have never gotten it back together. There are some casualties in the movement.²²

One such casualty was Julian Bond:

Well, we tried. You'd try for a long time to balance school work and this kind of work [protest]. It was something I couldn't balance.

I had to give one up. I gave up the school work. Most people tried. Some people suffered.²³

²¹Lincoln, "Strategy of a Sit-In," p. 22; Walker, Protest and Negotiation, p. 21.

²²Interview with Lonnie King.

²³Interview with Julian Bond. See also Williams, The Bonds: An American Family, pp. 208-09; Neary, Julian Bond: Black Rebel, pp. 62-64.

If it was difficult for some students to handle the responsibilities of tending to studies while protesting, there can be no doubt that many students agonized over the dilemma of possibly incurring the disfavor of their parents by sitting in. Parents feared for their children's safety, economic reprisals, and damage to status.

Lonnie King was married and had a family of his own while attending Morehouse but knew well the pressures involved in parent-student conflict over involvement in the direct action movement. One student at Morehouse, Joe Pierce, had an aunt who was a school teacher: "[she] felt that he was going to get her fired."²⁴ Pierce was able to remain active but others were not. "After it [sit-ins and arrests] happened," Julian Bond recalled, "One or two students were forbidden to have anything to do with this again." Those parents argued: "I sent you to Morehouse and you come back with a police record. It's too much. But this was the exception, not the rule."²⁵

Carolyn Long remembers that "some" parents were supportive of their children's sit-in activities to a "certain extent." Her comments echo those of Bond:

²⁴Interview with Lonnie King.

²⁵Interview with Julian Bond.

. . .When it got to the point of arrests they didn't want them to be involved at all. Because the main thing, you know, professional Blacks in Atlanta were thinking of is, 'You're gonna ruin your career for the future and you'll have a record and we worked too hard putting you through college for you to just throw it away.' That kind of thing.

I really wouldn't want to call any names. There were some [students] who confided in us that their parents had told them that if they got that involved [to the point of being arrested], then they wouldn't have anyplace to stay and that kind of thing. But, that was in the minority.²⁶

It is probably true that most parents of student activists did not prohibit their daughters and sons from participating in the sit-ins. It is also likely that most were not enthusiastic in their support for their children. The majority were only marginally instrumental in determining whether or not their children were involved in protest activity. In some instances, parents tried to dissuade their offspring from participating in demonstrations where violence was always imminent but acquiesced when the young woman or man communicated just how dedicated he or she was to the movement. In other instances, parents did not express sentiments overtly but gave tacit support.

Mary Ann Smith Wilson and her sister, Ruby Doris Smith,--the former at Morris Brown and the latter at Spelman--were both committed members of the Atlanta Student movement

²⁶Interview with Carolyn Long.

from its initial stages. Their parents gave quiet support to their daughters. "They definitely did not speak out or prohibit me or my sister from participating at all," said Wilson. "I'm pretty sure there were some things they couldn't understand about it but, I think, ultimately they felt there was nothing but good that could come out of that kind of thing. So, for the most part they were very supportive." When asked if they communicated their support openly she replied by saying: "No, it was very subtle, very subtle. There was no open [message] that 'you have my support, go ahead and do your thing.' But there was no objection of what we felt we had to do."²⁷

The student who took credit for recruiting the two sisters into the movement recalled the reluctance of the two sister's mother. Mrs. Smith told him, "You've got both of my girls in this thing and I hope it works out."²⁸ Another parent who feared for the well being of his daughter but allowed her to participate, was a Professor of Theology at Morehouse, Roswell F. Jackson. He "reluctantly" gave his daughter permission to sit-in. Why was he reluctant? "The only true answer is that I feared for her safety." He saw

²⁷Interview with Mary Ann Smith Wilson.

²⁸Interview with Lonnie King.

this as a "selfish" concern common to "middle-class Blacks," who were "generally afraid" of challenging the white racist system. His daughter told him that becoming a part of the movement was "something she had to do" and would sit-in with or without her parents' permission. Although he was doubtful as to the possibility of success that the students would have in desegregating the downtown lunchcounters and other facilities, he felt something "needed to be done." He admired "those who had courage and conviction" because "I had been a victim of the situation for years."²⁹

Alton Hornsby's discussion with his mother was similar to that of Roswell Jackson's with his daughter. He recounted:

. . .When my mother and I got around to talking about it. . .she didn't prohibit me but advised me not to get, you know, deeply involved in it.

I replied, I guess, as most replied, at the time, that this was something we were going to have to do. I didn't use these words, meaning no disrespect and anything of that nature: 'This was something we feel we got to do.'³⁰

In addition to those parents who were either non-supportive or who found that their children's commitment was too strong to overcome, there were others who were more

²⁹Interview with Roswell F. Jackson, Morehouse College, Atlanta, Georgia, 17 April 1979.

³⁰Interview with Alton Hornsby.

openly supportive. Most prominent among these was Ralph Long, father of Carolyn and Wilma Long, both students at Clark College and members of the student movement. In his position as head of the Atlanta Student Defense Fund, organized to provide bail money for those arrested, Long placed himself on the front lines in support of the student for justice, serving as a bondsman. He describes his contribution in this way:

We had to have, after they got arrested, we had to have people to bond them out. . .I volunteered to be a bondsman because my children and so many other[s].

I knew it was the right thing to do and so many of the adults in Atlanta refused to do it. . .I just took it on my own. I was responsible for \$100,000 and that is what I signed up for. . .against my property.

From the beginning, Mr. Long said, "They had my blessings all the way. . .my daughters. . .I wish that it had been possible to have done this years before."³¹

Long was principal of the John Hope Elementary School in 1960, and concern was expressed by some to his children that his activities in the student movement might jeopardize his career.

I remember one time someone suggested to them [his children] that they not do this because it would jeopardize my job, and they came to me and we talked about it and what not.

³¹Interview with Ralph Long, Sr., 1275 Fair Street, Atlanta, Georgia, 19 June 1979.

I said, 'I'm a man of my convictions.' If they wanted to continue to do it, they should go ahead and do it. I told them 'you don't have to hide behind anything.'

Long told the superintendent of schools that he was involved in work for the student movement. She did not interfere and asked only that he keep her informed of time he had to spend away from his school. Some of his co-workers were critical of his involvement and reported it to the school superintendent, whereupon she called a meeting of her staff telling them she knew of Long's involvement in the student movement and that she found nothing wrong with Long's activity; moreover, she admonished them that she thought very little of those who felt it necessary to report Long's activities.³²

Mrs. Ralph Long also was concerned with the student movement. For her part, Mrs. Long was not "surprised" when the sit-ins began in Atlanta since they had first occurred in North Carolina. At the time of the March 15 demonstrations in Atlanta, she and other parents "settled down to waiting until the fad exhausted itself." When her daughters were arrested later in 1960 during the fall campaign against segregation, she "wept tears of frustration in the middle of

³²Ibid.

the night, when my own daughters deliberately put themselves out of reach, behind locked doors, through which I could not follow."

That night she was somewhat "jealous" of the movement, she recounted, because it "so radically disturbed and changed the pattern of our home life as we had known it, as we so desperately wished it could be." Religion helped her to bear the strains better. More than a year after the sit-ins began and after the resolution to the conflict had been reached, she felt that the student movement was something she wanted to "wait for me" as opposed to being left behind in its struggle for equality.³³ Another parent, Lee Brown, father of Ben Brown of Clark, also spoke of religion in relation to the movement. He felt "the children are doing God's work."³⁴

The parents of Julian Bond were like those of the Long sisters. Bond's father, Horace Mann Bond, was a well-known educator, college president, and activist, in his own right. Julian considered both his parents "very supportive. They were surprised, but I don't think either. . .thought it

³³Atlanta Inquirer, 22 April 1961, p. 2; See interview with Carolyn Long for discussion of parental worrying over her well-being during demonstrations.

³⁴Leonard, "Second Battle of Atlanta," p. 45.

was anything 'bad.'"³⁵ But, initially, at least, Mrs. Bond admitted to being against her son's involvement. She has said, ". . .most people like us were opposed to it."³⁶ Another author maintains that Bond's parents "had reservations about the student movement, to begin with" and "came to accept it."³⁷ There can be no doubt that Mrs. Bond was alarmed when Julian Bond was arrested in the March 15 sit-ins. When Julian's father arrived home the evening of March 15 after Julian and the other students had been arrested, Mrs. Bond shouted to her husband as he walked to the door: "Julian's got arrested!"³⁸ Even though the Bonds became like those parents who either quietly or more openly supported their children in the student movement; still, the great majority of parents did not influence their children's participation.

³⁵Interview with Julian Bond.

³⁶Neary, Julian Bond: Black Rebel, p. 55.

³⁷Williams, The Bonds: An American Family, p. 209.

³⁸Neary, Julian Bond: Black Rebel, p. 55.

CHAPTER V

"I HAD TO BE WITH THEM"

Besides the students' parents probably no group considered themselves more responsible for what they considered the well-being of the students than the presidents of the six A.U.C. schools. In 1960 the presidents and their respective schools were: Dr. Rufus Clement, Atlanta University, who was also president of the Council of Presidents; Dr. Benjamin E. Mays, Morehouse; Dr. James Brawley, Clark; Dr. Harry V. Richardson, Interdenominational Theological Center; Dr. Albert Manley, Spelman; and Dr. James Cunningham, Morris Brown. For this study Richardson, Brawley, and Mays were interviewed.

All of the presidents interviewed emphasized their support of the student movement; nevertheless, while supporting the students, the presidents had to take many things into account, the first of which was that of legal responsibility for the safety of the students.¹ Besides legal

¹Interviews with Mays, Brawley, and Richardson.

considerations, the presidents, no doubt, were conscious of other pressures that could be brought to bear on colleges. Dr. Mays "politely refused" the request of one trustee of Morehouse that he prevent the students from demonstrating.² In addition, all of the presidents had been affected by discrimination themselves, making it very difficult for them, as individuals, to oppose action on the students' part to desegregate downtown lunchcounters. On the other hand, one interviewer of Atlanta student activists has written that the presidents "urged on the students a plan which spared the downtown merchants, some of whom were financial supporters of the college."³ In effect, the presidents were motivated by conflicting impulses which influenced them to take actions, at certain times, favorable to change and, at other times, restrain, delay, and even stifle methods the students used to break the color line in downtown Atlanta.

Soon after the Greensboro sit-ins, the A.U.C. presidents became aware A.U.C. students were planning sit-ins of their own. According to Brawley, "that was knowledge that was pretty widely available when the first sit-ins began in North Carolina at A and T College. From that particular time on

²Mays, Born to Rebel, p. 293.

³Raines, My Soul is Rested, p. 87.

we were very much aware of what was going on. . . .We knew they were going to get into the act and we encouraged them to."⁴ He continued:

We encouraged them, because we [the presidents] knew the best way to handle a situation of this kind was to assure the students we were sympathetic, that we were as much interested in what they were doing to bring about change as they were. And we knew it would be most effective if we could work together, instead of working against one another.⁵

The response of Richardson was similar:

The general feeling among the presidents was that this was a justifiable cause, that the students were taking part in the push for civil rights, to break down Southern segregation from which we all had suffered.

This was the students' effort. . .to bear witness and take a part in it. I know that as far as possible we all were sympathetic to it. I do remember we had two or three sessions in which to discuss this.⁶

From the interviews conducted it appears that the presidents met among themselves, initially, to discuss the situation. Then, as demonstrations appeared imminent, they called the student protest leaders in to discuss plans for demonstrations in February of 1960.

It is important to note that the students felt a need to keep their plans away from the presidents and adults

⁴Interview with James P. Brawley.

⁵Ibid.

⁶Interview with Harry V. Richardson.

as much as possible for fear they would try to stop the students' efforts. Julian Bond commented that the students tried to discuss their plans as little as possible with adults.⁷ The students kept the members of the Student-Liaison Committee, many of whom were businessmen with contacts in the white community, designed to facilitate adult support work, at arm's length, even though the adults in it could be considered devoted in their support of the students. The adults in the committee were not allowed in the students' policy and strategy meetings but were asked by the students to "serve in an advisory capacity." This was because "we preferred not to embarrass or otherwise discompose our adult leadership; they may have vested interests or personal obligations which may make it more difficult for them to share directly in our deliberations, or in our strategy and the implementation."⁸ This arm's length attitude was also true for the college presidents.

When the presidents did find out that the students were organizing demonstrations they called in the student protest leaders and many of those who had been organized.⁹

⁷Interview with Julian Bond.

⁸Lincoln, "Strategy of a Sit-In," p. 21.

⁹Just what the presidents knew, and when they found

Lonnie King related this:

The Council of. . . Presidents got wind of what was going on and Dr. Mays sent Mrs. Hill, who was his secretary to the corner [at Yates and Milton Drugstore] one day to get me and Joe [Pierce] and Julian [Bond].

He summoned us to a room we didn't know existed--this big, ornate, conference room. When we all got there, there were all these students we had been organizing. [Laughter] I said, 'Lord, I must be out of school now.' [Laughter]

So, anyway, we came in. They [presidents] told me about the fact that they had heard what we were doing, and that they were concerned about it. They gave us a lecture about their responsibilities as college presidents to not get the students killed. . . . They had a responsibility to the students.

It was really imposing. And everyone looked at me [as if to say] 'Speak, leader.' So, I told them that I basically shared their concerns and I was concerned about that too. But, I thought we had a broader concern and that was the shackles of segregation and discrimination and if we were going to make this wall fall we

it out is difficult to determine. Benjamin Mays says that "a committee of them [students] came to see me, February 17, 1960, to discuss their plans to begin sit-ins in downtown Atlanta on February 19." See Mays, Born to Rebel, pp. 287-290; Interview with Mays. Jack Walker, in his study of the Atlanta student movement, writes that Mays persuaded students on February 17 to put their demonstrations off until after Martin Luther King, Jr.'s trial in adjoining DeKalb County for a traffic violation. See Walker, Protest and Negotiation, p. 72. In his book Mays acknowledges that he was concerned sit-ins might "affect adversely" King's trial. Mays goes on to say the Council of Presidents met with "student government presidents from each of the six campuses and two students from each of the six campuses. . . for the first time," on February 20. Finally, Mays remembers students came to his house at midnight March 14 to tell him that the demonstrations were on for the next day.

needed to join in now. We were prepared to do all that. I talked about our responsibilities as human beings.¹⁰

At this point, Dr. Clement proposed an option to sit-ins. He suggested the students let a legal challenge be attempted by the NAACP. "We basically said if we tried it from a legal point of view. . .it would take a long time."¹¹

Ms. Wilson's recollections of one such meeting called by the presidents to influence the students' actions substantiates King's account. "The feeling [of the presidents] was, sure, Atlanta had all the problems of segregation, but let's try to do something in a more constructive way. We can make some contacts. We can initiate some contacts downtown. I think probably the presidents were concerned that the campus just didn't become totally disrupted behind this."¹²

The "constructive" action Clement proposed in early March, after the option of legal maneuvering was rejected, was the writing of a statement of grievances by the students to let the public know why they were protesting. On the Appeal for Human Rights, Julian Bond said: "He [Clement]. . .was helpful in a way he didn't intend to be. He said 'if you do

¹⁰Interview with Lonnie King.

¹¹Ibid.

¹²Interview with Mary Ann Smith Wilson.

this, if you have this and demonstrate, no one will know why.' Of course, everybody would know why, we wanted to eat at the damned lunchcounters. He said 'why don't you issue a statement explaining why you were doing it.' I think he was trying to delay it, but we drafted this called "An Appeal for Human Rights."¹³

Lonnie King remembers that after it was understood that the students would take to the streets:

Clement recommended that we the students, and I'm sure that was their united recommendation--he was just saying it--that we write an Appeal for Human Rights and put it in the newspapers.

Clement advanced it [the money] from A.U. at first, but they raised money from all over America. In other words we were the best financed of any [sit-in] group.¹⁴

Julian Bond felt that "in retrospect [Clement's proposal] was a delaying move. . .what Dr. Clement really wanted to do was have us put off the initial demonstrations, believing if we ever did begin we couldn't be stopped."¹⁵ If that was Clement's intentions, he was successful only in delaying, not stopping, the sit-ins from taking place. The first sit-ins engineered by the group summoned to the

¹³Interview with Julian Bond.

¹⁴Interview with Lonnie King; Lewis, King: A Critical Biography, p. 114.

¹⁵Raines, My Soul is Rested, pp. 86-87.

meeting with the college presidents did not occur until March 15 in the middle of the month after the students began organizing in early February. Even the agreement between the presidents and the students about writing an appeal was not "unanimous at first. There were those who felt we should be out there doing what all the other students were doing," said Wilson.¹⁶ Finally a compromise was struck with the understanding that the publishing of an appeal did not preclude demonstrations.

It was further agreed that the first demonstrations would be a test case to reveal the grievances of the students and provide a court case. The students found themselves, Lonnie King remembers, "running with the foxes and chasing with the hounds on that issue. We tried to satisfy the college presidents but at the same time carry this thing through."¹⁷

At different times the reservations of the presidents were communicated to the students. Dr. Richardson confided that "where students were making unwise efforts, I think we would advise them against it." They were counseled not to indulge in activity which was either "too radical or which

¹⁶Interview with Mary Ann Smith Wilson.

¹⁷Interview with Lonnie King.

were legally liable." Richardson asserted that the presidents "on a number of occasions when the students would make their reports, we would. . .caution them about certain activities because we just thought it was overexposure on them. . .I do know there were many cases, a number of cases where we felt the students were unwise," although they never told the students not to participate in protest activities.¹⁸ At one point the presidents did prohibit students from meeting with sympathetic white college students at the A.U.C.¹⁹ In addition, both Brawley and Mays recalled they admonished the students that they should tell their parents of their plans to sit-in.

The meetings between the presidents and the students continued irregularly for a while in 1960, according to Julian Bond. The presidents in those meetings, Bond said, tried to say "why don't you young people come in here, tell us what you're going to do. . .before it happens. We don't want to be taken off guard. You see when we got arrested we didn't tell anybody."²⁰ This last statement is most likely

¹⁸ Interview with Harry V. Richardson.

¹⁹ Interview with Julian Bond; Raines, My Soul is Rested, p. 87.

²⁰ Interview with Julian Bond.

not accurate. Dr. Mays, in his autobiography, maintains that at midnight the night before the first Atlanta sit-ins of March 15, "a group of students visited my residence. . . to inform me that demonstrations were on."²¹ This does not appear to be the case for the other presidents in the A.U.C.

When the students were planning to march on the state capitol on May 17, 1960, the presidents were in touch with Atlanta police chief Herbert Jenkins and Mayor William Hartsfield who asked them to try to stop the students from marching to the state capitol during their march on the way to the rally at Wheat Street Baptist Church on Auburn Avenue. Dr. Mays spoke to King:

I remember when I told [Lonnie] King. . .[what Jenkins and Hartsfield said]. He said he had to go back to his committee.

Then they came back and assembled and King made a beautiful speech. He said 'If there is anybody in here that's going to be violent, don't go! If anybody can't go to jail without fighting he's not for this!' Nobody, nobody dropped out. No. . .not a single one.

Then, I knew that it [the movement] couldn't be stopped and I wasn't going to try. Because here are these kids doing what I had been doing alone since the turn of the century--fighting against injustice, discrimination. . . .

So, I couldn't say to these students they couldn't do what I had been doing alone. I'd been almost lynched three times. . .I was, of course, I had to be with them.²²

²¹Mays, Born to Rebel, p. 290.

²²Interview with Benjamin E. Mays.

About this incident Lonnie King recalled:

Dr. Mays and all of them called me in and asked me to call off the march. I told them I couldn't do it. I said 'you all have been teaching us that we have to become leaders. So, now that we have an opportunity to be leaders today, you don't tell us to be leaders tomorrow. We have a chance to be leaders today and I think we ought to do it and we are ready.'

I prayed and went on. Dr. Mays and his wife, Miss Sadie--they all said 'Son, we all hope things come out all right.'²³

As the students approached the capitol Jenkins personally ordered Lonnie King to divert the march threatening him with arrest if he did not do so. King obeyed the order, basing his decision on the fear of what would happen to the movement he had done so much to organize. "See, I didn't want to give the college presidents a stick to beat me over the head with." It was a stick he was sure they would use.²⁴

Even in view of this, King was able to say "all the college presidents were supportive of us intellectually, but as a practical matter, at the very outset of the movement, they thought we were going a little too fast."²⁵ This was the presidents' dilemma: There were times they took actions which seemed to show they were for the movement and at other times took actions that seemed to show they were not for the

²³ Interview with Lonnie King.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

movement. As has been said, they once prohibited interracial meetings of students on campus after the sit-ins had started. Another time they met with a group of white businessmen to ask them to desegregate their businesses to forestall the need for further demonstrations. One businessman told them desegregation would never come to Atlanta. Dr. Mays told him dryly, "Never is a long time."²⁶

Dr. Brawley had a chance to tell another of the downtown businessmen his views when the businessman suggested that the presidents stop the students from demonstrating. Brawley replied:

We can't stop these students. This is a movement. You've got to understand that this is a movement and it's not only a movement on any particular campus. . . but it's a movement nationwide. That you can't stop a movement of that kind. That this is a revolution.

. . . They told you what they want. There's nothing else and nothing short of compliance on the part of the white people here in Atlanta.

You've got to open up these stores, you've got to open up these restaurants, you've got to open up these lunch counters so that there'll be no discrimination. No more segregation and that sort of thing.

He summed up his comments by saying "Well, it was a hard job to do, but they did it."²⁷

Over a period of time the college presidents did come

²⁶ Interview with Benjamin E. Mays.

²⁷ Interview with James P. Brawley.

out publicly in support of the students. By the time of commencement in May, 1960, Dr. Albert Manley was able to tell the graduating class at Spelman: ". . .just as we [adults] had settled back and begun to believe your generation was indifferent to the great social issues of the day, you surprised all of us."²⁸ Dr. Richardson wrote an eloquent article in 1962 detailing his support for the student sit-in movement from a theological perspective.²⁹

If the presidents found themselves in a paradoxical position, their faculty members were more able to take clearer positions on the student movement. Faculty members at the A.U.C. fell into three groups in relation to the student movement: those supportive of the sit-in students; those aloof from the sit-in students; and, finally, those who were against the students' methods, if not their goals. The first and last groups appear to have been in the minority; the middle group appears to have been the largest of the three.

At Spelman College, Dr. Lois Moreland, in 1960, was a lecturer in the political science department. Students active

²⁸Albert Manley, "Charge to Students by Manley at Graduation," Spelman Messenger, August, 1960, p. 12.

²⁹Harry V. Richardson, "Some Religious Implications of the Sit-In Activities of American Students," The Negro Education Review 12 (April 1962): 51-54.

in the movement approached her for advice.

As I recall, some students came to me to talk to me about it. We had a very close relationship. I was very young and just about the same age as my students.

As I recall, some of the student leaders were in one of my classes. . . They were keeping me abreast of what they were going to do, or planning to do, or hoped to do.

They were asking advice, too, because I was a political science teacher.³⁰

Lonnie King and Julian Bond asked her to be the student movement's advisor, but she declined because she was pregnant at the time. She and her husband decided the risk of racist retaliation was too much of a danger to their unborn child.³¹ Moreland summarized her role in the movement:

I think the role I played was more like a counselor, not an advisor. . . they did come to me for emotional support, perhaps like a big sister. They'd talk about the concerns in the jail. They'd talk about the kinds of things they did.

They wanted me to talk about the law. They wanted me to talk about existential philosophy which they were very much into at the time. They had just read Sartre, apparently.

I was not a strategist for the movement, but I was supportive in the sense that anybody who is under pressure wants a sympathetic sounding board.³²

Another supportive faculty member at Spelman was Howard Zinn, of the history department, who took an active role in helping the students. A group of students used his

³⁰ Interview with Lois Moreland.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

car to ride downtown to sit-in on March 15, and he was assigned the duty of calling the media that morning to explain the student's reasons for demonstrating. Zinn and his wife participated in a sit-in at a Rich's lunch room where each ordered two meals and seated themselves. Then Black students, including King, Carolyn Long, and John Gibson joined them at which time the lunch room was closed.³³ Zinn described his relation to the Atlanta student movement as one of an "observer, a friend and an occasional participant. I had picketed supermarkets, sat-in at Rich's, gone with my students to desegregate the gallery of the legislature and marched downtown in a mass parade."³⁴ In his book, the Southern Mystique, which discussed Southern race relations in general and focused, in part, on the A.U.C. and the student movement, he dedicated the volume to his students at Spelman by saying that "without [them]. . .this book could not have been written."³⁵

Dr. Wendell Whalum was an instructor of music and advisor to the Student Government Association at Morehouse when the sit-in movement broke out. He was among a group of faculty members at Morehouse who were supportive of the

³³Zinn, Southern Mystique, pp. 112-113; 132-134.

³⁴Ibid., p. 136.

³⁵Ibid., p. vii.

student movement, but, at the same time, were ready to admonish the students if they perceived the student's actions to be incorrect. He explains "because of my then youthful status. . .students were a lot more communicative to me and I knew what was going on from almost the very beginning of the movement."³⁶ In more detail Whalum described how a group of professors came close to the movement:

He [Dr. Mays] asked Dr. [Robert] Brisbane, Mr. [William] Nix who was the Director of Personnel. . .then . . .and he asked a couple of other teachers. . .one was the late Dr. Sam Williams and he asked me. . .to. . . come to a meeting with the student government heads where he made it clear that we should help the students articulate what they were trying to do.³⁷

Dr. Robert Brisbane of the political science department probably became, along with Dr. Sam Williams, the closest Morehouse faculty members to the student movement. Brisbane's research specialty was Black protest and fourteen years later in his book, Black Activism, a history of the recent Black protest movement, he wrote of the Atlanta student movement he advised.³⁸ Dr. Whalum had this to say on Brisbane:

³⁶Interview with Wendell Whalum.

³⁷Ibid.

³⁸See footnote two in second chapter.

I do remember this well. Brisbane let us know that he really didn't need any help. That he and Sam Williams and Nix could touch base if they had to. . . .³⁹

Williams, head of Morehouse's philosophy department and pastor of the influential Friendship Baptist Church, preached "these students who are acting. . . God bless them. They are separating the men from the boys." At a protest meeting he went further and told the assemblage: "We're going to stay with, and even die with the students if necessary."⁴⁰ Dr. Lionel Newsome in the sociology department at Morehouse was another faculty member that gave support to the students.⁴¹

At Clark, M. Carl Holman was cited as the faculty member at that school most dedicated to the movement. He was the student movement's second advisor, helped the students begin the Atlanta Inquirer newspaper, and became its editor.⁴² Holman's comments in a March, 1961 editorial at the time of the sit-in agreement between the students and businessmen is indicative

³⁹Interview with Wendell Whalum.

⁴⁰Helen Fuller, "We Are All So Very Happy," New Republic, April 25, 1960, pp. 14-15; Walker, Protest and Negotiation, p. 113; See also interviews with King and Bond.

⁴¹Interview with Lonnie King.

⁴²Interview with Carolyn Long and Julian Bond; See p. 31 for discussion of newspaper.

of the tone he contributed to the movement. He believed the settlement was a matter of "treason and heresy" by the Black adults who had pressured the students into accepting the agreement. He criticized anyone who saw the settlement as a "major victory."⁴³

At Atlanta University Whitney Young, Dean of the School of Social Work, was clearly on the side of the student movement as its first faculty advisor. In a town meeting held at the university in the spring of 1960, Young spoke of the four values the sit-ins had. They had "dramatized injustice," "fought apathy," "released hostility," and "secured action."⁴⁴ Tilman C. Cochran, a professor in the School of Social Work expressed a perceptive attitude supportive of the student movement. Cochran in July, 1960 addressed a summer school assembly saying "Negro young people have lost their patience and are trying to change a world they didn't create."⁴⁵

⁴³Atlanta Inquirer, 11 March 1961, p. 2. See his other editorials from July 31, 1960 to March 25, 1961 in the Inquirer.

⁴⁴Atlanta Constitution, 25 March 1960, p. 10; George McMillan, "Sit-Downs: The South's New Time Bomb," Look, 5 July 1960, p. 24; Interview with Lonnie King.

⁴⁵Atlanta Journal, 27 July 1960, p. 10; Tilman C. Cochran, "Socio-Psychological Aspects of the Sit-In Activities of American Students," The Negro Education Review, 12 (April 1960): 41-45.

Although no faculty member at Morris Brown and ITC appears to have been as active and vocal as those at the other schools they nonetheless did support their students. In a human relations program at Morris Brown Dr. Margaret Rowley and other staff members had a vehicle through which they were able to contribute. She said:

I saw my part as a technician [in the human relations program]. We taught people about change and what it means and how you bring it about. . . .I thought my role was as supportive and helping with education. . . not just vague education but for the task they had to do.⁴⁶

The number of openly non-supportive faculty members was small. Whalum said "I can tell you that there was a divided group" with one group of older teachers "who said they're doing too much, they [students] need to withdraw," or slow down their protest activities. On Spelman's campus Lois Moreland did observe "opposition within the faculty" to the student movement in the initial stages of the movement.⁴⁷

At some points, the students experienced problems with professors who felt they should stay out of the movement. Alton Hornsby had three faculty advisors while at Morehouse, one the chairman of the History Department, Hornsby's major

⁴⁶Interview with Margaret Rowley.

⁴⁷Interview with Wendell Whalum and Lois Moreland.

area of study, the other two advisors in his minor areas of concentration, German and education. He summarized their stance:

Some were downright opposed. The history chairman, and this caused me great concern, advised me personally not to get involved, saying what I was going to risk in terms of scholarships and future careers.

The advisor in the German department was also against his involvement, while Dr. D. L. Boger, the third advisor, voiced his support in no uncertain terms.⁴⁸

Carolyn Long's French teacher at Clark, a white man, gave "very, very long dissertations on why Blacks should stay in their places." She "wondered why he never spoke to me or called on me in class and so forth." The semester she took his class in conversational French she received a grade of "D." The next semester, at Morris Brown, she took another class in French and received an "A."⁴⁹

Arthur C. Banks, Jr., a professor in Morehouse's Political Science department, was more moderate in his opposition to the student movement, although he made it clear that picketing was not the best thing the students could have been doing with their time in college. In a letter to the

⁴⁸Interview with Alton Hornsby.

⁴⁹Interview with Carolyn Long.

Nation, in reply to a previous article by Spelman professor Howard Zinn, Banks said that although the students' efforts were for a "noble cause" the demonstrations "may have been carried on at the expense of legitimate classroom activity. It would be helpful indeed if these picketing energies were used to strengthen and intensify intellectual activity on the Negro college campus. . . .Carrying picket signs is good exercise, but reading Great Books can yield greater profits."⁵⁰

The greater part of the faculty in the A.U.C. did not voice an open opinion either for or against the student movement. Hornsby said "that most of the faculty here at Morehouse and in the A.U.C. were simply aloof."⁵¹ King commented "many, most of the faculty members didn't express an opinion one way or the other."⁵²

As the sit-in movement extended through 1960 and 1961 faculty members became more supportive of the student movement, as did the larger Black Atlanta community. In Lonnie King's words, "it [faculty attitude] got more positive. You

⁵⁰ Arthur C. Banks, Jr., "Letters to the Editor," Nation, 17 September 1960, p. 140.

⁵¹ Interview with Alton Hornsby.

⁵² Interview with Lonnie King.

see, in the beginning I think a lot of people including students and faculty were apprehensive," because of the dangers inherent in resisting racist discrimination in the deep South. Moreland agreed that the faculty's attitude had changed to a more supportive posture over time.⁵³

Generally, then, the majority of faculty members in the A.U.C. did not actively involve themselves in helping and supporting the sit-in students. Over time, more professors expressed greater support of the students: a core of faculty members did actively support their students; a smaller group of professors fought the current of the times and tried to discourage the students from taking part in the movement.

⁵³Interview with Lonnie King; Lois Moreland; see also interview with Mary Ann Smith Wilson; Howard Zinn, The Southern Mystique, p. 120.

CONCLUSION

"THE STRUGGLE IS STILL GOING ON"

Atlanta's Black college students had been given examples of indigenous protest in the form of the Montgomery Bus Boycott. Some stayed in foreign countries for extended periods of time and saw that racial segregation was not a universal human experience. Closer to home, they saw the genuinely heroic Black adolescents of the public school integration battles. Most importantly, they had been a part of many degrading personal experiences themselves in a racist society.

As a result the students had the necessary inner strength and commitment to create an indigenous mass movement for the desegregation of lunchcounters, restaurants, restrooms, and other public accommodations in Atlanta. When the students began their organizing efforts, they had most of the white South against them. The courage it took to sit-in, picket, march, and boycott in the face of the brutality the white South could dispense was honestly heroic.

It was not only the racist white South that students had to contend with. Many parents were fearful for the students' safety and the loss of their own jobs. The college presidents, while identifying with the students' goals, tried to contain and direct the students methods, in a fashion they felt best. Faculty members were a mixed lot with some actively for the movement, fewer openly against it, and most aloof or non-involved.

The Southern student protest movement was not a first, but an important step in a continuum of Black protest. It was, in another sense, unique, in that it was the first instance of mass direct action in the recent civil rights movement. It took strength from the example of the Montgomery Bus Boycott and gave impetus to the freedom rides, voter registration campaigns, marches, boycotts, and freedom rides that exploded on to the scene in the 1960s and 1970s.

At the same time, the sit-in movement was limited, in that it did not attack the economic effects of institutional racism. Although one might have gained the right to sit at a lunchcounter, it was another thing to be able to buy a meal at the same lunchcounter. Also, the sit-in movement of 1960 and 1961 was most effective in the upper and urban South. Many rural and deep South areas had to wait until enforcement

of the 1964 Civil Rights Act for desegregation of eating facilities. These qualifications may miss the point.

The sit-in movement was a movement full of potential. That potential has been fulfilled only to a degree. The sad fact is that racism and its effects still plague the lives of Black people in this country. In 1960 the time had come for an important step in the struggle against that plague. The struggle is still going on.

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