CIVIL RIGHTS TRIP

FPC AND FUPC

APRIL 18-21, 2024

***"I am sick and tired of being sick and tired."* – Fannie Lou Hamer**

CIVIL RIGHTS TRIP

April 18

Leave FPC
Pit Stop at Georgia Welcome Center
Arrive at Lynching Marker
Drive to Moore's Ford Bridge
Drive to Zion Hill Cemetery
Drive to Montgomery, Alabama
Tour of Civil Rights Sites

April 19

Drive to Civil Right Memorial
Tributes to Civil Rights Martyrs
Visit National Memorial for Peace and Justice
Visit Legacy Museum

April 20

Drive to Selma
Tour of Selma by Joanne Bland
Walk across Edmund Pettus Bridge
Drive to Birmingham, Alabama
Tour of key Civil Rights sites in Birmingham

April 21

Drive to 16th Street Baptist Church
Attend Sunday service
Drive back to FPC

ITINERARY

CIVIL RIGHTS GROUP MEMBERS

FPC AND FUPC

Larry Bosc*
Rev. Lucy Crain*
Rev. Delton Farmer*
Cynthia Farmer
Connie Carlson
Ellen Smith
Tamera Sanders
Mim Jones
Anne Lafferty
Richard Lafferty

Sue Loeser
Ross Loeser
Kent Main
Linda McKnight
Lisa Dillard
David Dillard
Louise Ripple
Barbara Williamson
Chuck Williamson

Janet Lyman
Celeste Bagley
Mark Bowling
Barbara Byers
Shirley Evans
Hal Clarke
Nan Clarke
Souad Nowakowski
Christina Solis
Valerie Tutt

trip leaders

"Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly."
— Martin Luther King Jr.
Letter from the Birmingham Jail

DO THE WORK

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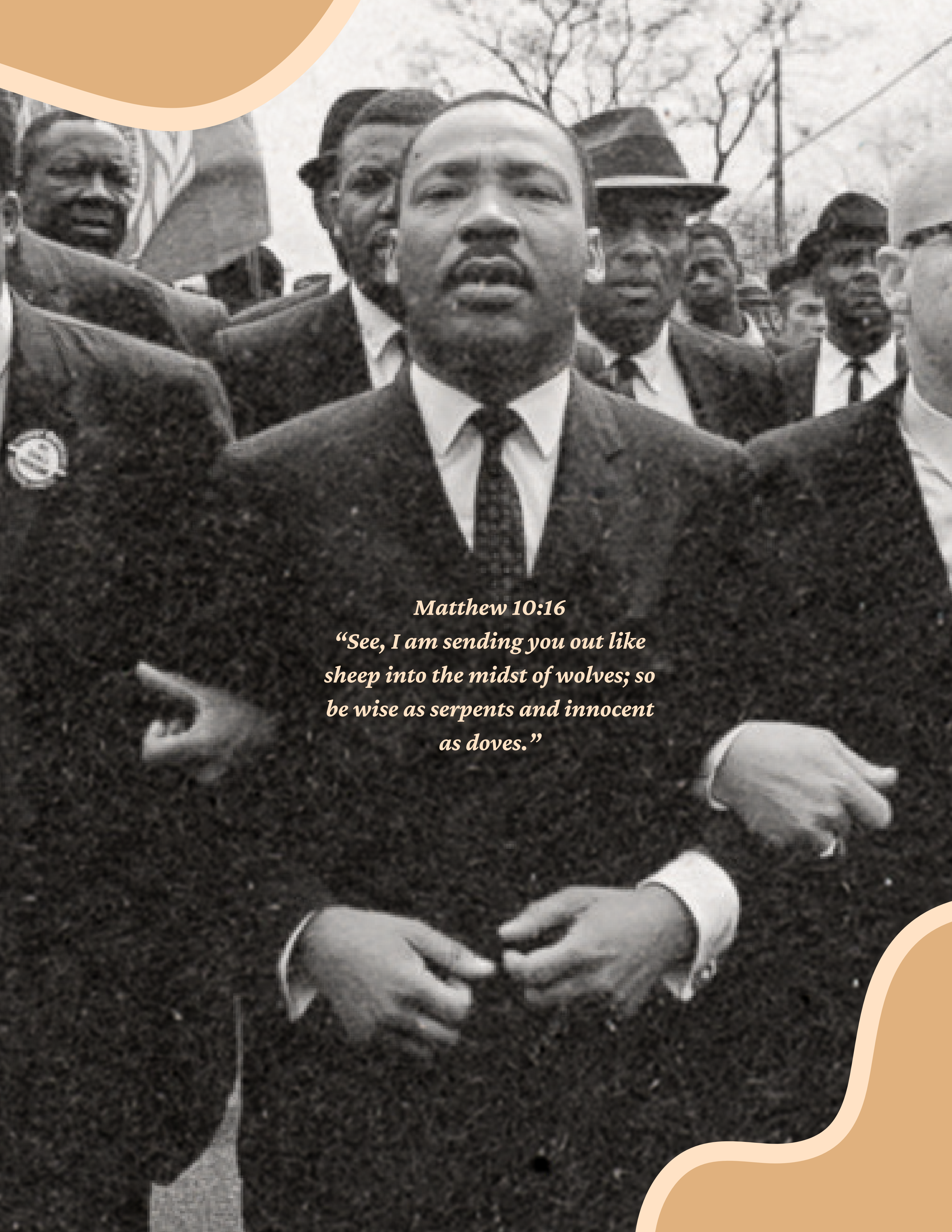

Matthew 10:16
"See, I am sending you out like sheep into the midst of wolves; so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves."

APRIL 18

What/How is the role of education in the work?

What does it mean for people of faith to "do the work?"

Why does educating ourselves even matter?

Why do we need to know the truth?

What do you think can be gained by revisiting the past?

"Friends, we are about to do some hard work together...."

Proverbs 4:7
"The beginning of wisdom is this: Get wisdom, and whatever else you get, get insight."

"Never must the church tire of reminding men that they have a moral responsibility to be intelligent."
Martin Luther King Jr.

Romans 12:3-10

“For by the grace given to me, I say to everyone among you not to think of yourself more highly than you ought to think but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. For as in one body, we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually, we are members one of another. We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us: prophecy, in proportion to faith; ministry, in ministering; the teacher, in teaching; the encourager, in encouragement; the giver, in sincerity; the leader, in diligence; the compassionate, in cheerfulness. Let love be genuine; hate what is evil; hold fast to what is good; love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor.”

DO THE WORK

APRIL 19

What is the role of relationships in the work?

Why should we bother to cultivate relationships outside of our circle?

Why do we need friendships with people who have different life experiences?

Why do they work together instead of individually?

What is the role of accountability?

Philippians 2:3-4

“Do nothing from selfish ambition or empty conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests but to the interests of others.”

DO THE WORK

"Stand for something, or you will fall for anything. Today's mighty oak is yesterday's nut that held its ground."

Rosa Parks

APRIL 20

How is doing this work part of our role as a disciple of Jesus Christ?

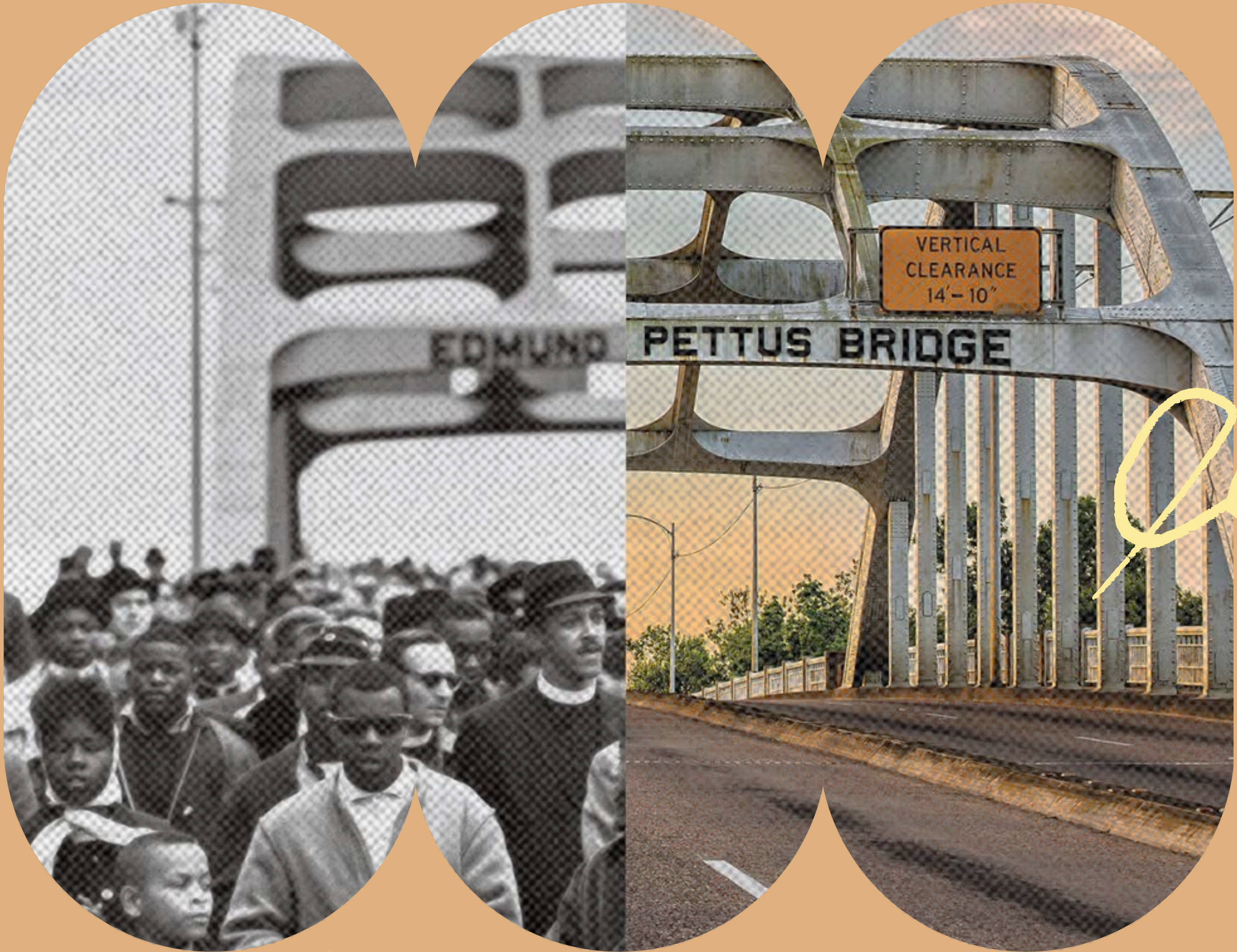
Why should the Christian family be a part of this work?

How is this work connected to our faith journey?

2 Corinthians 9:8
“And God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance, so that by always having enough of everything, you may share abundantly in every good work”.

“It cannot be denied that too often the weight of the Christian movement has been on the side of the strong and the powerful and against the weak and oppressed—this, despite the gospel.”
- Howard Thurman

DO THE WORK



I Peter 4:10

"Like good stewards of the manifold grace of God, serve one another with whatever gift each of you has received."

WE DEMAND
EQUAL RIGHTS NOW!
WE MARCH FOR
INTEGRATED SCHOOLS NOW!
WE DEMAND
AN END TO POLICE BRUTALITY NOW!
WE MARCH FOR
FIRST CLASS CITIZENSHIP NOW!

APRIL 21

How do we look to the role of God in the work?

Psalm 127

“Unless the Lord builds the house,
those who build it labor in vain.
Unless the Lord guards the city,
the guard keeps watch in vain.
It is in vain that you rise up early
and go late to rest, eating the bread of anxious toil, for he gives sleep to his beloved.”

“I'm a little pencil in the hand of a writing God, who is sending a love letter to the world.”
-Mother Teresa

Proverbs 3:5-6

“Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not rely on your own insight. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths.”

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CIVIL RIGHTS

Readings

“Letter from a Birmingham Jail"
16 April 1963

My Dear Fellow Clergymen:

While confined here in the Birmingham city jail, I came across your recent statement calling my present activities "unwise and untimely." Seldom do I pause to answer criticism of my work and ideas. If I sought to answer all the criticisms that cross my desk, my secretaries would have little time for anything other than such correspondence in the course of the day, and I would have no time for constructive work. But since I feel that you are men of genuine good will and that your criticisms are sincerely set forth, I want to try to answer your statement in what I hope will be patient and reasonable terms. I think I should indicate why I am here in Birmingham, since you have been influenced by the view which argues against "outsiders coming in." I have the honor of serving as president of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, an organization operating in every southern state, with headquarters in Atlanta, Georgia. We have some eighty five affiliated organizations across the South, and one of them is the Alabama Christian Movement for Human Rights. Frequently we share staff, educational and financial resources with our affiliates. Several months ago the affiliate here in Birmingham asked us to be on call to engage in a nonviolent direct action program if such were deemed necessary. We readily consented, and when the hour came we lived up to our promise. So I, along with several members of my staff, am here because I was invited here. I am here because I have organizational ties here. But more basically, I am in Birmingham because injustice is here. Just as the prophets of the eighth century B.C. left their villages and carried their "thus saith the Lord" far beyond the boundaries of their home towns, and just as the Apostle Paul left his village of Tarsus and carried the gospel of Jesus Christ to the far corners of the Greco Roman world, so am I compelled to carry the gospel of freedom beyond my own home town. Like Paul, I must constantly respond to the Macedonian call for aid. Moreover, I am cognizant of the interrelatedness of all communities and states. I cannot sit idly by in Atlanta and not be concerned about what happens in Birmingham. Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.

We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly. Never again can we afford to live with the narrow, provincial "outside agitator" idea. Anyone who lives inside the United States can never be considered an outsider anywhere within its bounds. You deplore the demonstrations taking place in Birmingham. But your statement, I am sorry to say, fails to express a similar concern for the conditions that brought about the demonstrations. I am sure that none of you would want to rest content with the superficial kind of social analysis that deals merely with effects and does not grapple with underlying causes. It is unfortunate that demonstrations are taking place in Birmingham, but it is even more unfortunate that the city's white power structure left the Negro community with no alternative. In any nonviolent campaign there are four basic steps: collection of the facts to determine whether injustices exist; negotiation; self purification; and direct action. We have gone through all these steps in Birmingham. There can be no gainsaying the fact that racial injustice engulfs this community. Birmingham is probably the most thoroughly segregated city in the United States. Its ugly record of brutality is widely known. Negroes have experienced grossly unjust treatment in the courts. There have been more unsolved bombings of Negro homes and churches in Birmingham than in any other city in the nation. These are the hard, brutal facts of the case. On the basis of these conditions, Negro leaders sought to negotiate with the city fathers. But the latter consistently refused to engage in good faith negotiation. hen, last September, came the opportunity to talk with leaders of Birmingham's economic community. In the course of the negotiations, certain promises were made by the merchants--for example, to remove the stores' humiliating racial signs. On the basis of these promises, the Reverend Fred Shuttlesworth and the leaders of the Alabama Christian Movement for Human Rights agreed to a moratorium on all demonstrations. As the weeks and months went by, we realized that we were the victims of a broken promise. A few signs, briefly removed, returned; the others remained. As in so many past experiences, our hopes had been blasted, and the shadow of deep disappointment settled upon us. We had no alternative except to prepare for direct action, whereby we would present our very bodies as a means of laying our case before the conscience of the local and the national community. Mindful of the difficulties involved, we decided to undertake a process of self purification.

We began a series of workshops on nonviolence, and we repeatedly asked ourselves: "Are you able to accept blows without retaliating?" "Are you able to endure the ordeal of jail?" We decided to schedule our direct action program for the Easter season, realizing that except for Christmas, this is the main shopping period of the year. Knowing that a strong economic-withdrawal program would be the by product of direct action, we felt that this would be the best time to bring pressure to bear on the merchants for the needed change. Then it occurred to us that Birmingham's mayoral election was coming up in March, and we speedily decided to postpone action until after election day. When we discovered that the Commissioner of Public Safety, Eugene "Bull" Connor, had piled up enough votes to be in the run off, we decided again to postpone action until the day after the run off so that the demonstrations could not be used to cloud the issues. Like many others, we waited to see Mr. Connor defeated, and to this end we endured postponement after postponement. Having aided in this community need, we felt that our direct action program could be delayed no longer. We have waited for more than 340 years for our constitutional and God given rights. The nations of Asia and Africa are moving with jetlike speed toward gaining political independence, but we still creep at horse and buggy pace toward gaining a cup of coffee at a lunch counter. Perhaps it is easy for those who have never felt the stinging darts of segregation to say, "Wait." You may well ask: "Why direct action? Why sit ins, marches and so forth? Isn't negotiation a better path?" You are quite right in calling for negotiation. Indeed, this is the very purpose of direct action. Nonviolent direct action seeks to create such a crisis and foster such a tension that a community which has constantly refused to negotiate is forced to confront the issue. t seeks so to dramatize the issue that it can no longer be ignored. My citing the creation of tension as part of the work of the nonviolent resister may sound rather shocking. But I must confess that I am not afraid of the word "tension." I have earnestly opposed violent tension, but there is a type of constructive, nonviolent tension which is necessary for growth. Just as Socrates felt that it was necessary to create a tension in the mind so that individuals could rise from the bondage of myths and half truths to the unfettered realm of creative analysis and objective appraisal, so must we see the need for nonviolent gadflies to create the kind of tension in society that will help men rise from the dark depths of prejudice and racism to the majestic heights of understanding and brotherhood.

The purpose of our direct action program is to create a situation so crisis packed that it will inevitably open the door to negotiation. I therefore concur with you in your call for negotiation. Too long has our beloved Southland been bogged down in a tragic effort to live in monologue rather than dialogue. One of the basic points in your statement is that the action that I and my associates have taken in Birmingham is untimely. Some have asked: "Why didn't you give the new city administration time to act?" The only answer that I can give to this query is that the new Birmingham administration must be prodded about as much as the outgoing one, before it will act. We are sadly mistaken if we feel that the election of Albert Boutwell as mayor will bring the millennium to Birmingham. While Mr. Boutwell is a much more gentle person than Mr. Connor, they are both segregationists, dedicated to maintenance of the status quo. I have hope that Mr. Boutwell will be reasonable enough to see the futility of massive resistance to desegregation. But he will not see this without pressure from devotees of civil rights. My friends, I must say to you that we have not made a single gain in civil rights without determined legal and nonviolent pressure. Lamentably, it is an historical fact that privileged groups seldom give up their privileges voluntarily. Individuals may see the moral light and voluntarily give up their unjust posture; but, as Reinhold Niebuhr has reminded us, groups tend to be more immoral than individuals. We know through painful experience that freedom is never voluntarily given by the oppressor; it must be demanded by the oppressed. Frankly, I have yet to engage in a direct action campaign that was "well timed" in the view of those who have not suffered unduly from the disease of segregation. For years now I have heard the word "Wait!" It rings in the ear of every Negro with piercing familiarity. This "Wait" has almost always meant "Never." We must come to see, with one of our distinguished jurists, that "justice too long delayed is justice denied." But when you have seen vicious mobs lynch your mothers and fathers at will and drown your sisters and brothers at whim; when you have seen hate filled policemen curse, kick and even kill your black brothers and sisters; when you see the vast majority of your twenty million Negro brothers smothering in an airtight cage of poverty in the midst of an affluent society. When you suddenly find your tongue twisted and your speech stammering as you seek to explain to your six year old daughter why she can't go to the public amusement park that has just been advertised on television, and see tears welling up in her eyes when she is told that Funtown is closed to colored children.

And you'll see ominous clouds of inferiority beginning to form in her little mental sky, and see her beginning to distort her personality by developing an unconscious bitterness toward white people; when you have to concoct an answer for a five year old son who is asking: "Daddy, why do white people treat colored people so mean?"; when you take a cross county drive and find it necessary to sleep night after night in the uncomfortable corners of your automobile because no motel will accept you; when you are humiliated day in and day out by nagging signs reading "white" and "colored"; when your first name becomes "nigger," your middle name becomes "boy" (however old you are) and your last name becomes "John," and your wife and mother are never given the respected title "Mrs."; when you are harried by day and haunted by night by the fact that you are a Negro, living constantly at tiptoe stance, never quite knowing what to expect next, and are plagued with inner fears and outer resentments; when you are forever fighting a degenerating sense of "nobodiness"--then you will understand why we find it difficult to wait. There comes a time when the cup of endurance runs over, and men are no longer willing to be plunged into the abyss of despair. I hope, sirs, you can understand our legitimate and unavoidable impatience. You express a great deal of anxiety over our willingness to break laws. This is certainly a legitimate concern. Since we so diligently urge people to obey the Supreme Court's decision of 1954 outlawing segregation in the public schools, at first glance it may seem rather paradoxical for us consciously to break laws. One may well ask: "How can you advocate breaking some laws and obeying others?" The answer lies in the fact that there are two types of laws: just and unjust. I would be the first to advocate obeying just laws. One has not only a legal but a moral responsibility to obey just laws. Conversely, one has a moral responsibility to disobey unjust laws. I would agree with St. Augustine that "an unjust law is no law at all." Now, what is the difference between the two? How does one determine whether a law is just or unjust? A just law is a man made code that squares with the moral law or the law of God. An unjust law is a code that is out of harmony with the moral law. To put it in the terms of St. Thomas Aquinas: An unjust law is a human law that is not rooted in eternal law and natural law. Any law that uplifts human personality is just. Any law that degrades human personality is unjust. All segregation statutes are unjust because segregation distorts the soul and damages the personality.

It gives the segregator a false sense of superiority and the segregated a false sense of inferiority. Segregation, to use the terminology of the Jewish philosopher Martin Buber, substitutes an "I it" relationship for an "I thou" relationship and ends up relegating persons to the status of things. Hence segregation is not only politically, economically and sociologically unsound, it is morally wrong and sinful. Paul Tillich has said that sin is separation. Is not segregation an existential expression of man's tragic separation, his awful estrangement, his terrible sinfulness? Thus it is that I can urge men to obey the 1954 decision of the Supreme Court, for it is morally right; and I can urge them to disobey segregation ordinances, for they are morally wrong. et us consider a more concrete example of just and unjust laws. An unjust law is a code that a numerical or power majority group compels a minority group to obey but does not make binding on itself. This is difference made legal. By the same token, a just law is a code that a majority compels a minority to follow and that it is willing to follow itself. This is sameness made legal. Let me give another explanation. A law is unjust if it is inflicted on a minority that, as a result of being denied the right to vote, had no part in enacting or devising the law. Who can say that the legislature of Alabama which set up that state's segregation laws was democratically elected? Throughout Alabama all sorts of devious methods are used to prevent Negroes from becoming registered voters, and there are some counties in which, even though Negroes constitute a majority of the population, not a single Negro is registered. Can any law enacted under such circumstances be considered democratically structured? Sometimes a law is just on its face and unjust in its application. For instance, I have been arrested on a charge of parading without a permit. Now, there is nothing wrong in having an ordinance which requires a permit for a parade. But such an ordinance becomes unjust when it is used to maintain segregation and to deny citizens the First-Amendment privilege of peaceful assembly and protest. I hope you are able to see the distinction I am trying to point out. In no sense do I advocate evading or defying the law, as would the rabid segregationist. That would lead to anarchy. One who breaks an unjust law must do so openly, lovingly, and with a willingness to accept the penalty. I submit that an individual who breaks a law that conscience tells him is unjust, and who willingly accepts the penalty of imprisonment in order to arouse the conscience of the community over its injustice, is in reality expressing the highest respect for law.

Of course, there is nothing new about this kind of civil disobedience. It was evidenced sublimely in the refusal of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego to obey the laws of Nebuchadnezzar, on the ground that a higher moral law was at stake. It was practiced superbly by the early Christians, who were willing to face hungry lions and the excruciating pain of chopping blocks rather than submit to certain unjust laws of the Roman Empire. To a degree, academic freedom is a reality today because Socrates practiced civil disobedience. In our own nation, the Boston Tea Party represented a massive act of civil disobedience. We should never forget that everything Adolf Hitler did in Germany was "legal" and everything the Hungarian freedom fighters did in Hungary was "illegal." It was "illegal" to aid and comfort a Jew in Hitler's Germany. Even so, I am sure that, had I lived in Germany at the time, I would have aided and comforted my Jewish brothers. If today I lived in a Communist country where certain principles dear to the Christian faith are suppressed, I would openly advocate disobeying that country's antireligious laws. I had hoped that the white moderate would understand that law and order exist for the purpose of establishing justice and that when they fail in this purpose they become the dangerously structured dams that block the flow of social progress. I had hoped that the white moderate would understand that the present tension in the South is a necessary phase of the transition from an obnoxious negative peace, in which the Negro passively accepted his unjust plight, to a substantive and positive peace, in which all men will respect the dignity and worth of human personality. Actually, we who engage in nonviolent direct action are not the creators of tension. We merely bring to the surface the hidden tension that is already alive. We bring it out in the open, where it can be seen and dealt with. Like a boil that can never be cured so long as it is covered up but must be opened with all its ugliness to the natural medicines of air and light, injustice must be exposed, with all the tension its exposure creates, to the light of human conscience and the air of national opinion before it can be cured. In your statement you assert that our actions, even though peaceful, must be condemned because they precipitate violence. But is this a logical assertion? Isn't this like condemning a robbed man because his possession of money precipitated the evil act of robbery? Isn't this like condemning Socrates because his unswerving commitment to truth and his philosophical inquiries precipitated the act by the misguided populace in which they made him drink hemlock?

Isn't this like condemning Jesus because his unique God consciousness and never ceasing devotion to God's will precipitated the evil act of crucifixion? We must come to see that, as the federal courts have consistently affirmed, it is wrong to urge an individual to cease his efforts to gain his basic constitutional rights because the quest may precipitate violence. Society must protect the robbed and punish the robber. I had also hoped that the white moderate would reject the myth concerning time in relation to the struggle for freedom. I have just received a letter from a white brother in Texas. He writes: "All Christians know that the colored people will receive equal rights eventually, but it is possible that you are in too great a religious hurry. It has taken Christianity almost two thousand years to accomplish what it has. The teachings of Christ take time to come to earth." Such an attitude stems from a tragic misconception of time, from the strangely irrational notion that there is something in the very flow of time that will inevitably cure all ills. Actually, time itself is neutral; it can be used either destructively or constructively. More and more I feel that the people of ill will have used time much more effectively than have the people of good will. We will have to repent in this generation not merely for the hateful words and actions of the bad people but for the appalling silence of the good people. Human progress never rolls in on wheels of inevitability; it comes through the tireless efforts of men willing to be co workers with God, and without this hard work, time itself becomes an ally of the forces of social stagnation. We must use time creatively, in the knowledge that the time is always ripe to do right. Now is the time to make real the promise of democracy and transform our pending national elegy into a creative psalm of brotherhood. Now is the time to lift our national policy from the quicksand of racial injustice to the solid rock of human dignity. You speak of our activity in Birmingham as extreme. At first I was rather disappointed that fellow clergymen would see my nonviolent efforts as those of an extremist. I began thinking about the fact that I stand in the middle of two opposing forces in the Negro community. One is a force of complacency, made up in part of Negroes who, as a result of long years of oppression, are so drained of self respect and a sense of "somebodiness" that they have adjusted to segregation; and in part of a few middle-class Negroes who, because of a degree of academic and economic security and because in some ways they profit by segregation, have become insensitive to the problems of the masses.

The other force is one of bitterness and hatred, and it comes perilously close to advocating violence. It is expressed in the various black nationalist groups that are springing up across the nation, the largest and best known being Elijah Muhammad's Muslim movement. Nourished by the Negro's frustration over the continued existence of racial discrimination, this movement is made up of people who have lost faith in America, who have absolutely repudiated Christianity, and who have concluded that the white man is an incorrigible "devil." I have tried to stand between these two forces, saying that we need emulate neither the "do nothingism" of the complacent nor the hatred and despair of the black nationalist. For there is the more excellent way of love and nonviolent protest. I am grateful to God that, through the influence of the Negro church, the way of nonviolence became an integral part of our struggle. If this philosophy had not emerged, by now many streets of the South would, I am convinced, be flowing with blood. And I am further convinced that if our white brothers dismiss as "rabble rousers" and "outside agitators" those of us who employ nonviolent direct action, and if they refuse to support our nonviolent efforts, millions of Negroes will, out of frustration and despair, seek solace and security in black nationalist ideologies--a development that would inevitably lead to a frightening racial nightmare. Oppressed people cannot remain oppressed forever. The yearning for freedom eventually manifests itself, and that is what has happened to the American Negro. Something within has reminded him of his birthright of freedom, and something without has reminded him that it can be gained. Consciously or unconsciously, he has been caught up by the Zeitgeist, and with his black brothers of Africa and his brown and yellow brothers of Asia, South America and the Caribbean, the United States Negro is moving with a sense of great urgency toward the promised land of racial justice. If one recognizes this vital urge that has engulfed the Negro community, one should readily understand why public demonstrations are taking place. The Negro has many pent up resentments and latent frustrations, and he must release them. So let him march; let him make prayer pilgrimages to the city hall; let him go on freedom rides -and try to understand why he must do so. If his repressed emotions are not released in nonviolent ways, they will seek expression through violence; this is not a threat but a fact of history. They are still all too few in quantity, but they are big in quality.

Some -such as Ralph McGill, Lillian Smith, Harry Golden, James McBride Dabbs, Ann Braden and Sarah Patton Boyle--have written about our struggle in eloquent and prophetic terms. So I have not said to my people: "Get rid of your discontent." Rather, I have tried to say that this normal and healthy discontent can be channeled into the creative outlet of nonviolent direct action. And now this approach is being termed extremist. But though I was initially disappointed at being categorized as an extremist, as I continued to think about the matter I gradually gained a measure of satisfaction from the label. Was not Jesus an extremist for love: "Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you." Was not Amos an extremist for justice: "Let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like an ever flowing stream." Was not Paul an extremist for the Christian gospel: "I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus." Was not Martin Luther an extremist: "Here I stand; I cannot do otherwise, so help me God." And John Bunyan: "I will stay in jail to the end of my days before I make a butchery of my conscience." nd Abraham Lincoln: "This nation cannot survive half slave and half free." And Thomas Jefferson: "We hold these truths to be self evident, that all men are created equal . . ." So the question is not whether we will be extremists, but what kind of extremists we will be. Will we be extremists for hate or for love? Will we be extremists for the preservation of injustice or for the extension of justice? In that dramatic scene on Calvary's hill three men were crucified. We must never forget that all three were crucified for the same crime--the crime of extremism. Two were extremists for immorality, and thus fell below their environment. The other, Jesus Christ, was an extremist for love, truth and goodness, and thereby rose above his environment. Perhaps the South, the nation and the world are in dire need of creative extremists. I had hoped that the white moderate would see this need. Perhaps I was too optimistic; perhaps I expected too much. I suppose I should have realized that few members of the oppressor race can understand the deep groans and passionate yearnings of the oppressed race, and still fewer have the vision to see that injustice must be rooted out by strong, persistent, and determined action. I am thankful, however, that some of our white brothers in the South have grasped the meaning of this social revolution and committed themselves to it.

Others have marched with us down nameless streets of the South. They have languished in filthy, roach infested jails, suffering the abuse and brutality of policemen who view them as "dirty nigger-lovers." Unlike so many of their moderate brothers and sisters, they have recognized the urgency of the moment and sensed the need for powerful "action" antidotes to combat the disease of segregation. Let me take note of my other major disappointment. I have been so greatly disappointed with the white church and its leadership. Of course, there are some notable exceptions. I am not unmindful of the fact that each of you has taken some significant stands on this issue. I commend you, Reverend Stallings, for your Christian stand on this past Sunday, in welcoming Negroes to your worship service on a nonsegregated basis. I commend the Catholic leaders of this state for integrating Spring Hill College several years ago. But despite these notable exceptions, I must honestly reiterate that I have been disappointed with the church. I do not say this as one of those negative critics who can always find something wrong with the church. I say this as a minister of the gospel, who loves the church; who was nurtured in its bosom; who has been sustained by its spiritual blessings and who will remain true to it as long as the cord of life shall lengthen. When I was suddenly catapulted into the leadership of the bus protest in Montgomery, Alabama, a few years ago, I felt we would be supported by the white church. I felt that the white ministers, priests and rabbis of the South would be among our strongest allies. Instead, some have been outright opponents, refusing to understand the freedom movement and misrepresenting its leaders; all too many others have been more cautious than courageous and have remained silent behind the anesthetizing security of stained glass windows. In spite of my shattered dreams, I came to Birmingham with the hope that the white religious leadership of this community would see the justice of our cause and, with deep moral concern, would serve as the channel through which our just grievances could reach the power structure. I had hoped that each of you would understand. But again I have been disappointed. I have heard numerous southern religious leaders admonish their worshipers to comply with a desegregation decision because it is the law, but I have longed to hear white ministers declare: "Follow this decree because integration is morally right and because the Negro is your brother."

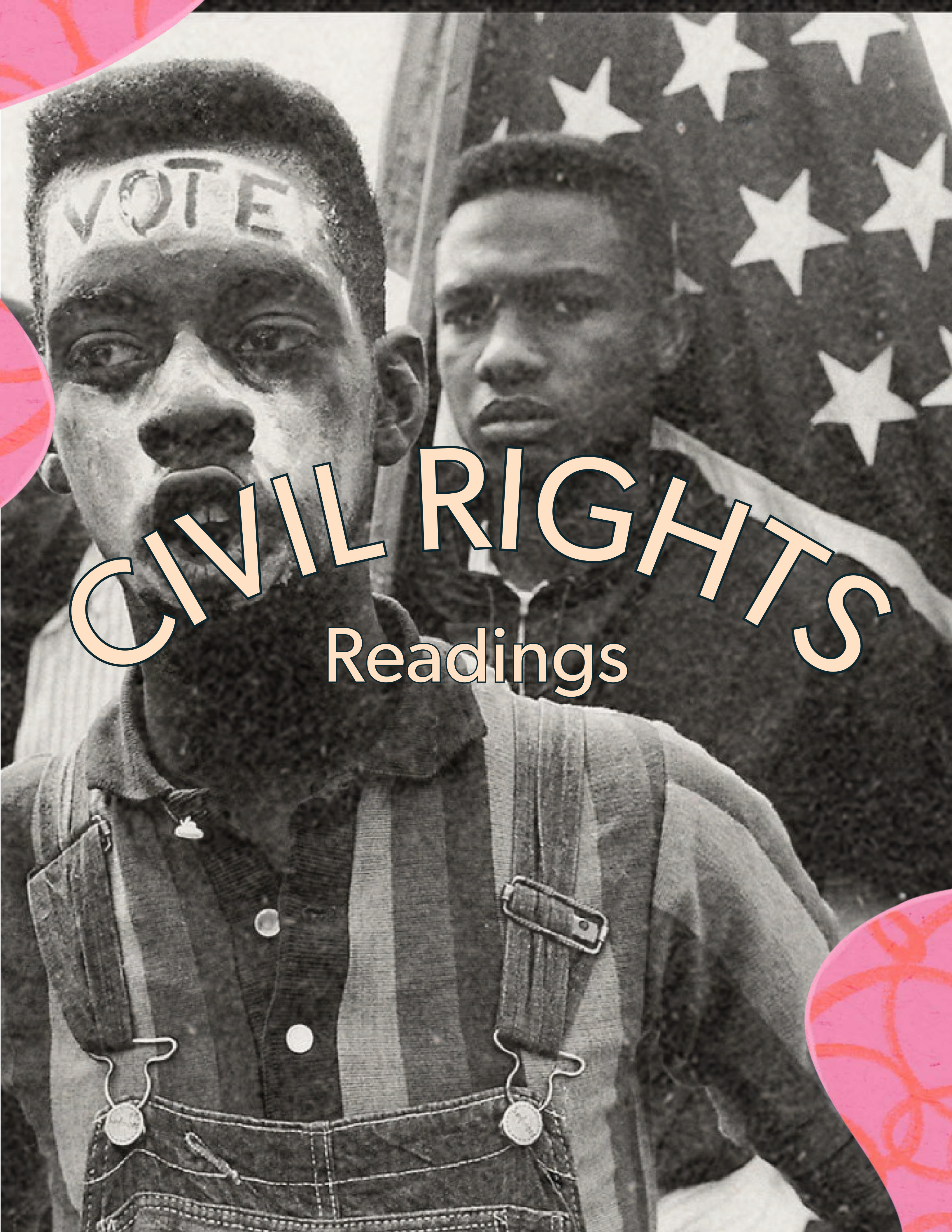
In the midst of blatant injustices inflicted upon the Negro, I have watched white churchmen stand on the sideline and mouth pious irrelevancies and sanctimonious trivialities. In the midst of a mighty struggle to rid our nation of racial and economic injustice, I have heard many ministers say: "Those are social issues, with which the gospel has no real concern." And I have watched many churches commit themselves to a completely other worldly religion which makes a strange, un-Biblical distinction between body and soul, between the sacred and the secular. I have traveled the length and breadth of Alabama, Mississippi and all the other southern states. On sweltering summer days and crisp autumn mornings I have looked at the South's beautiful churches with their lofty spires pointing heavenward. I have beheld the impressive outlines of her massive religious education buildings. Over and over I have found myself asking: "What kind of people worship here? Who is their God? Where were their voices when the lips of Governor Barnett dripped with words of interposition and nullification? Where were they when Governor Wallace gave a clarion call for defiance and hatred? Where were their voices of support when bruised and weary Negro men and women decided to rise from the dark dungeons of complacency to the bright hills of creative protest?" Yes, these questions are still in my mind. In deep disappointment I have wept over the laxity of the church. But be assured that my tears have been tears of love. There can be no deep disappointment where there is not deep love. Yes, I love the church. How could I do otherwise? I am in the rather unique position of being the son, the grandson and the great grandson of preachers. Yes, I see the church as the body of Christ. But, oh! How we have blemished and scarred that body through social neglect and through fear of being nonconformists. There was a time when the church was very powerful--in the time when the early Christians rejoiced at being deemed worthy to suffer for what they believed. In those days the church was not merely a thermometer that recorded the ideas and principles of popular opinion; it was a thermostat that transformed the mores of society. Whenever the early Christians entered a town, the people in power became disturbed and immediately sought to convict the Christians for being "disturbers of the peace" and "outside agitators."' But the Christians pressed on, in the conviction that they were "a colony of heaven," called to obey God rather than man. Small in number, they were big in commitment.

They were too God-intoxicated to be "astronomically intimidated." By their effort and example they brought an end to such ancient evils as infanticide and gladiatorial contests. Things are different now. So often the contemporary church is a weak, ineffectual voice with an uncertain sound. So often it is an archdefender of the status quo. Far from being disturbed by the presence of the church, the power structure of the average community is consoled by the church's silent--and often even vocal--sanction of things as they are. But the judgment of God is upon the church as never before. If today's church does not recapture the sacrificial spirit of the early church, it will lose its authenticity, forfeit the loyalty of millions, and be dismissed as an irrelevant social club with no meaning for the twentieth century. Every day I meet young people whose disappointment with the church has turned into outright disgust. Perhaps I have once again been too optimistic. Is organized religion too inextricably bound to the status quo to save our nation and the world? Perhaps I must turn my faith to the inner spiritual church, the church within the church, as the true ekklesia and the hope of the world. But again I am thankful to God that some noble souls from the ranks of organized religion have broken loose from the paralyzing chains of conformity and joined us as active partners in the struggle for freedom. They have left their secure congregations and walked the streets of Albany, Georgia, with us. They have gone down the highways of the South on tortuous rides for freedom. Yes, they have gone to jail with us. Some have been dismissed from their churches, have lost the support of their bishops and fellow ministers. But they have acted in the faith that right defeated is stronger than evil triumphant. Their witness has been the spiritual salt that has preserved the true meaning of the gospel in these troubled times. They have carved a tunnel of hope through the dark mountain of disappointment. I hope the church as a whole will meet the challenge of this decisive hour. But even if the church does not come to the aid of justice, I have no despair about the future. I have no fear about the outcome of our struggle in Birmingham, even if our motives are at present misunderstood. We will reach the goal of freedom in Birmingham and all over the nation, because the goal of America is freedom. Abused and scorned though we may be, our destiny is tied up with America's destiny. Before the pilgrims landed at Plymouth, we were here.

Before the pen of Jefferson etched the majestic words of the Declaration of Independence across the pages of history, we were here. For more than two centuries our forebears labored in this country without wages; they made cotton king; they built the homes of their masters while suffering gross injustice and shameful humiliation -and yet out of a bottomless vitality they continued to thrive and develop. If the inexpressible cruelties of slavery could not stop us, the opposition we now face will surely fail. We will win our freedom because the sacred heritage of our nation and the eternal will of God are embodied in our echoing demands. Before closing I feel impelled to mention one other point in your statement that has troubled me profoundly. You warmly commended the Birmingham police force for keeping "order" and "preventing violence." I doubt that you would have so warmly commended the police force if you had seen its dogs sinking their teeth into unarmed, nonviolent Negroes. I doubt that you would so quickly commend the policemen if you were to observe their ugly and inhumane treatment of Negroes here in the city jail; if you were to watch them push and curse old Negro women and young Negro girls; if you were to see them slap and kick old Negro men and young boys; if you were to observe them, as they did on two occasions, refuse to give us food because we wanted to sing our grace together. I cannot join you in your praise of the Birmingham police department. It is true that the police have exercised a degree of discipline in handling the demonstrators. In this sense they have conducted themselves rather "nonviolently" in public. But for what purpose? To preserve the evil system of segregation. Over the past few years I have consistently preached that nonviolence demands that the means we use must be as pure as the ends we seek. I have tried to make clear that it is wrong to use immoral means to attain moral ends. But now I must affirm that it is just as wrong, or perhaps even more so, to use moral means to preserve immoral ends. Perhaps Mr. Connor and his policemen have been rather nonviolent in public, as was Chief Pritchett in Albany, Georgia, but they have used the moral means of nonviolence to maintain the immoral end of racial injustice. As T. S. Eliot has said: "The last temptation is the greatest treason: To do the right deed for the wrong reason." wish you had commended the Negro sit inners and demonstrators of Birmingham for their sublime courage, their willingness to suffer and their amazing discipline in the midst of great provocation.

One day the South will recognize its real heroes. They will be the James Merediths, with the noble sense of purpose that enables them to face jeering and hostile mobs, and with the agonizing loneliness that characterizes the life of the pioneer. They will be old, oppressed, battered Negro women, symbolized in a seventy two year old woman in Montgomery, Alabama, who rose up with a sense of dignity and with her people decided not to ride segregated buses, and who responded with ungrammatical profundity to one who inquired about her weariness: "My feets is tired, but my soul is at rest." They will be the young high school and college students, the young ministers of the gospel and a host of their elders, courageously and nonviolently sitting in at lunch counters and willingly going to jail for conscience' sake. One day the South will know that when these disinherited children of God sat down at lunch counters, they were in reality standing up for what is best in the American dream and for the most sacred values in our Judaeo Christian heritage, thereby bringing our nation back to those great wells of democracy which were dug deep by the founding fathers in their formulation of the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence. Never before have I written so long a letter. I'm afraid it is much too long to take your precious time. I can assure you that it would have been much shorter if I had been writing from a comfortable desk, but what else can one do when he is alone in a narrow jail cell, other than write long letters, think long thoughts and pray long prayers? If I have said anything in this letter that overstates the truth and indicates an unreasonable impatience, I beg you to forgive me. If I have said anything that understates the truth and indicates my having a patience that allows me to settle for anything less than brotherhood, I beg God to forgive me. I hope this letter finds you strong in the faith. I also hope that circumstances will soon make it possible for me to meet each of you, not as an integrationist or a civil-rights leader but as a fellow clergyman and a Christian brother. Let us all hope that the dark clouds of racial prejudice will soon pass away and the deep fog of misunderstanding will be lifted from our fear drenched communities, and in some not too distant tomorrow the radiant stars of love and brotherhood will shine over our great nation with all their scintillating beauty.

Yours for the cause of Peace and Brotherhood, *Martin Luther King, Jr.*


VOTE
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Readings

“The Speech that Shot Birmingham" by Charles Morgan

Four little girls were killed in Birmingham yesterday. A mad, remorseful, worried community asks, "Who did it? Who threw that bomb? Was it a Negro or a white?" The answer should be, "We all did it." Every last one of us is condemned for that crime and the bombing before it a decade ago. We all did it. A short time later, white police officers kill a Negro and wound another. A few hours later, two young men on a motorbike shoot and kill a Negro child. Fires break out, and, in Montgomery, white youths assault Negroes. And all across Alabama, angry, guilty people cry out their mocking shouts of indignity and wonder, "Why?" "Who?" Everyone then "deplores" the "dastardly" act. But the "who" of "Who did it" is relatively simple. The "who" is every little individual who talks about the "niggers" and spreads the seeds of his hate to his neighbor and his son. The jokester, the crude oaf whose racial jokes make the party laugh. The "who" is every governor who shouted for lawlessness and became a law violator. Every senator and representative in the halls of Congress stands and, with mock humility, tells the world that things back home aren't really like they are. Courts move ever so slowly, and newspapers that timorously defend the law. It is all the Christians and all their ministers who spoke too late in anguished cries against violence. It is the coward in each of us who clucks admonitions. We have ten years of lawless preachments, ten years of criticism of law, courts, and our fellow man, and a decade of telling school children the opposite of what the civics books say. We are a mass of intolerance and bigotry and stand indicted before our young. We are cursed by our failures to accept responsibility and our defense of an already dead institution. Yesterday, while Birmingham, which prides itself on the number of its churches, was attending worship services, a bomb went off, and an all-white police force moved into action, a police force that has been praised by city officials and others at least once a day for a month or so. A police force that has solved no bombings. A police force which many Negroes feel is perpetrating the very evils we decry. . .

Birmingham is the only city in America where the police chief and the sheriff in the school crisis had to call our local ministers to tell them to do their duty. The ministers of Birmingham who have done so little for Christianity call for prayer at high noon in a city of lawlessness and, in the same breath, speak of our city's "image." . . .Those four little Negro girls were human beings. They spend their 14 years in a leaderless town where no one accepts responsibility, and nobody wants to blame somebody else. A town with a reward fund that grew like Topsy as a sort of sacrificial offering, a balm for the conscience of the "good people". . . .Birmingham is a city ... where four little Negro girls can be born into a second-class school system, live a segregated life, ghettoed into their little neighborhoods, restricted to Negro churches, destined to ride in Negro ambulances, to Negro wards of hospitals or a Negro cemetery. On their front and editorial pages, local papers call for order and then exclude their names from obituary columns. And who is guilty? Each of us. Each citizen who has not consciously attempted to bring about peaceful compliance with the decisions of the Supreme Court of the United States, every citizen and every school board member and schoolteacher and principal and businessman and judge and lawyer who has corrupted the minds of our youth; every person in this community who has in any way contributed during the past several years to the popularity of hatred, is at least as guilty, or more so, than the demented fool who threw that bomb. What's it like living in Birmingham? No one ever really knows, and no one will until this city becomes part of the United States. Birmingham is not a dying city; it is dead.

A "Fire in a Canebrake"

By: Larry Bosc

Lynch: "To murder by mob action and without lawful trial."
Webster's New world Dictionary of the American Language, second college edition

"Lynching created a fearful environment where racial subordination and segregation was maintained with limited resistance for decades. Most critically, lynching reinforced a legacy of racial inequality that has never been adequately addressed in America." "And how do you reach the truth if lying has become a habit?"
Ariel Dorfman, Afterword to Death and the Maiden from Laura Wexler's Fire in a Canebrake from which the title of this chapter is taken. In February of 2003 I was listening to an interview on NPR's Morning Edition with Laura Wexler. She was describing the brutal murder of four African-Americans in 1946. Despite a local and federal investigation, none of the perpetrators were ever brought to justice. The murders were big news across the country and was even a major factor in President Truman's pushing for anti-lynching legislation and the creation of the President's Committee on Civil Rights. Yet, despite years of studying key events before the modern civil rights movement, I had never heard of this tragedy. It had never appeared in any museum I had been to nor in any seminar I had taken up to that point. Naturally I had to find out more about this event and why it was not "common knowledge." That spring I was able to get in touch with Rich Rusk who was one of the founders of the Moore's Ford Memorial Committee-named after the site were the lynching occurred. Created in 1997, the organization initial purpose was to try and get the state and federal government to reopen the investigation. Additionally, they worked and finally got a marker describing the attack to be placed at the corner of Locklin Rd. and US Rt. 78 outside of Monroe, Georgia in 1999. But they didn't stop there. They set up a scholarship fund for students in local high schools, worked to restore 2 black cemeteries and establish grave markers for Mae Murray and George Dorsey and Dorothy and Roger Malcolm. Finally, they held a military service for veteran George Dorsey who served in World War II.

By the time I brought students to Walton County in 2004, the FBI had opened and closed their first re-investigation into the murders with no new indictments. Over the next several years I met many members of the multi-racial Moore's Ford group at the marker. Those early years were strong reminders of the need for America to not only acknowledge this dark past but to accept the lasting impact it is still having. In the first or second year I met a reporter for the Walton County Tribune at the marker. We talked about the placement of the marker where it was as opposed to the location of the lynching. He said that there was less fear that the marker would be vandalized, as the one at the gravesite of Roger Malcolm had been multiple times. We went to the bridge at the site of the murder and to the restored gravesites. We then had lunch in a small deli in Monroe. After our meal, he showed us the film "Lynch Law." Produced, directed and narrated by a French film company, the film is the only full length documentary of the event. After viewing the film, my students and I were blown away by both the brutality of the lynching, the subsequent coverup of the crime and the failure of the community to recognize this as a tragedy. In the next few years I was to meet many of the people in the film including Rich Rusk, Bobby Howard, and Waymond Munday. The most memorable part of this meeting was when I asked our host if he had a copy of the VHS. He said yes but told me to not tell anyone in town I gave it to him. The fear in his voice about giving me a film about an event that took place almost 50 years ago was something I will never forget. In the most recent book on the murders-The Last Lynching: How a Gruesome Mass Murder Rocked a Small Georgia Town by Anthony Pitch-he mentions this in a quote by an "informed resident." "There's still a lot of fear here. People don't want to talk about it." (p.161) Even teachers in the local high schools were discouraged from allowing their students to do research on the murders. On one visit a member of the committee and a high school history teacher recently arrived in town from Michigan told me another story that illustrated this unwillingness to face the past. He said that he had assigned one of his students to do some research on the lynchings as a part of a larger story on racial terrorism.

He was told, in no uncertain terms, that focusing on the local lynching was not an appropriate area of research. This story, like the one above, reinforced my commitment to bring my students (and later teachers and community members) to Walton County. These kind of stories were common in those years. For example, there was the paint war. Members of the committee said that at the bridge which crosses the creek where the lynching occurred, a paint war had happened. Members of a local Klan group had written racial epithets on the side of the bridge only to be painted over by group members. This went on for several weeks before it stopped. As Pitch describes in the book above, committee member Bobby Howard had "survived a firebombing and jail in his quest for justice." (p.196) One of the best things about those trips to Walton County was my friendship with Rich Rusk. The son of former Secretary of State Dean Rusk, Rich was the person who greeted us the most on our trips to the marker, the site where the lynching occurred and the cemetery. One time as he was talking to the students at the marker his son came up-a stunt man who appeared in The Walking Dead and other TV shows. Rich jokingly said that he was the valley between his famous father and son. Before I met Rich I learned a lot about his commitment to racial healing in the interview he gave in the film Lynch Law. There he describes his journey to help form the Moore's Ford Memorial Committee partly as a way of dealing with the destructive legacy of his father's role in starting and escalating the American involvement in Vietnam. Along with good friend Kirklyn Dixon, he would often bring handouts about the lynchings and the work of the committee for my students. After the failure of the reopening of the murders by the Georgia Bureau of Investigation to shed new light on potential suspects, many in Walton County decided to move in a different direction. Beginning in 2004 and organized in part by Tyrone Brooks and sponsored by the Georgia Association of Black Elected Officials, reenactments of the lynching began and continue to this day.

Rich often referred to these as unwise but I never got too deep into the rift not wanting to take focus away from his presentation to my students. Rich passed away in January of 2018 and my wife and I attended his funeral in Monroe. I learned a lot more about him that day. First, he spent 14 years in the 1980's and early 90's in Nome, Alaska ostensibly to be as far away as he could from his father. He would return to Athens, Georgia and would eventually work with his father on his memoir As I Saw It. I learned also that he was a an avid environmentalist working with Trout Unlimited in the Climate Change Coalition to convince state legislators to do more on the climate change issue. I even found out that he had engaged in recognition of racial terrorism campaigns in other areas of Georgia. I would take many student and teacher groups to the marker, the site of the lynching and the cemeteries for most of my civil rights trips. But as I found out many years later, the response of the citizens of Walton County was very different than the people of Troup County, Georgia. Before a trip in 2018 I found out that one of the first markers that the Equal Justice Initiative (EJI) placed in a community where a lynching occurred was in LaGrange, Georgia. That town, with the cooperation of EJI, had placed a marker at Warren Temple United Methodist Church telling the story of the lynching of Austin Calloway. In the unveiling of the marker hundreds of town residents joined EJI director Bryan Stevenson. At that time the mayor, city chief of police and other city leaders apologized for the lynching. This was in direct contrast to what has not happened in Walton county. The small group of students I took to the the church had already been to the marker off of Rt. 78. At that time, one of the deacons of the church was working on the church sign and stopped to talk to us about the ceremony. They, along with me, were struck with the radically different response to these horrific tragedies. It was both disheartening and encouraging. We have a long way to go before we can safely say that we have acknowledged the pain caused by this racial terrorism.

CIVIL RIGHTS
Readings

Joe Bell fights to open cold case records of a 1946 mass lynching

BY JULIANNE HILL

JUNE 20, 2023, 2:20 PM CDT

Joe Bell has been engaged in a legal battle to open the grand jury transcripts of a cold case lynching that occurred in 1946. At a 2008 American Bar Association event in Washington, D.C., Joseph Bell Jr., an attorney with a keen interest in discrimination cases, first met author Anthony Pitch, a historian and authority on President Abraham Lincoln. A friendship developed. Bell, an adjunct at the County College of Morris in Randolph, New Jersey, started taking his students to the nation's capital on Pitch's Lincoln tours. On a trip in 2013, Pitch told Bell about his work on a book about the 1946 mass lynching at Moore's Ford Bridge in Monroe, Georgia—known as the last mass lynching in America. But Pitch was stuck. "He said, 'You know, I really would like to wrap the book up by being able to secure the grand jury transcripts of that proceeding,'" says Bell, a founder of Bell, Shivas & Bell in Rockaway, New Jersey. The conversation about Pitch's desire to open the grand jury proceedings launched Bell's 10-year pro bono journey for justice for a decades-old case. In 1946, racial tensions in the South were running high. Two years earlier, the U.S. Supreme Court had declared all-white primaries unconstitutional in Smith v. Allwright, which bolstered voter registration of minorities and changed the dynamics of Georgia politics. On July 18, Maceo Snipes was the only Black person to cast his vote in Taylor County, Georgia. Just hours later, he was lynched, shot in the back. A week later and about 110 miles away in Walton County, Georgia, Roger Malcolm, a Black sharecropper, confronted his white employer, Barnette Hester. Malcolm accused Hester of sexually abusing Malcolm's wife, Dorothy, who was seven months pregnant. A fight ensued, and Malcolm allegedly stabbed Hester, who was taken to the hospital barely alive. Loy Harrison (right) stands on the old Moore's Ford Bridge with Oconee County Sheriff J.M. Bond (left) and coroner W.T. Brown of Walton County (center) after the July 25, 1946 lynching. After Malcolm's arrest, Dorothy asked their friends Mae and George Dorsey for help.

The couple went to their employer, Loy Harrison, a white farmer and landowner, who drove the Dorseys and Dorothy to the jail in Monroe, where Harrison posted Malcolm's $600 bond on July 25. On the way home, Harrison drove the two couples the long way home on an unpaved backroad. As he approached Moore's Ford Bridge over the Apalachee River, the road was blocked by 15 to 20 unmasked and armed white men. Mae Dorsey recognized some in the mob and called them out. After Harrison was told to step aside, the Malcolms and the Dorseys were dragged out of the car, tied to a tree and shot more than 60 times at close range. All four died. "The worst was Roger. His face was likened to shredded wheat," Bell says. No one charged. Days after the Moore's Ford lynchings, protestors marched in Washington, D.C., and the National Association of Colored Women picketed the White House. After the mass lynching at Moore's Ford, telegrams filled with outrage hit President Harry S. Truman's desk, motivating him to create the President's Committee on Civil Rights on Dec. 5, 1946. "This case really is truly a part of American history," says retired New Jersey Superior Court Judge Paul W. Armstrong. In the years following the lynching, the FBI and Georgia Bureau of Investigation interviewed 2,790 of Monroe's 4,100 residents, Bell says. One hundred and six people testified before a 16-day grand jury in Athens, Georgia, in December 1946. No one has ever been charged for the murder of the victims. Bell wanted to help Pitch learn the truth. "I feel that the historical significance of this case is that it is the beginning of the modern Civil Rights Movement in America," Bell says. "We wanted to shine light on the light of truth upon an appalling injustice: why no one has been brought to justice all throughout the years." He knew what he was up against. Long before his crusade for justice for the four people lynched at Moore's Ford Bridge, Bell began his career as a high school teacher in Newark, New Jersey, after graduating from Montclair State College. "I was always intrigued by the law, and wanted to be able to take on cases that perhaps could change society and change the way people live," Bell says. While attending Seton Hall University School of Law at night, Bell was elected Morris County clerk. One of his duties was presiding over naturalization ceremonies. "He would invite folks like Yogi Berra, and they would talk about their families and how they had come to America," Armstrong says.

“Now, Joe did all of this at his own expense.” While in that post, Bell developed a Braille ballot for the blind and a system to enable posting bail with credit cards. “His personality is so outgoing, so charming, people don’t realize how accomplished an attorney Joe is,” Armstrong adds. After graduating from Seton Hall, Bell went on to receive an LLM in labor and employment Law at New York University School of Law and began private practice at Dorsey, Pryor and Bell. He has been an ABA member since 1986. He served as municipal counsel and municipal prosecutor before opening his own practice in 1993. The Moore’s Ford case brought him into an area of law he’d never practiced. After more than 70 years, no one was sure that the grand jury records even existed, he says. If they did, the court would need to release the records for Bell to review. First step for the New Jersey lawyer was to be admitted to the Middle District of Georgia. Next, he reached out to U.S. District Judge Marc Treadwell, who said the records were gone—lost, misplaced or subject to a retention schedule, Bell says. The judge dismissed his application without prejudice. In 2016, just after Pitch’s book The Last Lynching: How a Gruesome Mass Murder Rocked a Small Georgia Town was published, Pitch called Bell. He had located the grand jury transcripts, mismarked in the National Archives and Records Administration outside Washington, D.C. Just weeks later, Bell argued to the court in the Middle District of Georgia that the Georgia Bureau of Investigation and FBI considered Moore’s Ford a cold case. “The judge felt that the [need for] secrecy was outweighed by the broader historical experience,” Bell says. Pitch was granted access. Of friend Anthony Pitch (right), Bell writes: “He was a consummate gentleman, always displaying the highest courtesy and dignity to those whose lives he touched.” Photo courtesy of Bell, Shivas & Bell. The U.S. Justice Department appealed to the Atlanta-based 11th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals, but a three-judge panel in a 2-1 vote affirmed the release in 2019. The government asked for the case to be heard en banc. In an 8-4 March 2020 decision, the majority said it would be improper to release the grand jury documents because it could endanger the secrecy of every grand jury proceeding going forward. Bell was frustrated.

"There are cases involving Richard Nixon Watergate tapes, Ethel and Julius Rosenberg, Alger Hiss, Jimmy Hoffa—they have released those grand jury transcripts," he says. Although Pitch died in 2019, Bell felt an obligation to press on. Undeterred, he appealed the 11th Circuit's decision to the Supreme Court. But in fall 2020, the court declined to hear Bell's appeal. "The Supreme Court decided not to accept [it]—this in the era of George Floyd. It's something that we still can't understand," Armstrong says. "If you look at the court and the public perception of the court's role as an instrument of justice, it's been denied this time," Bell says. "But we're not dead. We're not dead." His hope stems from the amendment of the Civil Rights Cold Case Act and a commission that will take a fresh look at the case. Four of the five members have been appointed to the Civil Rights Cold Case Records Review Board, though at press time the commission had not yet met. "We welcome letters from [ABA members] to their U.S. senators to act with dispatch in confirming the fifth member when nominated and expediting the creation of the panel and staff so that the memories of all that were lynched be enshrined by those who are living," Bell writes in an email. "Joseph being Joseph—and this going on the 10th year of his pro bono activity—as soon as President Biden finishes appointing members of the Cold Case commission, Joe will be arguing before that cold case commission," Armstrong says. "[Bell] has come to actually personify the commitment to pro bono advocacy." Bell feels a sense of obligation to the legacy of Pitch and the community. "Joe Bell is sharp, articulate and he knows the law," says Tyrone Brooks, a former Georgia state representative who organizes an annual reenactment of the Moore's Ford lynchings. "He's a godsend to our movement." "Why, oh why, oh why, were four innocent people killed so violently? Why was there such a cover-up? What is there to hide? It's been 76 years," he says. "I don't think you can begin the healing process until we know the actual truth. "I know that I've been defeated in the court battles, but being defeated is often a temporary condition," Bell adds. "Giving up makes it permanent. And I'm not giving up."

Georgia town attempts to atone for 1940 lynching

CNN Wire Jan 27, 2017

Emanuella Grinberg

LAGRANGE -- When it happened, news of Austin Callaway's lynching on September 8, 1940, was buried on the last page of his hometown newspaper in LaGrange, Georgia.
"Negro succumbs to shot wounds," read the LaGrange Daily News headline, squeezed between the personal ads and a report on a church fish fry. "Dies Sunday at Hospital, Struck by Seven Bullets." LaGrange police did not investigate the 16-year-old's killing. The courts did not act and the media did not follow the story after day one. In a scenario that sounds all too familiar, then and now, no one was held accountable. It would take 76 years for city officials to admit what really happened. "We failed Austin Callaway," Mayor Jim Thornton said. "Justice failed Austin Callaway." 'The truth shall set you free' The words echoed through LaGrange's Warren Temple United Methodist Church Thursday night, where more than 200 people crammed into pews and folding chairs to remember Callaway. It was a rare public reconciliation for a lynching, attended by black and white people, police, civilians and clergy, sitting and standing side by side. Programs ran out as attendance exceeded expectations, forcing people into an overflow room in a building next door. "Some would like to see us bury the past and move on," Thornton said. "Until we have a full and complete acknowledgment of the past we can never heal." As one elected official after another took the pulpit, delivering moving apologies to the African-American community and pledges to do better, the tone evolved from somber to reverent to hopeful. As Troup County State Court Judge Jeannette Little proclaimed to applause and cheers, "Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall set you free." 'The past shapes the present' Callaway's lynching lived in whispers among African-Americans of that era. As they passed on, in the absence of official records, media accounts or a gravestone, Callaway faded from the town's collective memory. Almost no one in LaGrange today knew Austin Callaway's name until recently -- not his descendants, not the local NAACP president, not the mayor, not even Police Chief Louis Dekmar. As the chief learned more about the lynching, he came to understand how it strained relations between his force and the African-American community.

He decided it was time to apologize for law enforcement's role and acknowledge its impact on community relations. "The past shapes the present," he said in an interview before the event. About a dozen uniformed members of the force surrounded the congregation as he delivered his testimony. His quest began with a conversation between two African-American women visiting police headquarters, he told the crowd. As they looked at historic photos hanging on the walls someone overheard one of them whisper "they killed our people" and shared the comment with Dekmar. Through conversations with African-American elders and archival research he learned the facts of the lynching -- little of which has changed since 1940. While a fire tore through the fertilizer plant across town, six armed men wearing hoods stormed the jail where Callaway was being held. News reports from the time said Callaway was arrested on a change of assaulting a white woman, Dekmar said. But no official record remains today describing the allegations. The mob ordered the lone jailer at gunpoint to open Callaway's cell and fled into the night with him. Hours later, a passerby found him on a dirt road in a rural part of the county. He had been shot five times in the head, Dekmar said. He was brought to the hospital and later died. The community's indifference was spelled out in the findings of the grand jury, to "get better locks for the jail," he said. Law enforcement failed to protect and serve Austin Calloway, "and for that I am profoundly sorry. It shouldn't have happened," he said, eliciting cheers from the crowd. "I sincerely regret the role law enforcement played in Austin Calloway's death, through action and inaction." An apology might ring hollow to the African-American community as an effort gloss over the past, he said. To the white community it may seem like ancient history that no one today is responsible for, he said. Those involved may be gone, but the police force that neglected its duty to Callaway is still here, he said. "It bears the burden of that history." Law enforcement doesn't carry all the blame, LaGrange College President Dan McAlexander said. One person, Warren Temple Pastor J.M. Strickland, and two ministerial groups sent a letter to the NAACP calling for an investigation. Otherwise, there was no evidence that LaGrange College or any of the area civic organizations sought justice, he said. LaGrange's event is a rare official acknowledgment of a dark period in the history of the South.

The Equal Justice Initiative in Montgomery, Alabama, has documented 4,075 racial terror lynchings in Southern states between 1877 and 1950, few of which have been publicly acknowledged. CNN found four instances of apologies for lynchings, including one in 2005 in Abbeville, South Carolina -- site of the 1916 lynching of a black farmer named Anthony Crawford at the hands of neighbors. White ministers apologized for racism, church burnings and lynchings, including Crawford's murder. Callaway's descendants, who only learned about him recently, welcomed the occasion as a chance to right wrongs and bring about healing in the community. Deborah Tatum, whose grandfather was the brother of Callaway's father, learned his name and his story in 2014 while researching genealogy. She was surprised to learn about the terrible secret but could understand why her relatives may have kept it hidden. "They tried to protect us as much as they could from the bad things happening," said Tatum, 55, a lifelong resident of LaGrange. "I don't think they had the luxury of being able to go to the police and or the officials for help. It was such an era of hatred." Tatum's uncle, James Callaway, has a harder time understanding how the killing remained a secret so long -- or why it happened in the first place. "Why would they be that down-low and dirty to do something like that to a kid?" he said. "It was like a black mark on the family." What's next? Tatum and Dekmar were not the only ones searching for the truth about Callaway. A church book discussion about cross burnings piqued Wesley Edwards' curiosity in area hate crimes, leading to Austin Callaway. A longtime African-American friend, Bobbie Hart, confessed ignorance to the lynching, prompting them to form the group "Troup Together" in search of the truth. The "knowledge deficit" is what worries Edwards. If Callaway's lynching remained a mystery all these years, what else don't they know about? "If white people have one version of history and African-Americans have a different one, then we don't know what we don't know," he said. "We've got to bridge that gap." Thursday's event marks the start of the healing process, Hart said. What's next? The need to save troubled African-American men in today's communities, she said. Topics such as poverty, incarceration and equal access to education bubbled up at various points in the ceremony, with less fanfare. It's easier, perhaps, to build consensus around reconciliation and healing than it is for systemic issues. "I believe the will is there," she said, "We need to keep working together."

Names on Civil Rights Memorial

Louis Allen - Shirley Evans
Willie Brewster - Janet Lyman
Johnnie Mae Chappell - Linda McKnight
James Chaney, Andrew Goodman, Michael Schwerner - Ellen Smith
Vernon Dahmer - Souad Nowakowski
Jonathan Daniels - Chuck Williamson
Cpl. Roman Ducksworth Jr. - Lisa Dillard
Willie Edwards - Richard Lafferty
Medgar Evers - Cynthia Farmer
Paul Guihard - David Dillard
Samuel Hammond Jr., Delano Herman Middleton, Henry Ezekial Smith - Connie Carlson
Jimmie Lee Jackson -Ross Loeser
Wharlest Jackson - Temera Sanders
Rev. Bruce W. Klunder - Anne Lafferty
Rev. George W. Lee - Valerie Tutt
Herbert Lee - Nan Clarke
Viola Liuzzo - Celeste Bagley
Oneal Moore - Barbara Williamson
William Lewis Moore - Kent Main
Lt. Col. Lemuel Penn - Sue Loeser
Rev. James Reeb - Christina Solis
Lamar Smith - Hal Clarke
Emmett Till - Barbara Byers
Clarence Triggs - Mimi Jones
Virgil Lamar Ware - Louise Ripple
Sammy Younge Jr. - Mark Bowling

"Laundry is the only thing that should be separated by color."

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