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Black Churchwomen's Lived Theology and Liberative Social Ethics during the Civil Rights Movement

By

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# Black Churchwomen's Lived Theology and Liberative Social Ethics during the Civil Rights Movement

By

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M.Div., Princeton Theological Seminary, 2006
M.B.A., Rollins College, 2002
B.S., Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University, 1995

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An abstract of
A dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the
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Abstract

Black Churchwomen's Lived Theology and Liberative Social Ethics during the Civil Rights Movement

By AnneMarie Mingo

This dissertation offers a counter to the marginalization of "everyday" Black Churchwomen's contributions to the historical, theological, and ethical underpinnings of the Civil Rights Movement. By interrogating Black women's evolving liberatory oriented virtue ethics of freedom, courage, critical assessment, and imagination, I highlight ways their belief in a God of justice and freedom compelled them to act.

During the Civil Rights Movement, many Black Churchwomen lived out their faith and risked their lives to do the socio-political work they felt they "had to do" as they pursued a cause that was bigger than themselves. Drawing from oral histories that I conducted with over forty civil rights era women at Big Bethel A.M. E. Church and Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta, Georgia, and First A.M.E. Bethel and Abyssinian Baptist Church in Harlem, New York, I retrieve a lived theology and construct a liberative social ethic from the experiences of eight representative women.

This dissertation draws from and contributes to three primary fields of study: American Civil Rights Movement history, liberation theology, and Christian social ethics. To date, limited focus has been given to the role of theology and ethics in the motivations and choices made by Black women during the Civil Rights Movement. The historical legacy of everyday Black Churchwomen's activism becomes a source for a lived theology of justice and freedom and a liberative social ethic of compulsion constructed in the midst of contested spaces. Drawing from concrete experiences, songs, scriptures, and prayers, this lived theology emerges in moments of conflict, bearing witness to God's presence in the midst of the Civil Rights Movement. For the women of this study, their moral formation within segregated Black communities resulted in a particular liberative social ethic that highlights virtues of freedom faith, courageous resistance, liminal assessment, and theo-moral imagination.

In this dissertation I center Black Churchwomen during the Civil Rights Movement as organic theologians and ethicists whose historic actions continue to provide contemporary guidance. Ultimately I argue that a lived theology of justice and freedom and a liberative social ethic of compulsion provide frameworks for strategic faith-centric organizing in religious-social-political activism today.

# Black Churchwomen's Lived Theology and Liberative Social Ethics during the Civil Rights Movement

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The love and support of my parents, G.W. and Cynthia Mingo, is unparalleled, so I commence my thanks with them. They were my first teachers, historians, theologians, and ethicists. Words are not adequate to express the love and gratitude that I have for them. I am who I am because of them.

My brother Gerald Mingo, whose free spirit continues to soar as he shapes young minds in some of our nation's most challenging classrooms, joins me in this legacy of activism through education that has been passed to us through our parents.

I am thankful for all of my extended family who have supported me throughout all of my journeys in life. I offer special thanks to my cousins whose generosity went above and beyond during the writing of this dissertation – Saundra Burgess, Michael and Nekisha Killings, and Charles Morris.

I have been blessed with wonderful friends, who consistently believe in me and encourage me to do the work that I have been called to do in the church, community, and classroom. At just the right time they have provided tangible support and safe spaces to just be me when I needed a break. These friends who are like family are: Stephanie Crumpton, Rob and Shaun Hardy, Brian Hart, Brooke Hobbs, Woodrow and Audrey Jackson, Tony Lee, Charles and Jennifer Maxell, Taydra Mitchell-Jackson, A. J. and Connie Richardson, Sharon Riddle, Angela Sims, Marion Watley, and William and Muriel Watley. These persons, my EBC sisters, and other members of my prayer team have meant more to me during this process than they may ever know.

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while I was at Morehouse College, and also helped me make connections that will benefit this project in the years to come.

As I worked on this dissertation, I was blessed to teach wonderful students who experienced and helped me work through some of my early ideas and concepts that are now found in these pages. My students at the W.E.B. Du Bois Institute at Princeton University, Emory University, and Morehouse College are my seeds of hope, which I have planted, who I know will continue to change the world as they too fight for justice and freedom.

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"We who believe in freedom cannot rest…" – Ella Baker

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## INTRODUCTION

I come to this work as a scholar, but my interest derives from people whose lives are walking historical texts. As a child, my parents always made sure that my younger brother and I understood the history of America through the experiences of those of African descent who looked like us. We received some of our most important contextually grounded history lessons from our parents as they reflected on their experiences growing up in Florida.

One of the stories that captivated me was from my mother, Cynthia Mingo, who was born and raised in Tallahassee. In the shadow of the state's capital building, she and other Blacks faced the disturbing realities of Jim and Jane Crow on a daily basis. She told me they were forced to pay at the front and then enter from the back as they rode the city bus, only to be left on the side of the road after paying if they did not make it to the rear entrance of the bus before the driver sped off. She told me of being prevented from trying on clothes, shoes, and other items in stores that would take Black people's money but not provide an opportunity for them to be assured satisfaction with their purchase. She also told me of how Blacks were made to stand outside to eat after entering a rear door of an eating establishment, despite paying the same amount of money for food, while White patrons ordered, sat, and ate at counters and tables. My mother shared the daily injustices she faced with my brother and me so that we would understand our current existence in relation to our parents' relatively recent past.

My mother had been one of the brave people in Tallahassee, Florida who received their marching orders during Mass meetings at her home congregation, Fountain Chapel A.M.E. Church, to do what she could when she could to thwart segregation, even if it

meant risking physical violence. She watched as the adults from her community created a network that enabled them to get to and from their places of employment during the eight-month bus boycott, which was started by two female students from Florida A&M University (FAMU) in May of 1956.[1] She listened as fellow students on FAMU's campus made plans to keep pushing against the unjust system of segregation by boycotting, protesting, and marching.

My mother's mother was very strict, and though my grandfather had participated in the Tallahassee bus boycott lead by Rev. C.K. Steele from 1956-1957, my grandmother was against my mother and her older sister Eunice's participation in the 1960 FAMU sit-ins.[2] Knowing the authoritarian way in which my grandmother ruled the house, it was always intriguing to me that my mother and my aunt participated in the sit-ins against my grandmother's wishes and without her knowledge. As a child, I wondered why they would risk possible retaliation from segregationists at the McCrory's 5 and 10 store and possibly even worse punishment from their mother at home.

When I was around five years old, after I watched cartoons on Saturday mornings, my mother and I regularly went to a Woolworth's in Gainesville, Florida and ate grilled cheese sandwiches there as a mother/daughter treat. With this intentional act, my mother passed down both a history and responsibility by helping me to understand that the

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[1] Carrie Patterson and Wilhemenia Jakes were the two students who refused to give up their seats when a White woman was seated near them. After being refused a refund of the ten cents they each paid to ride the bus, the cause for which they remained seated sparked a movement that cost the Bus Company and the city much more than twenty cents. The Tallahassee bus boycott, which lasted from May 1956 through January 1958, has received much less attention than the well-known Montgomery bus boycott. However, newspaper accounts show that at that time they were both held up as successful examples of the ways Black communities could come together to cripple the economic foundation of the bus companies in a way that ultimately caused them to support integrated seating on the buses. See Tananarive Due and Patricia Stephens Due, *Freedom in the Family: A Mother-Daughter Memoir of the Fight for Civil Rights* (New York, NY: One World Book, 2003); and Glenda Alice Rabby, *The Pain and the Promise: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Tallahassee, Florida* (Athens, GA: The University of Georgia Press, 1999).

[2] See Tallahassee, Florida McCrory's sit-ins in Glenda Alice Rabby, *The Pain and the Promise: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Tallahassee, Florida*, 91-94.

service we enjoyed at the lunch counter had not always been there for Blacks. She wanted me to take advantage of the victory that had been won years earlier during the undeclared Civil War for Civil Rights.

As I grew up, my mother also often recounted the story of one of her friends from church with whom she had grown up doing Easter and Christmas speeches. Calvin Bess Jr., left Tallahassee one summer in 1967 to participate in voter registration activities and was found dead in a creek in West Point, Mississippi. Her recounting the curious fact that, at six feet tall he had allegedly accidentally drowned in a mere three feet of water, was eerie.[3] This incident happened only a few years after my mother and her sister defied their mother to participate in sit-ins. They knew that what they were doing was risky, yet they did it anyway. It was that commitment to seek justice, despite the risk, that became a part of me from an early age. My mother committed to doing her small part to make sure that things would not always be as they were. She was a civil rights activist, but her name was not known and her story has never been told.

Almost thirty years after my internal questioning of why my mother would risk what she did to sit in and protest at McCrory's 5 and 10 in Tallahassee, I found myself in the presence of another woman whose story would make it all come together for me. I scribbled feverishly in my little notebook as I listened to "Nana Rosa," at that time an octogenarian Black woman and member at Big Bethel AME Church in Atlanta, Georgia where I currently serve as an associate minister. She described to me her experiences during the Civil Rights Movement, explaining how she was working at the Atlanta Life Insurance Company while her husband was one of the few Black men working at the Post

[3] One account of Calvin Bess' suspicious death can be found in Tananarive Due and Patricia Stephens Due's *Freedom in the Family: A Mother-Daughter Memoir of the Fight for Civil Rights*, 299-300.

Office. Nana Rosa explained how each week she and other women colleagues spent their lunch hour protesting in front of the U.S. Post Office for its lack of representative hiring and advancement of Blacks. I paused in my note taking to verify the timing of when this protesting was happening, and that is when I had my "ah-ha moment."

I asked, "Were you protesting in front of the Post Office at the same time that your husband was one of the few Black men to work there?" Her immediate response was "It didn't matter…it was bigger than that." I heard in her story the stories I had grown up hearing from my mother and other women in my home church. Nana Rosa, my mother, and others like them were the types of women who worked to engage in the moral formation of a nation; they were not simply focused on individual success and advancement, but the transformation of a whole society. The freedom they sought was one that could not be deterred by disapproving parents, or silenced in the face of possible reprisals against a spouse. Their actions were rooted in the belief that what they were doing "was bigger than" themselves. It was something they simply had to do.

In this dissertation, I mine the historical narratives of women like Nana Rosa and Cynthia Mingo as I revise theological expressions and construct ethical categories to develop a liberative theology and ethic from the lives of Black Churchwomen.[4] By building on the work of previous scholarship about Civil Rights Movement history, liberation theologies, and ethics, along with new oral histories from "everyday" Black Churchwomen of the civil rights era, I expand current understandings of theo-ethical

[4] While the women in this study are all Black and associated with a Black Church, I intentionally use the term "Black Churchwomen" in response to the language used throughout the 1960s and 1970s by the National Committee of Negro Churchmen, later known as the National Committee of Black Churchmen. This committee wrote the Statement on Black Power that was published in the *New York Times* on July 31, 1966. This statement, which is a significant guidepost in the creation of Black Theology, was signed by forty-eight persons, which included Dr. Anna Arnold Hedgeman, the only woman and only layperson to sign. Gayraud S. Wilmore and James H. Cone, *Black Theology: A Documentary History, 1966-1979* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1979), 22-30.

motivations for social activism during the Civil Rights Movement.[5] I retrieve a lived theology from the experiences, songs, scriptures, and prayers that formed a critical engagement with God in moments of contestation. By the words they used – their own or others' – these women articulated their theological understanding of how God was present and active in the lives of those fighting for justice and freedom. This lived theology clarifies the women's "doing of justice" and articulates their liberative social ethic rooted in virtues of freedom, courage, and imagination. After telling their stories and unpacking their theology, in this dissertation I construct a lived theology of justice and freedom and a liberative social ethic of compulsion that derives primarily from the thought and activism of eight Black Churchwomen.[6]

Many historical media accounts of the Civil Rights Movement recall the experiences and perspectives of men who spoke at mass meetings, occupied the front lines of marches, and openly challenged city, county, and state leadership. Since these accounts often omit the women who helped both organize and keep the Movement going, they have helped to shape an understanding of the Civil Rights Movement that primarily highlights the efforts of men. Addressing this gap in the common narrative has been the focus of recent scholars and practitioners such as Bettye Collier-Thomas, Vicki

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[5] In this dissertation, I will often refer to the Civil Rights Movement as simply "the Movement," with the capitalization noting the reference to the more generally understood social actions and events during both the traditional and "long" Civil Rights Movement periods. Other social movements will be referred to by the full name with which they are most commonly associated. I use a capitalized Black to reference the sociological group of peoples of African descent, and I also use a capitalized White to reference the group of peoples of European descent. If reference is made to a particular color such as a white crayon, I will use the word in the lowercase form. While I recognize that the group of people that I refer to as Black have had an interesting history of being named and naming themselves in America, including African, Nigger, Negro, Colored, Black, and African American, I use Black as an all-encompassing descriptor to include those from continental Africa and throughout the African Diaspora. Unless a part of a direct quotation, this will be the language used throughout the dissertation.

[6] Theology in this dissertation refers primarily to Christian understandings of God, however there are times in which the participants draw on a broader understanding of God that is not limited to one expressed religion. In those cases I will attempt to identify this distinction.

Crawford, Belinda Robnett, Rosetta Ross, Deborah Gray White, and others in order to ensure that the women of the Movement will be reclaimed from their places of relative obscurity.[7]

*Widening the Scope and Influences of the Movement*

Women feature prominently in historic photographs and documentaries from the Civil Rights Movement, particularly inside the Black Church, in the streets protesting, and as they were arrested. The faces of these women are clearly visible, making their involvement in the Movement undeniable. However, their particular stories are unknown. Adding new narratives of women to the field of civil rights scholarship has helped to widen our understanding of the Movement's scope. However, even though newer scholarship includes perspectives of female community organizers, there is still little information about one particular group of women whose beliefs and actions were critical to the Movement – Black Churchwomen.[8] Although these women were virtually barred

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[7] Some of the significant texts that widen the scope of the Movement by foregrounding the contributions of women, include: Bettye Collier-Thomas, V.P. Franklin, (eds.). *Sisters in the Struggle: African American Women in the Civil Rights –Black Power Movement* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2001); Vickie Crawford, Jacqueline Anne Rouse, and Barbara Woods, *Women in the Civil Rights Movement: Trailblazers & Torchbearers 1941-1965* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1990); Belinda Robnett, *How Long?, How Long?: African-American Women in the Struggle for Civil Rights* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1997); Rosetta Ross, *Witnessing and Testifying: Black Women, Religion, and Civil Rights* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 2003); and Deborah Gray White, *Too Heavy a Load: Black Women in Defense of Themselves 1894-1994* (New York, NY: W.W. Norton and Company, 1999). This list excludes important recent biographical accounts of women leaders including Barbara Ransby's *Ella Baker and the Black Freedom Movement: A Radical Democratic Vision* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2003) and Chana Kai Lee's *For Freedom's Sake: The Life of Fannie Lou Hamer* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1999), as well as many autobiographical accounts of women, which will be discussed later.

[8] General Civil Rights Movement survey books include the trilogy by Taylor Branch, *Parting the Waters: America in the King Years 1954-1963* (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster Paperbacks, 1988); *Pillar of Fire: America in the King Years 1963-1965* (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster Paperbacks, 1988); and *At Canaan's Edge: America in the King Years 1965-1968* (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 2006); Clayborne Carson, David J. Garrow, Gerald Gill, Vincent Harding, and Darlene Clark Hine (eds.), *The Eyes on the Prize Civil Rights Reader: Documents, Speeches, and Firsthand Accounts from the Black Freedom Struggle 1954-1990* (New York, NY: Penguin Group, 1991); Bruce J. Dierenfield, *The Civil Rights Movement,* Revised Edition (United Kingdom: Pearson Education Limited, 2004, 2008); and Aldon D. Morris, *Origins of the Civil Rights Movement: Black Communities Organizing for Change* (New York, NY: The Free Press, 1984). Female community organizer texts include accounts of SNCC women in Faith

from leadership in the wider Black community's most dominant organ, the Black Church, they often acted as the informal or "bridge" leaders of their churches and they maintained significant organizational power within their communities.[9]

Both men and women during the Movement recognized that leadership was associated with those who were willing to stand up for justice, and those who were not afraid to risk the consequences that such a stand could generate. The title of pastor or minister was not a prerequisite for leadership. Wanting to be a part of movements for social change caused many young women to ignore societal norms that encouraged them to sit back, be careful, and adhere to the community's unwritten politics of respectability. They took the risks and stood up against men whose actions were deemed unjust; they went to jail, and spoke up for themselves and others as they fought for causes they believed were bigger than their individual experiences. They believed themselves to be doing God's work and found respectability in that. Young women who had grown up in Black churches understood the God of justice as one who would not continually turn a blind eye to the injustices they faced, but would be with them in the fight for justice and freedom.

Because the stories of Black Churchwomen have largely been ignored, a potentially vital resource for current and future social activists is quietly making its way to the grave. In many ways, this dissertation project is a race against the clock to capture

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S. Hosaert, Martha Prescod Norman Noonan, Judy Richardson, Betty Garman Robinson, Jean Smith Young, and Dorothy M. Zellner (eds.), *Hands on the Freedom Plow: Personal Accounts by Women in SNCC* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2010).

[9] Belinda Robnett, *How Long? How Long?: African American Women in the Struggle for Human Rights*, see chapters 3 and 5. Sociologist Belinda Robnett offers the categories of bridge leaders and formal leaders to distinguish between the leadership of women who served as grassroots connectors or bridges within the community and the leadership of those in institutional hierarchy of the Black Church – primarily men. Changes in societal structures are noted as she explores a more inclusive type of leadership, which was the result of the equally intense work and physical risks taken by women as they struggled for rights.

the experiences of everyday women who have not had the privilege of numerous researchers seeking them out like the more well-known women such as Rosa Parks, Coretta Scott King, Ella Baker, Fannie Lou Hamer, and Septima P. Clark. Therefore, in this dissertation, I mine the stories of everyday Black Churchwomen for their theological and ethical jewels in an attempt to better understand how their actions contributed to the Movement.

My research uncovers a lived theology and liberative social ethic born out of the concrete experiences of "everyday" women as they participated in various struggles during the Civil Rights Movement. In this dissertation, by lived theology I mean a liberative theology of justice and freedom developed in the midst of Black women's tangible experiences of contestation and struggle. The terms lived theology and liberative social ethics are developed in ways that continue to expand upon the use of lived theology in the Project on Lived Theology in the Department of Religious studies at the University of Virginia. This project's goal is to understand "social consciousness of religious beliefs," seeing theological life as a form of public responsibility.[10] Through working groups, The Project on Lived Theology has come to understand lived theology as the interconnection of theology and lived experience. In this dissertation, I employ the term lived theology as a form of liberation theology that is constructed from the concrete experiences of Black women during the Civil Rights Movement.

I have also been influenced by Traci West's use of liberative social ethics in *Disruptive Christian Ethics: When Racism and Women's Lives Matter*. West describes liberative social ethics as a range of interconnected moral concerns, with components of embodied spiritual quest, seeking out the margins, historical consciousness, strategic

[10] The Project on Lived Theology, www.livedtheology.org.

resistance, and scrutiny of institutions.[11] These two aspects of lived theology and liberative social ethics are the starting point for the theology and ethics that are explicated in this dissertation from the lived experiences of Black Churchwomen.

I analyze the motivations of civil rights era Black Churchwomen as they faced difficulties and horrors through numerous struggles in the South and North. I contend that it is in these critical moments that their faith in and commitment to justice and freedom were shaped, challenged, defined, dashed and/or reified. As the narrative of Nana Rosa suggests, some women who participated in the Civil Rights Movement did so because of a greater "calling" that they felt on their lives; they participated without fear or concern for themselves individually. My research confirmed this and a variety of other motivations for the different theo-ethical actions of Black women.

*Genealogy of this Research*

The project follows a scholarly trajectory shaped by Black womanist ethics and recent scholarship by Black scholars of religions.[12] This genealogy begins with Katie Geneva Cannon, whose work in *Black Womanist Ethics*, published in 1988, created the initial space for this ethical work. Cannon analyzed the roles of Black women through Black women's literature, as a source for understanding what Cannon calls the "real-lived" texture of Black experiences and contextualized Black moral life. Cannon's

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[11] Traci C. West, *Disruptive Christian Ethics: When Racism and Women's Lives Matter* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 68.

[12] This includes: Katie G. Cannon, *Black Womanist Ethics*, (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1988); Emilie M. Townes, *Womanist Justice, Womanist Hope* (Atlanta, GA: Scholar's Press, 1993); Marcia Y. Riggs, *Awake, Arise & Act: A Womanist Call for Black Liberation*, (Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 1994); Rosetta E. Ross, *Witnessing and Testifying: Black Women, Religion, and Civil Rights*, (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Press, 2003); Marla F. Frederick, *Between Sundays: Black Women and Everyday Struggles of Faith*, (Berkley, CA: University of California Press, 2003); James Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1969, 1997); Major J. Jones, *Christian Ethics for Black Theology: The Politics of Liberation* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1974); Gayraud S. Wilmore and James H. Cone (eds.), *Black Theology: A Documentary History, 1966-1979* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1979); and James H. Cone and Gayraud S. Wilmore (eds.), *Black Theology: A Documentary History, Volume two: 1980-1992* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993).

engagement with literature, specifically her examination of Black women's moral reasoning through the writings of Zora Neale Hurston, was a pioneering move in the field of ethics.[13] For Cannon, Zora Neale Hurston's personal life, the moral wisdom for survival that her mother modeled for her, as well as the moral agency reflected in the fictional characters in Hurston's writings, present Black women's lived realities. Cannon's work shows that individual moral wisdom is often the result of familial or communal living that shapes ideas of right and wrong. In the same way that Hurston viewed Black experience as a source for her texts, and Cannon used Hurston and her texts as a source for doing ethics, I view Black women's lived experiences captured in oral histories as living texts that can be analyzed and critiqued for ethical construction.

My genealogy continues through Emilie Townes, whose work in *Womanist Justice, Womanist Hope*, takes a revisionist look at historical Black women, specifically the life and work of Ida B. Wells-Barnett. Townes used Wells-Barnett's autobiography and additional writings to reconstruct a worldview that otherwise might not have been obtained. Wells-Barnett's own writings offer insights about prophetic engagement with social injustice, and Townes engages those insights to articulate a contemporary womanist Christian social ethic around themes of authority, suffering, obedience, liberation, reconciliation, and power. In the same way that Townes uses Wells-Barnett's autobiography and writings for constructive ethical reflection, I engage the transcripts of the oral histories I collected from Black Churchwomen for the theological and ethical analysis presented in this dissertation.

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[13] Katie G. Cannon, *Katie's Canon: Womanism and the Soul of the Black Community*, (New York, NY: Continuum, 1995), 75-123. As the first womanist ethicist to publish a scholarly text, Cannon was writing during a time when the predominantly White male academy struggled to accept the voices of women, and these men were likely not ready to accept the expressions of Black women as ethical voices. She argued that Black women's literature could be trusted as mirroring Black reality in a textual form.

In *Awake, Arise & Act: A Womanist Call for Black Liberation*, Marcia Y. Riggs excavates a mediating ethic of Black liberation from the experiences and writings of Black clubwomen in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Riggs argues that the race-gender-class realities for Black clubwomen created experiences out of which they generated their own ethics. Riggs notes that it is the community itself that defines the theological and socio-historical veracity of liberation and responsibility. The communal ethics of the Black clubwomen is illustrative of the ethics of the women under study in this dissertation. As I study Black Churchwomen's participation in the Civil Rights Movement, I am also examining how individual women involved in a collective social movement provide a basis for constructing social ethics.

Rosetta Ross' *Witnessing and Testifying: Black Women, Religion, and Civil Rights* engages the religious lives of contemporary women by identifying seven women leaders within the Civil Rights Movement who had religious foundations, including Ella Baker, Fannie Lou Hamer, Clara Muhammad, and Ruby Doris Smith Robinson. Ross identifies the women's actions as the communal expressive practices of "testifying" and "witnessing," as a "ritualized mundane" – consecrated actions of the Divine in mundane situations. Ross also asserts that each of the seven women leaders value the "importance of human mutuality, the necessity of responding to the most marginalized, and the multi-dimensional requirement of responsibility." These women worked with God to change the troubling circumstances experienced daily by Blacks, by embodying the three virtues of "innovation, taking charge, and hope."[14] She draws on the three virtues identified by Katie Cannon – invisible dignity, quiet grace, and unshouted courage – that are cultivated in Black women's survival and well-being. In addition to the Cannon's virtues, Ross

[14] Ross, *Witnessing and Testifying,* 13-15, 227, 231.

identifies virtues that the seven Black women leaders of her study shared, including the love of others, a desire for self-determination, and the respect of human dignity.[15]

Finally, the focus of this study on the "everyday" woman is connected to Marla Frederick's anthropological work on the lives of Black women of faith, *Between Sundays: Black Women and Everyday Struggles of Faith.* By developing intimate relationships with women in Halifax County North Carolina, Frederick used ethnography to explore "the role of spirituality in the cultural production of activism in the lives of African American women," thus providing a model for understanding women's everyday expressions of faith.[16] Frederick's ethnographies in one rural county offer both an in-depth appreciation for and critique of Black women's spiritual motivations for social change. Like Frederick, I lived and spent significant time building relationships with women in the four church communities of my study, and by doing so expanded my understanding of Black women's experiences of faith as resources for change.

The aforementioned five women scholars – Cannon, Townes, Riggs, Ross, and Frederick – have each created intellectual space for my research. I advance their scholarship by prioritizing "everyday" Black Churchwomen as the subjects and the source for retrieving a lived theology and constructing a liberative social ethic.

This dissertation enlarges the existing scholarly trajectory by: 1) focusing on the lived experiences of "everyday" Black Churchwomen whose oral histories provide living texts for analysis; 2) excavating new understandings of women's agency and responsibility in their daily actions within the Civil Rights Movement; and 3) analyzing Black women's social activism in both the South and the North, nuancing the

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[15] It is unfortunate that these values and virtues are so briefly identified at the close of the book, without Ross taking the time to develop an application of them.
[16] Frederick, *Between Sundays*, *i*x.

geographical differences and similarities among the women which impacted the development of the women's theologies and socio-ethical foundations of social change.

**Three Primary Fields of Study**

As a social ethicist using an interdisciplinary methodology, this dissertation draws from and contributes to three primary fields of study: American Civil Rights Movement history, liberation theology, and Christian social ethics. In this dissertation, I engage and extend scholarship in these three fields of study by retrieving the historical legacy of Black Churchwomen's activism as a source for a lived theology and liberative social ethic.

First Field of Study: American Civil Rights Movement History

History is the source for my analysis of the underlying structural aspects of society that create the need for social activism. Historical studies on the Civil Rights Movement have often focused on the "leadership" of a few men and women, and have generally ignored the commitments and contributions of the "everyday" women who comprised the lifeblood of the Movement. In addition, most histories of the Civil Rights Movement focus on the southern movement and the well-known campaigns that the media covered in Montgomery, Birmingham, Greensboro, Nashville, Albany, and the Mississippi Delta. Only a few studies highlight the struggles for civil rights in the North where Blacks participated in sit-ins, boycotts, labor and tenant struggles during the Movement; also facing retaliation of various forms by northerners.[17] This dissertation

[17] When referring to a general geographical direction of north and south, the words will be used in lowercase. When referring to a collective region with general similarities and traits, the capitalized North and South will be used. While there is some literature on the role of women in leadership roles in the South, there has been very little research published on the roles of women in the civil and human rights struggles in the North, or other regions. Some scholars provide limited explorations into the experiences and contributions of women in the North. See, Matthew Countryman, *Up South: Civil Rights and Black Power in Philadelphia,* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), Thomas Sugrue, *Sweet Land*

shows the similar ways young Black women in the North and South sought to become agents in the Movement's quest for justice and freedom. In the following section, I will: 1) highlight the Civil Rights Movement literature that has been produced which helps to add perspectives of geographic regions, genders, and faith commitments, that have previously been omitted from the dominant narratives; and 2) outline an expansion of the Movement with a focus on a longer time period, a wider participant base than the known leaders, and deeper narrative driven insights for activist motivations.

*Writing/Righting the Movement*

The past two decades have witnessed a definite increase in the number of texts that expand the understanding of the Civil Rights Movement, of women's involvement in the Movement, as well as of local and regional experiences that add texture to the incorrect notion of a monolithic movement. A few of the significant texts that have contributed to the lengthening and widening of the Movement in the areas of the national and regional Civil Rights Movement, women and civil rights, and women, religion, and rights are discussed below.

*Civil Rights Movement – National and Regional*

Significant Civil Rights texts from 1990 through 2010 fall into three main areas: historical meta-narratives, biographical studies of leaders, and local movement histories.

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*of Liberty: The Forgotten Struggle for Civil Rights in the North*, (New York, NY: Random House, 2009), Peniel Joseph, *Waiting 'til the Midnight Hour: A Narrative of History of Black Power in America*, (New York, NY: Henry Holt, 2007), Martha Biondi, *To Stand and Fight: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Postwar New York City*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), Cheryl Townsend Gilkes, *If it Wasn't for the Women: Black Women's Experiences and Womanist Culture in Church and Community*, (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2000), Carol Anderson, *Eyes Off the Prize: The United Nations and the African American Struggle for Human Rights, 1944-1955* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2003), Jeanne F. Theoharis and Komozi Woodard (eds.), *Freedom North: Black Freedom Struggles Outside the South, 1940-1980* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), and Clarence Taylor (ed.), *Civil Rights in New York City: From World War II to the Giuliani Era* (New York, NY: Fordham University Press, 2011). This dissertation does not address civil rights activism in the Midwest or West, but I plan to expand the study to those regions in future work.

Spanning 1954-1968, Taylor Branch's trilogy *Parting the Waters, Pillar of Fire,* and *At Canaan's Edge* offers a meta narrative chronicling America's divisive practices particularly in the South, centering around the years that Martin Luther King, Jr. acted as the Movement's public leader. The majority of the biographical studies have focused primarily on King, the best-known leader of the Movement, including David Garrow's *Bearing the Cross* and King's own autobiographical writings edited by Clayborne Carson, *The Autobiography of Martin Luther King, Jr.* Though the general narrative of the Movement maintained a Southern locus, the influence of local politics and histories took on greater roles when they were brought to the fore in works including Charles Payne's *I've Got the Light of Freedom*, which uncovers the distinctive aspects of the Movement in the Mississippi Delta region.[18]

Robert Weisbrot provides a general survey of the Civil Rights Movement in *Freedom Bound*, where he focuses on the ways the movement changed and ultimately navigated a path to success.[19] He begins his account mainly from the sit-ins that were started by college students in North Carolina in 1960 and continues his overview through the 1980s where he identifies the "gains" of the Movement. Unlike most accounts, which focus on the southern movement or possibly on the northern movement, Weisbrot looks at both the northern and southern movements chronologically. Yet, much like the

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[18] Taylor Branch, *Parting the Waters: America in the King Years 1954-1963* (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster Paperbacks, 1988); Taylor Branch, *Pillar of Fire: America in the King Years 1963-1965* (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster Paperbacks, 1988); Taylor Branch, *At Canaan's Edge: America in the King Years 1965-1968* (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 2006); Clayborne Carson, *The Autobiography of Martin Luther King, Jr.,* (New York, NY: Grand Central Publishing, 2001); David J. Garrow, *Bearing the Cross: Martin Luther King Jr., and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference* (New York, NY: William Morrow & Company, 1986). Additional biographical studies will be noted under the section Women and Civil Rights.

[19] Robert Weisbrot, *Freedom Bound: A History of America's Civil Rights Movement*, (New York, NY: W.W. Norton, 1990).

dominant narrative in civil rights literature, he pays scant attention to the roles of women in the Movement and shows limited recognition of the impact of religion on the Movement.

Martha Biondi's *To Stand and Fight: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Postwar New York City* is revisionist history as it begins to uncover the struggle for freedom, self-determination, and rights in the urban North.[20] As a result, her work provides a different look at the struggle for rights that is not relegated to the southern Civil Rights Movement, but actually shows a movement that began earlier than tradition implies, ultimately making way for the Black Power Movement in the North. One of the main differences that this northern focus captures is the role of the Left and the focus on labor. In the North, women operated from positions of leadership within the organization more often than in the South. Biondi notes, "Women were major participants at every level of political organizing, except the highest, and in fact outnumbered men in four Harlem assembly districts."[21] Biondi misses the significance of the Black Church in lieu of the Left, and she omits entirely from her narrative the roles that Black Churchwomen in New York City played.

*Women and Civil Rights*

The scholarly pursuit of uncovering the significant roles of women's involvement in the Civil Rights Movement has been a project over two decades in the making. When Marymal Dryden watched the *Eyes on the Prize* documentary in 1987, she was inspired to create a national meeting that would recognize the role of the women of the Civil Rights Movement whose lives had not received the same level of attention as the male

[20] Martha Biondi, *To Stand and Fight: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Postwar New York City*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003).
[21] Ibid., 220.

media darlings of the Movement. She spearheaded a conference held in Atlanta, GA, *Women in the Civil Rights Movement: Trailblazers and Torchbearers, 1941-1965* which produced papers that became an edited volume of the same name. The conference brought together many activists and scholars for the first time, and provided a rich space for the telling of the stories of women leaders who had been marginalized in the memory of the Movement.

The 1990 publishing of the seminal collection of the stories of women's involvement and leadership in the Civil Rights Movement, *Women in the Civil Rights Movement: Trailblazers & Torchbearers 1941-1965*, was like a pebble tossed into the water: the text sent ripples out in the field of civil rights literature that sparked greater interest in the lives and contributions of previously unrecognized women who were significant parts of the Movement.[22] Mary Fair Burks' characterizations of trailblazers as those who pioneer in a field and torchbearers as those who follow trailblazers and expand knowledge first established by the trailblazer, recognizes the varying roles played at different times in various locations by participants in the Civil Rights Movement.[23] The first-hand accounts of trailblazing women such as Mary Fair Burks with the Women's Political Council (WPC) in Montgomery, Alabama and articles on women leaders including Ella Baker and Gloria Richardson, present a more comprehensive understanding of the grassroots socio-political structures that existed from the 1940s through 1960s, and which sparked and sustained various aspects of the Movement.

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[22] Vicki L. Crawford, Jacqueline Anne Rouse, and Barbara Woods, *Women in the Civil Rights Movement: Trailblazers & Torchbearers 1941-1965*, (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1990). Drawing from the contributions of over thirty pioneering women from the Civil Rights Movement attending a conference in Atlanta, GA in 1988, the seventeen essays compiled in this text uncover experiences of Black and White women, as they reflected on their lives at different levels of the Movement.

[23] Mary Fair Burks, "Trailblazers: Women in the Montgomery Bus Boycott" in *Women in the Civil Rights Movement: Trailblazers & Torchbearers 1941-1965*, 71.

By focusing on the leadership of women in the Civil Rights Movement, Belinda Robnett identifies categories of bridge leaders and formal leaders in her book *How Long?, How Long?: African American Women in the Struggle for Civil Rights*.[24] Bridge leaders were grassroots followers and organizers:

> Who utilized frame building, amplification, extension, and transformation to foster ties between the social movement and the community; between pre-figurative strategies (aimed at individual change, identity, and consciousness) and political strategies (aimed at organizational tactics designed to challenge existing relationships with the state and other societal institutions).[25]

Robnett distinguishes four types of bridge leaders: professional bridge leaders, community bridge leaders, indigenous bridge leaders, and mainstream bridge leaders. Professional bridge leaders were involved in civil rights activities before the formal movement, and they often worked across multiple civil rights groups envisioning greater advancement than local efforts. Community bridge leaders were active in specific organizations, and their work often built on the women's formal leadership within local communities. This leadership enabled the women to bridge the goals and desires of the Movement to the local community. Women who were indigenous bridge leaders worked with many of civil rights organizations, and they played the role of the trusted leaders who spoke up in moments of crisis. Robnett classifies mainstream bridge buildings as generally White women who helped bridge mainstream White organizations with the Movement. In contrast, formal leaders are those who had access to the institutional hierarchy of places like the Black church.[26]

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[24] Belinda Robnett, *How Long? How Long?: African American Women in the Struggle for Civil Rights*, (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1997)
[25] Ibid., 19-21.
[26] Ibid., 20-21.

Robnett's work addresses how gender operated as a method of exclusion from the formal leadership, through a socio-historical analysis of women in the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, the Congress of Racial Equality, the Women's Political Council of Montgomery, the Montgomery Improvement Association, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee, and the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party. Robnett uncovers the contributions Black women made to the leadership of the Civil Rights Movement by identifying the different leadership roles of women, while also showing how significant those non-formal types of leadership were to the overall success of Movement. The women in my study were not formal leaders with access to institutional and organizational power, but they were leaders in the way that Robnett characterizes bridge leaders. Specifically, the categories of community bridge leaders and indigenous bridge leaders capture the forms of leadership the Black Churchwomen in this dissertation demonstrated.

Other women and civil rights books that followed, including Bettye Collier-Thomas and V.P. Franklin's *Sisters in the Struggle: African American Women in the Civil Rights – Black Power Movement*, which helped to show the expanded roles of women in the organizing and sustaining of the long Movement that otherwise would have appeared to have been the sole efforts of one man, Martin Luther King, Jr. The collection of essays in this text brings attention to the role Black women played in Black freedom struggles from 1915 to 1980.[27]

[27] Bettye Collier-Thomas, V.P. Franklin (eds.), *Sisters in the Struggle: African American Women in the Civil Rights – Black Power Movement* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2001).

The fruit of a decade of work compiling narratives, *Hands on the Freedom Plow*, features many previously unknown personal reflections of women who were active in SNCC. Written by fifty-two Black, White, and Latina women leaders in SNCC, these first-person accounts are varied in experiences, but collectively the book highlights their struggle for freedom and equality. Despite the undeniable centrality of the Black Church in the Civil Rights Movement, there is not an intentional focus on the religious influences on the women's activism. Some of the narratives that are found in this book will be prime initial sources for larger biographies and documentaries on the lived experiences of these women.[28]

Some of the women who were active in leadership roles in the Civil Rights Movement have begun to publish autobiographies and memoirs that provide unparalleled insight into what they experienced on the front lines of interlocking battles against racism, classism, and sexism during the Movement. Other women leaders, including Ella Baker and Fannie Lou Hamer, have sparked interest in further research and as a result now have critical biographies that expand their reach and influence within history.[29]

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[28] Faith S. Hosaert, et. al., *Hands on the Freedom Plow: Personal Accounts by Women in SNCC* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2010).

[29] Important autobiographies and biographies of women in the Movement include: Melba Pattillo Beals, *Warriors Don't Cry: The Searing Memoir of the Battle to Integrate Little Rock's Central High* (New York, NY: Simon Pulse, 1994); Septima Poinsette Clark with LeGette Blythe, *Echo in my Soul* (New York, NY: E.P. Dutton & Co., 1962); Septima Clark, *Ready From Within: Septima Clark and the Civil Rights Movement, A First Person Narrative*, Cynthia Stokes Brown (ed.) (Trenton, NJ: African World Press, 1990); Tananarive Due and Patricia Stephens Due, *Freedom in the Family: A Mother-Daughter Memoir of the Fight for Civil Rights* (New York, NY: One World Book, 2003); Cynthia Griggs Fleming, *Soon We Will Not Cry: The Liberation of Ruby Doris Smith Robinson* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1998); Evelyn J. Frazier, *The Silent Warrior: An Autobiography by Evelyn J. Frazier as told to Pennye G. Hicks* (Lithonia, GA, Nia Pages II, 2008); Faith S. Holsaert, et al. (eds.), *Hands on the Freedom Plow: Personal Accounts by Women in SNCC* (Urbana, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2010); Phillip Hoose, *Claudette Colvin: Twice Toward Justice* (New York, NY: Farrar Straus Giroux, 2009); Carlotta Walls LaNier, *A Mighty Long Way: My Journey to Justice at Little Rock Central High School* (New York, NY: One World Trade Paperbacks, 2009); Chana Kai Lee, *For Freedom's Sake: The Life of Fannie Lou Hamer* (Urbana, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1999); Kay Mills, *This Little Light of Mine: The Life of Fannie Lou Hamer* (New York, NY: The Penguin Group, 1993); Constance Baker Motley, *Equal Justice Under Law: An Autobiography by Constance Baker Motley* (New York, NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux,

Despite the increased knowledge these autobiographies and biographies provide, there still remains a significant gap in the knowledge of the role that religion played in the choices Black women made regarding participating in the Movement.[30]

*Women, Religion, and Rights*

To understand the social and spiritual significance of religion and the centrality of the Black Church for women from the mid-1940s through the early 1970s, requires a better understanding of Black religion and social activism more broadly in the twentieth century. While the majority of publications on the Movement have virtually avoided the involvement of women and the importance of religion, a few scholars are beginning to enter this area.

Specific research on the Black Church during the Civil Rights Movement or Black Freedom Struggles in general has not made its way into widely read monographs. Contributions such as Andrew Billingsley's *Mighty Like a River: The Black Church and Social Reform*, and Anthony Pinn's *The Black Church in the Post-Civil Rights Era*, provide histories of the Black Church and activism but make a large leap from slave religion to a post-Civil Rights aspect of social responsibility for Black Churches. In over 200 pages, Billingsley only includes one nine-page chapter about the Black Church and

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1998); Barbara Ransby, *Ella Baker & the Black Freedom Movement: A Radical Democratic Vision* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2003); Amelia Platts Boynton Robinson, *Bridge Across Jordan* Revised Edition (Washington, DC: Schiller Institute, 1991); JoAnn Gibson Robinson, *The Montgomery Bus Boycott and the Women Who Started It: The Memoir of JoAnn Gibson Robinson*, David J. Garrow (ed.) (Knoxville, TN: The University of Tennessee Press, 1987); Nina Simone with Stephen Cleary, *I Put a Spell on You: The Autobiography of Nina Simone* (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 1991); Octavia Vivian, *Coretta: The Story of Coretta Scott King* Commemorative Edition (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 2006).

[30] There is also a relative gap in the understanding of the role that religion played in the choices that men made about participating in the Movement; however because the absolute leaders were primarily male preachers (including many of the leaders of SNCC), there is an implied connection between their religious beliefs and their actions. Examples of writings that have made these connections more direct are: Richard Lischer, *The Preacher King: Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Word that Moved America* (New York, NY: Oxford Press, 1995); and Andrew Young, *A Way out of No Way: The Spiritual Memoirs of Andrew Young* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1994).

the Civil Rights Movement, "Rev. Ralph Mark Gilbert and the Civil Rights Movement in Savannah." The rest of the book focuses on early Black Church history and experiences, or contemporary experiences in the 1980s and 1990s. Pinn provides even less context for the period to which his text compares itself, giving only three pages of space to the Church and the Civil Rights Movement and the Black Church and Black Power combined.[31]

Two texts which closely address the role of religion and women during the Civil Rights Movement are Rosetta E. Ross' *Witnessing and Testifying: Black Women, Religion, and Civil Rights*, and Bettye Collier-Thomas' *Jesus, Jobs, and Justice: African American Women and Religion*.[32]

The socio-historical womanist framing provided by Rosetta Ross is, as I stated above, one of the starting places for my own. In *Witnessing and Testifying*, she argues, "Black women's civil rights activism is their female enactment of Black religious values that reflected an internal concern for the Black community's survival and flourishing and a related external concern to address society's formal and conventional sources of

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[31] Andrew Billingsley, *Mighty Like a River: The Black Church and Social Reform* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1999), 53-61; Anthony B. Pinn, *The Black Church in the Post-Civil Rights Era* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002), 13-16; Anne M. Martinez, "Holy Wars at Home: Religion and Activism in U.S. Social Movements," American Quarterly, June 2006, Vol. 58 Issue 2, 535-543. See also James F. Findlay, Jr., *Church People in the Struggle: The National Council of Churches and the Black Freedom Movement, 1950-1970* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1993) for an account of White mainline churches during the Civil Rights Movement.

[32] Rosetta E. Ross, *Witnessing and Testifying: Black Women, Religion, and Civil Rights* (Minneapolis: MN: Fortress Press, 2003); Bettye Collier-Thomas, *Jesus, Jobs, and Justice: African American Women and Religion* (New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 2010). Additional books on the Civil Rights Movement and religion that have been published recently include Johnny E. Williams, *African American Religion and the Civil Rights Movement in Arkansas* (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2003); David L. Chappell, *A Stone of Hope: Prophetic Religion and the Death of Jim Crow* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2004); Davis W. Houck and David E. Dixon, *Rhetoric and Religion in the Civil Rights Movement* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2006); and Mark Noll, *God and Race in American Politics: A Short Story* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008), Chapter 4 "Religion and the Civil Rights Movement."

inequality."[33] Ross' is the first ethical text to explore the religious history of Black women in the Civil Rights Movement. She identifies the religious foundations of Ella Baker, Septima Clark, Victoria DeLee, Fannie Lou Hamer, Clara Muhammad, Diane Nash, and Ruby Doris Smith Robinson. Ross' construction of a "ritualized mundane" establishes everyday life as sacred life, and draws a link to communally expressive practices of "testifying" and "witnessing." As Ross explains, "testifying is telling stories of divine intervention (often in a worship service) through speech, while witnessing is attesting to faith in the divine by living in expectation of divine intervention and experiencing God in everyday life."[34]

Bettye Collier-Thomas' *Jesus, Jobs, and Justice* is the most recent comprehensive historical account of the role of religion in the activism of Black women. Collier-Thomas establishes a long historical view of religion in relation to the social and political activism of Black women from the period of enslavement through the twentieth century. Organizations and individuals are placed in the broader context of both American and world history, as she addresses issues of race, gender, religion, and economic and political power. While historically Black churches comprise the majority of the religious institutions identified, Collier-Thomas also includes women's contributions in Black religious groups that are often marginalized within Black Church studies, such as Black Catholics and Black Baha'i.

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[33] Ross, *Witnessing and Testifying*, xiii.

[34] Ibid., 15. The influence of religion within their lives prior to the Movement and as a part of the culture in general is much clearer. Two of the seven women highlighted, Diane Nash and Ruby Doris Smith Robinson, were not actively involved in the Church or a religious group during their involvement in the movement. As a result, the connections Ross makes between these women and religion may not be ones that the women would make themselves. See Ross, 198-221; also during my telephone conversation with Diane Nash on January 5, 2009 she emphatically told me that she was a Black woman, but *not* a Black Church woman.

Absent from both Ross and Collier-Thomas' texts is an accounting of the ways in which an understanding of the ways God/the Divine influenced the social activism of everyday Black women who were not leaders or a substantial part of a formal organization. It was these everyday women, who were not protected by employment in civil rights organizations, who made up the majority of the participants in the mass movements that enabled social and political change.

*Expanding the Movement*

Atlanta Student Movement civil rights veteran, Charles Black, explains that what many people do not understand about the Civil Rights Movement is that it was "long, wide, and deep."[35] There is much more to the Movement than can be reflected in sound bites of "We Shall Overcome," and "I Have a Dream." Expanding the length, breadth, and depth of the historical period of the Movement enables us to understand its historic, theological, and ethical lessons.

In general agreement with current *longer* views of the Movement, I extend the period beyond the traditional 1954-1968 anchors of the legal and political victories of *Brown vs. Board of Education* and the Civil Rights Act of 1968 into the mid-1940s through the early 1970s, while also acknowledging the suffering incurred during the more commonly recognized fourteen year period of the Movement. Within the longer period of the 1940s through 1970s, I resurrect the role of the Black Church which is has been neglected in other long views whose analyses and critiques lean more towards influence of labor and the left on the early Civil Rights Movement.

[35] Charles Black, Emory University Human Rights Week 2008 Panel – "The Legacy of the Civil Rights Movement on Human Rights Today," March 24, 2008.

The widening and deepening of the Movement is where the primary contributions of this work will be found since critical work has begun in its lengthening.[36] I begin to open *wide* the freedom gate by including many everyday women who made personal sacrifices to give life to a broader and more inclusive Movement, and I widen the geographical regions of activism moving beyond the south into the north east. I *deepen* and enrich historic narratives by recognizing that a more comprehensive understanding of this Movement requires more than the typical brief sound bites and trite phrases.[37] In particular, the strength of my analysis of the Movement is the result of engaging Black women participants in ways that allow for a deeper understanding of the moral motivations and commitments of those who have usually been forced to the margins of civil rights narratives. I believe that this depth can be best obtained by mining the experiences of women who were not the well-known media darlings of the Movement, but those whose lives continue to expand the legacy of social activism that has existed among Black American women for centuries. Below, I will give further examination of the Civil Rights Movement as long temporally, wide inclusively, and deep morally.

*The Movement as Long*

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[36] Some works include Harvard Sitkoff, *Toward Freedom Land: The Long Struggle for Racial Equality in America* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 2010), Angela D. Dillard in *Freedom North: Black Freedom Struggles Outside the South, 1940-1980* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, "The Long Civil Rights Movement and the Political Uses of the Past," *The Journal of American History*, (March 2005), Sundiata Keita Cha-Jua and Clarence Lang, "The 'Long Movement' as Vampire: Temporal and Spatial Fallacies in recent Black Freedom Studies" in *Journal of African American History*, Volume 92, Number 2, Spring 2007, pp. 265-288, and Steven F. Lawson, "Long Origins of the Short Civil Rights Movement, 1954-1968" in *Freedom Rights: New Perspectives on the Civil Rights Movement*, Danielle L. McGuire and John Dittmer (eds.) (Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky, 2011), 9-37.

[37] *Open Wide the Freedom Gate* is the title of Dorothy Height's memoir about her life as one of the most influential Black women of Civil and Human Rights struggles of the twentieth century. Dorothy Height, *Open Wide the Freedom Gate: A Memoir* (New York, NY: PublicAffairs, 2003).

Since the mid-1970s, scholars including Harvard Sitkoff, Angela D. Dillard, and Jacquelyn Dowd Hall have argued that the Civil Rights Movement is longer than the traditional 1954-1968 civil rights period. In 1975, Harvard Sitkoff published an essay entitled "The Preconditions for Racial Change," that both argued for the inclusion of freedom struggles from the 1930s as a part of the continuum of the Civil Rights Movement and expanded the period into the 1970s. Sitkoff explains that beginning in the 1930s, Blacks began to demand with greater impact the complete elimination of racial inequality in the United States. Each decade through the 1970s was marked with significant advances through the Supreme Court and Presidential stances. This long freedom struggle designation that Sitkoff consistently developed over the course of five decades provides a strong basis for the lengthening of the Civil Rights Movement within broader Black Freedom Struggles.[38]

In her essay "Religion and Radicalism: The Reverend Albert B. Cleage, Jr. and the Rise of Black Christian Nationalism in Detroit," Angela Dillard describes his activism in Detroit, MI as a part of a longer continuum, stating, "…I want to emphasize Cleage's and Black Christian Nationalism's place in the long history of the Black Freedom movement in America, while foregrounding an indebtedness to the particular history of political and religious radicalism in twentieth-century Detroit." While I do not go back past the 1940s, Dillard links the significance of religious radicalism as a part of

[38] Harvard Sitkoff, *Toward Freedom Land: The Long Struggle for Racial Equality in America* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 2010), 12-20.

the "continuity within the various 'phases' of Detroit's civil rights movement from the 1930s to the 1960s."[39]

Jacquelyn Dowd Hall's 2005 essay traces the course of what she also terms the "long civil rights movement" which, she argues, provides a truer story about the Movement. It was the long civil rights movement according to Hall,

> that took root in the liberal and radical milieu of the late 1930s, was intimately tied to the 'rise and fall of the New Deal Order,' accelerated during World War II, stretched far beyond the South, was continuously and ferociously contested, and in the 1960s and 1970s inspired a 'movement of movements' that 'defies any narrative of collapse.'[40]

Her expansion of the Civil Rights Movement to the earlier formative period of the late 1930s incorporates the role of labor unions and progressive organizations including the Communist Party as contributors to the modern Civil Rights Movement.[41] However, the organizational efforts of the Black Church in the fight for justice and freedom had been consistent for centuries in the United States before labor unions and the Communist party came into existence. Hall's expansion into the 1930s seems to be an effort to minimize the impact of organizations that were already active in the Black community.

Sitkoff, Dillard, and Hall's long views of the Civil Rights Movement not only reach back to the 1930s, but also reach forward beyond the Movement's traditional boundaries into the 1970s. This expansion of the traditional temporal boundaries of the Civil Rights Movement enables the inclusion of broader experiences of resistance and Black Freedom struggles including welfare rights activism and labor and housing

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[39] Angela D. Dillard, "Religion and Radicalism: The Reverend Albert B. Cleage, Jr. and the Rise of Black Christian Nationalism in Detroit" in Jeanne F. Theoharis and Komozi Woodard (eds.), *Freedom North: Black Freedom Struggles Outside the South, 1940-1980* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 155.
[40] Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, "The Long Civil Rights Movement and the Political Uses of the Past," *The Journal of American History*, (March 2005), 1235. Despite its popularity, Hall's focus on labor is not without critique, see Sundiata Keita Cha-Jua and Clarence Lang, "The 'Long Movement' as Vampire;" and Steven F. Lawson, "Long Origins of the Short Civil Rights Movement, 1954-1968."
[41] Dowd Hall, 1245.

struggles, and it uncovers more complex grounds in which the seeds of protest germinated until ready to spring forth.[42]

In addition to these more established methods of lengthening the Civil Rights Movement, I also give attention to the extraordinary length of time in how the Movement was experienced. When Charles Black said the Movement was *long*, he implied what the women frequently shared with me – the Movement was *not* an overnight success story. Those who participated in the Civil Rights Movement did not know whether or not they would be successful or how long it would take to accomplish what they set out to do. It was a long, uncertain, pressure-filled journey that they took on the road to justice and freedom.

Charles Payne observes, "Those who joined the movement in its early days could not have known that things would work out as they did…Faith in the Lord made it easier to have faith in the possibility of social change."[43] Faith became an important aspect of the sustenance of a long movement in which tired feet and tired bodies might have given up after a few days. The commitment made on December 5, 1955 to stay off the buses in Montgomery was reiterated weekly in mass meetings that supplied a dose of both spiritual and social support for a boycott that did not end until after Blacks had walked and carpooled for 381 days. The faith reinforced through the rituals of the mass meetings created communal support and enabled the women to remain committed to the cause

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[42] As more historians take a long view and a more local view of the Civil Rights Movement, additional insights into the prepared ground that would allow good germination of social activism are now better understood. Through works such as J. Mills Thornton, III, *Dividing Lines: Municipal Politics and the Struggle for Civil Rights in Montgomery, Birmingham, and Selma* (Tuscaloosa, AL, The University of Alabama Press, 2002), and Glenn Feldman (ed.) *Before Brown: Civil Rights and White Backlash in the Modern South* (Tuscaloosa, AL: The University of Alabama Press, 2004), the political changes of the times and often the economic influences become clear signs that the ground for activism was increasingly ready for the harvest.

[43] Charles Payne, *I've Got the Light of Freedom: The Organizing Tradition and the Mississippi Freedom Struggle* (Berkley, CA: University of California Press, 1995), 272-273.

much longer than they likely would have on their own. Despite occasional periods of stagnation within the national movement, daily local struggles kept pushing against the system for years. The fourteen years comprising the traditional Movement represents a period more than twice as long as most social movements, which generally last about six years.[44]

One of my research participants, A. Lenora Taitt-Magubane offers one perspective on the impact of the length of time. Taitt-Magubane was arrested in Atlanta and Albany, Georgia, as well as in Tennessee, in total spending well over a month in jail under very difficult situations, including severely overcrowded rat and roach infested cells where they were forced to sleep without mattresses.[45] As a Freedom Rider, Lenora was arrested in Albany, which resulted in her being jailed for two weeks. She remembers a local Albany woman, who was caught up in the emotion of the marching without considering the full cost. The woman Lenora observed, did not realize that she would actually be arrested and not able to leave the jail to go home and sleep in her bed that night. In contrast, Taitt-Magubane remembers thinking, "Well, freedom ain't a comin' in a day and by the time nighttime comes and you realize you can't go out and say it didn't come, I can't walk out the door [of the jail] and no one's coming."[46] The consequences for civil disobedience were real – it could cost your actual freedom or even your life.[47]

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[44] Labor historian E. P. Thompson explains that "most social movements have a life cycle of about six years," during which time they have a "window of opportunity" to exert their impact; quoting from Robert Korstad and Nelson Lichtenstein, "Opportunities Found and Lost: Labor, Radicals, and the Early Civil Rights Movement" *Journal of American History* 75 (December 1988), 811.

[45] A. Lenora Taitt-Magubane, Transcription of interview, 12. The actual amount of time she was in jail or the total number of arrests is not clear. This baseline time period is based on the oral history interview. A follow up question would be necessary to learn the complete number of arrests and time in jail.

[46] Ibid., 14

[47] Civil rights activists that were arrested were often subjected to violence during the arrest and once in jail. Some violence was so severe that it left activists permanently scarred or disabled. One well-known example is the brutal beating Fannie Lou Hamer and June Johnson received when they were jailed in

Fighting for freedom often required daily sacrifices of comfort and certainty. Freedom was a long process that did not happen overnight. The Movement was long chronologically, stretching from the mid-1940s to early 1970s, and it was also long temporally for those who endured the ongoing daily fight for freedom and justice without any indication of whether and when the victory would be declared.

*The Movement as Wide*

Historian Barbara Ransby asserts that we must not only look at the long Civil Rights Movement but we must also understand the "wide Civil Rights Movement and Black Freedom Movement." This wider movement requires that the non-dominant voices be written in for the full success of the Movement to be assessed. As the Movement is evaluated, one might ask what significant changes the average Black woman experienced before the Movement and after, or which civil rights victories had a broad and comprehensive reach compared to those that were more limited in scope.

Although few in number, autobiographies and biographies of women who were active within the Movement have recently begun to help claim wider space within the contours of civil rights narratives. Known for her extensive contributions on the life and activism of the godmother of the Movement, Ella Baker, Ransby's account of a wide Civil Rights Movement opens the scope and enables the voices of women to be heard who worked in housing struggles in the North, those who worked as a part of the welfare rights movement throughout the East, and many others whose activism in the quest for freedom and justice expanded the width and breadth of the Movement's goals. One outcome of widening the Civil Rights Movement is the challenge this presents to the

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Winona, Mississippi. Hamer was permanently disabled after the beating, and suffered other medical complications as a result.

media's dogged fascination with a single leader, to the extent that this narrow focus obscures those who make that leader possible.[48]

Like Ransby, I work to include voices that have been marginalized, often to the point of muteness, widening the Movement to incorporate women whose stories and experiences are not known. I foreground the voices of everyday Black women who were doubly marginalized: 1) as women in leadership who received very little recognition, and 2) as women foot soldiers who were lost to the collective consciousness which focuses on the contributions of men through tropes of doing what is best for the race and addressing issues of gender later.[49] This widening includes the experiences of young girls and women who were not leaders in the Movement and often not officials within formal organizations such as the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), statuses that would have given them relative security against the potential economic repercussions of their actions.

Rarely have the "everyday" women such as school teachers, social workers, students, secretaries, and others who made choices to stand up against the injustices they faced daily been given a chance to give voice to the motivations that drove their activism. These women were not the ones that the *Atlanta Daily World*, *Birmingham News*, *Amsterdam News*, and *Chicago Defender* sought out for feature stories or even a quote as the narrative of the Movement was constructed in newspapers during the 1950s and

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[48] Barbara Ransby, Lecture, "Are We There Yet? Obama, 'Postracialism' and the Legacy of the Civil Rights Movement," New Frontiers in Race and Difference Lecture Series, Emory Law School, September 30, 2010. It was in the lecture that I first heard Ransby describe the need to widen the Movement and not simply lengthen it. After speaking with Ransby again in 2011, she shared that she has not written about this anywhere.

[49] I intentionally do not utilize men's narratives, yet I acknowledge that there is also a need to do work on the "everyday" men who took part in the Civil Rights Movement, since their voices and motivations have also been marginalized and overshadowed by King and others. There is also an ongoing need for additional texts that capture the narratives of White male and female leaders and participants in the Movement.

1960s. Nor were these women the ones who were asked the questions by the television or radio news reporters looking for snippets for the evening news.

Few women were exceptions to this common practice of the day, and they were often those who were identified as formal leaders of organizations such as Diane Nash with the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), Gloria Richardson with the Cambridge Nonviolent Action Committee (CNAC), and Fannie Lou Hamer with the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP). These three exceptional women's words were captured in various media outlets: 1) when Nash challenged Mayor Ben West on television while protesting on the steps of Nashville's City Hall, by asking West whether he thought it was wrong to discriminate simply based on skin color;[50] 2) when Richardson's direct challenge of President Kennedy and Attorney General Robert Kennedy was covered on the pages of the *Baltimore Sun* and other newspapers in 1963 and captured the cover of *Jet* Magazine in the August 3, 1963 issue; and 3) when Hamer spoke out on NBC news against the injustice in Mississippi at the Democratic National Convention in Atlantic City, NJ on August 22, 1964.[51] The coverage of these events and the interviews or statements provided with them, gives us greater insights into these leaders goals and commitments, but this limited media coverage for these women leaders only goes so far into the underlying motivations for their actions.

In addition to gender, I also widen the geography of the Movement beyond the well-known southern civil rights towns of Montgomery and Birmingham, AL,

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[50] This critical moment on April 19, 1960 became a turning point in the Nashville movement.
[51] Diane Nash interview featured in *Eyes on the Prize* and photograph in *The Tennessean* April 20, 1960; Gloria Richardson, *Jet* Magazine cover August 8, 1963; and Fannie Lou Hamer's testimony before the credentials committee was broadcast on all major stations the evening of August 22, 1964, after initially being preempted by an impromptu press conference by President Lyndon Johnson.

Greensboro, NC, Nashville, TN, and Albany, GA, to include northern cities in New Jersey and New York and the civil rights activism that was prevalent "up south."

*The Movement as Deep*

Movement participants' deep motivations can be better understood through the stories of their lived experiences as they committed to work for justice and freedom, often at potential personal risk. As previously noted, the oral histories from Black Churchwomen, which comprise the primary sources for this dissertation, are the result of relationship building that enabled an even deeper dive into material and memories than might otherwise have been available to a researcher without the trust of the participants. Digging deeper enables richer reflective perspectives and more comprehensive models for the development of social activists in contemporary movements.[52]

A significant part of understanding the Movement as deep is to recognize the religious anchors of the Black community in the mid-twentieth century and the way that inspired the morals and ethics of Movement participants. At times, these socio-religious motivations were so deeply imbedded within the women that they could not explain why they felt compelled to fight for freedom and justice in the ways that they did. Like generations before them, some Black women during the Civil Rights Movement embraced an enduring ethos of communal uplift through struggle despite personal risks. This deep moral formation shapes the unquestioned commitments and demonstrated virtues that I will be elaborating later in this work.

By asking questions to understand what those who took the risks to act envisioned or imagined the results of the actions would be, as well as the role God played in their

[52] There were certainly times when women responded to an event without consciously thinking about the long term impact of their actions, however the oral history format provided a space for reflection that often helped reveal deeper motivations.

activism, I was able to begin to formulate answers concerning the motivations of Black women activists in the Movement. Today, there are very few social movements that last longer than a few years, often breaking down before the desired goal is met. The deeper understanding gained through this dissertation provides critical insights into why Black Churchwomen risked and sacrificed as much as they did, while choosing to remain committed to the long struggle for civil rights.

Lengthening the periodization and taking seriously the impact of the length of time participants endured the struggle, widening the participants and regions in which they were active, and deepening the understanding of why they acted provides general structure for the uncovering of a more comprehensive Movement.

Second Field of Study: Liberation Theologies

Liberation theologies are most often built on the principle that God has entered into a covenant with the poor and oppressed. God's covenant with the poor and oppressed inspires a commitment to freedom in all areas of life. Liberation theologies use a particular lens to engage the sacred and secular; where God is actively involved with humanity in the fight against oppressive elements throughout society. As a result, liberation theologians work to critically challenge oppression from individuals, organizations, and institutions. This dissertation contributes to liberation theology by elevating Black Churchwomen's articulations and understandings of God into a lived theology that is retrieved from an analysis of their experiences with God during moments of contestation primarily in the 1950s and 1960s.

Because theologies have experience as a source, all theologies can be lived theologies, but not all lived experiences and encounters are liberative.[53] Liberation theologies make justice and transformation central elements, while lived theologies may or may not focus on those areas. Liberation theologies name differently their revelations[54] from God because their contextualization requires distinctive sources to generate understandings. These liberation theologies are a part of a liberative school of thought, which each theology being influenced by the context in which they were generated.[55]

Latin American liberation theology uses tradition and social analysis as sources, claiming that God gives preferential treatment and attention to the poor and oppressed. Black theology takes as its sources sermons, songs, prayers, spirituals, blues, and sayings of Black people, declaring that God is Black and sides with the oppressed against the oppressor. Womanist theology begins with the experiences of Black women, often prioritizing themes of salvation, Christology, Biblical wisdom and personhood; insisting that God actively helps poor Black women who are oppressed on many sides. White feminist theology turns to women's experiences to claim that God works against systemic patriarchy and other forms of gendered oppression.[56]

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[53] There are many examples of this, including the theologies of Klansmen that were not liberative towards many persons including Blacks, Jews, Roman Catholics, and Whites who were supportive of equal opportunities for any of the aforementioned groups. Traditional Western theology draws from sources of scripture, tradition, reason, and experience that are primarily oriented towards White male dominance.

[54] Sometimes the source is explicitly named experience, at other times it may be named revelation, which I understand as an experiential act.

[55] I use the term 'liberative' to represent an overarching umbrella for particular liberation oriented theologies and ethics, including Black liberation theologies and ethics, Latin American liberation theologies, womanist theologies and ethics, feminist theologies and ethics, mujerista theologies and ethics, and queer theologies and ethics. These liberative theologies and ethics represent both universal and particular claims for justice and freedom in the face of various manifestations of oppression.

[56] See Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2001), Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics, and Salvation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1988); James H. Cone, *Black Theology & Black Power* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997, original edition 1969); Anne M. Clifford, *Introducing Feminist Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2001) in particular Reconstructionist Christian feminist theology 33-38; Jacquelyn Grant, *White Women's*

The Black liberation theologies that were constructed by Black male ministers and academicians during the late civil rights and early Black power eras named a universal Black experience that tended in reality to be the experience of men only, rather than that of women and men. For example, James Cone named the task of Black theology as analyzing "the black man's condition in light of God's revelation in Jesus Christ with the purpose of creating a new understanding of black dignity among black people, and providing the necessary soul in that people, to destroy white racism."[57] Beyond the exclusive masculine language of the time, there is an assumption that White racism is the only condition of bondage that needs to be destroyed.

Absent in Black liberation theology's constructive task were Black women's experiences of sexism both inside and outside of the Black community. Womanist theologians have been constructing correctives to the male dominated work of Black liberation theologians since the late 1980s. In her essay "Civil Rights Women: A Source for Doing Womanist Theology," womanist theologian Jacquelyn Grant examines the religious expressions of grassroots civil rights activist Fannie Lou Hamer who sought to have the humanity of all persons affirmed.[58] Grant identifies Hamer's theology as one that does not separate Christ from freedom and empowerment. However, Grant's subsequent theological work does not expand the connections to Hamer. My research and writing continues Grant's connections between civil rights women and activism. I assert

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*Christ and Black Women's Jesus: Feminist Christology and Womanist Response* (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1989); Stephanie Mitchem, *Introducing Womanist Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002); and Thomas Louis Schubeck, *Liberation Theology: Sources, Models, and Norms* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 1993). Additional liberation theologies include African, Asian, Islamic, Jewish, Queer, and so forth.

[57] James Cone, *Black Theology & Black Power*, 117.

[58] Jacquelyn Grant, "Civil Rights Women: A Source for Doing Womanist Theology," in Vicki Crawford, et al. (eds.) *Women in the Civil Rights Movement: Trailblazers & Torchbearers 1941-1965,* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1990), 39-50.

that many of the women like Fannie Lou Hamer developed a lived theology and liberative social ethic during the Movement that theological and ethical scholarship has not previously observed or theorized.

The lived experiences of many Black Churchwomen during the Civil Rights Movement were deeply embedded in their liberative understanding of God.

Third Field of Study: Christian Social Ethics – Liberation and Virtues

Throughout this dissertation, I use a liberative framework for the theology and ethics of Black Churchwomen during the Civil Rights Movement. Within this framework, I give emphasis to moral formation and the practice of virtues, which allows this work to reconsider an older strand of Christian ethics as part of a framework of liberation.

*Liberative Social Ethics*

Liberative social ethics is concerned with ways of doing and being in society that allow all persons to flourish. Christian social ethicist Traci West asserts, "A liberative Christian social ethic enhances one's recognition of the range of interconnected moral concerns that must be addressed. It ignites a commitment to find ideas for resisting societal practices that violate bodies, devalue worth and dignity, and treat dismissively the gifts, hopes, and struggles of peoples."[59] Liberative social ethics expose the contradictions in traditional Christian social ethics, which frequently fall short in the praxis of generating norms that actually change the oppressive foundations of society.

West argues that feminist liberative ethical thought insists upon an inseparable link between the particular and universal. Universal moral priorities point to broader, common interests that can be shared across various cultural contexts, while particular moral priorities address specific, individual realities that reflect the particularities of lived

[59] Traci C. West, *Disruptive Christian Ethics*, 68-69.

existence. I agree with West that attempts to separate universal from particular moral concerns disadvantage women whose moral issues are connected to their embodied presence within society.[60]

In this dissertation I privilege the voices of Black Churchwomen of the civil rights era as organic theologians and ethicists whose particular voices challenged systems of oppression and caused social and political change. The actions of the women highlight a liberative construction of social ethics emerging from their theological understandings. By acting on what their conception of God required, these women privilege an innate desire for freedom and justice as the core foundation for ethical social action.

Such a particular liberative social ethic is also universal, that is, accessible to anyone who seeks to understand "what is going on" and to offer action-oriented solutions for righting wrongs that deny justice and freedom through its social systems.[61] This ethic, constructed from the thoughts and actions of the Black women in this study, is Christian centered but its implications are not constrained by its particular religious roots. Lillian Sue Bethel, for example, who did not identify as traditionally religious during the Movement remarks: "I would not be religious in terms of how most people would say being religious, I was a believer, okay, in that sense. And, of course, I was going through many different changes even with that. I was almost about to convert to Judaism one time."[62] While the experiences within her family's church in Albany, Georgia were important to her spiritual shaping, Bethel's belief that she had to do something to make

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[60] Ibid., 41-43.

[61] H. Richard Niebuhr's guiding question for his ethics is "what is going on," from which he seeks to determine a fitting response to the actual situation being assessed. See, H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Responsible Self: An Essay in Christian Moral Philosophy* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1963), 60-61. Within the period of the long Movement, musician Marvin Gaye prophetically asked the same question in 1971, "What's going on?" as he encouraged an assessment of the social and political conditions of the day (lyrics by Al Cleveland, Renaldo Benson, and Marvin Gaye).

[62] Lillian Sue Bethel, Transcript of interview, 14.

things better was not the result of a specific sermon or teaching in a particular church, but an internal drive present even as she explored other faiths. Lillian Sue Bethel, like others, saw that things around her were wrong and did not accept them as her fate. Her belief that something should and could be done to make things better for everyone inspired her to act.

Likewise, a liberative social ethic addresses both the oppressive social conditions and those who are impacted by them. This ethic is not solely an insular reflection of morals, but a call to act in the places where injustice takes place, whether in the streets, schools, stores, churches, public libraries, pools, parks, or any other place where equal access and opportunity should exist for all. This idea of equal access and opportunity is linked to the understanding of the benefits of citizenship in a nation that has held up an ideal of equality, but where many groups have been denied personhood and rights. Current examples, such as the increasing prison populations among Black women as a result of inequitable sentencing guidelines for drug offenses, point to tangible symptoms of targeted oppression.[63] Liberative social ethics seek to address the origins of systemic forms of oppression and then dismantle those suppressive structures in order to create a more just society. While liberative refers to the overall norms (of justice) and the purpose (liberation), it is possible to have different liberative forms. Central to my work is the understanding already found in womanist work, that the forms of virtue ethics are the forms in which Black Churchwomen have lived their ethical lives.

*Virtue Ethics*

[63] Nekima Levy-Pounds, "Beaten by the System and Down for the Count: Why Poor Women of Color and Children Don't Stand a Chance against U.S. Drug-Sentencing Policy," *University of St. Thomas Law Journal*, 462, (2005-2006).

Virtue ethics finds roots in the moral philosophy of Plato and Aristotle, where moral character shapes the *telos* of a person. Shaped by philosophers like Alasdair MacIntyre, contemporary virtue ethics is understood as the quest for the good that is constructed and understood within a particular context.

Moral character is emphasized as a more important aspect of acting within community than rules or perceived consequences.[64] Moral action is dependent upon prior moral formation rather than on extensive deliberation. Central concepts of traditional virtue ethics include virtue, practical wisdom, and *eudaimonia*. Much like in classical virtue ethics, there is a wide range of items on modern lists of virtues, and the hierarchy of virtues varies from list to list in modern scholarship. Lists of classical and contemporary virtues include: charity, temperance, prudence, fortitude, justice, courage, generosity, honesty, patience, compassion, and overall concepts of moral wisdom.

Virtues are types of moral excellence that are connected to culture where virtues are nurtured and supported as the proper ways of being. Moral virtues are acquired by habitual practices shaped within particular cultural situations.[65] In this dissertation, I highlight discussion of virtue ethics because of the ways Black Churchwomen, spoke about their moral lives. Here I particularly follow upon the work of womanist ethicists Katie G. Cannon and Melanie Harris.

*Womanist Virtue Ethics*

In *Black Womanist Ethics*, Katie Cannon identifies virtues of Black women through the explication of characters in the writings of Zora Neale Hurston. Hurston's

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[64] Plato, *The Republic*; Aristotle, *Nichomachean Ethics*. The teleology is emphasized over the deontology, and consequentialism.

[65] Peter J. Paris, *Virtues and Values: The African and African American Experience* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2004), *12*.

three-dimensional characters allow Cannon to capture the nature of Black women's virtuous living in response to race, gender, and class oppression. Cannon's three virtues of Black women are "invisible dignity," "quiet grace," and "unshouted courage."[66] For Cannon, "virtue is not the experiencing of suffering, nor the survival techniques for enduring. Rather, the quality of moral good is that which allows Black people to maintain a feistiness about life that nobody can wipe out, no matter how hard they try."[67] In her analysis, the virtues of invisible dignity, quiet grace, and unshouted courage emerge from the particular experiences of Black women and are thus the basis of their character and actions to overcome the triple oppression of race, gender, and class in society. Cannon describes virtue as a "moral good" that allows Blacks to continue to fight for the good in life.

Invisible dignity is a sense of knowing and being that seeks more than the limited perspective society has for Black women.[68] Quiet grace acknowledges the invisibility of Black women's moral character while they master, radicalize, and sometimes destroy the negative orientations that confront their community. This quiet grace manifests itself in the search for truth.[69] Finally, the virtue of unshouted courage is the fortitude and inner conviction Black women developed from the responsibilities forced on them in the face of oppression.[70]

In *Gifts of Virtue, Alice Walker, and Womanist Ethics,* Melanie Harris further develops the quest for womanist virtue ethics.[71] Harris writes, "womanist virtue ethics

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[66] Cannon, *Black Womanist Ethics*, 159.
[67] Ibid., 104.
[68] Ibid., 105-116.
[69] Ibid., 125, 126, 127.
[70] Ibid., 143, 144.
[71] Melanie Harris, *Gifts of Virtue, Alice Walker, and Womanist Ethics* (New York, NY: Palgrave, 2010), 53-58.

not only looks for ways of establishing moral agency for women and communities of color but also uses the histories, stories, and a number of 'nontraditional' sources from which womanist wisdom and morals can be gleaned."[72] Harris identifies the virtue ethical implications in the writings of Alice Walker, thus building on Cannon's literary model. Through her analysis of Walker's fiction and nonfiction essays, Harris posits a list of womanist values – wholeness, uncovering and validating voices and stories of women of African descent, survival and liberation, honoring women's sexualities, and the act of self-naming; along with womanist virtues of generosity, graciousness, audacious courage, compassion, spiritual wisdom, justice, and good community. These values and virtues form the base for Harris' construction of a womanist virtue ethic.[73]

Cannon and Harris both analyze the experiences of Black women in the fiction and nonfiction essays of Zora Neale Hurston and Alice Walker respectively, to identify values and virtues for a womanist virtue ethic. These authors incorporated into their stories virtues rooted in the socio-historical realities primarily of Black women in the twentieth century. In this dissertation I continue to build upon womanist virtue ethical scholarship by explicating virtues found not in fictional texts or authored essays, but in the lived experiences of Black Churchwomen as disclosed through their oral histories. Through their stories of facing multiple forms of oppression, we are able to see moral values and virtues beyond those identified in the dominant ethics such as invisible dignity and audacious courage. Within the context of a centralized Black religious community, virtuous qualities are revealed in the lived experiences of these women. The moral ethos of the Black community, particularly during the mid-twentieth century, created

[72] Ibid., 57.
[73] Ibid., 60, 66-87.

communal virtues and values that made acting with courage to fight for the good life a reality for Black women. Virtues can lead to liberatory actions because they have a goal of human flourishing and well-being. In this dissertation, the role of virtue ethics identified in the lives of Black Churchwomen is liberatory in nature, focusing on freedom, courage, critical assessment, and imagination.

**Oral History as a Source for Marginalized Narratives**

Scholars who have previously written about women of the Civil Rights Movement have utilized historical resources including archival sources of newspapers, diaries, and other writings, to construct their accounts of women in the Movement. Others who have focused on individual women leaders of the Movement have often used a combination of interviews with the women and those who knew them well, along with archival sources. Still other compilations have been the result of individual women contributing personal essays that represent their experiences during one or more aspects of the Movement. [74]

My ability to use and reflect on oral histories as a primary source for theological and ethical construction is possible because of the importance that womanist, Black feminist, and White feminist scholars have placed on uncovering and prioritizing the

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[74] As examples, see: Deborah Gray White, *Too Heavy a Load: Black Women in Defense of Themselves, 1894-1994*; Vicki L. Crawford, Jacqueline Anne Rouse, and Barbara Woods, *Women in the Civil Rights Movement: Trailblazers & Torchbearers 1941-1965*; Marianna W. Davis (ed.), *Contributions of Black Women to America: Volume II, Civil Rights, Politics, and Government, Education, Medicine, Sciences* (Columbia, SC: Kenday Press, 1981); Bettye Collier-Thomas and V.P. Franklin (eds.), *Sisters in the Struggle: African American Women in the Civil Rights – Black Power Movement*; Belinda Robnett, *How Long? How Long?: African American Women in the Struggle for Civil Rights*; Barbara Ransby, *Ella Baker & the Black Freedom Movement: A Radical Democratic Vision*; Chana Kai Lee, *For Freedom's Sake: The Life of Fannie Lou Hamer*; and Kay Mills, *This Little Light of Mine: The Life of Fannie Lou Hamer*. Published oral histories of the Civil Rights Movement include: Henry Hampton and Steve Fayer, *Voices of Freedom: An Oral History of the Civil Rights Movement from the 1950s through the 1980s* (New York, NY: Bantam Books, 1990); Howell Raines, *My Soul is Rested: The Story of the Civil Rights Movement in the Deep South* (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 1977); and Juan Williams, *My Soul Looks Back in Wonder: Voices of the Civil Rights Experience* (New York, NY: Sterling Publishing Company, 2004).

voices of women who have been marginalized.[75] I am particularly indebted to the works of womanist ethicists whose task of retrieving Black women's experiences as a constructive source, I continue with this dissertation. I also follow models provided by Theologian Ada María Isasi-Díaz in *En la Lucha: A Hispanic Women's Liberation Theology*, and Ethicist Traci C. West in *Disruptive Christian Ethics: When Racism and Women's Lives Matter*, who try to present the voices of women as unchanged as possible.[76] However, in distinction from their work, I chose collecting oral histories and mining autobiographical texts as a method of collecting primary data from Black Churchwomen who lived through and were active in the Civil Rights Movement.

As a contribution to oral history, my work stands in the tradition of cultural and social anthropologists like Zora Neale Hurston, Katherine Dunham, and W.E.B. Du Bois, who each conducted ethnographic research within Black southern and northern communities to provide insights into many areas of Black culture, including aspects of their spiritual beliefs.[77] The paths paved by Hurston, Dunham, and Du Bois allow me in this dissertation to do similar work with the stories of Black Churchwomen of the civil rights era.

Oral history is unique as the only form of history that works exclusively with the living. Allan Nevins is credited with "developing" the method of oral history in the

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[75] Some of these women include Katie G. Cannon, Cheryl Townsend Gilkes, Joan Martin, Marcia Riggs, Traci West, Letty M. Russell, Rosemary Ruether, and Beverly Wildung Harrison.

[76] See Ada María Isasi-Díaz in *En la Lucha-In the Struggle Elaborating a Mujerista Theology: A Hispanic Women's Liberation Theology* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1993), Chapter 4 "In Their Own Words: Latinas as Moral Agents"; and Traci C. West in *Disruptive Christian Ethics: When Racism and Women's Lives Matter* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), Chapter 5 "Leadership: Dissenting Leaders and Heterosexism." See Apendix B for select transciptions of the oral histories for the women central to this dissertation.

[77] See Zora Neale Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers, 1937, 1965); Zora Neale Hurston, *The Sanctified Church: The Folklore Writings of Zora Neale Hurston* (New York, NY: Marlowe & Company, 1981); Katherine Dunham, *Island Possessed* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1969); and W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York, NY: Penguin Group, 1996).

United States in 1948, but he notes that oral history founded itself, and could have come to life in any variety of places.[78] History is always an interpretation, and oral history acknowledges the oral transmitter as the interpreter of his or her experiences. Where possible, I refer to additional sources to support the oral history information, such as newspapers and organizational minutes. In many ways, oral histories provide more trustworthy information than autobiographies because a well-informed interviewer will ask a person clarifying questions face-to-face in ways that often provide a form of cross examination.

For centuries, West African griots served as oral historians, recalling and transmitting the narratives of both the challenges and victories of their people, and thus keeping the stories alive generation after generation. Within the African diasporic community, it is more common to know the oral story of what grandparents and great grandparents did than to have a written account of their experiences in books or even family letters.

This long oral tradition within the Black community makes the collection of oral histories a strong fit within the continuum of sharing experiences from generation to generation as the women of the study did directly with me and indirectly with those who will experience what they shared through my future publications. It is this primarily oral tradition that has also made this project a critical attempt to canonize the experiences of Black religious women whose understandings of God led them to act in ways that changed American social structures and inspired change throughout the world.

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[78] Allan Nevins, "Oral History: How and Why It Was Born" in *Oral History: An Interdisciplinary Anthology* (Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press, 1984, 1996), David K. Dunaway and Willa K. Baum (eds.), 33, 36-37.

Because relatively few of these experiences have been captured through print and published materials, in most academic and historical settings it can seem as if they did not occur because there is nothing formal to validate them.[79] None of the women in this dissertation have published autobiographies or memoirs of their experiences during the Civil Rights Movement, so extensive written narratives are not available other than in the transcriptions of this dissertation.[80] When engaging the women highlighted in this study, I chose to combine oral and written exercises to gather their memories. The women contributed small written stories in addition to their oral responses to my interview questions.[81]

Many of the women had not verbally shared their experiences previously. Often the act of telling their stories brought up details and feelings from the Movement that they had not accessed in decades. The oral history format that I use in this dissertation created a comfortable space for remembrance and personal reflection, producing rich transcripts that reveal new insights about the Movement. By "complexifying" simpler narratives, oral histories such as these recognize a broader collection of previously marginalized voices as historical contributors to the Civil Rights Movement.[82]

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[79] Ethicist Katie Cannon was told that the experiences of Black women that she understood were not true because there were no books that could be pointed to that showed it written somewhere. This was a part of the genesis for her initial works in the area of Black Womanist ethics. Katie G. Cannon, *Black Womanist Ethics* (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1988).

[80] A. Lenora Taitt-Magubane shares a portion of her experiences while a student at Spelman College in Harry G. Lefever, *Undaunted by the Fight: Spelman College and the Civil Rights Movement 1957-1967* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2005), 31, 64, 67-68, 70, 78, 81-82, 88-90, 99, 106, 108, 129, 133-137, 141-143, 260-261. Bessie Smith Sellaway's arrests as a Spelman student are also mentioned in *Undaunted by the Fight*, 70, 89. The lack of published writings by the women whose lives help construct the theology of ethic further distinguishes this work from previous womanist ethicists who were able to analyze published sources including literary texts and organizational minutes.

[81] A thick description of my methodology is provided in the Appendix A.

[82] Donald A. Ritchie, *Doing Oral History: A Practical Guide* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2003), 13.

The oral histories throughout this dissertation are a form of mini-autobiographies provided by the women as living texts that I have gathered in this work. Like oral history, autobiography can help thicken our understanding of historical periods and experiences that have previously tended to draw mainly from privileged sources, with the result that they have not been as representative or inclusive as possible. Some consider autobiography to be a democratizer of history, allowing voices that have traditionally been excluded to be heard on their own terms.[83] As an ethnographer, I view women who write and publish their autobiographies as participant observers of their own lives, and I consider what we read in their books to be a form of expanded and edited field notes and reflections. In the same way that oral historians and ethnographers rely on the field notes they write to guide their research, I will use the field notes and reflections left by women who have written their own autobiographies and memoirs as additional primary source materials to expand both the width and depth of the Civil Rights Movement.[84]

Since the core period of the Civil Rights Movement took place 40-55 years ago, the time span between the women's activities and my collection of these stories creates additional challenges in using oral history as a method. In line with oral history techniques, I gathered as much information as possible about the period and the locations the women may have been active in, in an effort to understand each participant's broader context. Occasionally I helped gently guide memories based on known communal events such as a large march or boycott. As with any oral history, there are many factors that

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[83] Emilie Townes, *Womanist Justice, Womanist Hope*, 21.

[84] Autobiographies include, Septima Clark, *Ready From Within: Septima Clark and the Civil Rights Movement, A First Person Narrative*, Cynthia Stokes Brown (ed.) (Trenton, NJ: African World Press, 1990); Amelia Platts Boynton Robinson, *Bridge Across Jordan* Revised Edition (Washington, DC: Schiller Institute, 1991); and JoAnn Gibson Robinson, *The Montgomery Bus Boycott and the Women Who Started It: The Memoir of JoAnn Gibson Robinson*, David J. Garrow (ed.) (Knoxville, TN: The University of Tennessee Press, 1987).

may influence how information is shared and presented; therefore I maintained the same general method and primary questions for each of the interviews to aid in the consistency of data collection for analysis.

Some may consider the first hand experiences of the Black Churchwomen in my study to be biased and uncritical, but I argue that they provide essential insight into the motivations of women during the Movement. Moreover, these women's accounts provide a depth and correction to different sorts of biases and limitations in other civil rights and Black religious accounts. This dissertation is a living text, a written record of the lived experiences of everyday Black women who chose to act during the Civil Rights Movement and continue to act today.

**Overview of Study Boundaries and Methodology**

The rough boundaries of this study are formed by the nature of the group that I have selected – Black Churchwomen in the civil rights generation in the northern and southern United States. More particularly, these women are: a) Black – of African descent, primarily born in the United States; b) Churchwomen – previously and/or currently involved in the Black Church as defined by Lincoln and Mamiya, specifically Big Bethel African Methodist Episcopal (A.M.E.) Church, Atlanta; Ebenezer Baptist Church, Atlanta; First A.M.E.: Bethel Church, Harlem; and Abyssinian Baptist Church, Harlem; and c) of the Civil Rights generation – broadly understood as those born before 1955.[85] North and south are the general geographical terms that I use for those women in my study currently living in New York, NY and Atlanta, GA.[86]

[85] The leadership of women like Septima Clark and Ella Baker, born May 3, 1898 and December 13, 1903 indicates a potentially wide range for an upper age limit. The lower limit identified for this study includes the age of those who were children and teenagers during the pinnacle period of 1960-1965. The majority of Blacks in America did not actively participate in the Civil Rights Movement, just as the majority of Black

A brief outline of the methodology used for this research follows, including explanations of the selection of interviewees, the location of the interviews, and when the data collection took place.[87] I identified which category of voices and experiences I would seek out based on the current lacuna within civil rights, women's history, and theo-ethical texts, which do not focus on "everyday" Black religious women. I solicited participants through announcements in worship bulletins at the four churches that comprised my primary sites. Those announcements sought women who were involved in the Civil Rights Movement and other Human Rights struggles at any level, whether as an individual or as a part of a group. The women self-selected into the study by making their own determination about what "involved in the movement" meant.

Although I had initially asked church leaders at Big Bethel and Ebenezer for potential women to interview, I eventually chose this method of self-selection and self-identification because the activities of the women were sometimes unknown to their church leaders for various reasons. For example, many of the women had been involved in the Movement while they were teenagers at different churches in different states. In addition, the current pastors of the churches in my study were not pastoring during the Civil Rights Movement, and many were not aware of the historic involvement of the women in their congregation. If I had only approached persons recommended by pastors, I likely would have been introduced only to women in congregations whose stories were already known, such as Martin Luther King, Jr.'s sister, Christine King Farris at Ebenezer, to the exclusion of others like Peggy Lucas at the same church.

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Churches also did not participate in and support the Movement; therefore the designation of the generation does not necessarily include participation.

[86] I am looking at neither the entire north nor the entire south, and there may be some regional generalizations outside of the cities from which my research participants are drawn that require more nuances than I am currently allowing for.

[87] A thicker description of the methodology used for this dissertation is included in Appendix A.

Four churches in Atlanta, Georgia and Harlem, New York, served as my primary research sites.[88] The first two churches selected were Big Bethel A.M.E. Church and Ebenezer Baptist Church, both in Atlanta. The two churches are located on historic Auburn Avenue five blocks away from each other, in the center of what was once a booming area for Black Atlantans. At times said to rival the vibrancy of Harlem with its progressive Black business ownership and cultural contributions, the corridor known as "Sweet Auburn" was also a hub for religious and civil rights activities during the Movement. I identified two comparable churches in New York City – First A.M.E. Bethel Church (First Bethel) and the Abyssinian Baptist Church, both in Harlem. First Bethel and Abyssinian are both located off Lenox Avenue, five blocks from each other. The members of these congregations and the communities that they served generally would have been exposed to similar information and experiences, and likely would have witnessed the same community marches, rallies, and other forms of protest and activism.

The inclusion of these four churches expands the geographical area of traditional civil rights research, and represents larger historic churches within the major Black Methodist and Black Baptist denominations that jointly comprise a significant majority of the membership of historically Black Church populations.[89] Both Big Bethel A.M.E. and First A.M.E. Bethel have a singular denominational association – the African Methodist

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[88] See Appendix D for additional information on the four churches.

[89] Many other studies including Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham's *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), which focused on the National Baptist Convention, make generalized Black Church claims while only focusing on one denomination within the broader Black Church pantheon. The Hartford Institute for Religion Research notes the A.M.E. Church as the largest Black Methodist denomination, and the National Baptist Convention, U.S.A. as the largest Black Baptist denomination, with the Progressive National Baptist Convention rounding out the top twenty-five denominations among American and Canadian churches. http://hirr.hartsem.edu/research/fastfacts/fast_facts.html#largest accessed September 28, 2011. The U.S. Religious Landscape Survey, conducted in 2007 by the Pew Research Center's Forum on Religion & Public Life, and in its 2009 publication "A Religious Portrait of African Americans" they note that 45% of African Americans associate with Black Baptist or Methodist Churches. http://pewforum.org/A-Religious-Portrait-of-African-Americans.aspx, accessed September 28, 2011.

Episcopal Church. Ebenezer Baptist Church is dually aligned with the Progressive National Baptist Convention (following a split from the National Baptist Convention U.S.A. because of Martin Luther King Jr.'s social activism), and the American Baptist Churches in the U.S.A. Similarly, The Abyssinian Baptist Church is aligned with the Progressive National Baptist Convention, the American Baptist Churches in the U.S.A., and the National Baptist Convention, USA.

After identifying the churches and receiving approval to work with women as research subjects, I began the process of building relationships with the gatekeepers within the churches.[90] I was a participant in the worship life of each of the churches in different capacities, from serving on the ministerial staff at Big Bethel and working with the women's ministry at Ebenezer, to serving in worship regularly on Sundays, and taking communion to sick and shut in members at First Bethel during the summer, and attending weekly services and social events like the church picnics at all of the churches.

As a participant observer within the congregations and working through the gatekeepers who included ministers, administrators, and women who were long-time members, I began to identify the best methods of reaching my target women. Through multiple church bulletin announcements seeking women from the civil rights era, and my public recognition by the pastors of the churches during worship services, I was able to solicit participation in an oral history project, which became the central foundation of my research.[91] After over two years of working with the churches and the women – living

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[90] IRB approval by exemption provided October 9, 2008. Research conducted under Study No: IRB00005138.

[91] The text was slightly customized for each church, but the church bulletin announcement used this general format and language: "**Seeking Women from the Civil Rights Era!** Rev. AnneMarie Mingo, a Ph.D. candidate at Emory University in Atlanta, GA is conducting research for her dissertation focusing on Black Churchwomen who were involved in the Civil Rights Movement and other Human Rights Struggles. Women from Abyssinian will play a significant role in this project. If you or a woman that you know was

within the community in Harlem for eighteen weeks over two summers, and preaching and teaching in the churches in Atlanta – I gained the trust of the community and was welcomed into the homes of the women as an adopted daughter, niece, or granddaughter. This relationship building helped break down many of the potential barriers to accessing the women's real stories.

My aim was to interview eight to ten women in each church with the hope of receiving five strong interviews from each of the four churches to make up the core of the experiences upon which a lived theology and liberative social ethic could be constructed. From 2009 to 2011, I conducted forty-three interviews among Black Churchwomen in Harlem and Atlanta, and of those, I used eight women's interviews – two from each church – to develop the overall themes that ground the construction of a lived theology and liberative social ethic in this dissertation. The eight women are: Lillian Sue Bethel, Doris Brunson, Peggy Lucas, Rose Davis Schofield, Bessie Smith Sellaway, Marjorie Wallace Smyth, Beatrice Perry Soublet, and A. Lenora Taitt-Magubane.[92] The women each responded to open questions designed to encourage them to share as much information as possible about their life during the Movement.

The first question I asked each interviewee was to "Tell me about yourself," which often resulted in rich reflections of their lives as young people through the present moment. I frequently asked the subsequent questions, "When thinking about the Civil Rights Movement, what song, scripture, saying, word, and/or color comes to mind?," "What role did/does God play in your involvement?," "How did you envision/imagine

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involved in the Movement/Struggle at any level (individual, group, etc.) contact Rev. Mingo to arrange an interview **before August 8th** at the church or your home. Contact: (609) 937-7817 or amingo@emory.edu for more information." Samples of the announcements from the church bulletins are included in Appendix A.

[92] The women gave consent to use their real names in this research (IRB00005138).

change?," "Did you participate by yourself? If not, who joined you and why?," and "What is your first memory of activism?," but the order in which I asked the questions was based on the woman's responses and the amount of information they provided to the first question. I asked follow up questions for the sake of clarity and to elicit deeper reflections into their motivations.

I used a grounded theory methodology as developed and expanded by Barney G. Glaser in my collection and analysis of the oral history interviews. Glaser contends that "all is data" but that the quality, relevance, and usefulness of that data vary.[93] This method allows theory to be generated inductively, embracing all of the qualitative knowledge captured in the oral histories as data. In grounded theory, instead of trying to separate the previous experiences of the researcher, including her interactions with people, perspectives, and other research practices, those encounters shape the ways theories are constructed. In a similar way to which I approach social ethics beginning with H. Richard Niebuhr's question "What is going on?," Glaser teaches that the first question to ask in grounded theory is "What's happening here?" Through that question, he encourages the researcher to understand the general social and social psychological processes at work.[94] By developing codes to describe common attributes within the transcribed texts, combining individual codes into super codes, and finally code families, theories can be constructed from various inputs that are grounded in the greatest number of occurrences within the qualitative data set. One of the first mandates of grounded theory is to "study your emerging data," which requires that the researcher remain open

[93] Barney G. Glaser "Constructivist Grounded Theory" *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, 3(3), Art. 12, (2002) http://nbn-resolving.de/urn:nbn:de:0114-fqs0203125. Accessed April 7, 2013.
[94] Kathy Charmaz, *Constructing Grounded Theory: A Practical Guide Through Qualitative Analysis* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications Inc., 2006), 20; and Barney G. Glaser, *Theoretical Sensitivity* (Mill Valley, CA: The Sociology Press, 1978).

to all theoretical possibilities as the data are being collected and read.[95] Grounded theory enabled me to discern the most significant factors within the women's narratives, and it allowed me to use their language to guide the development of a theology and ethic.[96]

Since the women of my study and others like them had not previously been studied in ways that produced theologies and ethics from their perspective as religious women during the civil rights era, I was very concerned about forcing the theoretical categories of Black theology or womanist theology or ethics onto the women without first drawing from the language they use to express their own theology and ethics. Grounded theory as a methodology privileged the voices and experiences of the women and gave me a tool for qualitative analysis of data through which the lived theology and liberative social ethic emerged rather than interpreting the data through Black or womanist theological or ethical categories.[97]

**Overview of Chapters**

Moving beyond the existing scholarship, this dissertation takes seriously the lived experiences of Black Churchwomen whose faith influenced their activism during the Civil Rights Movement. It provides a deeper understanding of socio-historical foundations for the theological and ethical development of Black women during this significant era within U.S. history.

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[95] Charmaz, 46-47.

[96] My questions were designed to remain as open as possible while also seeking specific information that would allow me to understand what role if any God played and what result the women expected from their actions. Two of the elements (songs and scriptures) that ultimately became sources for the lived theology I asked about specifically, but the sources experience and prayer I did not. Likewise, the liberative social ethic of compulsion is developed from the language used by seven out of eight of the women at various points in their oral histories, language that was not in response to a direct question.

[97] Barney G. Glaser, *Basics of Grounded Theory Analysis: Emerging vs, Forcing* (Mill Valley, CA: Sociology Press, 1992); and Kathy Charmaz, *Constructing Grounded Theory: A Practical Guide through Qualitative Analysis* (London: Sage Publications, 2006). I used the qualitative analysis software Atlas.ti, which is designed for grounded theory analysis. The software provided a way for me to collect, code, and analyze the transcripts from my interviews. This software also made it easy to identify passages across the various transcripts that featured similar themes based on the codes that I assigned to phrases.

Chapter One provides some historical framing of the eight women featured in this dissertation. It highlights socio-historical events that shaped the birth and growth of their personal commitments to social activism. This chapter also addresses the influence of the Black Church on socio-religious activism during the Civil Rights Movement. The activism of the women cannot be separated from the socio-historic context.

Chapter Two retrieves a lived theology of justice and freedom from the lived experiences of the women in the study. The sources of this lived theology are individual and communal experiences, songs, scriptures, and prayers that the women articulated during their oral history interviews. This chapter further develops the women's self-understanding as moral agents working with God. I make the case that the lived theology of these women is a liberative theology, differing from the traditional Black liberation theology articulated by Black men during roughly the same period of time in the 1960s.

Chapter Three constructs a liberative social ethic of compulsion from the lived experiences of the women. Drawing from Christian social ethics and virtue ethics, the components of this ethic are: freedom faith, liminal assessment, courageous resistance, and theo-moral imagination. The compulsory sentiment reflected in the phrase, "it was something I had to do," is consistently repeated by women in this study in both the North and the South. This liberative social ethic is not only illustrated through the lived experiences of the eight women, but it is also evident in the Women's Political Council of Montgomery, an organization which provided critical leadership and strategy for the Montgomery Bus Boycott.

Chapter Four reviews the conclusions and contributions of this work before considering the contemporary uses for a lived theology of justice and freedom and a

liberative social ethic of compulsion. Noting the distinction between the centralized Black communities of the civil rights era and the decentralized communities today, I assert the critical need for the Black Church as the conduit for moral formation in Black women's lived theology of justice and freedom and ethic of compulsion. The experiences of mothers Mamie Till-Bradley and Sybrina Fulton, offer examples of how this theology and ethic are evident in Black Churchwomen in two different moments of struggle for justice and freedom in the United States.

The Appendices include the following: Appendix A - a thick description of my methodology, including illustrations of how I recruited women; Appendix B - small portions of the transcribed oral histories from the eight women central to this dissertation; Appendix C - lyrics for songs used within the dissertation; and Appendix D – brief histories of the four churches that served as research sites.

The stories of my mother's activism, particularly her repeated statement that despite the possible risks to her safety, protesting was something she had to do, changed and challenged me as a child. Thirty years later, Nana Rosa inspired me to embrace the communal oriented reality that individual actions are much bigger than we think. Through this dissertation I hope that the lived experiences of faith in the midst of struggle during the Civil Rights Movement conveyed through the stories told by everyday Black women will offer new ideas for additional analysis and faith-filled strategies in the ongoing fight for justice and freedom.

## CHAPTER 1 – Socio-historical Influences on Black Women's Participation in the Civil Rights Movement

Many scholars today assert that the major success of the Civil Rights Movement was a result of local movements led by everyday people, rather than the campaigns associated with a smaller number of charismatic leaders that were covered in the media.[98] The Civil Rights Movement is more than the fight for a bus seat, a hamburger at a lunch counter, or an inspiring song; it has roots within the ongoing Black Freedom Struggles in America. It happened in large and small ways that, when aggregated, created what history now records as one of the most important social movements in modern history.

There were a lot of unknowns as the Movement began, but there was a common hope and desire for freedom among Blacks that would allow them to live out their full humanity without experiencing socially constructed limitations. Although the majority of the participants in the Civil Rights Movement never knew whether history books would record their efforts, they believed that whether their names were known or not, their actions would be on the right side of history. Some events, such as the brutal murder of Emmett Till, touched the entire nation and formed a part of the socio-historical consciousness of young people who were about his same age in 1955. Some of those same young people for whom Till's disfigured image was permanently marked in their memories, took to the streets and filled the jails in protest of injustice in the mid to late 1960s. Similarly, the bombing that killed the four young girls, ages 11 to 14, in church one Sunday morning in Birmingham in 1963, sparked the national social and moral

[98] Scholars include: Emilye Crosby (ed.), *Civil Rights History from the Ground Up: Local Struggles a National Movement* (Athens, GA: The University of Georgia Press, 2011); John Dittmer, *Local People: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Mississippi* (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1994); Aldon Morris, *The Origins of the Civil Rights Movement: Black Communities Organizing for Change* (New York, NY: Free Press, 1984); and Charles M. Payne, *I've Got the Light of Freedom: The Organizing Tradition and the Mississippi Freedom Struggle* (Berkley, CA: University of California Press, 1995).

consciousness for many, especially young women close in age. These young women, who remembered Till and the girls in Birmingham, continued to pour into churches for mass meetings and to receive motivation and instructions for how to participate in the ongoing fight for freedom.

Everyday women's lived experiences help to fill a gender and class void within the Civil Rights Movement narratives and give us alternative views of the challenges, successes, and remaining opportunities of the Movement. This chapter highlights some of the socio-historical influences that shaped their activism. I discuss significant incidents recalled by the women in relation to larger economic, social, and political dynamics that were impinging upon Blacks during the twentieth century. But first I provide brief biographical sketches for each of the eight women.[99] By foregrounding the biographies of the women in this study, the reader can come to know the women as individuals whose lives are interconnected in ways that create a distinct social group that I am calling Black Churchwomen in this study. Beginning in this chapter and continuing throughout the dissertation, the understanding of the history of the civil rights era is broadened through the stories and experiences shared by these Black Churchwomen.

*Black Churchwomen*

LILLIAN SUE BETHEL is a no nonsense type of woman who was raised in Albany, Georgia and Central Florida. After graduating from high school she moved to New York City to live with her mother before returning to Albany in 1961 to complete college following her mother's sudden death. As a student at Albany State College (now University) she was an active part of the Albany Movement from 1961-1964. She

[99] Consent was given by the women to be referred to by their real names. Emory University IRB #00005138. Also see Appendix B for select transcribed portions of the participating women's oral histories.

expressed frustration with some of the older members of her hometown who were not supportive of the SNCC workers fighting to secure rights for Blacks. Bethel did not believe that persons from outside of Albany should work harder for justice and freedom in Southwest Georgia than those who were born and raised in the area.

Therefore, she attended mass meetings at Mt. Zion Baptist church to stay connected with what was happening in the Movement. Once back on Albany State's campus, she would often encourage other young women to leave classes to come out and march as a part of the efforts taking place in Albany. Her feistiness and commitment to seeing justice for everyone continued in jail, where she refused the personal bail her aunt attempted to provide, instead choosing to remain in the overcrowded jails with non-edible food until everyone could leave. Jailed until Christmas Eve, Bethel's actions also resulted in her being expelled from college. However, she believes that God took care of her even in the expulsion, because unlike many students, she had already completed all of her final exams before being jailed. Therefore, although she was forced to sit out of school until the next year, she did not lose the credit for the semester that she was arrested.

Following her graduation in 1964 Bethel moved back to New York City to work. Today, she is an active member of First A.M.E. Bethel Church in Harlem where she founded and continues to lead the community food pantry and works with the Sunday school.

DORIS BRUNSON's mother asked her husband if it would be okay to leave New York and return home to Manning, South Carolina for the "lying in" just before giving birth so that their only child could be born in the South like they had been. He agreed so Brunson

was born in Manning, but she was raised by her parents in New York City. She believes that a personal commitment to activism has been engrained in her from grandfather and father – pushing her to stand up for herself and others whenever the chance presents itself. As a young high school teacher at Wadleigh High School in New York City, Doris worked to use education as a door to justice and equality for her students. It was in Harlem that she was inspired to participate in local and national marches including the March on Washington. She wanted more opportunities for the high school students she taught, and considered her children, so she did what she could to help make a difference. Doris wanted to be a part of the swelling number of supporters of the March on Washington, and so she went down to the march by herself determined to be one of the bodies they would have to count.

Because of her commitment to do what she could when she could, at times Brunson dropped everything to join protests on the streets of Harlem in the 1950s and 1960s. Doris Brunson continues to do community organizing in Harlem and is an active member of Abyssinian Baptist Church where she sings in the choir.

PEGGY LUCAS grew up in Dolomite, Alabama near Birmingham. After her mother died when she was a toddler, she was raised by father with help from an aunt who lived near them. Her father was active in the Birmingham Movement, and she attended mass meetings on Monday nights with him. As a teenager, Lucas went door-to-door with her father doing voter education and registration. She furthered her weekly involvement in the Movement when she was asked by the Alabama Christian Movement for Human

Rights Choir director Carlton Reese to become a choir member and eventually record an album with them.

In April of 1963 she went to J.J. Newberry's with a group of students to attempt to order a hamburger at the lunch counter and was arrested after refusing to leave until she was served. Identified now as one of the foot soldiers in Birmingham, she was jailed for five days and even placed in solitary confinement as a result of her actions. Peggy believes that the only reason she was not a part of the televised public showdown with Bull Connor and the powerful fire hoses in Kelly Ingram Park, is because she and other young people (including her sister) were already in jail. Her arrest record had the potential to limit job opportunities in Birmingham, so she moved to Atlanta to begin working and has remained there since. Peggy Lucas is an active member of Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta, where she participates in the women's ministry and sings in the choir.

ROSE DAVIS SCHOFIELD was raised in Elizabeth, New Jersey, and it was there that her activism took place primarily with members of Mt. Teman A.M.E. Church. Although not supported by the women in her family, Schofield received support from her grandfather to participate in protests arranged by her church and the local NAACP. She recalls "White Only" signs in New Jersey and the blatant discrimination in labor practices in her city. As a teenager, Rose believed what her pastor taught and preached – that exclusions and limitations based simply on race were not right.

She was excited to have an opportunity to do something that would make a difference, so after receiving permission from her grandfather, she began actively

participating in the Movement. Rose was ultimately arrested for chaining herself together with other young people in the middle of an active street in Elizabeth, New Jersey to bring attention to the need for systemic changes in the racially biased city and county contract bidding practices. At sixteen, Schofield's grandfather arranged for her to participate in the March on Washington, by riding from New Jersey to DC on a bus organized by men at a local Elizabeth, New Jersey bar.

Today, Rose Schofield is an active member of Big Bethel A.M.E. Church in Atlanta, where she serves as a stewardess, usher, and member of the sign language ministry.

BESSIE SMITH SELLAWAY is a self-professed "jail bird," having been arrested while a student participating in the Movement in Atlanta. She was born in Round Oak, Georgia near Macon, and lived there with her grandmother until it was time for her to start school. Sellaway spent her formative years in Atlanta, Georgia where her mother was already living because of the better job opportunities.

As a married student at Spelman College, Bessie was an active part of the Movement in Atlanta, where she went to mass meetings and rallies and agreed to participate in activities to test the laws of segregation. While not a member of Ebenezer at the time, she attended meetings there, where Martin and A.D. King would provide strategies for the places they were seeking to integrate in downtown Atlanta. She was arrested twice, spending multiple days at the Atlanta Prison Farm and the Atlanta Fulton Jail, and she still has the receipts from the money that her mother and pastor put in her account in jail allowing her to purchase toiletries and other items. Bessie explains that

each time she was arrested she served multiple days in jail but was let out before the completion of the full sentence because of the media attention that was spreading around the world.

After graduating from Spelman, Sellaway and her husband lived in Europe and in various places in the United States for many years, and returned to Atlanta when her husband retired from the military. After their return Bessie Sellaway joined Ebenezer Baptist Church where she now participates in the Seniors Ministry and Women's Ministry of Ebenezer. She also remains committed to struggles for justice, actively participating in multiple protests with the Occupy Atlanta movement.

MARJORIE WALLACE SMYTH grew up in the Collegeville area of Birmingham, Alabama, one street over from the city's charismatic Movement leader, Reverend Fred Shuttlesworth. She walked to school with Shuttlesworth's children and for years heard about the messages of equal rights that he preached. As the youngest in her family, she describes herself as the feisty one, who would run and drink from the "Whites Only" water fountain while shopping at Parisian's Department store just to see how the water tasted, much to the fear and dismay of her older sister. Smyth began resisting the systems of segregation as a young child asking questions about how Whites could worship God but act in ways that she believed to be ungodly. Her civil rights activism began as a teenager in Birmingham, where she often left school to participate in mass meetings and marches. Marjorie maintained her focus on grassroots activism while a student at Tuskegee Institute, at times traveling far into the country where people did not even have running water and signed their names with an "X," in order to teach them to write so they

could register to vote. After college graduation, she went to visit her sister in New York City as a graduation gift and she has remained there ever since.

Smyth is an active member of First A.M.E. Bethel Church in Harlem, where she serves as a steward and coordinator of many of the church's community outreach missions including distributing over 600 backpacks each year with back to school items for neighborhood youth. She also participates in other social and political action activities as a member of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc.

BEATRICE PERRY SOUBLET comes from a family of activists, who were leaders in the New Orleans, Louisiana community where she was raised. One grandfather became the first Black mayor in their town, and another actively fought for equal pay and opportunities for Black teachers in Louisiana. With a legacy of activism and the support of her family, Soublet's own civil rights activism began when she was a student at Bennett College in Greensboro, North Carolina. The first time she was arrested, she said she did not want to have to look at the hateful stares she assumed she and others would encounter as they sat-in, so she took Plato's *Republic* with her to read and keep her distracted while they continued intentionally breaking the Jim Crow laws in Greensboro's S&W Cafeteria. After another one of Beatrice's arrests, her fiancé asked her why she did what she did, and although she was only about nineteen years old and not married yet, her immediate response was that she did it for their children. She had opportunities as a result of the sacrifices her parents and grandparents made fighting for equality, and she believed it was up to her to do the same for her unborn children.

After the Movement Soublet continued to join fights for freedom and justice, later being arrested in Washington, DC while protesting against South African apartheid in the 1980s. In 2005, following her evacuation from New Orleans because of Hurricane Katrina, she moved to Atlanta where her daughter lives. Today, Beatrice Soublet is a member of Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic Church in Atlanta where she chairs the Social Action Ministry, and leads in the Eucharist and liturgy. Soublet is also an active member of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, and she participated in the study as a part of the Big Bethel A.M.E. Church in Atlanta, where her daughter Kathryn Stanley is a member.

A. LENORA TAITT-MAGUBANE is a native of New York City, and was raised in New York and Trinidad. Her Trinidadian father wanted her to receive a quality education so he sent her to Trinidad during her junior high school years. Her parents taught her to have a strong sense of self and equality, and she expected to be able to engage society without limitations because of her race. Lenora became involved in the Civil Rights Movement while a student at Spelman College in Atlanta, GA, where she experienced blatant segregation for the first time in her life. Taitt-Magubane's efforts to integrate a downtown theater in Atlanta by attending "My Fair Lady" with a professor and other Black students was captured in local and national media including a featured article in *Jet* magazine and the *Atlanta Journal Constitution*. As a part of the Atlanta Student Movement, she was arrested a few times and worked to create organizational systems within the jail that allowed students to receive financial support to make necessary purchases from the canteen, and to also maintain their school work.

Lenora later worked with the Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) in Southwest Georgia, and after leaving Georgia, she continued her activism in New York City. Although no one else in her family participated directly in the Movement, Fannie Lou Hamer and Ella Baker adopted her as a "daughter" and "niece." She participated in the study as a part of the Abyssinian Baptist Church in Harlem. Today, she continues to actively work for justice in New York City and South Africa.

These Black Churchwomen openly shared the stories of their upbringing as well as their experiences during the Civil Rights Movement. The socio-historic context in which these women began their activism will be the focus of the next section.

**Socio-historic Context of Black Churchwomen's Activism**

*Realities of a Racist Society*

The fear of brutal retaliation from Whites if a Black person did not fall in line with racialized social norms was a daily reality, particularly in the Jim Crow south. Whites were afraid of losing what they had and used whatever forms of repression and oppression possible to maintain their status and possessions. Beginning in the 1890s and accelerated by the 1915 release of the film *Birth of a Nation*, the perceived progress of Blacks, and romanticized notions of the South, led to the resurgence of White supremacist organizations including the Ku Klux Klan (KKK) which began to strike fear in the lives of Blacks through violence and intimidation.[100] Preserving their anonymity by

[100] Thomas Dixon, *The Clansman: An Historical Romance of the Ku Klux Klan* (New York, NY: Grosset & Dunlap, 1905); D. W. Griffith, *The Birth of a Nation*, Motion Picture, (New York, NY, 1915); David M. Chalmers, *Hooded Americanism: The First Century of the Ku Klux Klan, 1865-1965* (Garden City, NY, Doubleday and Company, 1965); Wyn Craig Wade, *The Fiery Cross: The Ku Klux Klan in America* (New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 1987). By the mid-twentieth century, the Klan also targeted Jews, Catholics, organized labor advocates, and Whites who actively supported civil rights.

wearing white hoods and robes, White men and women paraded through cities and neighborhoods to show their numerical strength and often also to announce that they would be back later to do more than march unless Blacks halted whatever actions Whites opposed. Frequently Whites left a burning cross on the lawn to strike fear in the Black community, or members of the Klan would go further, and set fire to homes and churches of Black leaders whom they perceived as agitators.

The infraction that prompted such violence was often something as minor as looking a White person in the eye, "getting too big for their own good" by working to achieve a better life than the limited expectations many Whites had for Blacks, or standing up for the rights of themselves and their families. As domestic terrorists the KKK responded to actions that they deemed as dishonoring Whites.[101] Klan members also lynched Black men who were accused (often without any basis) of bringing dishonor on White womanhood by looking at, speaking to, or (even consensually) sleeping with a White woman. After exacting their own form of vigilante justice, Klansmen often further terrorized Black neighborhoods by dragging the maimed body through the streets. The Klan's activities surged again during the 1950s and 1960s as Blacks' fight for Civil Rights threatened the political and economic entitlement that racist Whites felt they deserved.

*Socio-economic Factors*

For three quarters of the twentieth century, one of the chief exports from the South was Black people who went from the fields and shacks in the South to factories

[101] The Klan's activities were not limited to areas of the traditional South. High Klan activity also took place in states including Pennsylvania, Ohio, Indiana, Oklahoma, Colorado, and Washington. Examples of Klan retaliation that had ramifications for the families of women in this study are provided in the section Family Histories of Activism.

and ghettos in the North. America's first great migration took place from 1910 to 1940; when nearly 1.6 million Blacks left the South for the North.[102] Nearly five million others left between the years of 1940 and 1970, during the second great migration, looking for greater economic freedom and opportunity. Blacks left the sweat and blood filled fields along with the harsh and often violent realities of *de facto* and *de jure* segregation of the South, for the deceptively appealing bright lights and "good paying" factory jobs that still relegated them to subservient spaces of existence in the North. Many of the young women active in the Civil Rights Movement had parents and grandparents who escaped the South by any means possible – some starting on foot and most finishing by train, took paths from Alabama to Ohio, Michigan, and Indiana; from Mississippi and Louisiana to St. Louis, Chicago, and Detroit; from Florida, Georgia, and South and North Carolina to Washington, D.C., Philadelphia, and New York; or from Arkansas, Texas, and Louisiana to California.[103]

Rose Schofield's family story is akin to many stories of Blacks' northern migration. The news that one of Rose Schofield's great uncles was doing "very well" financially in New Jersey inspired his siblings to leave their lives in Florida, even though

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[102] Bobby M. Wilson, "Historical Spaces of African Americans," in Ines M. Miyares and Christopher A. Airriess (eds.), *Contemporary Ethnic Geographies in America* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2007), 79-80.

[103] See Daniel M. Johnson and Rex R. Campbell, *Black Migration in America: A Social Demographic History* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1981), 74-78; and Isabel Wilkerson, *The Warmth of Other Suns: The Epic Story of America's Great Migration* (New York, NY: Random House, 2010). Also see Davarian L. Baldwin, *Chicago's New Negroes: Modernity, The Great Migration, and Black Urban Life* (Durham, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2007); Ira Berlin, *The Making of African America: The Four Great Migrations* (New York, NY: The Penguin Group, 2010); Timuel D. Black, *Bridges of Memory: Chicago's first wave of Black Migration,* Volume 1 (Chicago, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2003); Steven Hahn, *A Nation under Our Feet: Black Political Struggles in the Rural South from Slavery to the Great Migration* (Boston, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003); Nicholas Lemann, *The Promised Land: The Great Migration and How it Changed America* (New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 1991); Carole Marks, *Farewell—We're Good and Gone: The Great Black Migration* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1989); Milton C. Sernett, *Bound for the Promised Land: African American Religion and the Great Migration* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997); Joe William Trotter, Jr. (ed.), *The Great Migration in Historical Perspective: New Dimensions of Race, Class, and Gender* (Bloomington, IN, Indiana University Press, 1991).

they were modest landowners, and head north for better opportunities. Schofield's great grandmother and great aunt left Marianna, Florida and initially settled along the Elizabeth River in Elizabeth, New Jersey.[104] Only one generation removed from slavery, these two women knew the tough realities of sharecropping and believed that jobs in the North had to be better than the backbreaking work in southern fields.

After struggling initially, the great grandmother and great aunt became content with the "better" work they found as domestics in Jewish homes where they believed they would be treated well. This form of labor decreased but did not eliminate the physical toil on their bodies, and it provided income that while still low, was significantly more than they received in Florida. Better was good enough, and these two women did not see how anything good could come from ruffling the feathers of Whites. They could not imagine trying to reach for more for themselves or their great granddaughter and niece, Rose Schofield. Schofield associated her great grandmother's limited vision of better possibilities with what she referred to as a "slave mentality" that shaped her great grandmother's worldview leading to the acceptance of whatever Whites did without challenging it.

With domestic work as the only good employment she could envision for herself and others, Schofield's great grandmother did not see the benefit of a formal education, saying that the only reason she sent Rose to school was because it was the law to do so. Even though she did now know what possibilities existed, Rose Schofield wanted more than what she saw around her, so she made sure she graduated from high school as a first step.

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[104] Rose Schofield interview with author September 20, 2011, 2.

The fear and timidity of her great grandmother and great aunt when they encountered Whites in New Jersey was likely a remnant of their experiences as sharecroppers in Florida. Despite the women's admonition not to stand up to Whites, their fearful responses made Rose even more determined to fight against the labor inequalities she encountered so that she would not have to settle for less and live in self-limiting fear simply to maintain menial income as they had done.[105]

*Benefits within Segregation*

Segregated communities allowed Black parents to shelter their children from some of the painful experiences of racism, hatred, and indignities as they navigated sensitive interactions with Whites on a daily basis. Some of the women in the study thought their parents were mean or strict because they would not allow them to leave their community's corner stores run by familiar men and women and go downtown to shop where the White people shopped. They later realized that their parents' prohibition was actually a form of protection against the painful encounters with Whites on buses or in stores that could shatter their understanding of the loving world their community provided.[106] The love experienced in the Black community was strong among neighbors and it found even greater concentration in all-Black schools.

There were benefits to the segregated schools that Blacks attended, which functioned as incubators for systemic change that would likely not have taken place in

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[105] Rose Schofield, transcript of interviews May 10, 2010 and May 6, 2013.

[106] This prohibition was also necessary to save the lives of young men who were at even greater risk of being murdered for the slightest offense to Whites whether real or imagined. Marjorie Wallace Smyth recalls her father giving additional lectures to her brothers regarding where they could or could not go. "…the girls never went anywhere by themselves anyway, but he would tell them places that they could not go, where they were never to go. To never go alone, and how to protect themselves." Marjorie Wallace Smyth, Transcript of interview, 6.

integrated schools.[107] In these Black schools teachers and administrators taught students to be proud of who they were and prepared them to achieve academically and socially at the highest possible level. As the Civil Rights Movement continued to expand, young high school and college students possessed the perfect combination of being naively fearless and optimistically hopeful which enabled them to risk more than they realized in order to gain more than their parents and grandparents could have imagined.

Birminghamian Peggy Lucas was already involved in the Movement with her father, but she committed to do more than sing after young leaders spoke to her and other students attending Miles College. Marjorie Wallace Smyth became involved in the Movement while in high school in Birmingham thanks to students from Miles College who regularly visited to plant ideas of freedom and rights in the minds of high school students who were often excited to join in the fight. Smyth's involvement continued when she became a student at Tuskegee Institute where she joined a local civil rights group of likeminded students. Beatrice Soublet's exposure to and influence by CORE happened while she was a student at Bennett College, where she along with students at North Carolina A&T were taught about nonviolence as a tool for activism.

Although Black colleges varied in levels of official support for student activism, Lillian Sue Bethel, Bessie Sellaway, and A. Lenora Taitt-Magubane each found out when protests, mass meetings, and events were going to happen through communication at the all Black Albany State and Spelman Colleges. Soublet recalled Dr. Willa B. Player, the President of the all-women's Bennett College, was concerned about students safety, but

[107] See Richard Kluger, *Simple Justice: The History of Brown v. Board of Education and Black America's Struggle for Equality* (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1975); James T. Patterson, *Brown v. Board of Education: A Civil Rights Milestone and its Troubled Legacy* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2001); Clarice T. Campbell, *Civil Rights Chronicle: Letters from the South* (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 1997), 9; Nancy T. Ammerman, "The Civil Rights Movement and the Clergy in a Southern Community," *Sociological Analysis*, Vol. 41, No. 4 (Winter 1980), 339-350.

she was proud and supportive of her students' participation in the Movement in Greensboro; at times meeting with students in her office to tell them so.[108] Bethel believed that Dr. William H. Dennis, the President of Albany State, was forced to suspend her and other students who were arrested for their participation in the Freedom Ride protest in 1961. She explained, "He didn't have a choice. This came down from the State, because it was a State School."[109]

Segregated schools enabled new ideas of radical change to be birthed among young people who were often too naive to realize the full extent of the possible ramifications of their choices. While all of the students at these schools were Black, they were not monolithic – some believed in and felt compelled to participate in the Movement, while others did not. Beatrice Soublet and Lillian Sue Bethel described some of their classmates and even roommates who decided not to participate because they did not want to risk losing scholarships or being expelled from school – saying their parents sent them to college to get an education not to join a movement. Others simply did not believe in the goals or methods of the Movement. Although not every student at a Black college participated in the Movement, those who did, like the women in this study, recognized the urgency of the moment. These women took precautions to maintain their academic standings to the best of their ability, but their actions showed willingness to sacrifice their formal education and future careers for the Movement if necessary.[110]

*Black-Owned Media*

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[108] Conversely, Dr. Albert Manley, the President of Spelman College, was not very supportive. Taitt-Magubane met with Manley to try to gain support for the stances she and other students took or to at least help him have a better understanding of their goals. A. Lenora Taitt-Magubane, 10.
[109] Lillian Sue Bethel, 6.
[110] See chapter three for illustrations of the academic risks taken by from Lillian Sue Bethel and A. Lenora Taitt-Magubane.

Black-owned media facilitated the spreading of images, thoughts, and ideas between the north and south, and so helped to influence activism and support in the Civil Rights Movement. I found in my research and interviews that some women in both the North and South recalled northern newspapers that showcased the activist stances being taken in the North. One of the main groups the women remembered hearing about were members of Abyssinian Baptist Church and the Reverend Adam Clayton Powell, Jr. who pastored the church from 1937 to 1971. Beginning in the late 1930s Powell led protests and marches in places where Blacks shopped or paid for services but were not given equal opportunities for employment and advancement. Newspaper reports on such events inspired a sense of activism and respect. Mamie Till Bradley's bold decision to publicize the images of the brutal murder of her son Emmett Till in *Jet* magazine exposed the deadly realities of many southern Blacks.

Till's murder marked a coming-of-age moment for many young people whose parents could no longer shelter them from the painful race realities that could lead to the death of someone their own age. In North Carolina and New York, Pat Smalls and Rose Fofana both recalled sitting around the dinner table as their families discussed images of lynching, including the brutal murder of Till reported in *Ebony* and *Jet*. They also recalled discussing reports about sit-ins in Black newspapers like the *Journal and Guide*.[111] The Black-owned media outlets including newspapers, magazines, and radio, covered the full spectrum of realities of Black existence in the North and South.[112] Newspapers like the *Pittsburgh Courier* also helped to start and promote campaigns such

[111] Pat Smalls and Rose Fofana interviews with author, August 5, 2010 and August 5, 2009 respectively. These two women are a part of my larger research this dissertation draws from.
[112] This spectrum ranged from the society pages covering Blacks traveling to Europe, church announcements and social activities, to the full coverage of brutal murders like Emmett Till's.

as the Double V (victory at home and abroad) campaign during World War II. These types of media exposures planted seeds that often took root when such young women later became associated with churches like Abyssinian Baptist because of the protests and boycotts led by Adam Clayton Powell, Jr., or when they created individual acts of protest.

There were many socio-historic factors that influenced the activism of young Black women in the Civil Rights Movement, with the realities of racism as the underlying common factor. Black women relocated to northern and urban cities in search of better job opportunities and economic advancement. All-Black schools actually provided environments that became kindling for activism that began to spark all over the nation, and all-Black media helped to promote and support campaigns. However, one of the most important influences on the activism of young Black women was the bold and courageous actions of family members.

**Family Histories of Activism: Standing Up and Speaking Out**

The earliest memories and influences of social activism for the women often originate in stories of grandparents and other relatives who stood up for themselves and spoke out for justice. The family histories of activism recount stories of courage in the Jim Crow south of the early twentieth century. Given the realities of lynch mobs and other violence against Blacks, the courageous acts of these family members were emblazoned on the memories of the children and later passed on to their granddaughters.

Doris Brunson recalls a story told in Manning, South Carolina about her grandfather who stood up for himself after a White man backhanded him for expressing his disapproval for the way his friend was being treated. Brunson's grandfather grabbed the White man and held him with one hand while he pulled out his pocket knife and

slashed him from the top of his shoulders all the way down his body. Doris Brunson recounts the repercussions this act of courage and defiance of racialized social norms had for him and his immediate family:

> When he finally realized that he had done it, he just let him go, and this guy fell back. So he went home, and he told my grandmother what had happened and what he had done. He said, "I'm going to have to leave. Will you go with me?" She said, "I will go with you and the children wherever you want to go." So that night, he took my grandmother and my dad and his sisters…and they went to the train line. They didn't go to the train station because they knew that the Klan would be out there and would get him. He flagged the train down with a lantern. When the train stopped, the conductor said, "What are you doing flagging this train down? We have a schedule! What's the matter with you? You crazy?" My grandfather told him what happened, and it turned out that they were both masons, and he gave him this hand signal. He said, "C'mon, c'mon get on. Get your wife…. go get her." They got on the train, and they went to a town that was miles away.[113]

The complicated racial dynamics of the South not only resulted in his family understanding the grandfather's actions towards the White man as courageous rather than violent, they also facilitated the family's escape thanks to a fraternal bond, between the grandfather and White train conductor, that seemingly went beyond race.

The train did not originate in Manning, so the conductor was not aware of the altercation that had taken place earlier that day. Yet because of the reality of racialized domestic terrorism in the South, the White conductor understood the need for a way of escape to be made for this family. The man her grandfather cut did not have to utter a threat to say that 'he would be sorry for what he had done;' it was understood that as night fell Klan vigilantes would deal with this Black man who had stepped out of his appointed place. The disruption caused by the threat of retaliation forced not only Brunson's grandfather, but also his wife and children to flee their home. Memory of this

[113] Doris Brunson, Transcript of interview, 14-15.

flight, and especially the reason it was necessary, was permanently etched in their minds, and the story was passed on to future generations, including Doris Brunson. She was told of her grandfather's act and was taught to remain proud of the way in which her family stood up for themselves and also banded together for survival even if it meant leaving all that they had. Fear was real, but the ability to resist with courage was honored. It was an early lesson that Brunson continued to apply later when she began to participate in marches and activities within the Civil Rights Movement on behalf of her students for whom she wanted a better future.

In a similar fashion, as a young girl, Peggy Lucas was told a story about her grandfather who was working in a small town in Alabama. He demanded money for the work that he had completed, and ultimately pistol-whipped the White man who would not pay him. When Lucas' grandfather returned home that evening, he told his family to gather everything they could and they left town by horse and buggy that night.[114] The unspoken reality of terror caused these two grandfathers not only to stand up for themselves but also to take responsibility for protecting their families from the violence the lynch-mob oriented system of justice would likely bring. The actions of Brunson and Lucas' grandfathers remained models for the bold (but non-violent) stances these women would later take during the Civil Rights Movement.

Black women also boldly stood up for themselves. Lillian Sue Bethel remembers one such incident during a shopping trip with her aunt:

> We were in the clothing store [and] she was buying me a pair of shoes. We were standing there waiting to be serviced and this white lady came and got in front of us and she looked and said, no, I was here first. And, of course, the white lady exercising what she thought was her right: but you may have been here first, but I'm white. My aunt told

[114] Peggy Lucas, 13.

> her she didn't care what she was. Now, see, those were lynching words. She didn't care what she was, and I'm sure part of her bravery came from her father, who was my grandmother's brother.[115]

Bethel's great uncle was a businessman in Albany who did not rely on Whites for his family's livelihood. The family's economic independence allowed her aunt not to fear that her words could lead to a lack of employment, but the realities and history of lynching in southwest Georgia made Bethel concerned that her aunt's words could cost her her life.

Similarly Beatrice Soublet's mother defiantly placed her hand in a pair of stockings to see if the color would work for her skin tone much to the dismay of the White saleswoman. Soublet recalls,

> I don't care when you came down to the store. Everybody who came after you was getting waited on, and my mom used to say my daughter and I were here first, and this was long before integration [or] anything. The woman would put her hand, you know, this was when you used to buy stockings, and the sales clerk would put her hand in there to show my mama how, you know, the shade—my mama said your hand is not the color of mine, let me put it on. I said, oh, oh God. But it was just the sense that you deserve better.[116]

Growing up in Louisiana, Soublet described her mother as having a very fair complexion that actually may have been similar to the saleswoman's; however her mother's race consciousness was such that she taught her daughter by example to always expect better treatment, even when it was not given. Soublet's response of "oh, oh God," appears to have been a response of embarrassment for the scene her mother might potentially create in the store, rather than a response of concern that the White woman might perceive her defiance as a challenge punishable by lynching.

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[115] Lillian Sue Bethel, 7.
[116] Beatrice Soublet, Transcript of interview, 8.

Many Black parents tried to limit their children's exposure to the harshness of Whites by doing the shopping without children in tow or strategically using mail orders to browse options and make selections from the comfort of their homes. Retail environments provided prime testing grounds for respectable treatment since Black shoppers were expected to pay the same price as Whites but were not given the same customer service. Consequently, these spaces became hot beds of social protests and individual acts of speaking out transformed into collective campaigns of economic boycotts with the desired goal of equal service as customers and equal opportunities as future employees.

Both Bethel and Soublet recalled those experiences in the years long before the Civil Rights Movement as everyday forms of activism that helped them to maintain their humanity and dignity in the midst of demeaning racial social stratification. These actions were a part of their daily negotiations for their humanity, and planted seeds of resistance within the young women who observed them. Many of the women in this study also learned lessons of strength, courage, and standing for justice at young ages from their family members and through their own assessment of their surroundings. Expectations were changing, laws were changing, and lives were changing as a result.

The examples in the clothing stores not withstanding, in my interviews I found it surprising that the family support and advocacy many of the women referenced came most often from their fathers, grandfathers, and uncles, and not from their mothers, grandmothers, and aunts. In some instances the mothers were deceased or not present in the home for other reasons. At other times the paternal figures were simply the ones who were looked up to for support as the young women began their acts of non-violence that

they expected to be met with violence – something most maternal figures could not understand them volunteering to undertake.

In the case of Peggy Lucas, her mother had died when she was young, and she wondered if she would have been permitted to participate in the Movement if her mother was still living.[117] Lucas began doing voter education and registration door-to-door with her father Louis Lucas, Jr. who had been active in his Birmingham community for many years.

> My father and I would go door-to-door asking our neighbors to become registered voters. He had been attending, you know, the mass meetings, the Monday night meetings and, of course, he would bring that information home and that's what we would do. We had a script and it was teaching our neighbors how to read the Preamble to the Constitution. Some people were really afraid…and we had to convince them.[118]

That they had to teach their neighbors to read the Preamble reflects the vestiges of systems that did not create equal opportunities for education for many Blacks who were forced to leave school, often without learning to read or write, in order to work and help their families.

Lucas' father modeled activism for her as they diligently worked to help other Blacks in Birmingham learn how to register to vote and how to make their political voices heard.[119] Her father taught her that exercising the right to vote was more important

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[117] Peggy Lucas' maternal aunt lived near her family and helped to raise her. Her aunt was not active in the Movement and did not believe her mother would have been supportive, but that did not stop Lucas from participating with her father.

[118] Peggy Lucas, Transcript of interview, 23.

[119] From 1964 to 1965 the State of Alabama changes the voter registration requirements four times in an effort to prevent Blacks for successfully registering to vote. In addition to a long form with information that provided details about housing and employment (that made retaliation easy), voter registration requirements included reading from sections of the Constitution, writing portions of the Constitution. See sample registration form in Alabama Department of Archives and History - http://www.alabamamoments.state.al.us/sec59ps.html.

than any fear of retaliation. He taught that power and respect were gained through the ability to participate in the political process and elect persons who an individual believed would best represent them at each level of government.

In April 1963, when Peggy Lucas decided that she needed to do more than sing in the Alabama Christian Movement for Human Rights (ACMHR) choir and work one-on-one with neighbors to prepare them to register to vote, she packed a little bag and told her father she was going to get arrested that day.[120] Lucas always remembered that her father did not say anything to stop her, but she knew he was filled with an unspoken pride. This deliberate act of social defiance at a lunch counter prompted her older sister Shirley to commit a similar act, so that Peggy would not be in a Birmingham jail without family.

Actions were sanctioned not only through silent acceptance, but also by signing on the line to approve of young persons' non-violent direct actions. When jails in Elizabeth, New Jersey began to fill up with adults, the local NAACP chapter turned to children as a part of their strategy to overcrowd the jails. Rose Schofield's grandfather not only gave formal permission for her to participate in activities with the NAACP in Elizabeth by signing a consent form, he also walked to pick her up from jail after she was arrested in August 1963.

Schofield recounts family discussions around her participation in the Movement including a debate on whether she could attend the March on Washington:

> I was 16 and my aunt and 'nem said no I couldn't go; they would never let me go anywhere. And then my grandfather happened to say I think she should go. I think it would be a good experience. And they said well she's 16. She'll be down there by herself…somehow my grandfather dug up the money, and I wound up on the bus and he knew

[120] Reverend Fred Shuttlesworth started the Alabama Christian Movement for Human Rights in 1956 after the NAACP was prohibited from operating in the state of Alabama. It was the most powerful civil rights organization in the state.

> these people, because it was going from some bar that had gotten up a bus load of people and they told him we'll look out for her.[121]

Schofield's mother was not fully present in her life at the time, and her great-grandmother and aunt who raised her were afraid and did not think that it was wise for her to participate in civil rights activities. Her grandfather did not take on the "slave mentality" of his mother who did not want to rock the boat. Instead he believed in his granddaughter's passion for justice and provided the critical support necessary for Schofield to live out her purpose as a young woman willing to fight for equality.

Only a couple of weeks after picking her up from jail for civil disobedience, and despite the protests of the women in her family Schofield's grandfather made arrangements for her to travel to the March on Washington to continue to fight for jobs and freedom. He trusted the men at the local bar who coordinated the bus trip from Roselle, New Jersey to the March on Washington. He knew that the collective values of the community would allow the massive event to be a good experience for her, even if family members did not accompany her. The protection that her grandfather normally provided would be taken on by other men from the community who gave their word that they would look out for Rose. The communal orientation of northern and southern segregated communities reinforced the shared values and shared goals for uplift, even when there was not full communal participation in the events that would provide the uplift.[122]

**The Influence of the Black Church**

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[121] Rose Schofield, Transcript of interview, 12.

[122] To be clear, the Black community was not monolithic. Everyone was not supportive of the goals of the Movement, or the widely shared values of uplift and advancement.

Since its beginning, socio-religious activism has been part of its core reason for existence of the Black Church.[123] Socio-religious activism is the belief that religions have social responsibilities to act in ways that reflect and reinforce the justice and love of their God. For many Movement participants the "religious" is a part of the spiritual ethos and the very heart of their being. This sense is not always limited to a particular denomination or faith tradition and is central to African-centered notions of religion. Such activism indicates conscious action, not passivity or blind agreement; it means acting in a way that challenges injustice deliberately and forthrightly.

Since the days of enslavement the Black Church served as a place where information was shared and strategies of resistance and survival were supported.[124] This ranged from ways to work efficiently so that work would be completed with minimal brutality from overseers, to plans for insurrections such as the two planned by Denmark Vesey and Nat Turner, to serving as stops on the Underground Railroad. C. Eric Lincoln argues that the very existence of the Black Church was the "concrete evidence of the determination of Black Christians to separate themselves from the white Christians, whose cultural style and spiritual understanding made no provision for racial inclusiveness at a level acceptable to Black People."[125]

Socio-religious activism in which religious expression focused on freedom and justice was a central aspect of the Civil Rights Movement in the Black Church community. From churches being used as the central location for mass meetings, to

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[123] See Albert J. Raboteau, *Slave Religion: The "Invisible Institution" in the Antebellum South* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2004); C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence Mamiya, *The Black Church in the African American Experience* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1990); and E. Franklin Frazier, *The Negro Church in America* and C. Eric Lincoln, *The Black Church Since Frazier* (New York, NY: Schocken Books, 1963, 1974).

[124] Survival was an acceptable goal, but not all Blacks or Black churches were supportive of resistance during slavery.

[125] C. Eric Lincoln, *The Black Church Since Frazier* (New York, NY: Schocken Books, 1974), 107-108.

religious songs being re-appropriated into Movement songs, and well-known scriptures being generously sprinkled in speeches designed to motivate action, religion pervaded the Movement. The Movement eagerly adopted religious language, and often it became the most powerful vehicle by which to generate long-lasting support from across generations of primarily southern Blacks, and those who were "Up South" in the North but helped to fund many of the efforts in the South. Without the social stability of the Black Church, and the empowering beliefs of an expansive religious understanding of love, the non-violent activism of the Movement may not have succeeded in its long fight for freedom and justice.

One of the most clearly identified socio-religious activist organizations was the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), which grew out of the marches and protests in Montgomery, AL and other southern cities. The organization was the brainchild of a very diverse group, many of whom were without explicit religious leanings, yet were steeped in the same socio-religious ethos. In 1957, three strategists, Ella Baker, a Black Christian woman, Bayard Rustin, a Black Quaker man, and Stanley Levinson, a White Jewish man, organized what would come to be known as the SCLC in Levinson's kitchen, where "Rustin drafted the working papers for the establishment of the SCLC and Baker edited them."[126] The organization, and its affiliates such as the Nashville Christian Leadership Council, had a goal of promoting love and justice through direct action in non-violent ways.

At the founding of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) in 1960, charter members developed a statement of purpose, drafted by James Lawson,

[126] Joanne Grant, "Godmother of the Student Movement" in *Crisis* Magazine, July/August 2001, 40.

which also reflected the socio-religious activism from which they were born.[127] The statement read in part:

> We affirm the philosophical or *religious ideal of nonviolence as the foundation of our purpose, the pre-supposition of our faith, and the manner of our action*. Nonviolence as it grows from Judaic-Christian traditions seeks a *social order of justice permeated by love*. Integration of human endeavor represents the crucial first step towards such a society…. By appealing to conscience and standing on the moral nature of human existence, nonviolence nurtures the atmosphere in which reconciliation and justice become actual possibilities.[128]

This overt emphasis on nonviolence as a presupposition of their faith and a social order of justice permeated by love, expresses a socio-religious ethos that existed within the Black community.

However, even while religion and faith were vital to the Movement, not all Black churches were willing to participate. C. Eric Lincoln explains that the Civil Rights Movement affirmed and challenged the Black Church's understanding of its responsibility as an agent of social change. Lincoln criticizes Black Church leaders who professed involvement through the SCLC, but really only offered financial support. Amelia Boynton Robinson, Wyatt T. Walker, and others noted that many Black pastors were afraid to open their own churches for meetings.

Lincoln's observation of the limited involvement of many Black churches in the Movement reinforces what has been known anecdotally for years. While the faces captured by the media were often those of Black clergymen, within individual communities, a minority of the Black clergymen were actually activists. Optimistic

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[127] Lawson did mission work in India in the 1950s for the Methodist Church, and he received his STB from Boston University in 1960. He organized and began teaching non-violence strategies in Nashville, TN while doing work at Vanderbilt University after King persuaded him to go to the South to help. http://mlk-kpp01.stanford.edu/index.php/encyclopedia/encyclopedia/enc_lawson_james_1928/, accessed December 18, 2011.

[128] David F. Burg, *Encyclopedia of Student and Youth Movements* (New York, NY: Facts on File, 1998), Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), 184. Emphasis added.

figures report that 43% of all Black churches participated in the Civil Rights Movement in at least some small way, most of them southern rural churches in which the inequalities that Blacks faced were more pronounced than in some of the urban environments.[129] Civil rights veteran Wyatt T. Walker observed that up to 90% of the ministers in Birmingham were not supportive of the efforts of the SCLC, even during the height of the Movement.[130] Whatever the percentage, what is clear is that there are very few instances of even half of the Black Church community participating in the Civil Rights Movement; perhaps future research will provide more precise evidence of engagement.

The reasons that many of the Black churches and their pastors did not participate in the Movement varied. Some were simply too small to house the number of people who attended the weekly mass meetings. Others became increasingly afraid of White retaliation as the bombings of churches and homes of those who were associated with the activism increased. Because of more than 50 bombings in Birmingham between 1947 and the most well-known 1963 bombing of the 16th Street Baptist Church the city was nicknamed "Bombingham." As a child in Birmingham, Marjorie Wallace Smyth remembers the windows of her home rattling many times by the impact of the bombs set off at Rev. Shuttlesworth's nearby home.[131]

Amelia Boynton Robinson recalls that in Selma, AL they often struggled to get ministers involved.

> Convincing the black ministers that the time to help their people was now and the place was right here was harder. Almost all ministers had to be begged to let us have meetings in their churches (we could not go

[129] C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya, *The Black Church in the African American Experience* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1990), 189.
[130] Adam Fairclough, "The Southern Christian Leadership Conference and the Second Reconstruction, 1957-1973" in *South Atlantic Quarterly 80* (1981), 183.
[131] Marjorie Wallace Smyth, 5

> to the armory, schools, courthouse, and other political places) and after we persuaded them, the church would be opened by the sexton but the ministers would conveniently disappear at the meeting time.[132]

Boynton Robinson notes that after a few years and the brutal treatment of some of the young persons like Bernard and Colia Lafayette who came to help Selma residents stand up for their rights, a few churches and ministers began to offer help, but many remained uncommitted to the full struggle for freedom. Some ministers would not stand up and push for changes out of fear of repercussions from Whites who had originally given the land for churches, or who provided resources that assisted the church on annual days and times of financial difficulty. In yet other cases, ministers who enjoyed some level of status within the White community did not want to jeopardize their privileges and perks, so they did not openly challenge the status quo. These ministers sold their silence for small trinkets of personal benefit that did not help their church members or the wider community they served. Some of the women in this study attended churches on Sundays where their ministers and members were silent on the issues, so they joined mass meetings at different churches on Mondays which were committed to standing up and speaking out.

Nevertheless, three women from my broader study – Peggy Lucas, Alicia Roberts, and Marjorie Wallace Smyth – recall going to churches to attend Mass Meetings on Monday nights to find out the information regarding the local movement in Birmingham, as well as to participate in a transformative communal religious experience that inspired them to continue fighting for justice. These women did not always have the support of their home church or pastor, but they did not allow that to thwart their participation,

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[132] Amelia Platts Boynton Robinson, *Bridge Across Jordan*, 218, 78-81, 226-227, 232, 234.

instead embracing the support of other churches and pastors within the broader Birmingham community.[133]

Socio-religious-activism has been a part of the Black Church in America since its creation, but only a minority of Black Churches actively participated in the Civil Rights Movement. The low numbers of actual participants disrupts the popular narrative, but reinforces social movement theory that suggests that activist participation is rarely over twenty percent. Although the number of churches participating was small, the faith of the people who crammed into the churches who were not afraid to open their doors for the Movement was very large.

**Conclusion**

The socio-historical underpinnings of Black Churchwomen's activism presented here are: socio-economic factors in the larger society; segregated neighborhoods created communities where love and care armed Blacks to face indignities from Whites on the outside; media outlets that covered news of importance to the social and political well-being of the Black community; and a heritage of socio-religious activism in the Black Church. Formed under these influences, Black people mobilized a struggle for freedom and justice for all. Black Churchwomen in this study joined that struggle and practiced a lived theology of justice and freedom; that theology is the focus of the next chapter.

[133]Marjorie L. White, *A Walk to Freedom: The Reverend Fred Shuttlesworth and the Alabama Christian Movement for Human Rights, 1956-1964*, (Birmingham, AL: Birmingham Historical Society, 1998).

## Chapter 2 – Retrieving a Lived Theology of Justice and Freedom

Black Churchwomen during the civil rights era operated from a liberative understanding of God. Throughout this chapter I retrieve a theology shaped by the particular experiences of Black Churchwomen during moments of contestation in the Civil Rights Movement. Drawing upon experiences, songs, scriptures and prayers, I explicate the women's lived theology of justice and freedom. This lived theology is based upon a contextual faith that reveals a contemporary wrestling with God in the face of challenges.[134]

### Liberation Theologies

Liberation Theology can be understood as critical reflection on the praxis of faith carried out in specific contexts. Emphasis is placed on praxis as a priority rather than an emphasis on dogmas in traditional Western theologies. Liberation theology assumes that dogmas can be disconnected from people's lives whereas reflection upon praxis reveals their understanding of God through the contextualized living out of their faith. A lived theology of justice and freedom based upon the reflections and experiences of Black Churchwomen participating in the Civil Rights Movement is a liberation-centered theology. This theology is born out of critical reflection on the praxis of faith conducted in moments of contestation in society as a part of a struggle for justice and freedom.

Liberation theology is generally linked with the struggles of the poor and oppressed. In the Civil Rights Movement, even those Blacks who would have been

[134] The critical aspect of reflection is done generally in the living out of faith in the moments of contestation and not simply from the safe and often privileged ecclesial or academic spaces of contemplation. Although there are some internal struggles that were also a part of the theological insights drawn during the Civil Rights Movement, the focus of this lived theology is on how God was understood in relation to the external social systems that resulted in injustice and limitations.

considered middle class by virtue of education and status, such as doctors, lawyers, teachers, and pastors, were limited politically, economically, and socially in ways that many poorer Whites were not. In the Jim Crow south as well as in many other communities throughout the United States, the money of those in the Black middle or upper class could not buy access to White schools and neighborhoods, or membership in White social clubs and churches that working class Whites were privy to. Therefore, what was needed was not simply a theology for the economically poor, but a theology for the powerless – those who were denied the power to vote and change political situations; denied the power to work in jobs for which they were over-qualified in terms of education; exploited and denied fair compensation for their labor; denied generational power when their children were prevented from attending good schools that their tax dollars helped pay for; and denied the power to live where they wanted in order to give their families diverse exposure.

In the Jim Crow South with its bold signage and official laws, limited access to power was obvious. Likewise labor and housing struggles exposed the pervasive oppression of the Black community in the North. I contend that the ongoing oppression that Blacks faced as they approached the mid-twentieth century nurtured among the women in my study a liberative theology with justice and freedom as core tenets. Unlike the Black liberation theology constructed by academic theologians such as James Cone and J. Deotis Roberts, this liberative theology is a lived theology that is best retrieved from the experiences of Black Churchwomen.[135] Emerging from singing in the churches and on the streets, the praying in the jails and on the courthouse steps, and the silent and

[135] While drawing from the experiences of Blacks in the United States, Cone and others were not attentive to the distinct experiences of Black women, the systematic theology Cone constructed finds many connections to the elite White heritages that Black theology was compared with.

orderly marching from communities of pain towards the halls of power; this lived theology, unlike Black liberation theology at its origin, is not a Christian apology for, or response to the Black Power Movement. This lived theology of justice and freedom emerges in moments of conflict and contestation, bearing witness to God's presence in the midst of the Civil Rights Movement.

**Sources of a Lived Theology of Justice and Freedom**

The sources of a lived theology of justice and freedom during the Civil Rights Movement can be found in experience, songs, scriptures, and prayers. The remainder of this chapter focuses on a theological analysis of these four sources, particularly on experience and the theologies present in the lyrics of Civil Rights Movement songs.

*Experience*

Experience is one of the traditional sources of theology that is necessarily subjective and contextual. The catechesis of the early church was rooted in the experiences of a particular people, in a particular location, at a particular time. Historically, theologians have tended to regard as universal what is actually a particular experience, without reference to the specific context in which it was actually first known. Dominant Western European male understandings of Christianity, such as those articulated by the writings of the Catholic Church including Thomas Aquinas, and later Reformation leaders, most notably Martin Luther and John Calvin, have become accepted as normative. These text-based theologies were created by the privileged – White, European, male, educated – and did not engage ongoing experiences of those outside of these categories, such as women, peasants, non-Europeans, etc.

There are two ways to view experience in relation to theology. In one view the experience comes first and the theology comes later; in the other, theology provides a framework for making sense of the contradictions of experience.[136] Because I view experience as the starting point for theological inquiry and assessment, I begin this discussion of a lived theology of justice and freedom by privileging personal experiences that reveal who God is and how God acts through ongoing individual and collective encounters. I begin with experience as the first source because it was the first means for many of the women in the study by which they understood God as present and active in their lives. It was their experience with the presence of God that shaped the lyrics of the songs they sang, the scriptures they relied on, and the prayers they prayed – and still sing, rely on, and pray.

In a lived theology of justice and freedom, experience draws upon both God's ancient revelation through Holy Scripture as well as contemporary revelation through personal and communal life experiences. In the lives of Blacks in America who associate experiences with God as a liberator of the oppressed and a longsuffering but ultimate judge of the oppressor, God's continuous revelation in relationship with humanity is liberative and not oppressive. The Black Church assesses the actions of God as being ultimately *for* those faced with bondage and limitations and *against* those causing those end states. Black preachers often include personal and congregational experiences within sermons to illustrate the contemporary relevance of the God of the scriptures. Black women who were often limited to positions of informal leadership created space within and outside of the church to interpret God's actions. These women, also known as

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[136] Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2001), 193.

"mothers of the church," and other informal leaders played a critical role in the ways experience was interpreted and understood within the Black religious ethos.[137]

Many forms of Black religion value divine relationship and personal experiences more highly than secondary encounters through texts whose authors, being human, cannot be fully trusted to authentically represent a dynamic God through a fixed text.[138] Therefore, drawing on a history of alternative understanding of God through personal relationships, Black Churchwomen's experiences with God during the Civil Rights Movement reinforce the critical role personal experience plays in the Black religious community's understanding of who God is.[139]

During the Civil Rights Movement, such a lived theology was created in contested holy spaces as a result of specific experiences and encounters of young Black women. The personal experiences of two such women, Marjorie Wallace Smyth and A. Lenora Taitt-Magubane, to whom we now turn, shaped their understanding of God as one who was loving and just and who expected adherents to live in the same manner.

*Two Experiences – Constructing Theology in Contested Spaces*

Marjorie Wallace Smyth was only ten years old in 1955 when an encounter shook her spiritually and caused her to engage in theological inquiry. As a young girl growing up in an all-Black area of Birmingham, Alabama, she experienced one loving reality in

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[137] Cheryl Townsend Gilkes, *If It Wasn't for the Women: Black Women's Experience and Womanist Culture in Church and Community*, 43-60; Anthea D. Butler, *Women in the Church of God in Christ: Making a Sanctified World* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 32-54.

[138] Henry H. Mitchell, *Black Church Beginnings: The Long-Hidden Realities of the First Years* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2004); Peter J. Paris, *The Spirituality of African Peoples: The Search for a Common Moral Discourse* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1995); Albert J. Raboteau, *Slave Religion: The "Invisible Institution" in the Antebellum South* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2004).

[139] From early days of Black religion in the United States, there are accounts of persons tarrying for the spirit to come and fall, and make individuals relationship with God known to the community of believers. See Rabouteau, 212-288.

her immediate community, and an opposing reality in the all-White areas of her hometown. This opposition was most jarring in the physical location where it seemed there should have been the least amount of separation – on the grounds of a church. She describes one such encounter this way:

> … we would go to Church School and pass the White churches walking and I could not figure out how the children would come out and call us Niggers, and Sambos and what was the other cartoon they used to call us, Little Rascals, Buckwheat, that's the one, and I just couldn't imagine how they prayed to the same, did they pray to the same God? I used to ask my father how could they pray to the same God? They must have a different God than our God, I just couldn't believe it, I just never could understand.[140]

When asked whether or not she was able to conceptualize the "different God" that she thought must be the cause of such hatred towards Blacks, she replied,

> No, it didn't make sense. That's what was so puzzling [to] me. Did they have two Gods? My father taught us there was just one God and from what I've learned in Church School and our pastor getting up to speak to us, there was only one God. So there couldn't be a Black God and a White God, so something was wrong. Something was wrong. Then you would have every once in a while one person would know a white person that was so kind and was so different. But I didn't know any of them. I didn't know any of them.[141]

At the tender age of ten years old, her conflicting experiences made Smyth realize that something was wrong. Smyth's lack of experience with kind White persons shaped her understanding of whether or not the God that White persons served would act in ways that were kind toward others. For Marjorie, those who believed in and followed God should reflect the character of God. If their actions were unkind, maybe it was because their God did not require kindness but instead accepted or even encouraged hatred. Smyth

[140] Marjorie Wallace Smyth, August, 2009.
[141] Marjorie Wallace Smyth, January 7, 2012, 14.

and her friends walked past the White church and were verbally attacked and sometimes even spat at by other young people of similar age but of a different cultural and religious upbringing. The responses of the White children challenged the messages Smyth had been taught at home and in church about God, love, kindness, and the equality of humanity. The internal battle for her was not simply in the words used, but the underlying understanding of God those words revealed.

The assumed presence of God at the White church made the location of Smyth's encounter with hatred significant. Name calling in non-church settings did not generate the same theological inquiries as in the spaces where God was particularly believed to be present. The encounter with young White persons on the grounds of the church, who were presumably learning about God, as well as encounters with older White persons in the city, none of whom Marjorie knew to be kind, created a sharp disconnect in her mind. It appeared that one group of followers of God could love in the face of hatred, and another group of followers spewed hatred in response to acts of love and unity.

Smyth's experiences ultimately led her to decide that there was no way for the God of the White children and the God she knew as a Black child to be the same. She could not understand how the same God could produce mean, hate filled, exclusionary people at one church, and produce loving persons oriented to inclusion in another. The ten year old Smyth concluded that they simply "must have a different God than our God."

Smyth was not alone in her questioning. In the same city in April of 1963, Martin Luther King, Jr. asked a similar question of White churches in his Letter from Birmingham Jail. King's open letter response to eight White clergymen read in part:

> 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?"[142]

Both Smyth and King wondered whether perhaps White people were worshiping the one God incorrectly, or if based on their actions of hatred towards Blacks or apathy towards justice, they had a different God.

Such experiences with White church members and leaders in Birmingham were not isolated ones. In 1960, while a student at Spelman College in Atlanta, Georgia, A. Lenora Taitt-Magubane was also the president of the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) in her area. As a part of this organization she and others would regularly attend different churches for worship as they studied religion. She recalls an encounter on one Sunday morning at a White church in Atlanta not far from the Atlanta University Center:[143]

> One weekend we … decided we would visit a church in the West End … all of the churches in the West End were what you would call traditionally White churches, and I don't even know whether that church is there now, but I remember we went in the church and the man said we couldn't go in. And [I'm] saying, you know, we've really come to worship, and the man said well you can't come in here. And one of the things I remembered about that was I said, what are you going to do when you get to heaven? Are you going to in fact segregate people up there? He said, if I'm there

[142] Martin Luther King, Jr., "Letter from Birmingham City Jail" in *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King Jr.,* James M. Washington (ed.) (New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers, 1986), 299. Emphasis mine.

[143] Located west of downtown Atlanta, the Atlanta University Center is the largest contiguous consortium of Historically Black Colleges and Universities in the United States. During A. Lenora Taitt-Magubane's time as a student there it was comprised of Morehouse College, Spelman College, Clark College, Atlanta University, Morris Brown College, and the Interdenominational Theological Center.

> and I can, I will… He said I will be up there at the gates and I will make sure. And that struck me, and it was really very hurtful, you know, that one could say on the one hand one believed in the Lord, one believed in Jesus Christ, and on the other hand, that you would live and die to be a segregationist. And I guess that was the determination that subsequent weeks following when we were planning the sit in that there was really no turning back, and that I in fact…I was more and more committed to doing that.[144]

As a native of New York City, Taitt-Magubane was not accustomed to the blatant segregation and separation that limited interactions across races in Atlanta and throughout the American South.[145] She believed that any place where God was worshiped should be open to all believers of God. Though she had not gone much more than a mile from the historically Black college she attended, she and the others had walked into a very different world, a world in which God was used to sanction segregation, and where segregation would be maintained by any means necessary, not only temporarily here on earth, but also eternally in heaven.

Taitt-Magubane could not understand how someone could profess a belief in Jesus Christ, and particularly in the Church, take such an absolute stand for segregation's racial separation. What God would welcome those types of encounters? How small and narrow-minded must that God be? She envisaged Jesus Christ as one who brought different people together and spent time with them. She knew the story of the Canaanite woman who corrected Jesus' segregationist actions, pushing him to be more open, loving, and just, when she replied to his rebuke saying that even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall

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[144] Taitt-Magubane, 3.

[145] A. Lenora Taitt-Magubane's activism is also featured in a text on Spelman College students in the Movement. See Harry G. Lefever, *Undaunted by the Fight: Spelman College and the Civil Rights Movement 1957-1967* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2005).

from their master's table.[146] Yet when the White man at the door of the church was asked whether or not he would block Black Christians from heaven, he was not convicted by the challenge and did not see his desires of exclusive racial segregation in heaven as unjust and unloving. He accepted and supported racial segregation and believed that God did too.

Religious hypocrisy was not new for Blacks encountering Whites. During the period of African enslavement in America, slaveholders provided a particular gospel to the enslaved, a gospel that had three basic claims: 1) God ordained and intended the perpetual enslavement of Black people; 2) as a result slaves were to obey their masters; and 3) Blacks were not made in the image of God like Whites were, so they would not have equality within Christianity.[147] The religious hypocrisy that enslaved Blacks experienced from White Christians who professed a belief in God while using Christianity to justify the brutal institution of chattel slavery through the mid-nineteenth century, caused many Blacks to reject the Christianity of White slave owners who interpreted certain passages of scripture to reinforce the belief of their superiority over all persons who were not White. This rejection not only generated a new understanding of God, but also revealed the need for a separate place of worship – the Black Church – where this new, inclusive understanding of God could be passed on through preaching, teaching, and worship.

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[146] Matthew 15:21-28 (NRSV). Some scholars who suggest that Jesus was corrected include Frances Taylor Gench, *Back to the Well: Women's Encounters with Jesus in the Gospels* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), 1-11; J. Martin C. Scott (1996) "Matthew 15.21-28: A Test Case for Jesus' Manners," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament*: Vol. 63, 21-44 and Jennifer Thweatt-Bates (2008) "Perfect Righteousness," *Leaven*: Vol. 16: Iss. 1, Article 13, page 44.

[147] Delores Williams, "Gospel, Culture and Women in an African-American Context" in *Women's Perspectives: Articulating the Liberating Power of the Gospel* (Geneva, Switzerland: WCC Publications, 1996), 15.

Similarly in the mid-twentieth century Blacks experienced religious hypocrisy that allowed Whites to express certain beliefs in their churches on Sunday morning and then later bomb Black churches, even during a known time of worship. Smyth, Taitt-Magubane, and many others understood the God in the Black Church as the same God that White Christians worshiped. However their experiences of justice and freedom on-the-ground revealed qualitatively different understandings of this God. These women believed that God was ultimately on their side in the on-going fight for justice and freedom.

Bernice Johnson Reagon provides an example of this understanding when she describes the verses they added to traditional Movement songs.

> In 'We Shall Overcome' there's a verse that says 'God is on our side,' and there was a theological discussion that said maybe we should say, 'We are on God's side.' God was lucky to have us in Albany doing what we were doing. I mean what better case would He have? So it was really like God would be very, very happy to be on my side. There's a bit of arrogance about that, but that was the way it felt.[148]

As Reagon's statement reveals, there was a possessive nature that Blacks took on for God that is just as problematic as the position taken by Whites. The God who was on their side during the fight for justice and freedom, must have been against Whites who also believed God to be on their side maintaining segregation.[149] Through the Black women's experiences, the God of separation and exclusion they encountered through White Christians was not present in the Black churches where they worshipped.[150]

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[148] Bernice Johnson Reagon in Henry Hampton and Steve Fayer, *Voices of Freedom: An Oral History of the Civil Rights Movement from the 1950s through the 1980s* (New York, NY: Bantam Books, 1990), 107-108.

[149] The "proof" was ultimately found in the results. Whoever was on the winning side, must have been on the side of the true God.

[150] Although there were not White persons present in Black churches on Sunday mornings, it was not because Blacks were being physically prevented from coming to the church to worship.

Through their engagement with God and persons who fought against them, the women came to understand God who joined them in their daily experiences of struggling for justice and freedom as being inclusive and loving, and not seeking to separate anyone, especially persons who professed to be followers.

Individual and communal experiences revealed God's presence and God's character. When sides were drawn, God was on the side of those struggling for freedom. Those who were struggling ultimately received help for God. The women of this study believe God's revelation and presence is not limited to churches – indeed, as I have shown, they thought God's presence actually may not be in churches where God's love was not shown to others. God was often revealed in daily interactions and confrontations. As Smyth and Taitt-Magubane later became devoted to civil rights activism, they experienced God in jail, while marching in the street, and while having acts of violence committed against them by hate-filled Whites. God's revelation was not limited to the grounds of the church. During the Civil Rights Movement, declarations of this God who was revealed through experiences were often made known through the lyrics of the songs.

*Songs*

Music during the 1950s and 1960s Civil Rights Movement provided spiritual, physical, and emotional support for persons who were committed to social change in the United States. As a part of the spiritual arsenal that women, men, and children used to stand up against the often-violent forces of segregation, songs expressed theological and socio-political stances, and therefore were one of the most portable and powerful weapons of the Movement. While these songs were sung in churches during mass

meetings, they were regularly sung during marches, while walking to work, or any other time the spirit moved. During the Civil Rights Movement, songs were often sung as a part of a communal act and public statement; rarely were they solo acts. Songleaders played an important role as they made theological and ethical statements as they led those gathered in mass meetings, jails, and protests in song.

Although music was always a part of the mass meetings, many of the early sit-ins and marches deliberately did not incorporate music in an effort to prevent participants and organizers from being charged with any number of frivolous charges or being deemed disorderly. Decisions like these reveal politics of respectability at work in many of the communities. Black activists sought to prove they were worthy of respect through their overall demeanor and dress during acts of protest. Despite not being a part of many initial public protests, singing was almost always a part of the preparation for resistance whether in mass meetings or workshops. Singing was strategic. Though marchers and sit-in participants often began their protests in silence, they turned to song as a public pronouncement of their physical presence and strength. Campaigns such as the Albany Movement, which began in 1961, featured singing as an integral part of their public activism. Customized song lyrics created organically in the midst of the protest could simultaneously condemn individuals such as White city leaders and commend persons participating in the Movement.

Black activists, young and old, male and female, gave voice through music to experiences of spiritual and political power. It did not matter whether or not they were a part of a formal organization or simply on their way to school or work: as long as they could sing, they were able to summon a boundless and unifying power that gave strength

for the journey. As they sang, they re-appropriated a longstanding tradition; the Spirituals had unified Blacks in social protest and rejection of subjugation over a century earlier.[151] Singing became one of the most easily adaptable methods of positive and non-violent resistance even when the lyrics questioned the moral grounds of segregationists. As a non-violent weapon, collective singing enabled the activists to make strong theological and ethical stands generally without being drawn into physical retaliation against Whites.[152]

The music of the Civil Rights Movement draws from a number of sources within the Black music tradition. These include the Spirituals, Labor Movement songs, Gospel, and Rhythm and Blues. Many of the songs that are revised versions of Spirituals build on the spirit of social protest and spiritual strength that the songs were imbued with when they were created during the period of Black enslavement in the United States. Frederick Douglass poetically described the spirituals as "…tones, loud, long, and deep, breathing the prayer and complaint of souls boiling over with the bitterest anguish. Each tone was a testimony against slavery, and a prayer to God for deliverance from chains."[153] With their legacy in Black struggle spirituals found new life in the Civil Rights Movement.

In addition to an overwhelming emphasis on obtaining freedom, whether physical or spiritual themes of Christian faith, love, and salvation, pervade the spirituals. W.E.B. DuBois wrote of the African genius for transmuting hope and faith in ultimate justice into

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[151] Often Whites who heard the Spirituals during the period of enslavement did not understand the coded messages of the songs that spoke of the desire for both physical and spiritual freedom. Cheryl A. Kirk-Duggan, *Exorcizing Evil: A Womanist Perspective on the Spirituals* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997), 57-75.

[152] Rare exceptions to this include the episodes in the Parchman penitentiary in Mississippi.

[153] John Lovell, Jr., "The Social Implications of the Negro Spiritual," in *The Social Implications of Early Negro Music in the United States*, Bernard Katz (ed.) (New York, NY: Arno Press and The New York Times, 1969), 134.

song.[154] Tilford Brooks identifies events and stories from both the Old and New Testaments in the Christian Bible, and notes, "So many Biblical events have been treated in spiritual texts that, if they were placed in chronological order, they would be almost equivalent to an alternative version of the Bible."[155] This alternative version of the Bible would likely reflect Blacks' canon within a canon whose focus was on how God delivers followers from oppression. This canon did not focus on Biblical passages used by Whites to justify slavery such as Ephesians 6:5-8 with the Apostle Paul's language requiring slaves to obey their masters, intentionally excluding verse 9 which requires masters to not threaten slaves. Enslaved persons instead created lyrics that focused on how God delivers followers from oppression such as in the Spiritual "Didn't my Lord Deliver Daniel," based on Daniel 6:11-22.

When the spirituals were initially considered by young people within the Civil Rights Movement, there was some reluctance to appropriate the music of the period of enslavement, a painful era many Blacks worked so hard to distance themselves. However, combining the power of the spirituals and the ability to take the original lyrics or make small changes to increase their relevance for their current struggles allowed Movement activists in the mid-twentieth century to connect with the previous Black Freedom struggles of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. They understood that what had been a source of power and unity then, could also empower and unify in the twentieth century.

Through recontextualized lyrics, singing by Movement participants can be understood as social commentary. This form of commentary was not limited to those who

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[154] W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folks* (New York, NY: Penguin Group, 1996), 213.
[155] Tilford Brooks, *America's Black Musical Heritage* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1984), 34.

were official leaders or those with a certain class or educational status. Anyone could begin a song at any time, and anyone had the autonomy to change lyrics, add verses, or do anything else that would make the song appropriate for the needs of the moment. Singing helped to bridge the gaps of difference that existed within the Black community. Whether young or old, rich or poor, male or female, formally educated or not, they could all come together and communicate as equals through song. Music was a great equalizer. "Singing did not simply allow people of different classes and backgrounds to communicate – it made them equal."[156] Singing also provided a way for persons to actively participate in the Movement even when for various reasons they did not feel that they could engage in more confrontational acts including direct action protests that might result in physical retaliation and jail.

This ability to communicate as a group also provided the ability to motivate and strengthen the commitment to the cause of justice and freedom. Few songs that were used as strategic tools and non-violent weapons during the Movement were sung as solos. These communal and organically dynamic songs were learned through singing in the moment, and not through rehearsals and formal distributions of sheet music. In the tradition of Black church singing, those who attended mass meetings where songs were raised knew the roles and responsibilities of singers who drew on the call-and-response tradition of Black music that survived from the African continent. The songleader was a position of leadership in the Movement, a position that women could hold. Bernice Johnson Reagon notes that an accomplished songleader possessed the "fine art of knowing what song to sing at which occasion, when it was necessary to change lyrics,

[156] Kerran L. Sanger, 42.

and when songs could be used as they had existed for years in the Black community."[157] She would raise a song with the hope that the congregation or group would catch it and carry it farther than the one voice could.

Analysis of the twenty songs recorded in various southern mass meetings from 1963-1964 that are compiled in the Smithsonian Folkways Recordings' "Voices of the Civil Rights Movement," shows that ten of the twenty songs were initiated and led by women. Sometimes the women were known and named in the credits of the songs, and at other times, they were lone voices that were raised in the meeting, not to be silenced by others.[158] Although some persons were known as strong singers within communities and they would often step into song leadership, the songleader was not generally a role assigned to an individual, but was something that an individual took on as they saw the need or felt led of the Spirit.[159] Leadership could move from person to person as the song progressed.

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[157] Ibid., 44.

[158] Smithsonian Folkways Recordings, *Voices of the Civil Rights Movement: Black American Freedom Songs 1960-1966,* Disk 1: Mass Meetings (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution, 1997). Women led and women initiated songs from the recordings are tracks 1. "Freedom Medley: Freedom Chant; Oh Freedom; This Little Light of Mine" – Led by SNCC Freedom Singers with Rutha Harris; 2. "This Little Light of Mine" – Arranged and led by Betty Mae Fikes; 3. "If You Miss Me from the Back of the Bus" – Arranged and led by Betty Mae Fikes; 4. "Lord, Hold My Hand While I Run This Race" – woman initiator and songleader; 9. "Ain' Scared of Nobody" – Arranged and led by Amanda Bowens Perdew and Virginia Davis; 10. "Leaning on the Everlasting Arms" – woman initiator and songleader; 13. "Go Tell It on the Mountain" – Arranged and led by Fannie Lou Hamer; 14. "Wade in the Water" – Arranged and led by Fannie Lou Hamer; 16. "Walk with Me, Lord" – Arranged and led by Fannie Lou Hamer; and "Don't You Think It's About Time That We All Be Free" – written and led by Mabel Hillary. In "Lord, Hold My Hand While I Run This Race," the woman who initiates and leads the song is not deterred by the man who actually has command of the microphone and tries to end the singing and direct the service in another direction while she sings, but continues raising new verses and leading the congregants in song.

[159] Similar fluid leadership also happened with the musicians. Alicia Roberts describes times when she was in mass meetings in Birmingham, and no one was playing the piano, so she would go to the piano at whichever church she was in and begin to play the songs that were being sung without being asked to do so. Alicia Roberts Interview with author.

Thus, the songleader possessed a unique form of power that was fluid and improvisational, and not limited by position or perceived stature within the community. Kerran Sanger notes:

> Activists told many stories, for instance, in which they stressed situations where songs were started by a lone voice or by a person who would not usually be thought of as a leader. Unlike some traditional attitudes toward communication that imply great men are the only catalysts of change, the activists suggested that the average person could be the starting place for change, by beginning alone but encouraging others to join in.[160]

This fluid improvisation was particularly true of spontaneous songs that arose in mass meetings, during protest marches, or in jail. There was also more formalized Movement singing, such as that done by Peggy Lucas who sang as the lead soloist in the song "Freedom Shall Be Mine" with the Alabama Christian Movement for Human Rights Choir's recording, where there were assigned leaders and soloists within songs.[161]

The songs that were retained and survived through recordings represent those that gained the most traction within the local, regional, and national aspects of the Movement. This contextual nature combined with the religious grounding of many of the songs enabled the music to be both prophetic and political. Folk singer and activist Guy Carawan recalls a night when the Highlander Folk Center in Monteagle, Tennessee, was infiltrated by local police, who made freedom workshop participants sit in the dark while they searched through their suitcases and bags. He remembers that someone began to hum "We Shall Overcome," and "Then from a Negro girl – a high school student from Montgomery, Alabama – a new verse came into being. Sitting there in the dark, this girl

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[160] Kerran L. Sanger, 76.
[161] Alabama Christian Movement Choir for Human Rights led by Carlton Reese, *We've Got a Job*, "Freedom Shall Be Mine," Peggy Lucas, soloist, 1963.

began to sing, 'We are not afraid, we are not afraid today.'"[162] Not only did this young high school girl become a song leader, she also became a song writer, whose verse constructed in a space of contestation becomes one of the most well used verses in the face of real threats and fears during the Movement.

The addition of the line "we are not afraid" to "We Shall Overcome" addressed the realities of the Civil Rights Movement where there were often good reasons to be afraid! James Farmer, who served as the Executive Secretary for SNCC during the early 1960s, described the Freedom Riders in Jackson, MS who sang "We Shall Overcome." He recalled that their greatest fervor was reserved for the stanza "'We are not afraid. We are not afraid. We are not afraid, today. Oh, deep in my heart, I do believe, we shall overcome, someday.' I wished, I must confess, that singing it could make it so. It almost did. We sang loudly to silence our own fears. And to rouse our courage."[163] While fear and the potential for fear was acknowledged, the profession through singing that "we are not afraid" encouraged protestors to not allow fear to limit or immobilize them.[164]

The young high school girl was not the only one who created new lyrics during these moments. Jamila Jones (née Mary Ethel Dozier) was a member of a trio in Montgomery before the Movement began there. As mass meetings began in Montgomery at the end of 1955, she and others started singing for the Montgomery Improvement Association (MIA). She describes singing some well-known songs like "This Little Light of Mine," but also adding new verses – and entire new songs – when necessary. She recalls, "We would make up songs. All the songs I remember gave us

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[162] Kerran L. Sanger, 47.
[163] James Farmer, *Lay Bare the Heart: An Autobiography of the Civil Rights Movement* (New York: Arbor House, 1985), 6-7.
[164] Kerran L. Sanger, 88.

strength to go on…It was kind of spontaneous; if somebody started beating us over the head with a billy club we would start singing about the billy club, or either the person's name would come out in a song."[165] Songs were often developed based on melodies the women grew up singing in church and during gatherings in school. Janine Culbreth Rambeau wrote the song "Oh Pritchett, Oh Kelly" to the tune of "Oh Mary, Oh Martha" while in the Dougherty County jail in Albany, Georgia. The song challenges Albany's Chief of Police Laurie Pritchett and their Mayor Asa Kelly. Music was a powerful tool because one could use it flexibly to respond to a variety of situations.

During the Selma to Montgomery march, songs were created and used to reinforce the purpose of the marchers' actions during the multi-day walk. Reagon notes, "songs supplied a steady spiritual nourishment through activities of that march; the verses that people fashioned expressed their intentions and reasons for being there."[166] The freedom and autonomy that Movement participants felt as they used music as a tool enabled them to transform songs in ways that were not limited by sacred and secular dichotomies, but rather embraced an African worldview that did not separate the two. What was important was the strength that the songs provided, through theological, ethical, and political statements that reminded them that God was on their side, that standing up was the right thing to do, and that justice would come.

Kerran Sanger states, "In jail, many other forms of direct actions were denied the activists but, in singing, they were able to find a positive rhetorical place between

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[165] Bernice Johnson Reagon, "The Civil Rights Movement" in Mellonee V. Burnim, Portia K. Maultsby (Eds.), *African American Music: An Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 602.; Mary Ethel Dozier (now Jamila Jones), interview conducted by Jesse Johnson, Jr., November 1974

[166] Bernice Johnson Reagon, "The Civil Rights Movement," 621.

passivity and acts of violence."[167] The songs had multiple audiences: the singers themselves, those who were opposing and oppressing them, and through media exposure, the wider society. Despite these multiple audiences, the focus of the lyrics was generally on the community itself, as a way of encouraging, supporting, and motivating those who were moving in the same direction towards justice and freedom.

An analysis of the pronouns within the songs reinforces the interweaving of personal and collective commitments. One example is found in the Movement's anthem "We Shall Overcome" where verses include lyrics of individual and collective beliefs and assertions – "We shall overcome, we shall overcome, we shall overcome some day. Oh-oh-oh deep in my heart, I do believe, we shall overcome some day." The rhythm of the song would not change if the lyrics said "deep in *our* heart, *we* do believe," but the we-my-I-we commitments and professions in the Movement version of the song are simultaneously collective and individual.[168] The second person usage of "you" most often referred to others within the group and not external adversaries. Sanger explains, "Even when the singers sang of 'you' and 'I' as distinct agents, they continued to sing with their coworkers, articulating their common goals and constituting a cohesive group. All singers would simultaneously be both 'I' and 'you,' referring to themselves as 'I' while the others referred to them as 'you.' The 'you' was not a member of a separate group or an adversary but part of the 'we' that was stressed in so many songs."[169]

As the Civil Rights Movement began to embrace the energy of young college students in the early 1960s, the music began to play an even greater role. Beatrice Soublet

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[167] Kerran L. Sanger, 19.
[168] The original song "I'll Overcome Someday" was individually focused, so the changes during the Civil Rights Movement were intentional.
[169] Kerran L. Sanger, 86.

recalls the power of the music being sung outside when she sat in with fifty students at an S&W cafeteria in Greensboro to test integration laws.

> Music was just a part of it. My family would give concerts at the church, and as I look back on the civil rights demonstrations, it was the singing that was so fundamental, and I can remember the first time I was arrested that the—I was not afraid. I mean, you know, typically 17, 18 year old. You know, you're there. It's cool. Everything's fine, and then when they closed the door to that paddy wagon and I didn't hear people singing, it was my first moment of fear. It was just the first moment of fear because that music was just—it was sustaining.[170]

Music had power, and the sound of the music was both emotionally and physically sustaining in times of uncertainly and unrest.

Many of the women in my study described the mass meetings as occasions when there would be a lot of singing, praying, and persons explaining what they had accomplished collectively, and what they needed to do next. Bernice Johnson Reagon portrays the services before these meetings as devotional times that included sacred songs, prayers, and scripture readings, noting that the devotions were adapted to prepare participants to confront local issues.[171]

Rose Schofield recalls that singing "God be with You Till we Meet Again" at the end of mass meetings in New Jersey was particularly important at times when the homes of Movement leaders were being bombed or threatening phone calls or letters were being received.[172] The song was a parting prayer of petition for protection. The power felt by the community as they sang and prayed for protection and continued the fight to justice

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[170] Beatrice Soublet, April 14, 2010, 3
[171] Bernice Johnson Reagon, "The Civil Rights Movement," 605.
[172] The bombing of homes and churches in the North during the Civil Rights Movement has been lost to the common history that focuses on bombs in southern cities such as Birmingham.

mitigated the power of the threats. The community understood God as a companion, protector, and sustainer.

Though music was almost always present in churches during the mass meetings, its use outside of the walls of the churches varied based on the period within the life of the Movement, the laws of the place of protest, and the ability to make strategic statements through song. Reagon observes, "You could not organize Black people without singing, and the singing of the Civil Rights Movement was powerful and inseparable from the organizing and formulation of strategies; so, too, were the prayer and testimonies, sermons, and speeches."[173] The significance of the music was linked to the overtly religious components of the mass meetings, and other organizing gatherings where devotionals and religious proclamations were not able to be separated from the socio-political actions that were taking place through protest.

I asked each of the women who participated in my research to write down on a blank index card a song that reminded them of the Civil Rights Movement. Songs that were listed ranged from traditional hymns including "Amazing Grace" and "Precious Lord," to conventional Civil Rights songs such as "We Shall Overcome" and "Ain't Gonna Let Nobody Turn Me Around," to contemporary songs of empowerment including Aretha Franklin's "R.E.S.P.E.C.T" and James Brown's "Say It Loud – I'm Black and I'm Proud." The eight women central to this dissertation provided the names of eight songs, with some of the songs mentioned by more than one woman. These songs, with the number of submissions among the eight women in parenthesis, are: "We Shall Overcome" (4), "Oh Freedom" (2), "Ain't Gonna Let Nobody Turn Me Around" (2), "We've Come This Far by Faith" (1), "God be with You Till we Meet Again" (1), "Guide

[173] Bernice Johnson Reagon, "The Civil Rights Movement," 623.

My Feet While I Run This Race" (1), "This Little Light of Mine" (1), and "If I Can Help Somebody as I Pass Along" (1).

"We Shall Overcome" was the most consistently named song among all of the women who participated in the research. This song is often considered to be the anthem of the Civil Rights Movement specifically, and of global Freedom Struggles more broadly. "We Shall Overcome" became the song with the greatest traction and widest acceptance and use. Though it was a song that originally described the need for individuals to stay focused and not yield in their quest, it became a communal articulation of a desire to win in the struggle for freedom.

As the women described why they chose this song, they reflected on the theological meaning of their participation in the Movement. There was more than an eschatological hope of something in the future, there was a belief that the change would happen while they were living. When she sang, Rose Schofield felt that eventually the societal systems they were challenging *would* be overcome. Peggy Lucas believed that Blacks were capable of overcoming the many challenges that they faced. Bessie Sellaway described "We Shall Overcome" as the song of the Movement, and believes that today people still need to have faith, hope and belief that it is possible to overcome.[174]

Self-determination and self-control form two of the main experiences Lillian Sue Bethel and Peggy Lucas expressed through the song "Oh Freedom." When asked why she chose this song, Bethel quickly said, "I'm not going to be a slave to anyone…I'd be dead before I let somebody enslave me." Slavery was understood as bondage or limitations to humanity in any form. We see her sense of self-determination in her refusal to allow her

[174] Interviews conducted by author with Rose Schofield, July 12, 2012; Peggy Lucas, November 6, 2010; and Bessie Sellaway, November 10, 2010.

aunt to bail her out of jail in Albany, GA; instead insisting she would stay until everyone could be released. Lucas explained that because "Oh Freedom" speaks of a personal commitment to take control of yourself and your life, the song was a good motivator for action.

Beatrice Perry Soublet, who was active in the Movement in Greensboro, NC, and Doris Brunson, who was active in the Movement in New York, NY both recalled "Ain't Gonna Let Nobody Turn Me 'Round" as the song that most reminded them of the Movement. The words of this song also reflect a type of self-determination to remain focused on the forward movement towards a goal despite opposition and challenges (often violent) from Southern Whites.

The decision to include the names of oppressors in song lyrics is reminiscent of songs in the Hebrew Bible text, primarily the Psalms that directly address oppressors of God's people, and speak to the presence of God during their struggle. Lyrics like "Ain' gonna let Chief Pritchett, lordy, turn me 'round, keep on a walkin', keep on a talkin', marchin' up to freedom land," speak of God's companionship and commitment to those who struggle. The song does not actually include the word "Lord" within the lyrics, but the recording of the SNCC singers' rendition shows they added "lordy" within each verse, an indication that the desire for freedom was so great that with the underlying help of the Lord (lordy), they would stay committed to doing whatever it took to get there.

Brunson's recollection of this song being sung in Harlem is one that reinforces Blacks' common desire for justice and freedom even in places where the outward signs of segregation's limiting practices were not as obvious to her. For both Brunson and Soublet, the song expressed their acceptance of the mission they believed to be from God

to move forward to advance the goals of the Movement.[175] Both women were determined not to give up on their goals even if they were threatened. They would keep marching until all were free.

Peggy Lucas described the importance of the song "We've Come This Far by Faith," as a song of simultaneous reflection and proclamation. For Lucas, the song was a testimony because "we've been through quite a bit, so we rely on God and faith…We are overcomers. How could we survive all the things we've been through? We are a strong people."[176] This song recognized the rich faith-filled history of past victories and anticipated future victories. The words of the song reflect a trust and dependence on God that would allow the singers to persevere toward their goal.

A. Lenora Taitt-Magubane's experiences in the South and North prompted her to list three songs that inspired her. The first song she listed was "Guide My Feet, While I Run this Race," which recognizes the need for guidance as they worked towards the goal of justice and freedom, so that the efforts will not be in vain.[177] This song reinforced their sense of God's attentive presence during the long struggle for justice and freedom.

The primary themes in the eight songs the women recalled center around requests for God's guidance, companionship, and protection. The God to whom the activists addressed their songs they understood as the God present with them in their contested spaces of the day. Lyrics such as "Guide my feet, while I run this race," morphed into verses such as "Guide my vote, while I run this race" and "Guide my mind, while I run

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[175] The traditional lyrics for Ain' Gonna Let Nobody Turn me Around, as recorded in 1963 by the SNCC Freedom Singers includes "lordy" after each phrase of "Ain' gonna let…" See Appendix C for the full song lyrics.

[176] Peggy Lucas, November 6, 2010.

[177] Two additional songs that Taitt-Magubane noted were "This Little Light of Mine," a favorite of Fannie Lou Hamer who became a surrogate aunt for her, and "If I can Help Somebody as I Pass Along," which was a song of a servant's heart, and it was a concluding part of the last sermon that Martin Luther King, Jr. preached at his home church, Ebenezer Baptist.

this race." Activists understood God as being present, attentive, and active within all forms of struggle. The words that the songleader called out reflected the activists' understanding of who God was and what God would do through them, such as directing the protests and guiding the electoral process.

Whether sung in mass meetings, along protest marches, in jail, or silently as people went about their day, there is social, spiritual and political power in the theology of the songs of the Civil Rights Movement. These songs identified by the women contribute directly to a theology of justice in the face of unfairness and freedom from numerous oppressions.

*Scriptures*

Besides asking the women to write on the blank index card the name of a song that reminded them of the Civil Rights Movement, I also asked them to identify a favorite scripture (without the aid of a Bible). Scripture plays a significant role in the religious underpinnings of the Movement because the Biblical texts point back to previous experiences with God and God's people, while also giving guidance and hope for the present and future. Scripture was used alone, within songs, and within prayers. Historically, the Biblical texts of Black Freedom struggles have centered on Exodus narratives or those highlighting eschatological battles and hopes.[178] However the eight women of this study recalled and relied on a variety of texts during their involvement in the Movement that raised themes of God's love, trustworthy guidance, strength,

[178] See Eddie S. Glaude, Jr., *Exodus!: Religion, Race, and Nation in Early Nineteenth Century Black America* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 3-18.

endurance, joy, provision, justice, and forgiveness. In this section, I review several of the key texts and the women's reflections upon them.[179]

The 23rd Psalm was the favorite Scripture listed by three of the eight women. During the civil rights era it was often learned and publicly recited during childhood at home, church, and in school. As a result this Psalm was one of the best-known and therefore most portable biblical texts in the Movement.

Lillian Sue Bethel shared this scripture, explaining that she believed she has lived out everything in the 23rd Psalm through her life experiences. Peggy Lucas recalled this scripture from the Movement because she felt that it covered all situations – of God providing shelter in stormy times, and of God providing everything for activists to keep calm amidst hard life choices.

> *1. The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.*
> *2. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters.*
> *3. He restoreth my soul: he leadth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.*
> *4. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.*
> *5. Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.*
> *6. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.*[180]

The women understood that the path towards freedom and justice required that they walk through some of the deepest valley experiences that America would undergo in the one hundred years since the emancipation of enslaved Blacks. White hatred was spewed at

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[179] The texts are all quoted from the King James Version (KJV) of the Bible which was the version used most often in Black Churches during the Civil Rights Era. Despite the antiquated language, the rhythm of this version allowed for easier memorization and recitation. Many older Black Christians today will still argue that the KJV is "the Lord's Bible," therefore they prefer to hear it read from over other more accurate and accessible translations.

[180] Psalm 23 (KJV).

them and pure evil was done towards them simply for wanting to change the imbalances and inequities of life. Each day that they went out as the first persons to integrated schools, as persons sitting-in with the goal of integrating interstate transit waiting rooms, and other public spaces, they faced manifestations of evil in what might be called the valley of the shadow of death.

Verses four through six of the psalm were especially important. Each time activists summoned strength by singing out loud or to themselves, "We are not afraid" in the face of evil, they also could recall the fourth verse of the 23rd Psalm which reminded them that despite evil God was with them, protecting, shielding, and comforting them like a shepherd does his sheep. When the women chose to go to restaurants where local and state laws prohibited them from sitting and eating with Whites, they recalled the fifth verse of the psalm, that God would prepare a table before them in the presence of their enemies. The promise of the sixth verse, that goodness and mercy would follow them, reinforced the belief that they were doing God's work, so God would remain with them.

Other experiences prompted women to rely on quite different scriptures. When A. Lenora Taitt-Magubane heard the White man at the entrance of the church in Atlanta wanting to keep her out of the church and promote segregation in heaven, she knew she was encountering evil. Taitt-Magubane drew on First Corinthians 13 to emphasize her love ethic as foundational for her understanding not only of God, but of how those who follow God should act.

> *1. Though I speak with the tongues of men and angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal.*
> *2. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing.*
> *3. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give*

> *my body to be burned and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing.*
> *4. Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up,*
> *5. Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil;*
> *6. Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in truth;*
> *7. Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things.*
> *8. Charity never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away.*
> *9. For we know in part, and we prophesy in part.*
> *10. But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away.*
> *11. When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things.*
> *12. For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known.*
> *13. And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity.*[181]

The words and actions of the racist White man at the church were unloving, and he likely sounded to her as sounding brass and tinkling cymbal – brash and discordant with the love of God.

The Corinthians text reminded Taitt-Magubane that the work she was doing would not mean anything if her motives were not centered in love. Any actions to draw attention to herself as one who was doing a great thing, would do a disservice to the good that she was attempting to accomplish. The most important portion of the scripture for Taitt-Magubane, was the thirteenth verse, "And now abideth faith, hope, and charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity." The charity that grounded her actions was built on her faith in God and her hope for the future, yet she knew that her faith and hope would not amount to much unless everything she did was centered in love.

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[181] I Corinthians 13 (KJV).

Love, as a central theme in the preaching of Martin Luther King, Jr. and others, was not passive but a potent living force. Throughout his speeches and writings, King identified love as the center of the nonviolent Civil Rights Movement. In earlier speeches, while establishing the Movement, he was careful to clarify that the love he referred to was not *eros*, which he understood as an aesthetic love, nor *philia*, which King explained as a reciprocal personal love between friends.[182] The love King promoted as the central driving force behind the Movement was *Agape* – an understanding, creative, redemptive good will for all. *Agape* is not a natural human love, but the love of God working in people's lives. For King it was *Agape* that would allow those who were struggling for justice to love the person while hating the bad deed that the person is doing.

Taitt-Magubane did not always accept what "De Lawd" said, as she and others jokingly referred to Martin Luther King, Jr., but like King she understood God's love as radical, complicated, and countercultural in many ways.

Marjorie Wallace Smyth listed both the 23rd Psalm and Proverbs 3:5-6 as inspirations for her involvement in the Movement. Like Taitt-Magubane, Smyth understood her actions to require guidance from God. This portion of Proverbs underscores both a need to trust in God and to rely on God for proper guidance in one's actions.

> *5. Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding.*
> *6. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.*[183]

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[182] Martin Luther King, Jr., *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King Jr.* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 1986), "The Power of Nonviolence" (1958), and "An Experiment in Love" (1958), 12-20.
[183] Proverbs 3:5-6 (KJV)

The ability to trust the Lord and not your own thoughts, inclinations, or even fears identifies the mindset of the person guided by God. God was a trustworthy guide even when the paths along which God directed a person led directly into the valley of the shadow of death.

In the experience of these women, the Lord did not always seem to speak immediately, sometimes causing uncertainty. Learning to wait on the Lord for guidance and strength was a skill that often needed to be acquired, especially when protests and Movement efforts extended from days to years. Beatrice Perry Soublet drew upon Isaiah 40:31 during her regular participation in the Movement in Greensboro.

> *31. But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint.*[184]

The Prophet Isaiah's imagery provided strength and endurance in the long struggles for freedom. Activists believed that the work that they were doing was the Lord's work, and that the Lord would move on their behalf, just as had been done on behalf of their fore parents during previous Black Freedom struggles.

The text promised that if they did not rely solely on themselves, but instead waited on the Lord to give them strength, their diminished capacity would be renewed. They would soar in their quests, run victoriously in their race, and walk towards justice without fainting. Soublet explains the verse's significance:

> God will always lift you up with wings like eagles,…that if you put your faith in God and you can move forward no matter how difficult the test…Those that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up on wings as eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and never faint, never tire. Because we used to sing "Walk and Never Tire" as a part of one of our songs. …If I had to

[184] Isaiah 40:31 (KJV).

> encapsulate the ideas of the Movement that you just have to keep going because your strength comes not from you anyway, but that if you trust in God that you are going in the right direction and doing what is just for God's people, God will be with you and will lift you up and you can run and not tire.[185]

The God described in this scripture strengthened both young and old, and gave the ability to keep marching on to freedom land, no matter how long or difficult the journey.

One of the many questions raised by the Civil Rights Movement is how women, men, and children could face the atrocities that they did and not turn to violence or allow the desire for revenge to consume them? While the Prophet Isaiah's words provided strength for the long journey. Bessie Sellaway's choice of Philippians 4:4 shows what shaped her:

> *4. Rejoice in the Lord alway: and again I say, Rejoice.*

The call to rejoice was not about rejoicing in one's own doing, or one's own accomplishments, but to rejoice in the Lord. This rejoicing was not contingent on whether or not things were going well or happy feelings abounded; those who were believers in the Lord were to rejoice all of the time.

Like Smyth, and Soublet, Sellaway realized that her ability to not respond in kind to the mean actions of Whites was not based on her own capacity to love, but that God expanded her capacity to love, even in the midst of confrontation. She explains, "hatred, meanness, love or whatever, it's contagious. It can get passed on until there's a break, until there's a cure for an ailment and when people don't see it or realize it, it's just a continuous participation without knowing."[186] As Sellaway reflected on reading

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[185] Beatrice Soublet interview with author, September 16, 2012.
[186] Ibid., 14.

Philippians, she knew that the joy the Apostle Paul names also had the potential to become contagious. Rejoicing in the Lord always despite pain inflicted by others allowed rejoicing rather than a violent response to become a practical strategy of resistance. The contagiousness of love and joy that she had been infected with in her community remained present even in the midst of contentious and hate filled situations. God did not change Sellaway's situation, but God changed her heart and subsequently changed her response to the situation. In her lived theology, there is a core understanding that while a situation does not necessarily change, one's perspective on and response to a situation can change when a woman focuses on her ability to find joy in the Lord.

Perhaps when we see historic footage of Blacks being struck down by Whites, but standing back up and brushing themselves off with a smile, their response is the result of their conscious choice to rejoice in the Lord with the belief that their ultimate goal was being fulfilled when they did not respond with violence. They could respond without violence because they understood that they were not operating on their own, but through the strength and guidance of God. The victory that the non-violent protestor possessed allowed them to find joy when they resisted the temptation to respond to the taunts, threats, slights, and blatant attacks.

Matthew 6:9-13 is another well-known text, one that Rose Schofield recalled as being important for her and many others during the Movement. This text focuses on the prayer Jesus Christ taught his disciples, and is commonly known as The Lord's Prayer, or as Schofield said, the "Our Father."

> *9. After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name.*
> *10. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.*
> *11. Give us this day our daily bread.*

> *12. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.*
> *13. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen.*[187]

When one's own words of prayer were unsure, and when one was in places where one needed God's presence, reciting scripture as prayer provided both a promise and prophecy for the past, present, and future.

Although traditional Black churches did not use a common book of prayer, they did turn frequently to many of the same scriptural prayers such as The Lord's Prayer. Much like the 23rd Psalm and Proverbs 3, this text portrays God as caring not only about an otherworldly heaven, but reminds readers that what God desired on earth ultimately would done. This God was a parental figure, a provider of the basic needs of each day. Schofield's scriptural prayer expected God to provide guidance and direction in the face of evil and temptations, and closed with the understanding that whatever was to be done, it was because of God's power and not solely hers.

Through the scriptures identified by the women as representative of their experiences and used by them during the Civil Rights Movement, there are a few themes that continue to appear. Themes of protection, love, trustworthy guidance, strength, endurance, joy, provision, justice, and forgiveness are observed in the scriptures of Psalm 23, I Corinthians 13, Proverbs 3:5-6, Isaiah 40:31, Philippians 4:6, and Matthew 6:9-13.[188]

God's protection in Psalm 23 is realized when encounters with enemies are the result of Divine preparation. Thanks to the presence and protection of God, walks through dark and troubling times are not filled with fear. It is God who prepares the table

[187] Matthew 6:9-13 (KJV).
[188] Some of these themes were also apparent in the lyrics of the Movement songs.

of provision in the presence of those who desire to do harm, and despite the discomfort likely on both sides, God provides a reserved seat at the table. God's protection does not mean that the presence of evil and potential harm is absent, but that God is there in the situation.

While most overt in the First Corinthians 13 text, within each of the scriptures resides a love ethic of God that is the greatest and most enduring of the themes that each of the others can be built upon. Songs, scriptures, and prayers return frequently to the theme of love as a source of comfort and strength in these women's fight for change. They accept God's trustworthy guidance in Proverbs 3 because in previous times when ways did not seem clear or sure, God was strong enough to lean on and sure enough to follow.

Biblical texts such as Isaiah 40 and personal lived experiences reveal that in the past even when natural strength was depleted, supernatural strength was renewed so that the long struggle could not only be endured but also completed. Joy in the book of Philippians was the result of changed perspectives in challenging situations, which maintained a focus on a joyful future. Through the Lord's Prayer women solicited provision, justice, and forgiveness beyond human ability. The scriptures these women recalled speak of encountering God as one who is present and attentive to the physical, emotional, and spiritual needs of the women.

Much like other theologies, scripture in a lived theology of justice and freedom is a foundational source. Women drew on scriptures that revealed the nature and character of God in their everyday lives as they struggled for justice and freedom.

*Prayers*

Through the prayers of the people, you can hear the hopes of the people. We see in their pleas for God to move and for freedom to be theirs a theology of a God who moves in the midst of human situations and is attentive to the cries of the people. The prayers of the people that were uttered to God silently in moments of fear and anxiety and those offered publicly in mass meetings, in pray-ins, on the steps of local and state government buildings, and in jails were generally extemporaneous prayers and were hence not written down or otherwise recorded. Marjorie Wallace Smyth remembers general themes of the prayers at mass meetings in Birmingham, "You know when you're fourteen, fifteen, that age, you think about all of them as you know, Lord have mercy on us and guide us and protect us, cover us with the blood of Jesus Christ, I can remember that."[189] Women's Political Council leader, Jo Ann Gibson Robinson, recalls spirited devotions of prayers and hymns during the mass meetings in Montgomery during the bus boycott. She notes, "Prayers were offered for 'endurance, tolerance, faith in God.' There were prayers for city commissioners; for 'misguided whites'; for the weak, and for all races and nations."[190] Prayers were not only for those participating in the activism, but also for Whites who were opposing the change Blacks sought.

One written prayer that was drafted in pencil by Martin Luther King, Jr. for an unknown occasion reads:

> O God our eternal Father, we praise thee for the gifts of mind with which thou hast endowed us. We are able to rise out of the half-realities of the sense world to a world of ideal beauty and eternal truth. Teach us, we pray thee, how to use this great gift of reason and imagination so that it shall not be a curse but a blessing. Grant us vision that shall lift

[189] Smyth, August 2009.
[190] Jo Ann Gibson Robinson, 62.

> us from worldliness and sin into the light of thine own holy presence. Through Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.[191]

King's prayer was a prayer of thanksgiving for mental capacities to see beyond the secular into the sacred. It was also a prayer of guidance that requested that God teach them how to use the gifts of reason and imagination in ways that would be blessings and not a curse. King's acknowledgement of a gift of imagination highlights one of the most powerful theological capacities that enabled the socio-political change necessary in society to be viewed as a possibility. King's prayer for vision that could lift them from where they were into God's own holy presence recognizes the need to see things not simply as they were through the eyes and experiences of those who were facing troubles in the world of darkness, but to see things more clearly through the eyes of God.

Marjorie Wallace Smyth believed that she and others were working on the side of God, and that their understanding of a God of justice was based in the authority they gained by walking with God. After participating in a mass meeting at a Baptist Church in downtown Birmingham, Smyth walked out of the church with others to begin their non-violent direct action demonstration. Across the street they saw Eugene "Bull" Connor directing the firemen to turn the fire hoses on them, saying "Get those niggers there," but as Smyth explains, "They turn on – there were long hoses and not a drop of water, but we were prayed up, I don't care what nobody say, we were just prayed up."[192] For Smyth, being "prayed up" meant that the words that were prayed in the church before walking out resulted in protection from God who heard their prayers and interceded on their

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[191] Martin Luther King, Jr., Handwritten prayer, date unknown. Transcription by AnneMarie Mingo. http://www.thekingcenter.org/archive/document/draft-prayer-given-dr-king Accessed September 18, 2012. Also see Lewis V. Baldwin, *Never to Leave Us Alone: The Prayer Life of Martin Luther King, Jr.* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2010).

[192] Smyth, 2009.

behalf. Smyth described herself and others as spiritual people whose prayers were powerful enough to temporarily stop the violence perpetrated against them, and prove that they were on God's side. That encouraged them to stay connected to a God who heard their prayers and responded directly in the midst of their struggles for justice and freedom.

As Smyth and others walked in the authority of God, even when professed Christians sought to do them harm, they believed that their God heard their prayers and protected them. They understood the impotence of the water hoses to be a display of God's power protecting them from evil. Such incidents shaped Smyth's understanding of God as a God of protection and justice. Communication with God through prayer was real and immediate for Smyth. She and others expected results from their fervent prayers in the mass meetings, because they believed God to be on their side.

Such prayer power occurred not only within the walls of the church, but also often in the streets or even in jail. A. Lenora Taitt-Magubane explained how those in jail for protesting were sometimes asked to pray for those in jail for other reasons. "…when people were going for trial or I guess hearings, before they would go … someone might come over to me and say, Lenora would you pray with me before I go?" After another student read something from the Bible, she would pray with the person before they went to trial. She often did not know until later why they were in jail, sometimes finding out it was for murder.[193] Others welcomed her prayers because they believed those like Taitt-Magubane were imprisoned for righteous reasons and consequently had God on their side.

[193] Taitt-Magubane, 6.

One such righteous leader and organizer in the Southwest Georgia movement was Prathia Hall. Her prayers and her preaching encouraged and influenced many within the Movement. Some of the women who had come to the South from the North to work for freedom in Southwest Georgia were particularly thought to have a holy boldness about them and power in their prayers.[194] Bernice Johnson Reagon notes that generally women did not pray publicly in church with the exception of perhaps on Saturdays. So when Reagon heard Prathia Hall and Kathleen Conwell pray, these young Black women both made a lasting impact on her. It is believed that King heard Hall praying one night at Mt. Olive Baptist Church in Terrell County, Georgia describing her dream with a repeated refrain of, "I have a dream," which King later incorporated into his famous speech.

Hall understood the power of prayer as a transformative element and a way to receive support. In 1962, she described how the fear of the residents led them to help the young activists like herself in the only way they knew how – through prayer. Hall described their experiences during voting drives, sharing "It's fear that slams the doors in our faces and hope that makes those same people whisper about us and get down on their knees and pray for us."[195] The hopes of the people were seen in their silent prayers for the students who were risking their lives to obtain the freedom and justice that these older people were too afraid to fight for themselves.

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[194] See Drew D. Hansen, *The Dream: Martin Luther King Jr., and the Speech that Inspired a Nation* (New York, NY: Harper Collins, 2003). In response to Courtney Lyon's paper on a panel at the Association for the Study of African American Life and History on September 28, 2012, Bernice Johnson Reagon shared that both Prathia Hall and Kathleen Conwell's public prayers included the phrase I have a dream while they were active Georgia, and Dr. King is said to have been present to hear both. It is known that King did not originate the phrase, but in the Black preaching tradition, borrowed it from the prayers that he heard prayed in Southwest Georgia. Therefore, King's use of the phrase could have come from one or both of the women. Their prayers were known to have moved people physically as they prayed with power and conviction. King's use of the phrase in sermons began in November 1962.

[195] Claude Sitton, Special to *The New York Times*, "VOTING DRIVE MET BY HOPE AND FEAR; Student Workers in Georgia Tell of Rights Campaign Hope for Negroes Seek Meaning in Lives U.S. Inquiry Under Way" September 11, 1962, Page 20

Prayer has a unique place in the lived theology of justice and freedom for being a very personal form of expression to God, and for being a two-way communication. Prayer is the way that God provided direct interaction with those who were praying. Whether done silently as a part of personal devotion, or publicly as a part of communal support and strengthening, prayer was a creative and often charismatic way for scripture to be invoked, Godly promises to be remembered, stories of past victories to be recalled, and messages of hope to be expressed. There was both an intimacy and a vulnerability to prayer when all hopes, fears, concerns, and needs were placed on the physical or metaphorical altar before God. There was also a strength and freedom in releasing concerns to God, who had proven to be more than able to handle things big and small in past freedom struggles, and was expected to do no less in their present struggles. Prayer was a method of personal and communal empowerment as a result of relationship with the God who heard and responded to their prayers, thus remaining active in the fight for justice and freedom.

Some songs, which I call prayer songs, formally included a prayer within them. One of the most notable prayer songs is found in the third verse of "Lift Every Voice and Sing." Written by James Weldon Johnson and put to music by his brother J. Rosamond Johnson, this song and prayer provided memory of God's deliverance in the past and hope for God's provision in the future.

> *God of our weary years, God of our silent tears,*
> *Thou who hast brought us thus far on the way;*
> *Thou who hast by Thy might, led us into the light,*
> *Keep us forever in the path, we pray.*
> *Lest our feet stray from the places, our God, where we met Thee.*
> *Lest our hearts, drunk with the wine of the world, we forget Thee.*

*Shadowed beneath Thy hand, may we forever stand,*
*True to our God, true to our native land.*[196]

The God of this prayer is a God who has been with those who have struggled through years of wearying labor and strain, the God who is aware of their tears, even when they went unnoticed by others.

Though not often noted as being a part of the songs of the mass meetings, the women I interviewed recalled "Lift Every Voice and Sing" as a song that was sung so regularly in school during assemblies and other public events that the lyrics and melody became a part of the communal repertoire that could be drawn upon when needed. Other prayer songs women recalled from my research as speaking to them during trying times included "Have Thine Own Way Lord," and Martin Luther King, Jr.'s favorite song, "Precious Lord, Take My Hand," that he often asked Mahalia Jackson to sing.[197]

Coretta Scott King wrote beautifully about the power and influence of prayer in the struggle for freedom and justice. "Prayer is how we open our hearts to God, how we make that vital connection that empowers us to overcome overwhelming obstacles and become instruments of God's will…prayer gives us strength and hope, a sense of divine companionship, as we struggle for justice and righteousness."[198] King understood both through the personal prayers she had offered since her childhood and through the collective prayers she experienced during the Movement that God was a conversation partner who not only heard the prayers but responded on behalf of those praying.

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[196] James Weldon Johnson, "Lift Every Voice and Sing."
[197] Songs recalled by Deborah Stuckey and Lillie McGowan respectively in interviews with author.
[198] Coretta Scott King in *Standing in the Need of Prayer: A Celebration of Black Prayer* (New York, NY: Free Press, 2003), x.

As with so many aspects of the Civil Rights Movement, public prayers were often focused on communal needs of the people and not the individual praying. Prayers were offered for transformation of the oppressor as well as endurance for the oppressed as they fought for a better future. As Coretta Scott King put it, "Throughout the movement, we prayed for greater human understanding. We prayed for the safety of our compatriots in the freedom struggle. We prayed for victory in our nonviolent protests, for brotherhood and sisterhood among people of all races, for reconciliation and the fulfillment of the Beloved Community."[199] The prayers of the people revealed the hopes and desires of the people, and their expectations of God to hear and respond.

**Conclusion**

A lived theology of justice and freedom is a liberation theology that is constructed in the midst of contested spaces. It is a potent theology experienced during the Civil Rights Movement through experience, songs, scriptures, and prayers. Women who became active in the Civil Rights Movement marched, sat-in, organized, went to jail, pushed limits to showcase injustice, and did anything else they could to participate in the active *doing* of justice. They believed that as they were doing the work of justice, they were doing the work of God. They understood that efforts to obtain justice without love, would perhaps lead to a legal justice where signs were removed or laws were changed. However justice with love would lead to a spiritual justice where hearts were changed in ways so that with or without laws loving and just actions would take place. For these women, love enabled them to endure the hate directed toward them and to respond with a loving kindness that unsettled some oppressors whose own hatred then had to be

[199] Ibid.

reassessed. In all this, Black Churchwomen knew that they were not able to show justice and loving kindness on their own, but thanks to God.

The God they followed was not a distant otherworldly God, but one who would walk with them through shadows of death so that they would not fear the evil that surrounded them as they took their stands for justice and freedom. God was actively involved with them because God loved them. Thanks to their understanding of God as a God of protection, love, trustworthy guidance, strength, endurance, joy, provision, justice and forgiveness, they chose to act in a way that reflected the influence of a just, kind, and loving God who would be present with them.

The women's hope and belief in a God who could turn things around co-existed with their actual oppressive reality. They bore witness to God's ability, invoked in Romans 8:18 that "the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared to the glory which shall be revealed in us."[200] The God who had been with the Israelites as they suffered unjustly under the hand of Pharaoh was the same God who had been with their foremothers who had suffered unjustly under the hand of American slaveholders. And the women believed it was this same God who was with them in the moments when they suffered under the hand of Jim and Jane Crow Segregation.

This on-the-ground understanding of God is constructed through, 1) Experiences that reveal God's loving character, 2) Songs which reinforce the guidance and direction, companionship and commitment, and provision and protection of God, 3) Scriptures that take seriously God's love, guidance, strength, provision and protection, and 4) Prayers which allow vulnerable communication with a God of comfort. This collective understanding of God based in the lived experiences of the women gave them a

[200] Romans 8:18 (KJV).

conviction that God was a personal God who was with them as they struggled for justice and freedom. This God would not leave them in the situations they found themselves in, but would remain with them along the journey. These understandings of God revealed in relationship through daily experiences and encounters are not experienced by only one group or in one period, but are communicated across generations as a testimony to the power and love of God for struggling people.

## Chapter 3 - Constructing a Liberative Social Ethic of Compulsion

Black Churchwomen in the Civil Rights Movement recognized God as a God of justice and freedom. In the previous chapter, I discussed the sources that these women drew upon to ground their lived theology of justice and freedom. This chapter builds on this theology by developing a liberative social ethic from actions of Black Churchwomen who embrace the lived theology's liberative understanding of God. The lived experiences of Black Churchwomen who were actively involved in the Civil Rights Movement reveal qualities that are both virtuous and liberative.

My analysis and interpretation of these women's liberative resistance to oppression through the lens of virtue ethics highlight the following virtues: freedom faith, liminal assessment, courageous resistance, and theo-moral imagination. These virtues, which characterize the experiences of Black Churchwomen during the Movement, are the basis of a liberative social ethic of compulsion. I begin the constructive task by discussing the ways in which the Black Churchwomen's ethic is a virtue-based social ethic with reference to some of the historical context. In the balance of this chapter, I will present the virtues using the women's oral histories and discuss the liberative social ethic that these Black Churchwomen bequeath us.

### *Virtues and Contexts*

Philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre states that, "a virtue is an acquired human quality the possession and exercise of which tends to enable us to achieve those goods which are internal to practices and the lack of which effectively prevents us from achieving any

such goods."[201] MacIntyre connects virtue with the quest for the good or for goods, and further asserts that virtues are best constructed and understood within their context. It is therefore important to foreground the contextualization of virtues instead of implying that there is a universal normative description developed outside of a particular context, tradition, or worldview.

Social ethicist Peter Paris' scholarship on moral virtues grounded in an African cosmology is a prime example of this last point. Paris identifies moral virtues that are rooted in a particular African centered spirituality. This means that the virtues of an African American social ethic differ significantly from other traditions because they draw from African and African American cultural experiences. In addition, African and African American virtue ethics have the promotion and preservation of the Black community as its highest moral good.[202]

The socio-ethical actions of women in the Civil Rights Movement were developed as practices that were taught and reinforced within segregated community structures such as the Black Churches, Black Civic Organizations (Masonic and Greek organizations), and all Black schools (public education and Historically Black Colleges and Universities). Blacks desired to develop as moral and respectable people; thus, they strove to act in ways that were not detrimental to the perception of the race.[203] As a result, the community often could privilege certain White bourgeois morals.

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[201] Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981, 1984, 2007), 191.

[202] Peter J. Paris, *The Spirituality of African Peoples: The Search for a Common Moral Discourse* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1995); and Peter J. Paris, *Virtues and Values: The African and African American Experience* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2004), 12-15. Also, see Samuel Roberts, *In the Path of Virtue: The African American Moral Tradition* (Cleveland, OH: The Pilgrim Press, 1999).

[203] Also consider remnants Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham's concept of Blacks politics of respectability that she offers in *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 185-229.

However, there was also a strong heritage of ongoing collective values practiced in the segregated Black communities and their churches. The Black community in the mid-twentieth century was a centralized community where the fortune or misfortune of one was felt by all. An African-centered worldview of the village remained strongly intact within the Black community at that time. Neighbors were expected to get involved in the moral formation of youth, chastising them wherever they were if they were witnessed doing something that did not live up to the community's values. The values that were passed on included support, uplift, and pride, with anything that brought shame of the community or family being strongly discouraged by everyone in the community.

Marjorie Smyth describes the Collegeville community that she grew up in Birmingham:

> It was a working community and it was a family…I knew that if I walked from one end of the block to the other end, by the time I got to my aunt's house, the lady in the middle of the block could tell my aunt what I had done – how I pulled my skirt up to my bra to have my skirt real short. But by the time I got to my aunt's house it was pulled back down…And knew how we painted our lips red. Then by the time I got to my aunt's house I had to take it off…But it was community and we were a village…[when] they had a fire, we heard the fire truck, we all ran. The whole community right there they helped out. It was always one. We had a garden…But it was nothing for [the lady across the street] to ask for tomatoes.[204]

The Black community was one centralized place where neighbors were like family, and support was provided regularly in a variety of forms.

During nonviolent direct action training in mass meetings and workshops, Martin Luther King, Jr. and other Movement leaders emphasized particular ways of acting that reinforced virtues of love, courage, and hope. While these are classical virtues, they are

[204] Marjorie Wallace Smyth, 10-11.

also a part of the Black Church and community heritage. These communal values are found in the work of Black Churchwomen, and they are core to the ethics practiced by women in this study. These values connected with the lived experiences of Black Churchwomen during the Civil Rights Movement to construct a liberative social ethic of compulsion.

**Components of a Liberative Social Ethics**

The virtues drawn from the cultural experiences of Black Churchwomen in the Civil Rights Movement, also comprise the four components that I offer here as a liberative social ethics which include: freedom faith, liminal assessment, courageous resistance, and theo-moral imagination. The women's understanding of God, as explicated in the lived theology of justice and freedom, pushes them to act in ways that rely on the faith they have inherited, assess their experiences critically, resist oppression, and do the work necessary to make the just world they imagine a reality. All four components are inspired by a compelling belief that liberative action is something that the women had to do.

*Freedom Faith*

Freedom faith, the first component of this liberative social ethic, is central to the desires each woman felt for something better than the conditions under segregation. In the documentary, "This Far by Faith," activist, pastor, and professor Prathia Hall uses the term "Freedom Faith" in a way that describes what many women in my study also experienced. As she shared in the film:

> The local people had wisdom of the ages. They had lived in this system of brutal racial injustice all of their lives, and for their generations past. How had they done that? They had done that because each generation had passed on to the next generation this thing that I

> call *freedom faith*. This sense that I'm not a nigger, I'm not a gal, I'm not a boy. I am God's child. And as God's child, that means that I am everything that I'm supposed to be.
>
> It may cost my job, it may cost my life, but I want to be free, and I want my children to be free. So I'm going down to the courthouse, and I'm going to sign my name. And I'm going to trust God to take me there and I'm going to trust God to bring me back. That's courage. That's faith. That's freedom faith.[205]

Faith, freedom, and courage are themes that run throughout both published accounts and my own interviews of Black Churchwomen during the Civil Rights Movement. Very often in the stories I heard, each of these themes would work together to illuminate freedom faith, rooted in the women's understanding of God and their desire to work to bring about change.

Freedom faith is rooted in two elements that were central to the very core of the being of Black women in America: 1) an inborn desire for freedom and 2) an inherited legacy of faith that insisted upon God's promise for freedom. Whether expressed in the songs, prayers, scriptures, or general experiences, a desire to be free was no longer a fleeting thought of a future possibility, as it was perhaps under slavery. This desire to be free was instead linked to a firm belief and understanding that the time for change, the time for justice, and the time for freedom is <u>now</u>. *Chronos* time had given way to *kairos* time, and the bondage and limitations that God's children had faced for centuries in the United States were now being brought to light and challenged with a collective boldness that had not existed before. These women and others knew that they would have freedom soon because the time had come for them to join together and act on their faith.

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[205] Prathia Hall, "This Far by Faith" Episode 4, *Freedom Faith*, Transcript pages, 9-10. Emphasis added.

Ruby Hurley, Youth Director and then Southeast Regional Director for the NAACP, was an active leader in the southern Movement. She often used the language of Black churchgoers to offer a challenge of active faith in the fight for freedom. In an interview about her activism and recruitment with the NAACP, she explained her strategy:

> I did use the Bible, and I found this effective in saying to our people, 'You go to church on Sunday, or you go every time the church doors are open. You say 'amen' before the minister has even had the word out of his mouth. Many times you don't know what you're saying 'amen' to, but you're still saying 'amen'. Yet you tell me you're afraid. Now, how can you be afraid and be honest when you say, 'my faith looks up to thee', or when you say that God's going to take care of you? If you don't believe it, then you're not really being the Christian you say you are…Then, I've also talked about – still do, as a matter of fact – the business of what Christianity really means, whether they really will walk on streets paved with gold, and how important is that when you can't walk on streets paved with concrete down here; and drinking milk and honey when your children don't have good, substantial meals on this earth. Isn't this more important? So I used the Bible, really, as a basis in dealing with our people.[206]

Hurley pushed the boundaries of faith by challenging those who said they believed to act on their beliefs, so that they would experience freedom and justice not only in an otherworldly sense in heaven, but in their everyday lives. She made it clear to believers that freedom was inextricably linked to faith, and that faith had real world relevancy.

A. Lenora Taitt-Magubane called this faith "blind faith…when you believe in what you are doing, you don't have the fear."[207] She noted that as students, they focused more on the cause than the consequences, so their faith in the righteousness of the cause blinded them. This blind faith allowed them to overlook many of the life threatening

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[206] Transcript of an interview with Mrs. Ruby Hurley; Director, Southeastern Regional Office of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People; John H. Britton, Interviewer, Atlanta, GA, January 26, 1968, Howard University Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, 15.
[207] Taitt-Magubane, 8.

actions (that gave pause to the people Hurley challenged) the students embarked upon as activists with the goal of changing society.

Because the women in this study learned in their homes and churches that they were equal to Whites in the eyes of God, those who actively resisted did so in ways that challenged situations and structures that deemed them unequal. How could a God who created them all in God's image say that some should be free to flourish, while others should be given the leftovers, provided intentionally lower quality materials with which to build their lives, and be expected to accept positions of inferiority? Freedom faith challenged inequalities based on the social construct of race.[208] Freedom faith was an active and critical faith.

Beatrice Soublet relied on the faith taught in her family to help her to stand up to injustice in the same way that her parents and grandparents had done. Her great grandfather had been enslaved, freed and then resold into slavery for $1,650, a price Soublet will never forget. After emancipation, he had a vision for how he wanted his family to be able to live and exist, so he promoted education in his family and his community, and fought daily for justice, becoming the first Black mayor of Donaldson, Louisiana.

When asked why she thought her family was active in so many forms of social change and uplift, Soublet shared:

> I think that my family's faith in the church and feeling…that right will always—faith in God, faith in—if you're on the right side, eventually if you're on the side of justice and goodness, eventually it comes through. It's gonna come through. I think that would have to have sustained them… Where that desire to do and to feel that things could get better. I just think it's faith. I really do, and just—and then what else are you

[208] Gender was not challenged as much by this virtue.

> going to do? Just what else are you going to do? …You can't just give up, so I guess that might have been what pushed them on.[209]

Soublet recounted how her family had conversations around the table regarding the difficulties Blacks faced in a segregated society. She explains that her beliefs reflect those conversations and her family's legacy of relying on faith to fight for freedom: "You know we can do better, we can be better, and we can make society better."[210] Soublet continues today to rely on her faith in God as she engages in contemporary fights for freedom.

Yet freedom faith did not only mean placing faith in God; it also meant having faith in themselves. In their youth, the women said they actually did not always reference God as the source of action, whereas as adults they understood the hand and will of God to have been on their side throughout their involvement. Some women, like Lillian Sue Bethel who walked away from the church as a young adult, still retained a belief that God was with them. She reflects, "it's interesting how God plans things when you don't know what's happening."[211] The women believed that things could not remain the way they were. They had faith that if they stepped out on behalf of God to change things, even at the risk of their lives, God would remain with them. In search of ultimate freedom, by leaps of faith, they often took risks in the liminal spaces between the reality of the present and their belief in the future.

*Liminal Assessment*

Liminal assessment is a critical step in the development of a liberative social ethic. In his 1964 essay, "Betwixt and Between: The Liminal Period in *Rites de Passage*," Victor Turner writes of a period of margin or "liminality" as persons undergo

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[209] Soublet, 7, 8
[210] Ibid., 8.
[211] Bethel, 5.

initiations as rites of passage.[212] The liminal space is a time of almost but not yet during which initiates are living in or between multiple worlds at the same time. For Turner, during the liminal period, the subject is "structurally, if not physically, 'invisible.'" These invisible beings in transition he characterizes as having nothing – "no status, property, insignia, secular clothing, rank, kinship position, nothing to demarcate them structurally from their fellows." They are in a sort of "sacred poverty" as they transition through a liminal space.[213]

These attributes of structural and physical invisibility can be ascribed to many women who existed in liminal spaces because of both their race and gender during the civil rights era.[214] Liminality is a threshold space, a crossing from one reality into the next.[215] The women of my study were often in the liminal space of almost, but not yet achieving full freedom and wholeness of dignity in the broader American society.

Liminality is a stage of reflection and assessment; one leaves behind old habits, and considers the society, the cosmos, and powers that generate and sustain the persons who are in the liminal space.[216] Women during the Civil Rights Movement realized that they were in spaces that were at times foreign to them, yet they reflected on what could be and envisioned a society known for real justice and freedom.

By virtue of their position in society, Black women were often in a location of "almost but not yet" in their work environments, in the church, and the wider community.

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[212] Victor Turner, *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual*, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1967), 93-111.
[213] Ibid., 95, 98-99
[214] It is not my aim to suggest that male leaders within the Civil Rights Movement were not also in liminal spaces as they too encountered access to new areas in the broader social and political arena. However, the women in my study could be doubly marginalized as Blacks within a White society as women within a movement with male leadership.
[215] The Latin *Limen*, meaning threshold, is the root of liminal and liminality.
[216] Turner, 105.

In general, they were not feared as much as Black men who were prohibited from interactions with White women, through the ideological framing of the alleged sexual danger Black men posed. Black women were "trusted" to do menial and often invisible work in the homes and businesses of Whites.[217] White women and men openly made plans around Black women that might negatively impact the Black community, assuming that Black women could not think critically; but many Black women were smart enough to carry information back to the Black community.

Women's Political Council leader, Jo Ann Gibson Robinson, shared the experiences of Black women that were relayed to her during the Montgomery Bus Boycott. In one such instance, a Black maid expressed love for the White family that she worked for and she believed that they loved her too. Unbeknownst to each other the husband and wife would both give the maid a few extra dollars for the boycott. This Black maid's liminal position became obvious when the family that she worked for entertained their White neighbors. Robinson explains:

> Then, when neighbors visited this home to deplore the boycott activities of the audacious blacks, the man and wife joined in the conversation as if they felt the same way. When she, the maid, was called in to bring food or drinks to the guests, each of the two hosts would wink at her to assure her that they were merely being polite hosts.[218]

She felt close with the family and loved them; the family financially supported the boycott, yet in the presence of other Whites, despite such winks of supposed assurance,

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[217] Although work in those places at times put Black women in danger of undesired sexual advances from White men. Also see Danielle L. McGuire, *At the Dark End of the Street: Black Women, Rape, and Resistance – a New History of the Civil Rights Movement from Rosa Parks to the Rise of Black Power* (New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 2010).

[218] Jo Ann Gibson Robinson, *The Montgomery Bus Boycott and the Women Who Started It: The Memoir of Jo Ann Gibson Robinson*, 108.

both the guests and the employers who did not acknowledge and speak up for her and others rendered this Black woman and her desires for justice and freedom invisible.

Deborah Stuckey, a current member of First A.M.E. Bethel in Harlem, grew up in Bishopville, South Carolina, where her grandmother babysat the children of the KKK's Grand Wizard in that area. She recalls her grandmother trying to have Deborah and her sister babysit also, but she refused.

> My grandmother used to babysit for…the Grand Wizard; he used to be the Mayor. The Mayor was Bold Smith, I never forget his name… and she used to say, well you know, if you want to make some extra money you can both babysit the kid and I said, I am not babysitting those, excuse my language, little white brats because they were terrible. You know, you'd babysit them and they would want to kick you and I said I can't do it, mom, I can't do it. And I stuck with that and she didn't make us. She just said, okay, well, you know, so and so needs you to babysit, I was never one that she demanded to do it because I was sort of … like the militant, … with the afro and the whole thing. … It was something that she just instilled, you say well, I may not like what you say, but I respect it. I don't want y'all to hold nothing in, speak your mind but be respectful in speaking it.[219]

Stuckey's grandmother respected her choice, and did not force Deborah to accept the same things that she accepted. She encouraged Deborah to speak out respectfully no matter the situation. This helped Stuckey to understand that she had the right to see things from her perspective without feeling a need to submit to the views of others. Later she would go against the wishes of her grandmother and march in protest of the racist acts taking place in Bishopville, because although she understood that a portion of the family's income came from the pocket of the Klan, she refused to remain silent in the face of injustice.

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[219] Deborah Stuckey, Transcript of First A.M.E. Bethel Focus Group, 15, 16.

A. Lenora Taitt-Magubane's experience at the entrance of a White church when the White man told her she and other Blacks could not come in to pray and worship, was a liminal one on the basis of which she assessed the role of Christianity and real equality in Christ. Walking up the steps of the White church became a boundary crossing experience – after encountering the White man Lenora made a personal commitment that while she had been turned away from worshipping she would not turn back from what became a commitment to seek equality everywhere, even in the church. When she returned to her own community, she could not live as if she had never been exposed to the hatred from racist White Christians. Lenora's understanding of Christianity and justice was forever changed at the threshold of that White church on a Sunday morning in Atlanta.

Black women were in a liminal space of being neither fully free nor fully constrained. Having moved mentally if not physically, Black women had left their original space in society, but had not fully arrived where they were going. In these liminal spaces, knowledge that is obtained is not simply information, but intrinsically changes one's being. They did not accept things as they were nor did they see the future through rose-colored glasses. Instead, they assessed the two worlds from a liminal or in between position that provided unique points of critique and engagement with society.

Women in both the northern and southern United States were able to envision new possibilities thanks, in part, to the physical bodies and intellectual ideas traveling "Up South" to New York and other northern cities, and then in response sending letters and Black newspapers back down South to South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, and so

forth.[220] However, when Ruby Hurley addressed people who said that outside agitators were coming and stirring things up, she said: "nobody has to tell anybody that they hurt…I might need some help in learning how to get the foot off my neck, but I knew that I hurt. And this is the way that I found it with Negroes in the South. They know that things were not right, but they didn't quite know how to go about effecting changes."[221] Gaining tools, resources, and masses of forward acting persons is what they needed to transition fully from the liminal space of the almost but not yet.

Many of the women in my study were operating in a liminal period that at times lasted for decades as they fought for a justice that they could imagine but could not quite obtain. Some of the women described liminal situations in which they did not fully understand the benefits of what they were fighting for or the risks that they were taking as they moved from one place to the next. Many later acknowledged this risk taking as a form of youthful naïveté that actually becomes one of the helpful aspects of liminal assessment.

Liminal assessment is a reflexive act that happens when a person in the process of transitioning from one place to another lacks the ability both to return to the previous position and to enter the new place. Once aware of the new possibilities after their mind, spirit, and desires have been stretched, it is not possible for that person to return to their previous state the same way. While reflexive, liminal assessment does not simply happen from a current location looking backwards, but with an eye forward towards what is to come.

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[220] Many women in New York spoke of having conversations while they were still living in the South about the type of social progress that was being made in the city. Often family members who had gone moved up to New York because of better job opportunities, sent back copies of Black Newspapers such as *The New York Amsterdam News*, a newspaper founded in 1909 by a Black man from South Carolina.
[221] Ruby Hurley, Howard University Moorland-Spingarn Center Archives, 10.

Assessment implies that those who were in those liminal positions were making a determination about what they could see and what they would or would not do about the knowledge obtained by what they saw or experienced. Their liminal, in-between, position provides them with more clarity and it allows them to see more than one side at the same time. In their liminal spaces, these women were often able to envision and imagine new options based on the insights and perspectives they gained by straddling several perspectives. During the Civil Rights Movement, Black women were in unique liminal positions that enabled them to envision justice, and then to do the work to reconstruct societies broken by injustice.

Taitt-Magubane describes one of the times when she was in jail and the found herself making an assessment in a liminal space that she knew would allow for a timely response to her condition:

> The next day the head of the prison came in and he came through, 'how are you all girls doing?' Everything was open. The showers were like here and the bars were right there, so anyone could just walk, you know, anything to destroy your dignity. And he came and he said, 'how is everything going?' And I said everything would be fine–and I think he had a *New York Post* reporter with him and someone else. He was showing off, you know, we treat our prisoners very humanely. And I said everything would be fine if we could have–you know, I told him about the canteen. I said, but you know, we're students and we need our books and they took the books away from us. While he's saying that, I'm looking over and seeing the reporter writing down everything, and the man is turning red and five minutes later the lady was mumbling 'you all come out here and get your books.' And we came and got our books.[222]

Despite the thoughts and expectations of the White jailer, this young college student understood that she was in a liminal position in jail. By using her voice in the presence of the *New York Post* reporter to appeal to the jailer for more humane conditions (receiving

[222] Taitt-Magubane, 5-6

access to their books and other items), she and other students could transition to a better situation.

Liminal assessment resulted in a vision that saw beyond the already to imagine the possible. What the women could clearly see and envision enabled them to also courageously and strategically resist the things that blocked the vision, – working to help turn their visions into a reality.

*Courageous Resistance*

Adding the verse "We are not afraid" to the singing of *We Shall Overcome*, acknowledged that there was reason to be afraid to stand up and speak out against injustice. In their courageous fight for justice and freedom Black Churchwomen often were resisting people who knew them and their families, or knew the schools and colleges they attended, or even where they worked and lived. Often the simple act of stepping up, standing with a sign, or marching with a group could result in violence and arrest. Many of the young women who were active in the Movement in college were first generation college students. Resisting oppression and committing acts that could bring shame on a family was a serious thing that took courage to do.

Even when the civil rights activities were in large public groups, anonymity was rarely possible since photographs of these events – particularly of arrests - were often published in newspapers and magazines. The actions of Schofield and Taitt-Magubane were photographed and printed in *The Daily Journal* newspaper of Elizabeth, NJ and *Jet* magazine respectively.[223] The publicity surrounding the arrests of Lillian Sue Bethel in Albany, GA, Peggy Lucas in Birmingham, AL, Rose Schofield in Elizabeth, NJ, Bessie Sellaway in Atlanta, GA, Beatrice Soublet in Greensboro, NC, and A. Lenora Taitt-

[223] *Elizabeth Daily News*, August 9, 1963, *Jet* Magazine March 31, 1960.

Magubane in Albany, GA, meant that their names and other information were known and could possibly be used against them and their families or the schools they attended. Some family members saw the arrests as badges of honor. Yet in other cases, the arrests records of the young women brought shame to some families, and also put future careers in jeopardy.

Knowing these possibilities, Peggy Lucas nonetheless made the courageous decision to commit an act that would likely cause her to be arrested and taken to jail. She prepared for her time in jail and told her father that she was going to go sit-in so she could get arrested. Peggy recalls:

> I was probably about 16, 17. And he was a very proud man, and he would talk about how things were and how, you know, the next generation could make it better. So I remember the morning I went to jail. I said to him…daddy well I think I'm going to jail. They came out to Miles and they asked some of the students to participate in the sit-ins; and I had my little personal items together and he just looked. He just looked. He didn't say yes and he didn't say no. I know he was proud, and so he was. He was very proud.[224]

The arrest became a badge of honor. After Peggy's arrest, her older sister also committed an act in order to be arrested and be able to support Peggy in jail with her presence. Lucas' courage sparked action in her sibling and pride in her activist father.

Although Beatrice Soublet grew up with a family of social and political activists, she was not initially sure how they would respond to her actions. Nevertheless, she courageously resisted, potentially risking reprimand by White society, her college administrators, and her family. Beatrice Soublet describes a time when she was home in Louisiana from Bennett College for the holidays and understood that her family embraced her activism:

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[224] Lucas, 8.

> I came home and it must have been for Christmas and so my uncle was asking me, 'sing some of those songs you all used to sing with the movement', and they were really proud of me. I had no idea what my father, what my people would say because I wasn't going to call anybody and ask them should I go sit in? I had no idea, but I knew it was something I had to do and it was something that I did. It was important.[225]

That her family supported her actions spurred Soublet on to become even more committed to the fight for justice and freedom when she returned to Greensboro, North Carolina.

Courageous resistance takes place both among groups and in individuals; it marks a move beyond the space of naïveté that can be a part of liminal assessment. Courage to resist also requires courage to risk. Many of these acts of resistance might on the surface seem benign, but even the seemingly small acts of sitting in a seat on a bus, walking into a door of a business, or praying at the altar in a church could and did result in emotional, physical, and spiritual harm to those acting.

The company of others resisting often strengthened an individual's resolve to resist. Beatrice Soublet recalls her first arrest when she was a student at Bennett College in Greensboro, NC.

> So it was a Thanksgiving weekend or something and they had had this big ad in the paper. Bring your family to dinner at S&W Cafeteria, so we had with us a young man who was a Quaker. He was a European American guy, and so we—there were 50 of us in all that were arrested, so I think all 50 of us. Yeah. So we all came and we sat down at the seats in these people's cafeteria, and I'm reading my book and he said, this guy, 'I brought my family. You advertised. I brought my family for Thanksgiving dinner.' 'Oh no. We don't serve colored,' so we just sat and we sat and we knew we'd be arrested.

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[225] Soublet, April 14, 2010, 3.

> We just sat and we sat until the police came and people were eating around us and people were looking at us like we were inhuman. What are you doing here, you must be crazy kind of thing, but again, I didn't make eye contact with anybody. My little face was right in my book, and then the police came and took us away and there were other people who—I'm not sure if they—they must have been outside while we were inside because they were singing. They were outside. I remember the singing, and so some people were not ever to have come in and sat down…

The organization and planning of the sit-in ensured that there would be audible support for the fifty students sitting inside the cafeteria. The courage of those sitting inside sparked courage for those students who remained outside singing freedom songs while they stood in harm's way on the outside when the police were called in for those on the inside.

However, Soublet felt a shift when she realized that she would be arrested.

> Then when we came outside and the people were singing *Ain't Going to Let Nobody Turn Me Around, Turn me Around* and we're kind of singing or at least in your head you're singing with them. You're aware of what's going on with you that these police are taking you, but the song is still resonating. The song, you hear them singing and you feel the song and then bam, that door closed. I can't—it was a sound—the sound of the door closing, that combination, that door closing, which was a literal separation from these other people and emotional separation in a sense from your support, the music. It was just overwhelming for just—for that moment, and I do think that that professor was there. Her name was Elizabeth Lizner, I think, because she saw in my eyes for just that moment a kind of shock. Bam! And I remember her reaching her hand out or something and we were both saying to each other it's going to be alright. It was kind of like now do you realize what you have really done.
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> You know, it's one thing to decide you're going to stand out and sing somewhere or hold a picket sign even if you're standing up to people that are saying unpleasant things. That's one thing, but now you have

> separated yourself and you don't know where you're going and what's going to happen to you.[226]

As long as Soublet was with the larger group and could hear the singing of those who were also supporting them outside of the restaurant, she remained courageous. It was when the separation happened, when the doors of the paddy wagon slammed and muted the supportive singing of others, that Beatrice began to realize her collective act could have unknown individual consequences. Although her worst fears of being taken somewhere that others would not know about and having something terrible done to her were not realized, she understood well how the powerful and strategic support of others, particularly in this case the professor, reinforced her own courage.

Soublet's experience, along with that of others, indicates that there was a reciprocal and also contagious nature to the courageous resistance that took place during the Movement. Much like a hot coal that grows into a fire when in close proximity to other coals but quickly dies out when alone, courage sparked courage, and resistance sparked resistance.

Lillian Sue Bethel describes encouraging others on her college campus to get involved and not sit back. Her experiences in New York City protesting with the Freedom Riders, before returning to Albany, Georgia for school helped her to understand that there were persons throughout the nation who were also engaged in actions against the injustices and inequalities they faced.[227] She wanted to be an active part of the change that was taking place.

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[226] Ibid., 11, 14.

[227] Also see Raymond Arsenault, *Freedom Riders: 1961 and the Struggle for Racial Justice* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2006), 452-510.

Bethel was older than many students at Albany State, and her life experiences meant others viewed her as a trusted resource. Knowing that she was looked up to, she used her relationships with younger students at Albany State to convince them to become involved in the things that she was doing:

> There was a young lady in school, Tootie, we always called her Tootie…. She and a couple of others who were younger than me we had developed a relationship and I could talk to them and like if they knew I was going I could get them to go and would ask them to get other folks to try to go, that kind of thing… because we had a relationship it was easier to talk to them and get them to go and say well, see, you know we need to do this we ought not to be doing this and blah, blah, blah. And they joined me in going to whatever marches we had and to the meetings and what have you. In fact when I left school I think they were still involved.[228]

Bethel understood her power to influence other students. She also knew that the younger students would have more courage to fight if they did their resistance work as a part of a group, so she recruited them. For Lillian Sue, who had worked for a number of years before returning to school, learning was not limited to the college classroom, but included active social involvement for the common good.

Unlike Soublet and Bethel who were college students when they were active, the experiences of Rose Schofield were unique because of her young age and the structure and organization of the NAACP in Elizabeth, New Jersey. Before she could participate in activities that might result in her arrest, she had to have a consent form signed by an adult guardian. Her mother, aunt, and grandmother did not support her participation, and were afraid for her and others who sought to resist Whites in New Jersey. However, her grandfather signed the consent form required by the NAACP so that Rose could actively participate in different protests and gatherings throughout the city.

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[228] Bethel, 12.

The early support of Schofield's grandfather was significant and remained consistent; when she was arrested, he was the one who walked to two different jails to find her so that she could be released into his custody.

> We had two police stations in town and my grandfather was supposed to come and pick me up. He went to the *wrong* place, so *everybody* got picked up but me and then the police started teasing me…They said I don't think anybody is coming for you and I was like yeah my grandfather is coming for me, [they said] no, they don't want you and I'm like maybe they don't want me and I started crying and everything. And then my grandfather finally got there and he said where were you, and I was like here, where were you? We were in there fussing at each other. I said why didn't you come get me. They said you didn't want me. He said because I went to the other police department… My grandfather just didn't know. He went to the wrong one. And they didn't drive, so he had to walk all the way uptown and then come back to midtown where I was staying at the police station.[229]

Schofield's grandfather's support went beyond signing a form so that she could participate, to doing whatever was necessary to retrieve her after she was arrested for her actions. Schofield knew she did not have full support from the women in her family, but knowing that her grandfather was behind her gave her the courage to stay in the fight for justice as she and others resisted the White establishment in New Jersey.

None of the women in my study admitted going to events with the intention of having the spotlight and attention placed on them as individuals. At times their actions were as a part of groups that they organized or of which they were a part, and at other times they acted without any others there to support or even bear witness in the event that something went wrong. Their courage was in the face of physical, emotional, and spiritual risk, yet they continued to resist. The courage to resist required the courage to act.

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[229] Schofield, 15.

The actions the women I interviewed recalled about the Civil Rights Movement were often a continuation of acts of resistance that had been a part of the women's ways of being in the world for much of their lives, growing out of a heritage of resistance. These acts enabled them to grow in courage and boldness with each success. They found courage to act despite opposition because they believed the justice and freedom they imagined for themselves and future generations had been placed in their thoughts by God.

*Theo-moral Imagination*

Within the field of contemporary virtue ethics, imagination and narrative are influential concepts for ethical development and assessment.[230] In *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*, Iris Murdoch defines imagination as "a spontaneous intuitive capacity to put together what is presented to us so as to form a coherent spatio-temporal experience which is intellectually ordered and sensuously based."[231] Using this framework, I suggest that imagination during the Civil Rights Movement builds on the liminality discussed above.

John Paul Lederach has insisted on the centrality of imagination in the work of conflict transformation. Lederach suggests that: 1) "moral imagination develops a capacity to perceive things beyond and at a deeper level than what initially meets the eye;" 2) imagination emphasizes the creative act that takes place as "art makes moral reasoning possible;" and 3) "moral imagination has a quality of transcendence" causing it to break free from structural dead-ends.[232] Lederach sees "moral imagination as the capacity to imagine something rooted in the challenges of the real world yet capable of

[230] See Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue;* Iris Murdoch, *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*, (London: Vintage, 1992); and Lisa Tessman, *Burdened Virtues: Virtue Ethics for Liberatory Struggles* (New York, NY: Oxford Press, 2005).
[231] Iris Murdoch, 308.
[232] John Paul Lederach, *The Moral Imagination: The Art and Soul of Building Peace*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 26-27.

giving birth to that which does not yet exist."[233] In other words, moral imagination works from a liminal position, where new realities are believed to be possible but are not yet attainable.

Imagination is also "an exercise of freedom." Women during the Movement used a combination of strategic preparation and spontaneous execution to bring about social change. They exhibited a form of moral imagination in action that would bring freedom not simply for themselves, but for all persons. Their moral actions in challenging social structures in order to bring about a more just society demonstrated virtues such as faith, courage, perseverance, hope, and love. An understanding of God's role in their current situation and their future pushed the Churchwomen in the Movement to act with a theo-moral imagination grounded in a lived theology of justice and freedom. These women understood God as liberative and just, therefore what currently was, would not always be. They believed God's vision for justice and freedom was planted and nurtured in their imagination and then manifested through their actions.

With tears in her eyes, Beatrice Soublet describes what she imagined for her unborn children that she was sitting-in, protesting, and being arrested for at the age of 19:

> Oh that they wouldn't have to endure growing up being told that they couldn't go places because of their color and they couldn't be in this school and they couldn't sit there. And having their change thrown down on the counter instead of put in your hand. They couldn't have to go through these little daily indignities. And you couldn't try on clothes. You'd have to take them home, and just treated like you're not worth anything. I didn't want my children to ever experience that. Your money is just as green as anybody's and you can sit down and have a sandwich at Woolworth's.[234]

[233] Lederach, 29.
[234] Soublet, 14.

Her passionate belief in the reality of this vision was what kept Soublet focused and committed to the cause of justice and freedom, even as a teenager.

Rose Schofield imagined everyone working toward a unified goal, because that was what she felt God wanted everyone to do. She explains, "I just thought we would all be working together that we would have one goal, that I thought that was what God wanted us to do. I might have been naïve and I might still be naïve but I just think that's what he wants."[235] The goal that she believed everyone should be working towards was equality, so she went to the protests and mass meetings regularly to continue her part of the fight towards the equality and justice consistent with the vision she was given by God.

Many of the women in my work expressed an understanding of God that was based in a knowledge that even if things were not currently just, God who had the power to speak life into dead situations and societies operating counter to God's will, could "call those things that be not as though they were."[236] Their reality did not limit the revelation they had received from God, and as a result, they worked within and against society to create the change they envisioned and imagined through God. Because their theo-moral imagination was rooted in what God had revealed to them, they pushed through the suffering and overcame the pain by continuing to protest.

These imaginative actions resulted in new access for Blacks to social and political power, justice, and freedom. When society asked whether seemingly impenetrable societal structures could be reconfigured more justly, it was often Black women who imagined a different society and insisted upon actions for change. The practices of the

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[235] Schofield, 21.
[236] Romans 4:17b (KJV).

Women's Political Council (WPC) of Montgomery, AL, serve as a case study of the work of practical moral imagination seen in my interviews. While male religious leaders sat on the side discussing ideas, one of the first collective acts, the Montgomery Bus Boycott, was the result of the just society that the Women's Political Council imagined and then brought into being through a boycott and other actions.

A group of women formed the WPC in 1946 with a goal of elevating the status of Blacks, years prior to the period considered the traditional civil rights movement.[237] They had already imagined the possibilities of change through courageous resistance, so they were ready for the opportunity when Rosa Parks made a spontaneous and yet strategic decision to maintain her seat on the segregated bus in December of 1955.[238] Parks became the face of the spontaneous execution of Montgomery's bus boycott, but she too had been strategically preparing for change as she engaged her moral imagination. She and her husband had been involved in the efforts to free the "Scottsboro Boys" in the 1930s. She was an active member and leader in the A.M.E. Church, and had been a member of the NAACP since the early 1940s, serving as the long time secretary for the local chapter and as the advisor for the Montgomery NAACP Youth Council as early as 1949. Indeed, a few years earlier, Parks had a run-in with the same bus driver on whose bus she was later arrested. In August 1955, two months prior to

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[237] A three-tiered approach focusing on 1) political action, including voter registration and interviewing candidates for office, 2) protest about abuses on city buses and use of taxpayers' money to operate segregated parks, and 3) education involving teaching high school students about democracy and teaching adults to read and write well enough to fulfill voting requirements. See Vicki L. Crawford, Jacqueline Anne Rouse, Barbara Woods (Eds.), *Civil Rights Movement: Trailblazers & Torchbearers 1941-1965*, (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1990), 79.

[238] The WPC had also started resistance actions after the arrest of a high school teenager, Claudette Colvin, who refused to give up her seat on a bus nine months prior to Rosa Parks. Burks notes: "Members of the WPC appeared before the commission [City Commission] at least six or seven times before the Colvin case." Crawford, et. al., 82.

her arrest, and in the aftermath of the Emmett Till murder, Rosa Parks participated in a training workshop at the famed Highlander Folk School.

Septima P. Clark, a leader within the Movement at Highlander and at other Citizenship School programs with the SCLC, recalls Parks' training:

> [Rosa Parks] came to Highlander Folk School while I was directing the education program in 1955. She was working with a youth group in Montgomery and she said "I want to come and see if I can do something for my people." So she came. We sent money and gave her a scholarship. And when she went home, she had gained enough courage, enough strength to feel that she could stand firm and decide not to move when that man asked for her seat.[239]

Parks' actions combined strategic preparation and spontaneous response to injustice. Her practices were rooted in the church, the NAACP and other organizations of social activism; and at a moment that even she had not anticipated, those elements came together in a way that would spark the moral imagination of a nation.

Women like those in the WPC had been working for years to pave the way for significant change within society. They built the networks and educated themselves and others about the socio-political structures they desired to change. When Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat, the WPC, who had been waiting for the "right opportunity," sprang into action. WPC founder Mary Burks, reflects on the practical activities of creating and distributing leaflets to announce the first day of the boycott:

> The announcement distributed on Saturday was composed on Friday night after the official boycott vote by representatives of the Women's Political Council in the basement of the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church (the men were on the other side of the room planning strategy). In addition to Jo Ann Robinson and me, Irene West and Uretta Adair participated. After our formulation had been approved by everyone present, it was typed by Jo Ann and mimeographed.[240]

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[239] Ibid., 90.
[240] Ibid., 82.

The WPC was ready to execute the boycott and make sure that the word was communicated to the Black community to stay off of the buses, so that the efforts would be as the boycott began. Burks reports that they started distributing the pamphlets at 6:00am because she and Jo Ann Robinson had been invited to a bridge party that evening, a society event they could not miss.[241]

For Burks, the work on the boycott expanded her understanding of the larger struggle for justice. As the WPC distributed the announcement for the first day, she notes:

> Often we not only had to take the time to explain the leaflet, but also first to read it to those unable to do so. It was my first encounter with masses of the truly poor and disenfranchised. I remember thinking that not even a successful boycott would solve the problems of poverty and illiteracy which I saw that day.[242]

The reality of the problems of poverty and illiteracy planted another seed of theo-moral imagination for Burks who remained committed to work as an educator in the city afterwards. The combination of strategic preparation and spontaneous execution enabled a collective moral imagination to be acted out in a way that would ultimately result in social change that moved beyond concerns about Montgomery's public transportation, to issues of poverty, illiteracy, and other issues throughout the nation.

Moral imagination played an important role in social change. The choices that those participating in the movement faced were those that took place in the liminal space of what was and what could possibly become.[243] They sought to live their lives in a way

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[241] This reflects their middle-class orientation and yet their commitment to the goal reinforced their broad desire for the social change they imagined for everyone.
[242] Crawford, 82-83.
[243] These activists acted with courage without knowing whether they would actually be successful in their efforts.

that centered on actions taken by people, who though currently without "acknowledged power," acted in ways that brought freedom.[244] Reflecting on the Movement, Bernice Johnson Reagon stated, "The movement gave all of us choices about how we would live, and it gave us a chance to act as people with power."[245] Living out virtues of freedom faith, liminal assessment, courageous resistance, and theo-moral imagination gave persons who had been oppressed in their past and present choices for their future.

*A Liberative Social Ethics of Compulsion – Something They "Had to Do"*

Throughout the interviews with these women who were active during the Movement in both the south and the north, one phrase continued to come up. Frequently, these women described their actions as something that they "had to do."[246] Of the eight women whose oral histories comprise the primary data for this dissertation, seven of them used this phrase when talking about their work and commitment.

They consistently named their inability to do anything other than the activism to which they had committed their lives. Whether as a one-time act, something that they sought out to participate in as often as possible, or something in which they acted in a leadership capacity, they spoke about feeling compelled to act in ways that would result in communal justice and freedom. What they saw in the daily inequities and what they heard in the vitriolic rhetoric created an insatiable desire to see the world change for the better, and that was something to which they could not turn a blind eye or a deaf ear. Despite the choices of accomodationists and others to wait for things to change, and to trust those who were in positions of leadership to do the right thing, the risks that these

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[244] Power acknowledged and recognized as both real and valid by those White persons in the formal and informal power structures of society.
[245] Crawford, 204.
[246] This language provides the spirit of the liberative social ethic that can be created from the lived experiences and expressions of the women.

women took and the sacrifices that they made were all things they believed they "had to do."

This inner compulsion was both source and framework, driving the women first to analyze a situation, then to imagine what ought to be, and finally to work pragmatically to find ways to realize those visions. The distinctive element of a virtue ethics is this sense that there are no other options but the one being acted upon. These Black Churchwomen did not need to deliberate or decide because they were already morally formed by their heritage, their faith, and their experience to take actions in service of justice and freedom. The Black community provided the moral necessary including: lessons from sermons and church school, values and virtues modeled by their parents and grandparents, and reinforcement from the community that the opportunities they received were not solely for themselves (it was bigger than that), but to make things better for those who would come behind them. As the women reflected on their actions, they consistently analyzed the situations that they encountered with a clear sense of moral judgment and resolve to change the situation.

Lillian Sue Bethel became active in the Movement in New York and Albany because she felt she should do something about the things that she saw. She did not participate in any training for her actions; she simply joined in with the marches, protests, and other acts. When asked why she began her participation without going through any non-violence training to prepare her for what she would face, she replied, "it was just in me that this was wrong, okay, and if this is what you have to do to kind of help things along, then you do it."[247] In New York, she joined protests with the Freedom Riders

[247] Bethel, 28

before they began to make their famed trips south that often resulted in extreme brutality. Bethel's inner desire and drive to act meant that she did not consider, positively or negatively, the publicity that she might receive. She described joining the protests in New York City: "before I left to go to school [in Albany, GA], in New York I had been… a part of the Freedom Riders. Now nobody can tell you they saw me or whatever unless they were just standing right next to me and probably wouldn't remember. But I felt compelled to be a part of it."[248] Her participation in the Movement in New York, was fully stirred when she moved back to Albany to complete college after the sudden death of her mother. It was there that she took a more active role, feeling that she had to stand with the Freedom Riders, trying to prevent the brutality that Riders experienced in parts of Alabama from happening in Albany.

Bethel's decision to support the Freedom Riders in Albany resulted in her being arrested along with many other students from Albany State and the surrounding area.[249] The jails were not equipped for the numbers of persons arrested, so there were at times 20 to 30 persons in a cell made for eight. Bethel explains her mindset at the time: "Well, see that would have been a hardship except that it was not a hardship to me because of why I was there. I was doing what I thought I had to do and then there was more than me. It was a whole lot of folks doing the same thing, so I didn't feel, I guess, like a lot of people did, 'I'm never going to do this again' or what have you, no. I didn't feel that."[250]

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[248] Ibid., 1.
[249] Howard Zinn, *SNCC: The New Abolitionists* (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 1964, 1965, 2002), 40-51.
[250] Bethel, 1.

Although a native of Albany, with family resources that could have made the situation easier for her, Bethel declined the opportunity to be released earlier and spent a week in jail:

> I was in there for a week, okay. I got out the day before Christmas. Christmas Eve they let us out. And I never will forget one of the guards or whatever you called them at that time, looked at me and said we shouldn't let you go, because my aunt was going to bail me out and I wouldn't go. I told them that I would leave when everybody else was released. Now I can't tell you why I said that other than the fact that I felt that we all should be let out at the same time. I don't recall it being any strong feelings about anything at that time. I just felt that that's the way it should be. Why, I can't tell you, okay. Now if that happened to me today, I could give you some sort of explanation. I couldn't. It was just what I felt I had to do and that was it.[251]

Without deliberation, Bethel knew she had to stay in solidarity with the others. Speaking up and speaking out despite possible consequences became something she had to do: "…there had been a couple of times that I felt that I had to say something. I just couldn't stand there and either look at it or listen to it or what have you. I just had to speak my opinion on it."[252] The compulsion was consistent in both words and deeds.

Despite not having the language or even religious conviction at this time, Bethel ultimately understood that all of her actions – from the time when as a young girl she forbade a White man from trying to sell pornography in her neighborhood, to her decisions to protest which led to her expulsion from College – were a part of her God calling. "Because it's like I was compelled to do it. It was already, okay, preordained for me to do and see even though I was a person who was religious but not religious."[253]

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[251] Ibid., 6.
[252] Ibid., 10.
[253] Ibid., 14.

In further reflection on the risks and rewards of her activism, Bethel viewed her actions as necessary: "…the only thing I can think of is it was one of the highlights of my life and I'm so grateful that I had the opportunity to be a part of it. To me it was no big deal. Even now it was no big deal. I view it as something that I needed to be a part of and that I had to be a part of, and I couldn't understand at that time why everybody else didn't feel the same way."[254]

Doris Brunson felt that throughout her activities in New York City she was living out a commitment that was engrained in her family. Her knowledge of her grandfather standing up for others, even at the risk of his own life, as well as watching her father stand up and demand respect for his family, made indelible impacts on her. She was taught by her father and grandfather that you had to have a personal ethic that guided you to do what was right and just. As a result, when she would came into contact with protest marches taking place in the streets of New York, she abandoned her previous plans and joined in shouting "Black Power" or whatever was the cry of the day. Brunson explained, "I just felt that I needed to be where I could be part of the voice for change for making it possible for us to have the same respect as any other race. I felt, if I weren't a part of that, you know, then I would be more or less letting my family down. I had to be a part of this opportunity."[255] Participation was something she felt compelled to do; she could not simply sit by. Whether on a local level in New York City or at the national March on Washington, she saw her ability to join in with the protests as an opportunity that others did not have, and since she did, she acted.

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[254] Bethel, January 7, 2012, 42
[255] Doris Brunson, Transcript of interview, 17.

Peggy Lucas' belief in doing whatever was necessary to help get people registered to vote was summed up in her brief response, "So we did what we had to do."[256] During the 1960s in Birmingham, Alabama and the surrounding areas, doing what they had to do may have required teaching persons to write, teaching them to read, helping them learn parts of the Constitution, or any number of other things to meet the requirements of the Jim Crow South's political system. Instead of being dismayed at the challenges, she simply did what she "had to do."

As a young woman, Rose Schofield and other young people took seriously her pastor's call for action in the northern Movement and put their lives on the line when they chained themselves together in the middle of the road to block large construction trucks from entering a site (where Black companies had been prevented from bidding on contracts). As she discussed her arrest, she reflected on the role that she and other young people were able to play that adults would or could not take on at the time. She states, "It was just something we had to do and it was the children who got to do it because the adults, if they were arrested, they would have lost time from work. We were kids and it was during the summer."[257] Schofield took pride in the fact that when something needed to be done, she was one of the ones who rose to the occasion.

Beatrice Soublet's activism began when she watched her grandfather work to get equal salaries for colored teachers (as Blacks were called at that time) in New Orleans, Louisiana. She later watched him bring a group of teachers back from a conference in Baton Rouge after refusing to accept unfair treatment regarding their lodging. Soublet saw her involvement as continuing a spiritual commitment to justice that had been passed

[256] Lucas, 20, 10.
[257] Schofield, 1.

down to her from her two grandfathers and parents. She explains, "so that kind of spirit of doing something to make things right for people to make things better is like, you know, in my DNA. I mean you just don't sit back."[258] She understood herself to be biologically wired for action in the face of injustice. Her understanding that she had an inborn desire to do something to make things right for people that prompted her to become active when the opportunity presented itself while she was a student at Bennett College in Greensboro, North Carolina. Soublet's participation in the Movement without knowing whether her family would be supportive or not reinforced her belief that "it was something I had to do and it was something I did. It was important."[259] Protesting, sitting in, getting arrested, and participating in strategy sessions, were all simply a part of the legacy she was born into – it was what she had to do.

Marjorie Wallace Smyth recalls her awakening and commitment to activism at a very early age. In describing her early participation in discussions about injustice with her neighborhood friends in Birmingham, including Ruby, Patricia, and Fred, who were the children of Birmingham Movement leader Rev. Fred Shuttlesworth, she said, "I think that was my first—as an elementary school student was my awareness of the difference in knowing then that we had to do something and that we would be the generation that would make a difference."[260] Smyth's understanding that it would take her generation was also reflected in her actions as she made a commitment to activism as the youngest child in her family, a commitment that her father and older siblings did not make. She felt that despite her father's fears, being willing to risk being beaten, arrested, and perhaps more was something that she simply had to do, even if other immediate family members

[258] Soublet, 3.
[259] Ibid., 3.
[260] Smyth, January 7, 2012, 7.

did not understand why. She believed that her father and those of his generation did not actively participate or encourage his children to do so because of fear. With this knowledge, Marjorie took her activism into her own hands and moved forward. "I just knew that—you know, he would fuss but he would get over it. That was it. He wanted to protect us. Didn't want nothing to happen to us. But I was determined."[261] Smyth understood the communal need for action as greater than her own family. She was a part of a deep history of freedom fighters, and was determined to not shy away from the quest for justice.

The strength of the segregated Black community was the matrix for this compulsion. They encouraged each other, corrected each other, shared with each other, and helped each other. The values and morals that were formed within these types of communities continued to shape the women who participated in the Movement, with the understanding that their efforts were for the community that raised them and not solely for their own personal benefit.

A. Lenora Taitt-Magubane explained the lengths that people would go to and the sacrifices that they would make to right the wrongs that they faced on a daily basis:

> I would say that the involvement in the movement was because of the fact that people felt that they could play a role in righting a wrong, and the wrong at that time was segregation and wherever it was rooted it could be stopped. And the belief that the law was on our side ultimately—which is the difference between here and a place like South Africa where you didn't have the law on your side so you were really going up against it. But here you had a constitution and you believed that ultimately, you could win in the courts and that's what it was all about. So the ICC ruling, the breaking down of the laws, the 1954 Brown vs. Education, all of the laws that have been passed, you know these were – this was part of it. And if we fought it through the courts it could be won. Now, you might

[261] Ibid.

> get your head broken open before you get to the courthouse but the fact is ultimately the goal was—and a lot of people lost their lives but they believed that it could happen.[262]

Even if they faced violence and even if violent death became a real possibility because of their beliefs, the commitment such women had was to act no matter what. The righting of wrongs was based on a belief that what society was like now did not always have to be that way. Sitting back, and watching and waiting were not options for these women. Their commitment to justice and freedom meant taking the risk to act. They were living out a liberative social ethic of compulsion. Becoming active in the Movement was something the women felt compelled to do.

**Conclusion**

As these examples show, there were many ways that Black Churchwomen understood what they simply "had to do" – the actions they engaged in, the risks they took, and the physical and emotional challenges that they faced. This feeling that they did not have a choice to do anything other than act during the Civil Rights Movement constitutes what I call a liberative social ethics of compulsion, realized through the virtues these women lived.

For Black Churchwomen during the Civil Rights Movement, their moral acts were influenced by their moral formation in a distinctively Black culture in which they were raised. Within this culture, faith was a central element that helped to guide and inspire all their actions. Through freedom faith, they understood that with God's help, oppression could be overcome and freedom would reign. The women were not blind to the realities that they faced, especially in the broader White community, so as they moved

[262] Taitt-Magubane, 18.

between communities, they assessed right and wrong, and made a strategic decision to fight for what they believed was right. With courage, Black women stood up to human and institutional foes, taking the risks necessary to bring about change not only for himself or herself but also for everyone. Finally, because of their strong virtues of faith, perseverance as they assessed and engaged society, and courage, Black women imagined and brought about a more just society that God revealed to them as individuals and in groups.

Black Churchwomen driven by faith and a hope for a better future developed a liberative social ethics of compulsion comprised of freedom faith, liminal assessment, courageous resistance, and theo-moral imagination. As they did what they had to do, they assessed the situations that they found themselves in as right or wrong, and knew they had to act in order to make things better for themselves and others. Communally liberative in its focus, this ethic became individually compulsory in its practice.

## Chapter 4 – Contemporary uses for a Lived Theology of Justice and Freedom and a Liberative Social Ethic

*Black Churchwomen as Socio-political Religious Activists*

Since the beginning of the Black Church in America, Black Churchwomen have continuously comprised a significant majority of its membership. Despite often being limited from positions of formal congregational leadership, women found and continue to find ways to shape theologies and ethics that have been nurtured within a Black religious context. Throughout this dissertation, the lived experiences of young Black women in the Civil Rights Movement have revealed their ability to engage liberative social activism from beliefs that instilled a spiritual mandate to act.

Because of the way the women in this study understood their spiritual mandate to act, their lives were changed significantly by their experiences half a century ago. Today, as in the past, they do not seek to engage the political system from within as elected officials. Instead, many of them work tirelessly on campaigns to elect those who they believe live out political convictions similar to their own. They agitate from outside of traditional centers of power, pushing for recognition of socio-political issues with their undeniable presence and voicing their convictions through many forms of protest. Today, all of these women continue to engage in grassroots, person-to-person activism making a difference one life at a time.

In this chapter I first review the lived theology of justice and freedom and liberative social ethic of compulsion derived from the lived experiences of Black Churchwomen. Then I discuss the implications of their theology and ethic for current struggles for justice and freedom. After a brief description of the different context of today's struggles, I illustrate how the theology and ethic retrieved from Black

Churchwomen is important today, by a) discussing lived theology as a practice and way of doing theology, and b) presenting examples of this theology and ethics at work in the current Black Church for Black Churchwomen.

*A Lived Theology of Justice and Freedom*

The chart below summarizes key aspects of a Lived theology of justice and freedom, and helps give insight for the theology's application today.

**A Lived Theology of Justice and Freedom**

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| Origins | Recalled experiences of Black women civil rights participants. Explicit and implicit understandings of God as a living actor within the struggle for justice and freedom. |
| Purpose | To allow the lived experiences with God to be accepted as valid revelations of the desires of God for God's people. |
| Task | To analyze the understanding of an active God, while enabling that God to provide and internal power to live in just and loving ways. |
| Belief | God is revealed and encountered through lived experiences, and not relegated to the experiences of one group during one period in time. The analysis of God's revelations is open to those who God has been revealed to through their process of living. |
| Starting Point | The daily experiences and encounters during the period of limitation and oppression in the Civil Rights Movement. |
| Accountabilities and Audience | To speak to the Church, the academy, and the broader community about the contemporary revelatory understandings of God based in daily experiences that reinforce the character of God and strengthen the character of human beings. |
| Ethical Activity | A virtue ethics of freedom, courage, liminal (time and space) assessment, and imagination are grounded in the understanding of a God who is present in righteous struggles and of the necessity of engaged action (compulsion). |

Retrieved from the lives of Black Churchwomen who were actively involved in social and political protests during the Civil Rights Movement, a lived theology of justice and freedom is expressed through the theological constructs of individual and communal experiences, songs, scriptures, and prayers. Liberative in its aim, this lived theology

offers a critical reflection on the praxis of faith conducted in moments of contestation in society as a part of a struggle for justice and freedom. Like other liberative theologies, this theology is rooted in a particular context and purpose, seeking to provide power to Blacks facing oppressive forces in society.

Using oral histories as a primary source, the lived theology of justice and freedom in this dissertation explicitly and implicitly understands God as an engaged actor in the ongoing struggle. Individual and communal lived experiences brought encounters with God when contested spaces gave rise to God's continual revelation as a God of justice and freedom. The music of the Civil Rights Movement provided spiritual, physical and emotional support, with lyrics that declare God as present on the side of those fighting against oppression. Rooted in the tradition of Black religious music, these fluid and improvisational songs often changed lyrics to speak to specific situations as an organic form of social and political commentary. When signs and banners were taken from protesters, the activists still had their voice that they raised in song. The lyrics of songs identified by the eight women in this dissertation highlight requests and expectations of God in areas of guidance and direction, companionship and commitment, and provision and protection.

The lived theology of justice and freedom engages different Biblical scriptures from the Exodus and Apocalyptical texts that studies of Black Freedom struggles have traditionally focused on. Of the scriptures noted by the Black Churchwomen of this study, the 23rd Psalm was the most predominant. The text's promise that God would be with followers as they walked through dangerous places and sat at tables in the presence of enemies was comforting as the young women faced hateful and at times violent

crowds during marches and sit-ins. Other themes revealed through additional Biblical texts reinforce the women's understanding of God's love, trustworthy guidance, strength and endurance in the struggle, joy, provision, justice, and forgiveness.

The prayers of the people gave voice to their hopes and desires as they made requests to a God who they believed could do the seemingly impossible as partners with them that they could not do alone. They prayed for protection and guidance as they stood up against powerful individuals and institutions that wanted to maintain their power through the oppression of Blacks. Prayer was a powerful collective tool when used publicly in mass meetings and other gatherings, and it was also a very personal tool when used privately by individuals seeking direct communication with God. When they prayed, they believed that God listened and responded by acting on their behalf in the fight for justice and freedom.

Retrieved from Black Churchwomen's personal experiences with a loving and justice seeking God who is present in the midst of contestation, the lived theology of justice and freedom is liberative theology. This revelation of God required audacious and liberatory actions by followers in the face of injustice and oppression. These actions were guided by a liberative social ethic of compulsion.

*A Liberative Social Ethic of Compulsion*

When God has been actively working on the side of the oppressed, those who have benefited from this commitment from God believe that they too must fight for the justice and freedom of all persons. Black Churchwomen who were actively involved in the Civil Rights Movement lived and engaged society by understanding that virtuous action was liberative action. The liberative social ethic of compulsion constructed in this

dissertation is a part of an enduring legacy for Black freedom fighters. Through daily on-the-ground encounters with oppression, the women's moral qualities reveal virtues of freedom faith, liminal assessment, courageous resistance, and theo-moral imagination.

Freedom faith is rooted in two core features of Blacks in America: an inborn desire for freedom, and an inherited legacy of faith that insisted upon God's promise for freedom. While strengthened by victories of the past, such as the emancipation of enslaved Blacks, freedom faith during the Movement focused on an immediate outcome that would change their current oppressive states within segregation. Black women assessed their oppressive situations from a liminal space. Despite contradictory experiences, they were able to envision that a just society could exist even as they struggled to obtain that new reality for themselves and their community.

Fighting for justice and freedom required courage as the women resisted White male dominant individuals and institutions that were determined to maintain power and advantages at almost any cost. The women in this dissertation courageously resisted the temptation to shy away from physical, emotional, and spiritual risks; instead boldly marching, protesting, and sitting-in to disrupt White supremacy and segregation. These courageous actions were reinforced by a theo-moral imagination based on their liberative understanding of God and their belief that what currently existed would not always be. This creative God of creation revealed new strategies and potential realities that women like Montgomery's Women's Political Council put into strategies to receive access to social and political power, justice, and freedom.

The women whose experiences revealed this liberative social ethic of compulsion, used language that indicated that the fighting and struggling for justice and freedom that

they were engaged in was not something they haphazardly wanted to do, it was something they "had to do." This compulsory ethic was different from what early Black theology scholarship theorized; that those in the Black Church during the Civil Rights Movement were passive, and simply followed the charismatic leader, King. These women actively engaged individual and collective forms of activism with the goal of making society better than it currently was. The history of the pro-active preparations of Montgomery's Women's Political Council counters any idea of passivity. These Black Churchwomen could not live during the era in which they found themselves and others experiencing injustices and not act. This inner compulsion to act enabled them to analyze their current situation, imagine what ought to be, and work pragmatically to bring the God given vision to reality. The women committed their lives to social activism and today they remain determined to do what they have to do, even if no one ever knows their name.

*Contributions of the Theology and Ethics*

Throughout this dissertation I have identified some of the theological and ethical motivations for Black Churchwomen's activism during the Civil Rights Movement. These women were committed to justice and freedom for the community, even if it meant they faced challenges as individuals. Through their faith, many Black women felt compelled to build on a heritage of virtue and a legacy of freedom struggles as they fought against various forms of injustice through non-violent means.

Through my focus on the experiences of "everyday" Black Churchwomen, their agency and commitments to justice were as bridge leaders without the organizational protection of primarily male formal leaders. The oral histories of the women in this

dissertation help expand the typologies of bridge leaders outlined by Belinda Robnett by adding perspectives of young women who were also indigenous bridge leaders in both the southern and northern Movement. These younger women leveraged different social connections and influence most noticeably in churches and college campuses. The contextualization of the women influenced their theo-ethical foundations, resulting in a lived theology of justice and freedom and a liberative social ethic of compulsion.

**The Role and Impact of a Lived Theology and Liberative Social Ethic Today**

Many of the issues faced by Black Churchwomen during the Civil Rights Movement including the ramifications of *de jure* segregation have changed, but there remain many *de facto* issues of justice and freedom within our society that must be addressed. The women who were active during the Movement continue to find ways to do work that counters and challenges injustices in our contemporary society. Their lives indicate that there was something that took root within them during the Movement that continues to grow and bear fruit in their communal activism and support today. Black Churchwomen felt that there was a greater calling on their lives, so they found ways to participate in the Movement to bring justice and freedom. This "something within" was with them as they experienced activism for the first time and has become so innate that it is often not fully articulated by those who continue to believe that there is work within the community that they "have to do" today. The social ethic of compulsion during the Movement was not a one-time act, but a lifetime commitment to justice and freedom.

*The Contemporary Black Church and Social Activism*

For many Black women, the centralized Black community during the 1950s and 1960s reinforced the beliefs of previous eras such as the Black women's club movement

era of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. These beliefs encouraged communal rather than individual goals of social uplift. Although there has never been a time of unanimous support and participation in socio-political activism, *de jure* segregation forced physical proximity and created an awareness of the needs of all Blacks of various social standings.

It is this centralized Black community during the 1950s and 1960s that was the context of the young women in this study. As they grew up, they were exposed to communal commitments to social change and activism that became a part of the ethos for many. Many of the women recalled a naïveté of sorts as they went about their activism. At generally young ages, few had the words to completely articulate why they did the things that they did. They simply believed what they had been taught at home and church – that God was in the midst of everything and that it was not right for anyone to be treated disparagingly by others.

Within the Black community, the Black Church was one place where the educated and non-educated, the land owners and renters, the sharecroppers and business owners could all come together on equal standing.[263] In the church, everyone was a part of the family of God; they were all equally called Sister and Brother, Mr. and Mrs., and not the derogatory terms of boy, my girl, or "auntie" like Whites often referred to them. The respect given within the Black Church provided strength to withstand negative treatment in the White public square.

The Black Church is imbued with a powerful and transformative spirit that has undergirded freedom struggles for centuries. Through the singing, praying, preaching,

[263] In general, membership in Masonic organizations also created a democratic experience regardless of background.

and teaching, the power of that spirit is conveyed to all who participate in the life of the Black Church. Socio-religious activism has been a part of the Black Church since its origins, and justice and freedom are two of the most consistently fought for goals. The Black Church played a critical role in sustaining activism during the Civil Rights Movement – providing spiritual strength, enhancing social relations, and sharing political strategies for justice and freedom.

These spiritual, social, and political contributions were not solely the responsibility of the pastor of the church, but also lay women who contributed by singing, praying, and teaching. Faith in a God who encourages through singing, hears through prayers, and speaks through preaching and teaching, enabled Black Churchwomen who participated in the Civil Rights Movement to experience God as a partner in the struggle for justice and freedom.

Today, the Black community has become more decentralized. This is especially true for middle class Blacks who were able to leave the previously all Black neighborhoods after the Civil Rights Act of 1968 (Fair Housing Act). Many of the doctors, professors, lawyers, and other professionals moved away from the communities where they previously served as both pillars and examples for young people to model their lives after. Replacing the communal values of the past, individual oriented modern capitalist values have been adopted by many Blacks, who are no longer willing to stand up or speak out in ways that may jeopardize their personal advancement.

The Black Church, which has long been the central hub of the community now requires a drive back to the neighborhood to participate in services, making it less likely that it will also be the place for multiple week day meetings. Although Blacks still attend

church in higher percentages than any other racial group in America, there are more Blacks today who are "unchurched" than ever before.[264] In the current context, there are now at least two generations of Blacks who do not have the spiritual and theological foundation that has historically been a critical component in Black Freedom Struggles.

Activism does not have to be connected to the church, of course, but there continue to be benefits to the social and spiritual connection of the church that provided much of the strength and power of the Civil Rights Movement. To illustrate, the church provides an inbuilt weekly connection with members and visitors that allows those who have been working for justice and freedom in individual areas throughout the week to come together for support and renewal on Sundays. Those who may have found themselves standing alone at their job are able to stand side by side with others who like them have not given up on the fight. In addition to the religio-socio-political messages that are shared through the singing, praying, and preaching, the common space of the church becomes a place of strength as bodies come together to hug, smile, and support each other. Much like the Monday night mass meetings held in churches during the Civil Rights Movement that focused on ways to bridge the sacred and the secular to encourage consistent activism in the face of injustice, the church today also often provides additional weekly opportunities for religio-socio-political activist training through special topic Bible studies and Christian education courses.

An example of this can be found at Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta. Through the Sunday sermons delivered primarily by Pastor Raphael G. Warnock, members and visitors Biblically engage current social and political issues from: the multi-year fight to

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[264] This is consistent with the rising number of Americans who report they have no explicit religious identification. Gallup – http://www.gallup.com/poll/159785/rise-religious-nones-slows-2012.aspx#1.

stop the lethal injection of Troy Davis in Georgia, the call for justice for Trayvon Martin in Florida, the moral responsibility of Christians to vote in every election, and the call for non-violent celebrations in the wake of extreme gun violence. Sunday sermons feature such titles and scriptures as: "Truth vs. Power" – John 10:7-18, 18:33-38a, 19:5-12; "Dare to Disconnect" – Number 14:1-4, Exodus 16:1-3, 11-12, cautioning that Pharaoh is the comfort you have with the bad you know; and "Will You Go?" – Exodus 3:1-12a, reminding listeners that God will not put up indefinitely with dysfunctional social arrangements.[265] In addition to Sunday morning sermons, Ebenezer's weekly Bible study, "Worship on Wednesday – W.O.W.," has focused on studying texts that moved beyond the Bible to promote commitments outside of the walls of the sanctuary. An example of this is the Bible study series that began in April 2012 with a communal viewing of the documentary "Slavery by Another Name," with over three hundred persons in attendance. Following the documentary, members embarked on a four-week Biblical study Michelle Alexander's book *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*, and the response the Church is required to make regarding mass incarceration.

In the spring of 2010 I was a visiting instructor at Ebenezer, teaching a six-week course on women in the Civil Rights Movement as a part of the Christian Education Department and co-sponsored by the Young Adult and Women's Ministries. This course was taught to both members and visitors from the community, and included weekly readings, short writing assignments, and an individual project. The course culminated with a commitment by each student to impact particular aspects of community issues by:

[265] Sermons preached by Raphael G. Warnock on April 1, 2012, February 13, 2011, and November 14, 2010 respectively. Worship bulletins and notes in the author's possession.

attending school board meetings, becoming active on local neighborhood boards, volunteering with youth programs, teaching literacy and entrepreneurship, addressing issues of gentrification and its impact on housing, schools, and transportation, and being proactive versus reactive in other areas of importance for the community.

Black Churches like Ebenezer Baptist Church have a rich history and heritage of social action and engagement. They promote freedom faith through the preaching and teaching, and courageous resistance through outreach ministries that address social injustices. Today there are many areas where justice and freedom are needed, and the legacy of the Black Church should place it at the front of the struggles to achieve it. Ebenezer continues to be a place where previous activist women find life through the pastor and members' commitment to continue to fight for justice and freedom today in new forms.

*Two Mothers Illustrate the Power of the Theology and Ethics*

Reminiscent of the watershed moment that Emmett Till's murder became for young Blacks in 1955, the 2012 murder of seventeen-year-old Trayvon Martin in Sanford, Florida sparked outrage throughout the United States, and struck a chord with young Blacks, who like young people during Till's murder, saw themselves in Martin. Through faith and a desire to do what she could to bring about justice for others, Mamie Till-Bradley, the mother of the brutally slain fourteen-year-old Emmett Till, represents one of the early examples of a lived theology and liberative social ethics in the Civil Rights Movement. Till-Bradley used something very difficult for her as a mother – the gruesome death of her only son – as a way of mustering the virtues of freedom faith, courageous resistance, and theo-moral imagination to bring about a corrective to the

blatant wrongs occurring in Mississippi and to help move American society toward a greater good of justice and freedom. Till-Bradley demanded to take her son's body back to Chicago to be buried instead of allowing it to stay in Mississippi. While making plans for her son's funeral and referring to the public viewing of her son's brutalized body, Till-Bradley told Mr. Rayner, the undertaker in Chicago:

> I would like for as many people to walk in here and see this thing as want to come. As long as we cover these things up, they're going to keep on happening…I'm pulling the lid off of this one…my personal feelings don't matter, it's those other boys and girls out there that we're going to have to look out for…and the more people that walk by Emmett and look at what happened to this 14-year old boy, the more people will be interested in what happens to their children…[266]

Courageously resisting the request of the undertaker to "fix him up," which would have tempered the heartbreaking image for viewers, she proclaimed: "I wanted the world to see what had happened to my boy."[267]

By the end of the wake and funeral at Roberts Temple Church of God in Christ in Chicago, and in the days between the actual interment of the body, over 600,000 people walked past her son. Instead of sitting silently like so many before her, Mamie Till-Bradley drew on her faith and courageously went on a national tour sponsored by the NAACP, where she described the horrific accounts of her son's murder only two months after the tragedy. During a speech at Bethel A.M.E. Church in Baltimore, Maryland on October 29, 1955, she is quoted as saying, "I have invested a son in freedom and I'm determined that his death isn't in vain."[268] Since the cost had been so great, she wanted to

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[266] Davis W. Houck, David E. Dixon (eds.), *Rhetoric, Religion, and the Civil Rights Movement: 1954-1965*, Section 17 - Mamie Till-Bradley, "I Want You to Know What They Did to My Boy," (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2006), 137-138.
[267] Ibid.
[268] Ibid., 139. Also, in 1964 after the bodies of Michael Schwerner, James Chaney, and Andrew Goodman were found in Mississippi on August 4th, a flier from CORE invited people to Hear! How Our Brothers

make sure that she stood up and spoke out for justice and freedom. Her actions indicate the living out of a theology as indicated through the complicated notions of her faith and action, when she stated:

> When I was talking to God and pleading with Him and asking why did you let it be my boy, it was as if He spoke to me and said: - 'Without the shedding of innocent blood, no cause is won.' And I turned around then and thanked God that He felt that I was worthy to have a son that was worthy to die for such a worthy cause.[269]

This notion of sacrifice is problematic at best, yet it is a religious theme, which has historically and continues to provide a peculiar form of comfort and understanding for many who have been oppressed.[270] Till-Bradley's sacrificial language reinforces the sacramental nature of the act that took place, as she made sure that the death did not happen in vain.[271] As she lived out her actions, she found comfort in her communication with God, who was present in her life with direct revelation through prayer. This experience with God and the understanding that she embraced was that her son's death would not to simply have an impact on her, but God wanted to use it to help achieve the ultimate goal of freedom. This freedom faith was a part of her theological and ethical understanding of a God who could use even a difficult thing for her as an individual to bring about great change in the broader society.

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Died For Freedom and how we are carrying on the fight in Mississippi. "HEAR Mrs. Fanny Chaney Courageous Mother of James Chaney" at New Zion Baptist Church, 2319 Third Street on Thursday, August 27, 1964, at 7:30 P.M. She is publicized as being courageous, and by speaking out she publicly resisted any fear that may have existed as a result of the murder of her son. Photograph of flier in Danny Lyons, *Memories of the Southern Civil Rights Movement* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1992).

[269] Houck, 139-140.

[270] Sacrifice is one of the themes taken up by early womanist theologians, where Black women bore the greatest burden in personal sacrifice.

[271] For a womanist critique of the notion of sacrifice among Black Christian women, see Jo Anne Marie Terrell, *Power in the Blood: The Cross in the African American Experience* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1998), 99-125.

Till-Bradley's courage and actions pricked the moral social conscience of persons not only in the United States, but also throughout the world, as the images of her son's body in before and after states were published in domestic and international newspapers and magazines. Through her discussion with the undertaker, we also see her faith and courage, as she used her theo-moral imagination to see social change in a way that moved beyond her individual situation with the hope that other boys and girls would not have to fear living in the hate filled society that her son Emmett had encountered.

Till-Bradley's speech at Bethel A.M.E. Church in Baltimore, MD just months after the end of the trial which resulted in a not guilty verdict for J.W. Milam and Roy Bryant the men who kidnapped Emmett Till from his uncle, Mose Wright's home, illustrates her moral virtues through action. To make the world she imagined possible, Mamie had to strategically use opportunities to draw attention to the vitriolic hate that killed her son and sought to further malign her as she stood up and spoke out. While speaking at the rally in Baltimore, Till-Bradley reflects on how reading the hate mail that she received from Whites in Mississippi prompted her to continue to have the courage to resist. She says the letters gave her "a new determination to stand up and fight that much harder," she went on to say:

> I do realize that those people are going to have to be taught. As long as they exist, and as long as their minds stay dirty, we're going to have a little harder time progressing and advancing. I also know that if I'm upsetting just one of them, then I feel that I'm doing a pretty good job.[272]

Months before the public stance by Rosa Parks on December 1, 1955, these actions by Till-Bradley, ultimately sought a transformation of moral consciousness and just actions,

[272] Houck, 134.

and became a critical part of the early stimulus for the Civil Rights Movement. Her willingness to use the media and not allow her son's brutal death to be covered up like so many other southern atrocities, resulted in young people in the North finding out about the injustices and deadly consequences of being Black in the South that many had previously been ignorant to.[273] Galvanizing the public outcry, Till-Bradley also directly petitioned President Dwight Eisenhower in a telegram sent to and received by the White House on September 2, 1955 in an effort to bring the morals of the nation into question in the face of the tragedy she faced. The telegram read:

> I the mother of Emmett Louis Still (sic) am pleading that you personally see that justice is meted out on all persons involved in the beastly lynching of my son in Money Miss. Awaiting a direct reply from you Mamie E. Bradley[274]

Her concern was for the progress and advancement of humanity, which she linked to changing the practices of groups and individuals that sought to limit others within society. Till-Bradley leveraged the media attention she had been able to draw in the wake of her son's murder, and helped to put the horrendous crimes of Southern Whites on the front page of newspapers and magazines all over the nation.[275]

She told the people gathered to hear her in Baltimore, "But without the newspapers and the press news agencies, there never would have been a trial in

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[273] Rose Fofana, First AME Bethel Group Interview.
[274] Telegram from Mamie Bradley sent to Dwight D. Eisenhower September 2, 1955, in President Eisenhower's archives. Dwight D. Eisenhower's Records as President, Alphabetical File, Box 3113, Emmett Till. http://www.eisenhower.archives.gov/research/online_documents/civil_rights_emmett_till_case.html Accessed October 13, 2008.
[275] This included the publishing of photographs Emmett Till's corpse in the *Chicago Defender*, the *Pittsburgh Courier*, *Jet Magazine*, and the NAACP's *Crisis*. While white newspapers and magazines covered the story, none published the photographs. Houck, 131.

Mississippi. That was forced on them. It was bitter gall in their mouths."[276] Through the effective use of the media, which became one of her pulpits, Till-Bradley's decision to let the world see "what they had done to her boy," sparked global outrage. As a result, in addition to the telegram she sent to President Eisenhower, his office received approximately 3,000 letters, wires, and cards related to the murder of Emmett Till, and over 11,000 signatures on a petition. The wires included a telegram from Chicago's mayor Richard Daley, pushing Eisenhower to seek federal action against the men who murdered Till.[277] Mamie Till-Bradley was a Black Churchwoman whose belief that God allowed this tragedy to happen to her for a greater cause propelled her to use her son to bring a face to the horror that Blacks were encountering daily throughout the South. This courageous decision also put the nation on notice that mistreatment of Blacks was no longer going to remain under the steel lined cotton curtain of the South.[278] A threshold had been crossed and Till-Bradley's assessment of Whites, particularly in the South would subsequently be viewed through the lens of her son's murder. She wanted to make sure that the curtain was pulled back, so other forms of protests at local and national levels could be understood in a different light (radical change was needed) to dismantle the hate, helping to build the momentum of the Movement.

Similarly since 2012, Sybrina Fulton, the mother of Trayvon Martin, has also used the media to help expose the ramifications of the "Stand your ground" law that took

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[276] Ibid., 142. The reference of bitter gall in their mouth links to the Biblical account of the bitter gall that Jesus was forced to take while being crucified for the sins of humanity.

[277] Memorandum for Colonel Goodpaster from Max Rabb, the first Secretary to the Cabinet, and a critical inside actor in the area of civil rights during the Eisenhower administration. Sent from the White House on January 6, 1956. Eisenhower Archives. http://www.eisenhower.archives.gov/research/online_documents/civil_rights_emmett_till_case.html Memo, Maxwell Rabb to Colonel Andrew Goodpaster regarding mail received at White House regarding Emmett Till, January 6, 1956 Accessed December 27, 2012.

[278] This concept is taken from Mamie Till-Mobley's comparison of the Iron Curtain in Russia with the "cotton curtain in Mississippi that must have a steel lining." Houck, 133.

the life of her son, and an unknown number of others throughout the United States. Like Till-Bradley, Fulton made the determination that her son's death will not be in vain. She also decided to use the death to help change the laws that allow non-law enforcement or military persons to shoot first even when their lives are not in danger.

In an interview with National Public Radio's Michel Martin, Fulton expressed her ultimate goal of justice: "If it takes me the rest of my life, I am dedicated and committed to getting justice. So, I can wait a year. If that's the process, the proper process that it has to take, I'm willing to wait for justice to be served."[279] While Till-Bradley explained that her son was invested in the quest for freedom, Fulton understood that the justice she sought in the specific case of her son, would create the possibility of justice for countless others. Sybrina also realizes that her courage to stand up and speak out for Trayvon has resulted in persons from many racial backgrounds coming together to join the fight for justice so that others will not meet the same fate as her son.

Fulton, a member of Antioch Missionary Baptist Church in Miami Gardens, Florida, describes her faith as important for her as she continues to live with the tragic loss of her son. The passage that she relies on the most to "help get her through" is one that women in this study also relied on; Proverbs 3:5-6, "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct your paths."[280] Fulton and her ex-husband, Tracy Martin have spoken at many mass gatherings, including speaking in many churches throughout the nation. Two such

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[279] Sybrina Fulton. Transcribed portions of interview on NPR, on April 26, 2012. http://www.npr.org/2012/04/26/151377059/sybrina-fulton-i-can-wait-a-year-for-justice. Accessed December 27, 2012.

[280] Sybrina Fulton. Interview with Jaweed Kaleem for The Huffington Post, May 11, 2012. "Trayvon Martin's Mother, Sybrina Fulton, Reflects on Spirituality and Motherhood." http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/05/11/trayvon-martin-mother-sybrina-fulton-_n_1509090.html. Accessed December 27, 2012.

churches are the West Angeles Church of God in Christ in Los Angeles, California, where a large rally took place on April 26, 2012, and the Empowerment Temple A.M.E. Church in Baltimore, Maryland where Fulton spoke on May 20, 2012.

In an interview, the Associated Press reported "Fulton told reporters that she's making such trips not just for her son, but for other young people who might be victims of racial profiling."[281] Fulton, like Till-Bradley has not been silenced by her grief, but has spoken up and out to those whose moral consciousness she hopes to prick in a way that will allow them to join her in the ongoing fight for justice for her son and others. She has decided to do what she has to do, because the need for justice is bigger than her son.

The murder of Trayvon Martin awakened old racial tropes and challenged those who had been comfortably living in their middle class sensibilities; helping them to realize that the same thing could happen to them, their children, or any other young person. What one family experienced, was borne as the pain of many within the human family throughout the world. A world where young people did not have to worry about being profiled based on the color of their skin and clothing choice was a world imagined by Sybrina Fulton. Her faith gave her the courage to pursue justice, no matter how long it takes. Standing up and speaking out against the stand your ground law, is something that Fulton believes she simply has to do.

Mamie Till-Bradley and Sybrina Fulton are Black Churchwomen whose beliefs reflect a lived theology of justice where God remains with them and gives them strength in the struggle, and whose actions reinforce a social ethic of compulsion to act despite personal pain.

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[281] http://www2.wkrg.com/news/2012/may/20/trayvon-martins-mother-speaks-baltimore-church-ar-3826651/. Accessed December 28, 2012.

As the stories of these two women illustrate, a theology of justice and freedom lived out in the past can be studied and can be shared with people in the present. While this theology finds its origins in the experiences of Black women during a historic period of legal injustice and limitations, their understanding of who God is has important applications in comparable communities today. Understanding God as one who is present in the midst of contestation, and one whose enduring love provides protection, guidance, strength, endurance, joy, justice, and forgiveness in the present as in the past, reinforces individual efforts for religio-socio-political change today.

**Conclusion**

Through the lived experiences revealed and analyzed in this dissertation, a longer, wider, and deeper understanding of the theological and ethical motivations of Black Churchwomen during the Civil Rights Movement is moved from the margins into the critical center of civil rights and Black religious studies. A lived theology of justice and freedom and a liberative social ethic of compulsion can provide additional frameworks for strategic faith-centric organizing in religious-social-political activism today. This is possible through a focus on freedom faith that draws from our innate desire for freedom and our legacy of faith, liminal assessment of the current environment, courageous resistance against oppressive forces, and theo-moral imagination to see not only what is but what ought to be, and do what has to be done to make it a reality.

# APPENDICIES

# Appendix A - Methodology

## METHODOLOGY

In 2007 I met Rev. Gregory V. Eason, Sr., and Rev. Dr. Raphael G. Warnock, the respective pastors of Big Bethel A.M.E. Church and Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta, Georgia. I shared with them my desire to do research with women within their congregations who had been actively involved in the Civil Rights Movement. As an ordained clergywoman in the A.M.E. Church, I became an associate minister of Big Bethel A.M.E. and began attending services at Ebenezer Baptist on a regular basis. The pastors to the congregations introduced me during worship service and their introduction created the initial authorized credibility and space for me to begin to have women approach me with their interest in participating in my study. I developed a general information form that I had women fill out so that I would have their contact information as well as an idea of the type of activities they had previously been and were currently involved in.

In the fall of 2008, after one year of working to obtain IRB approval to conduct my study in a way that the women could be identified by their names instead of being forced to use a pseudonym, although that option was provided if they desired. At the time that I was going through the IRB approval process, Emory University was beginning to encounter more persons in the humanities who were doing ethnographic centered research, and my project was one of the earlier ones that helped to expand the understanding of the level of risk associated with identifying participants. My project was ultimately granted exemption within the IRB approval process, however I made sure that I used all of my approved documents and protocols. I submitted a list of loosely constructed interview questions for IRB review, but actually used far fewer questions in

my interviews. I also initially used focus groups, but the dynamics within the groups did not allow deeper probing into areas as women began to share their experiences. After conducting two focus groups at First A.M.E. Bethel in Harlem and one focus group at Big Bethel A.M.E. in Atlanta, I began solely conducting one-on-one interviews with women so that their narratives could be shared without interruption or any feelings of comparison or competition regarding Civil Rights experiences. The one-on-one interviews also made it more likely for some of the interviews to take place in the homes where other resource materials may have been available for review.

*The Research Sites*

The women who self-selected and agreed to participate in this study, have many commonalities as well as differences. A part of the commonalities are likely associated with the selection of the research sites through which they were identified. All four churches, Big Bethel A.M.E. Church, Ebenezer Baptist Church, First A.M.E. Bethel Church and Abyssinian Baptist Church, are the home to many middle and upper-middle class Blacks and they have historically been places of social status as well as spiritual growth. The membership of these churches may have higher percentages of college educated members and those who have had other opportunities for advancement than other Black churches because of these middle-class affinities. Many of the churches served as the gathering place within the community because of the ownership of the building, the size of the edifice, and/or the location within the center of the Black community. These histories that these churches share also provide a source of both commonalities and differences.

The women who are members of each of these congregations share that they became members for differing reasons, ranging from being born into that particular church, going to the church when they moved to the city because other family members were already there, joining the church because their husband was a member there, and regularly attending or joining because of what they knew about the pastor and/or congregation.

From 2008 through 2012 I continued to build relationships with members at Big Bethel A.M.E. and Ebenezer Baptist participating regularly in the life of the churches, as a part of my participant engagement. With the identification of two potential research sites in Harlem, New York, I began to develop relationships with the ministerial leadership at First A.M.E. Bethel and Abyssinian Baptist Church. As an active member within the A.M.E. Church, I knew the family and pastor of First A.M.E. Bethel, Rev. Henry A. Belin, III, and reached out to express my desire to work with the church as a part of my research. As a part of the Fund for Theological Education's Doctoral Fellowship programs I met Rev. Eboni Marshall (now Marshall-Turman), who was serving in ministerial leadership at Abyssinian Baptist Church. After a brief discussion, I sent information to Rev. Marshall to share with the Assistant Pastor, Rev. Violet Dease (now Dease Lee) and Abyssinian's senior Pastor, Rev. Dr. Calvin O. Butts, III. I flew to New York in 2008 to attend the 200$^{th}$ Anniversary celebration for the church. I received a verbal agreement from Butts to conduct my research at Abyssinian, but the full interviews did not really begin until 2010, when with the assistance of Rev. Raphael Warnock who had previously served at Abyssinian, I was able to have a sit down meeting with Butts to help me break through the institutional barriers.

As an ethnographer, I employed some methods in the communities in which my research participants currently live, which expand beyond traditional participant observation of ethnography by utilizing methods similar to what Tracey Hucks describes as participant engagement, and what I categorize as working as an *inside-outsider*.[282] Over the course of two years, I lived within the communities in which I conducted my research and became a regular participant in the aspects of their religious lives. A participant engagement model of ethnography recognizes that the perceived objectivity of a traditionally understood participant observer is mythic in nature because the person conducting the research brings with them aspects that are accepted or rejected by the researcher as the research subject is engaged.

Instead, I actively engaged the communities I conducted my research within, and became welcomed as a member of their religious and social communities and often adopted into their families. I approached this research as an inside-outsider, knowing the language, the sacred traditions, and being born into general aspects of the Black American Christian culture, while still not being native to some of the specific iterations in the research areas. The research site that the women are connected with does not necessarily imply the church of their membership. It refers to the church through which they found out about and agreed to participate in the research study. As an inside-outsider I entered the space through personal connections that could influence the "doorkeepers" in the congregations and was then welcomed in at the level more akin to a member than a visitor, and certainly not solely as an outside researcher. Through

[282] Tracey E. Hucks, "Perspectives in Lived History: Religion, Ethnography, and the Study of African Diasporic Religions," *Practical Matters* 3 (Spring 2010): 13. Hucks describes participant engagement as a series of multiple blurrings between human devotees and their sacred spirits through experiences that result from their shared beliefs.

"adoption" by various women in each congregation I was able to gain access as family to information that would often remain internal, and often had not even been shared with other biological family members. Inherent within this method is the challenge of becoming too closely involved to be a critical observer, however, I entered the relationships conscious of this challenge, and through classic methods of both oral history and ethnography, including participant observation, interviewing, note taking, and writing thick descriptions of experiences, I made intentional efforts to maintain space for critique and analysis.

With the generous assistance of Betty Bounds, I was able to live within the Harlem community eight weeks during the summer of 2009, and eight weeks during the summer of 2010. This consistent presence within the community allowed me to solidify relationships with key members of the churches, and to be embraced as more than a researcher who was simply there to take from them, but instead I was a person committed to the church, their community, and their lives. In 2009 I met Kevin McGruder and Martia Goodson who served as the President and Vice President of Abyssinian's Archives and History ministry. The help provided by McGruder and Goodson was critical for my research at Abyssinian. In 1991, Goodson conducted an oral history project with women from Abyssinian who were involved in the church from 1940 to 1970. The transcripts from this oral history project are held at the Schomburg, and they offered great context for the types of activities and interests among some of Abyssinians well-known members. During the summers of 2009 and 2010 I became actively involved in the life of the church and attended weekly Sunday worship services, Bible studies, Vacation Bible School, church picnics, and more. I developed good working relationships

with those who coordinated the church facilities that allowed me to reserve meeting spaces within the churches to conduct interviews.

As I began my research I quickly came to realize that everyday women's participation in the Civil Rights Movement was often something that was not known among leaders of churches. The support of the pastors was critical to my access and exposure to women who could potentially be a part of my study, especially because many pastors were not fully aware of various members' involvement. Each pastor introduced me to the congregation by having me stand, and saying a little about me, and the research that I was seeking to do at the church. I also had announcements placed in the bulletins at each of the churches. Examples are included within this section of the appendix. At Big Bethel A.M.E. it took a little longer to gain enough participants for the study, so I developed an additional flier that I distributed requesting participants and the announcement from the bulletin was also included on the church website.

Women self-selected into my study by contacting me in person after church, when I would stand in the back or on the side at the direction of the pastor who announced where I would be, or by email or phone utilizing my contact information in the church bulletin. I scheduled interviews for the women either at the church or in their homes, and each interview ranged from about one hour and a half to three hours. The longer interviews were generally those that took place in the homes and women offered me meals and took the time to show me things in their homes. As an oral history, my goal was to ask as few open questions as possible that were designed to get the women to share as much as they could about their experiences during the Civil Rights Movement. Each interview was recorded with a digital audio recorder and a digital camera to capture

the embodiment of their experiences as they recalled them. The general questions that I asked were:

- Tell me about yourself.
- When thinking about the Civil Rights Movement, what song, scripture, saying, word, and/or color comes to mind? [This was written on a blank index card and then read aloud]
- What role did/does God play in your involvement?
- How did you envision/imagine change?
- Did you participate by yourself, if not who joined you and why?
- What is your first memory of activism – something you observed, something you were told about, or something you participated in? [This was written on a blank 8 ½ x 11 sheet of paper and then read aloud]

Follow up questions were asked to responses that the women offered to the questions. The first question, "tell me about yourself" often provided the most insight into the women's lives, their faith, and their activism.

With the assistance of a transcription service and double editing by me, a transcript was made of twenty of the forty-three interviews, and from those transcripts, eight women were chosen to be a part of my dissertation research. Two women from each of the four churches were selected based on the criteria I developed that looked for at their overall responsiveness to as many interview questions as possible, contributions to written exercises and questionnaire requests, and the availability of supplemental support for their experiences (e.g. newspaper articles, arrest records, etc.) when possible. I also chose not to include narratives that seemed to reveal too many deeply personal aspects

such as childhood rapes and other forms of abuse that were not connected to identifiable elements of the Movement.

I imported transcripts of the eight women into the qualitative analysis software Atlas.ti, which helped me to use a grounded theory methodology to identify significant themes within the oral histories that form the core of my data. After reading through the transcripts multiple times, I created 180 codes for use with phrases and sections of the interviews. I then created a few super codes to group similar codes, and 20 families that identified synergies between multiple codes as they were clustered together. The codes and families with the greatest number of occurrences provided direction for the most grounded ideas from which to develop the theology and ethic I put forth. The following passage from a portion of Marjorie Wallace Smyth's interview allows me to show a small example of codes and families I developed within the Atlas.ti software.

> Oh yeah, they would meet there. See, that's where it started. See, before Martin Luther King became involved they always met at Bethel. That's why they were always bombing us over there. And then they later moved down to 16th Street Baptist Church. But a lot of meetings were held in the dark over there at Bethel Baptist Church, yeah.

The above passage features the Codes: bombing, church, and mass meeting; and the Families: violence, church/religion/faith, and mass meeting. The Family "violence" is comprised of the codes bombing, danger, fear, hatred, klan, pain, riots, segregation, threats, trauma, and violence; the Family "church/religion/faith" includes the codes bible, church, church membership, faith, hope, prayer, religion, spiritual, worship, belief, scripture, and Jewish; and the Family "mass meeting" only entails the code mass meeting. Families and codes with the greatest number of occurrences or density across all of the transcripts under consideration were then expanded to bring together all of the

phrases from each transcript within a particular code or family. By reading these texts center around one code together I was able to see themes and patterns that would have otherwise been difficult to notice. The Atlas.ti software enabled me to more efficiently code and manage over 235 pages of text generated from the transcribed interviews of the eight women.

My analysis of the songs listed by the women as significant during the Movement began by locating recordings of the songs that were made in Mass Meetings in the South during the Civil Rights Movement to maintain the authenticity of the lyrics within the particular context. This method also allows for a multi-layer assessment of the other dynamics that were taking place through the singing, including the power and autonomy exhibited by women as they took leadership of the songs. By listening closely to those who initiate the songs and those who function as impromptu songleaders calling out which lyrics will be sung with the change of each verse, the autonomy of Black Churchwomen begins to come into view. These women songleaders made song and lyric selections based on their assessment of the needs of the group and in response to the challenges of the times. Songbooks were not used during Mass Meetings, and those who participated in the meetings regularly rarely recall songs being sung the exact same way from gathering to gathering. Verses were added and removed, names were changed, situations were customized, as the context in which the songs were being sung shaped the messages being delivered. This organic process enabled those who may have been blocked from other forms of leadership to shape the theological, ethical, and political foundation through the words that would not only be sung in the meetings, but also recalled in the midst of confrontation and confinement as the music and the subsequent

faith moved out of the churches and into the streets and jails. The formal analysis of the songs took place through a series of stages. After obtaining audio copies of the songs from original recordings during the Movement, I listened to the songs multiple times listening for each lead voice, each emphasized response within the call-and-response model highlighting those who were supportive of the choices being made in the music, and those who were trying to change the direction or move forward to another portion of the service. The transcription of the lyrics became the next stage, which also included noting portions that were done by the songleaders as well as those by the congregation or group. Significant fillers such as "oh Lordy" were also noted when they occurred with frequency but do not appear to be official lyrics of the songs. Questions concerning the songs and the context in which they were created and sung became one of the most critical and challenging portions of the analysis, and a part of this will have to be left to later work.

Within each of the four churches where I conducted my research, I developed relationships with the women members who volunteered to share their stories with me that I have maintained. Each year I continue to stay in contact with them by mailing cards at Christmas and Easter. Maintaining this relationship has also helped when I needed to follow up to gain additional information when questions arose during my analysis. In 2011, after conducting all of the initial research, I realized that there were some additional unifying questions that it would be helpful to have from each of the participants, so I mailed a supplemental questionnaire to them with an self-addressed stamped envelope inside to help increase my return rate. I also conducted brief follow-up interviews with some of the women in-person and by phone. My relationships continue

with the women today.

**Black Church Women Involved in Human Rights Struggles**

CONTACT INFORMATION

**(Please Print and use the back if additional space is needed)**

| | |
|---|---|
| Name: | |
| Address: | |
| Telephone: | |
| Alt. Phone: | |
| Best Time to Contact: | |
| Email: | |
| Organizations/Groups **Formerly** Involved in within the **Community** | • • • • • |
| Organizations/Groups **Currently** Involved in within the **Community** | • • • • • |
| Organizations/Groups **Formerly** Involved in **WITHIN** the Church: | • • • • • |
| Organizations/Groups **Currently** Involved in **WITHIN** the Church: | • • • • • |

**This information will be maintained by AnneMarie Mingo and Emory University for the purposes of maintaining contact during the study of Black Church Women Involved in Human Rights Struggles, and will not be shared with persons outside of this study without your consent.**

Study: Black Church Women Involved in Human Rights Struggles
Primary Investigator: AnneMarie Mingo
Version: 9/18/08

Study No.: IRB00005138 **Emory University IRB** IRB use only Document Approved On: 10/9/2008

**Emory University**
**Graduate School of Arts and Sciences**
**Graduate Division of Religion**
**Consent to be a Research Subject**

**Title**: Black Church Women Involved in Human Rights Struggles: African American Women involved in the Black Church and engaged in various levels of Human Rights Struggles throughout the 20th and 21st Centuries.

**Principal Investigator:** AnneMarie Mingo, Ph.D. Student, Emory University, Graduate Division of Religion; participant in the Concentration in Religious Practices and Practical Theology

**Introduction**
You are being asked to participate in a research study. This form is designed to tell you everything you need to think about before you decide to consent (agree) to be in the study or not to be in the study. It is entirely your choice. If you decide to take part, you can change your mind later on and withdraw from the research study.

After talking about the information in this consent form with the study team you should know:
- Why this research study is being done
- What will happen during the research
- Any possible benefits to you. Most research is done to learn things that will help people in the future. No one can guarantee that a study will help you.
- The possible risks to you. Consider these carefully.
- Who will have access to your study information

If you agree to join this research study, you will receive a copy of this consent form with your signature and the date, to keep. Do not sign this consent form unless you have had a chance to ask questions and get answers that make sense to you. Nothing in this form can make you give up any legal rights. By signing this form you will not give up any legal rights.

**Purpose**
The purpose of this study is to focus on the lived experiences and practices of African American women who are currently and have been historically involved in the Black Church and at the same time they have engaged in various levels of Human Rights struggles throughout the 20th and 21st Centuries. Human rights include rights to life, justice, freedom, and equality. Some recent Human Rights struggles include the U.S. Civil Rights Movement, the Women's Rights Movement, the Black Power Struggle, etc. This research seeks to uncover some of the unknown and underexposed practices of Church women who have been engaged in some of the struggles. An understanding of your lived experiences will help to identify a social ethic of Black Church women. A portion of this study also focuses on gathering oral histories of persons like you who have played significant, but often overlooked roles in the moral formation of the United States. As experiential stories are shared, it will help reveal a model for socio-political engagement through, but not limited to, the Black Church. As you recall your experiences from both the 20th and 21st Centuries, they will be shared with the Primary Investigator in small group and individual conversations. At times you may also share pictures and other items, which help to better share your story and the stories of other women you were involved with. The number of people involved in this research will depend on how many are willing to open up and share their stories and experiences.

**Procedures**
If you agree to participate, this project will involve learning from the lived experiences of various African American Church women by talking about their historical and current involvement in human rights activities. With your permission the lived experiences will be shared and captured by video and/or audio recording to preserve the stories of women like yourself whose lives, sacrifices, and commitment to human rights have made a difference in the American society. The research will primarily consist of focus groups in church and organizational settings, which will take approximately two hours. If additional information is needed the research will continue through informal individual interviews and oral history gathering that will take approximately one and one half hours, digitization of pictures and memorabilia that you want to share, etc., done in both formal and informal ways, to as completely as possible uncover the motivations for the work and to also understand how the Black Church in conjunction with their involvement shaped their worldview. The primary investigator, AnneMarie Mingo, will conduct this information gathering in a location that is easy for you (such as a church meeting room). The research may also include the gathering of information from other persons (spouses, children, siblings, organizational leaders, etc.) who share their experiences of Black Church women in Human Rights Struggles.

**Risks and Discomforts**
There are no known or anticipated risks to participants in this research other than those involved in normal daily life and regular historic reflection activities.

**New Information**
It is possible that the researchers will learn something new during the study about the risks of being in it. If this happens, they will tell you about it so you can decide if you want to continue to be in this study or not. You may be asked to sign a new consent form that includes the new information if you decide to stay in the study.

**Benefits**
Participation in this study may allow you to reflect on past actions in a way that provides clarity and motivation for yourself and others regarding social actions that engage human rights struggles. Taking part in this research study may not benefit you personally, but this may benefit society by helping to increase knowledge on this important study. The researcher may learn new things about participation in historic human rights struggles that may help others as they are facing contemporary Human Rights issues.

**Payment for Participation**
You will not be offered payment for being in this study.

**Confidentiality**
Because much of this research is also an oral history project, your image and/or voice may appear on film and/or audio recording, and your comments may be included in the oral history film and/or audio recording for documentation and research sake. If you are identified by name, your actual name will be used unless you indicate a desire to not be identified at which time a code will be used instead of your actual name and identifying characteristics. If any written reports, papers, or published articles are produced using this research, your statements may be quoted. If you are referred to you may be identified by your actual name. If you do not want to be identified by name, you can let the researcher know and a pseudonym will be used. The researcher will have access to the videotape footage and audio recordings of this research and to any notes made regarding it, and will keep them in a locked location.

**Withdrawal from the Study**
You have the right to leave a study at any time without penalty.

The study investigator and/or sponsor also have the right to take stop your participation in this study without your consent if:

- They believe it is in your best interest;
- You were to object to any future changes that may be made in the study plan;
- or for any other reason.

**Questions**
Contact AnneMarie Mingo at Emory University in Atlanta, Georgia, at 404-508-0308 or at amingo@emory.edu

- if you have any questions about this study or your part in it, or
- if you have questions, concerns or complaints about the research

If you have questions about your rights as a research subject or if you have questions, concerns or complaints about the research, you may contact the Emory Institutional Review Board at 404-712-0720 or 1-877-503-9797.

**Consent**
I have read this consent form (or it has been read to me). All my questions about the study and my part in it have been answered. I freely consent to be in this research study.

By signing this consent form, I have not given up any of my legal rights.

_____
Name of Subject

_____ _____
Signature of Subject Date

_____ _____
Signature of Legally Authorized Representative (when applicable) Date

_____
Authority of Legally Authorized Representative or Relationship to Subject (when applicable)

_____ _____
Signature of Person Conducting Informed Consent Discussion Date

Study No.: IRB00005138 **Emory University IRB** Document Approved On: 07/14/2011
IRB use only

**Black Churchwomen during the Civil Rights Movement**
**Supplemental Questions (PLEASE PRINT – If more space is needed, you can use the back)**

NAME: _____

1. When were you born?

2. Where were you born? (City, County, State)

3. During what year(s) were you active in the Civil Rights Movement?

4. Where did you live when you were active in the Civil Rights Movement? (City, County, State)

5. Did you have other family members who were active either before you, with you, or after you? If so who and when, (e.g. mother, father, brother, sister, cousins, etc)

6. Were you a member of a church while you were active in the Civil Rights Movement? If yes,
   - what was the name of the church

   - where was it located

   - who was the pastor

7. What were you doing during the Civil Rights Movement?
   If a student,
   - was the name of the school(s) and where was it located?

   If working,
   - who did you work for, and where were they located?

8. What are the two most important reasons that you decided to become active in the Civil Rights Movement?
   a.

   b.

9. Did you or your family members read any newspapers during the Civil Rights Movement? If yes, name the newspaper(s)

10. Have you thought of anything else about your experiences during the Civil Rights Movement since our interview that you would like to share? If so, briefly describe it on the back of this sheet. If you would like for me to call you so that we can discuss it, let me know here and I will reach out to you.

*Thank you for taking the time to fill this out and continue to assist me as I work to develop this work that will help future generations understand the roles that Black women played during the Civil Rights Movement. It is my hope that what I share through my work will encourage young people to stand up against injustice today. I would not be able to do this without you. Thank you! – AnneMarie Mingo*


Version Date(s): 06/19/2011

**Big Bethel A.M.E. Church Bulletin – June 6, 2010**

## JUNE 2010

*Jaime Francis-Asante, Shasta Askin, David Banks, Charles Barksdale, Marcus Black, Sean Bogan, Joel Boykin III, Asher Brazil, Ritchie Brown, Corey Brown, Marvin Bussey,Darrell Caldwell, Stephanie Crowl, Leroy Cutton, Eunice Davis, Morgan Freeman, Nicole Gainous, James Gartner Sr., James Grimage, Doris Hamilton, Debra Harrell, Nadia Hicks, Toni Hicks, Charlene Hood, Glen James, Andrea Johnson, J. Louise Ketchen, Shirley Kimble, Dominique Langley, Erina Ruth Lawrence, Birdie Malbary, Richard Marion, Ruth McKenzie, Eric Moore, Caleb Moore, William Parham, Jamier Ridgeway, David Rucker Sr., Leonard Scott IV, Niko Senatle, Rose Singleton, Phillip Skerrett, Bianca Smith, Lyel Cummings-Sutton, Adrienne Stowe, Essie Tunstall, Angelina Vance, Donna Wade, Kenya Wilkerson, Jawanna Wilkins, James Wingfield, Ryan Woodson*

*If you would like to have your birthday listed, please contact the church office at 404-627-9707*

### JUVENILE JUSTICE/ARK OF SAFETY MINISTRIES

JUVENILE JUSTICE/ARK OF SAFETY MINISTRIES desperately needs persons to assist with regular outreach efforts, development of powerpoint presentations, update of webpage and PR tools. Cards are provided in pews for your convenience. Will contact immediately. - Rev. Bessie Robinson

### MARRIED COUPLES MINISTRY

In order that we may better serve you, our married couples, (if you have not done so) please provide us with your date, month and year of your marriage prior to the month in which you were married. This information will be used to update our records and for Marriage Emphasis Sunday (4th Sundays 11:00). Thanking you in advance, the Married Couples Council Ministry.

### YOUNG ADULT CHOIR

The YAC is on a roll "Raising the Praise in Jesus' Name"! If you're interested make sure you come out Thursdays at 6:30pm. Even if you can't sing why not learn how? Please come and invite a friend so we can lift our voices to glorify the name of Jesus Christ! If you have any questions, please contact Reginald Cleaver Jr. at bbcyac@yahoo.com.

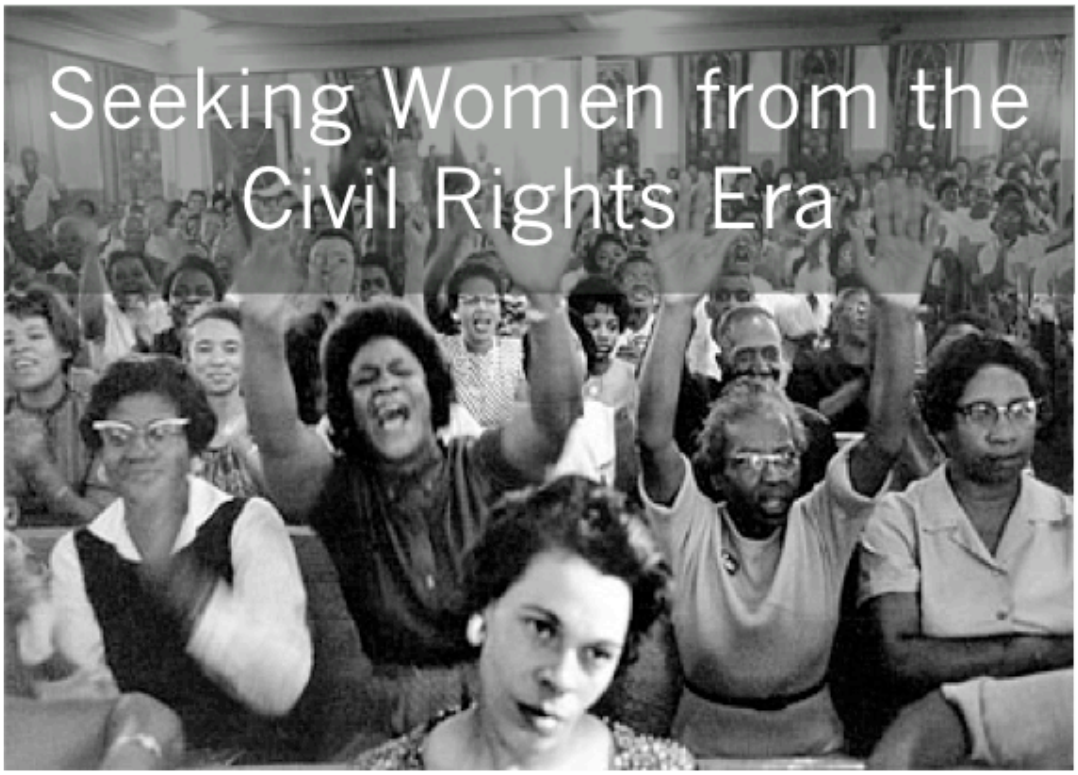
### CLOTHES CLOSET

The **Big Bethel Clothing Closet** is in dire need of **men's clothing**. Items needed include clothing, small and medium sizes, work boots & athletic shoes. There is also a need for baby clothing. You may bring your donations to the church office Monday - Friday.

### SEEKING WOMEN FROM THE CIVIL RIGHTS ERA

Rev. AnneMarie Mingo, an Assistant Minister at Big Bethel A.M.E. and a Ph.D. student at Emory University, is conducting research for her dissertation that focuses on Black Churchwomen who have been involved in the Civil Rights Movement. Women from Big Bethel will play a significant role in this project so your assistance is appreciated. If you or a woman that you know was involved in the Movement at any level (as an individual, in a group, or anything else), please contact Rev. Mingo at 404-508-0308 or amingo@emory.edu to arrange an interview, which can take place at the church or your home. Thank you in advance for your support.

**Flier soliciting Big Bethel members participation April 2010**




**Calling all Women involved in the Civil Rights Movement**

Women who are currently or have been members of Big Bethel A.M.E. Church are asked to join Rev. AnneMarie Mingo, a Ph.D. Student from Emory University, for discussions about their involvement in the church and in various activities during the Civil Rights Movement from the 1940's through 1960's. Small group and individual conversations will take place periodically in an effort to better understand the role of women and religion during the Civil Rights Movement. If you are interested or know a woman who might be interested, simply come and join us for small group discussions in April, or contact Rev. Mingo to arrange an individual session.

**Small Group Discussions**
**Wednesdays in April (7th, 14th, 21st, & 28th)**
From approximately 1:30-2:30pm

Big Bethel A.M.E. Church – Fellowship Hall, Room #5

For More Information Contact
Rev. AnneMarie Mingo

404.508.0308
amingo@emory.edu

**The Abyssinian Baptist Church Bulletin – August 1, 2010**

**Dear Dr. Oz Health Challenge Participants** We will continue to walk every Sunday following both services at 11:30 a.m. and at 2:00 p.m. The "Wait List" for the 24 Hour Fitness Membership has been activated. When we receive the new personalized invitation Letters, we will inform you. If you have any questions contact healthministry@abyssinian.org.

**Save the Date! September 5-10, 2010 – Abyssinian will attend the 2010 National Baptist Convention in Kansas City, MO.** The package is $1,250 single occupancy and $850 double occupancy. Space is limited! For registration and payments, see a representative today in the Vestry immediately following each service.

**Saturday, September 11, 2010, 10 am – The Sister To Sister Book Ministry** will meet in Central Park on 110th St. /Lenox Ave. The Ministry's summer reading is titled "The Help" by Kathryn Stockett. Bring a chair or blanket.

**Save the Date! September 24 - 26, 2010 – The Joshua Ministry host its 2010 Spiritual Retreat "Courage Under Fire"** at Tarrytown House Estate & Conference Center in Tarrytown, NY. General Registration is $355 (includes 1st class accommodations for double occupancy all meals, ground transportation, plenary sessions, and workshops). Register in the bookstore.

**YOUTH ACTIVITIES – *Our Children, Our Leaders of Tomorrow...*** *"Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it." Prov. 22:6*

**Youth Ministry** programming will resume in September. **Sunday School and Junior Church** are now in recess until the fall. For info, contact the office of the Youth Ministry at ext. 204.

**COMMUNITY NEWS & INFORMATION**

**Harlem Textile Works** presents textile workshops for adults! August 2nd-August 6th from 6:30 pm-9:30 pm. Explore the tradition of felting which began in the mountains of Mongolia to create coverings for lodgings. Contact (212) 234-5257 or harlemtextileswork@yahoo.com for more info.

**Seeking Women from the Civil Rights Era!** Rev. Anne Marie Mingo,a Ph.D. candidate at Emory University in Atlanta, GA is conducting research for her dissertation focus on Black Churchwomen who were involved in the Civil Rights Movement and other Human Rights Struggles. Women from Abyssinian will play a significant role in this project. If you or a woman that you know was involved in the Movement/Struggle at any level (individual, group, etc.) contact Rev. Mingo to arrange an interview **before August 8th** at the church or your home. Contact (609) 937-7317 or amingo@emory.edu for more info.

**Blue Nile Passage, Inc.** Rites-of-Passage Program for youth ages 12-15. Through interactive learning, disciplined loving and challenging guidance youth are groomed to be spiritually grounded, culturally enriched and morally guided. **Registration - Thursday, August 19, 2010, 6:00 pm-9:00pm,** *first come, first served.* Enrollment starts at 3:00 pm. The Abyssinian Baptist Church, 132 Odell Clark Place, Harlem NY. We are seeking volunteers, male and female mentors, or if you would like to make a donation contact: Clifford B. Simmons at (212) 561-1449 for more info.

## Ebenezer Baptist Church Bulletin – October 31, 2010

"Driven by God's Purpose, Marching to Higher Ground"

Jeremiah 29:11 — Philippians 3:13-15

Ebenezer

*The Order of Worship*

October 31, 2010

8:00 a.m. & 11:00 a.m. Worship Services

The Rev. Raphael G. Warnock, Ph.D., *Senior Pastor*

**Call To Worship** (8:00 a.m.)

**Praise & Worship** (11:00 a.m.)

***Hymn of Affirmation** ..... *"I Love You Lord Today"* ..... No. 581

**Invocation** (8:00 a.m.)

******

**Choral Worship** (8:00 a.m.) ..... *"Holiness (Take My Life)"* ..... The Praise Team
Keith Williams, *Director*

(11:00 a.m.) ..... Youth Ensemble
Mark Jackson, *Director*

**Welcome/Life at Ebenezer**

******

**Pastoral Prayer**

**Sermonic Selection** ..... *"I Give Myself Away"* ..... The Praise Team
by William McDowell

**Sermon** 8a - Obrey Hendricks - Mark 8:1-20, I Cor. 14:1-5a
11a - Obrey Hendricks -

***Invitation**

**Tithe Appeal/Offertory Prayer**
**At The Offertory** ..... *"I Will Give you The Praise"* ..... The Praise Team
rec. J.J. Hairston and Youthful Praise

***Benediction**

**Ushers:**
The Senior Usher Board - Nina House, *President*

* Congregation standing — ** Worshipers may enter

*If you would like to unite with our church, you may do so during the Hymn of Invitation, following the sermon, by Baptism, Letter, Christian Experience, Watch Care, Restoration or as an Associate Member.*

## ANNOUNCEMENTS:

**Attention Parents!** Ebenezer's Nursery is available during worship for children ages 2-4 in the Educational Building and, for your convenience, a Baby Cry Room is available to the right of the Narthex. An usher will be happy to escort you to either location.

**Seeking Women from the Civil Rights Era** - Rev. AnneMarie Mingo, a Ph.D. Candidate at Emory University, is conducting research for her dissertation which focuses on Black Churchwomen who have been involved in the Civil Rights Movement and other human rights struggles. Women from Ebenezer will play a significant role in this project. If you, or a woman that you know, was involved in the Movement/Struggle at any level (individual, group, etc.), please contact Rev. Mingo to arrange an interview which can take place at your home or the church throughout the months of October and November. Contact: 609.937.7817 or amingo@emory.edu.

HALLELUJAH NIGHT!!! **The Youth Ministry** of Ebenezer Baptist Church will be going to Berean Christian Church for Hallelujah Night today from 5:00 p.m.-7:30 p.m. This event is available for children and youth (6th-12th grade). There is no cost and transportation will be provided. For more information, contact Minister Michael Wortham at 404.688-7300 ext. 246 or michaelswortham@gmail.com.

**Christmas Gift Cards for IHAD Dreamers:** If you or your organization would like to donate/contribute towards a $30 Wal-Mart gift card for the Dreamers, please contact Burnette Cockfield at

**Homecoming Sunday**

Sunday, November 7, 2010

Pastor Warnock, preaching

**Nehemiah Culminates...**


Homecoming Sunday, November 7, 2010

EBENEZER BAPTIST CHURCH
Requests the pleasure of your company
at:

**A Party With A Purpose**

Benefiting the
**The Martin Luther King, Sr. Community Resource Complex**

Friday, November 5, 2010 | 8:00PM - 12:00Midnight
LOFT AT CASTLEBERRY HILL
170 Northside Drive, SW | Atlanta, GA 30313
$40.00 per person *(tax deductible)*
*Light Hors D'oeuvres and Dancing*

**Save The Date!**

*Fall Revival*

Sunday, November 14 (8:00 AM & 11:00 AM)
and Monday, November 15, 2010 (7:30 PM)

The Rev. Dr. Gina Stewart, *Revivalist*

# Appendix B – Select Transcriptions of Oral Histories

## Transcribed Recollections of Research Participants

### *PERSONAL INVOLVEMENT IN THE MOVEMENT*

LILLIAN SUE BETHEL[283]

After her mother died unexpectedly in New York, Lillian Sue returned to the South to finish college. She sees her move after her mother's death as a negative event that turned into a good thing.

*So I left and I went home where I went to Albany State. Now, see, if that hadn't happened I may never have gone, alright. Every cloud has a silver lining, so it was something good in that, too. Alright, You could say I did pretty good academically.*

*The first year I was there in '61 is the year of the so-called Albany Movement was when it got started. And, again, like I had said before, it started with the Freedom Riders and when they were in Alabama and other places people had sicced dogs on them. They had done everything to them, beat them up. And we had decided 'cause already then the movement sort of had got started.*

*But anyway I got involved, because my mind was already there. Once I knew that was going on, hey.*

How'd you hear about that?

*Being in school somebody else there was a part of it, and then they mentioned it to me. Well then they were having meetings at a place called Mt. Zion church okay and I just went. I got involved in it. I wanted to see what was happening.*

Do you remember your first day?

*At that, no. I don't. I really don't. I just remember I got swept up into what was going on you know what was going on and the singing. That's where I met Bernice. I didn't meet her at school at first. I met her at that meeting at the church, and then that's when I found out that she was going to the same school that I was going to.*

And she was Bernice Johnson at that time?

*Bernice Johnson, that's right. And she had such a beautiful voice, okay, so when we would have these meetings they would be almost like church meetings anyway and she would sing, okay. And I'm sure that attracted a lot of people, too.*

*One of the things I found out was people who that were older at that time couldn't understand what we were doing and couldn't see the need to be a part of it. And some of the younger people couldn't understand, because their vision was totally different and*

[283] Interview conducted with Lillian Sue Bethel on August 25, 2009. Transcription pages 5-7.

*they couldn't see anything wrong with what was going on, unfortunately. But eventually many of them sort of came around and understood it.*

*When we had done that march I was talking about and we were all put in jail, the school suspended every one of us. But, see, Bernice was suspended, but she was such a smart person, she ended up getting a scholarship with a school in Atlanta, so she didn't lose out on anything. Me, on the other hand, God took care of me in another way. I had taken all of my final exams; therefore, when I was suspended it didn't matter. You know 'cause most folks lost it, lost it. And I was just out for one term, and went back the next one.*

So they suspended you for a semester?

*Uh-huh, one semester. And I felt sorry for Dr. Dennis* [Albany State's President] *because I think maybe deep down in his heart he didn't really want to do it, but had no choice.*

How long were you there in jail, is this the time when it was just long—

*I was in there for a week, okay. I got out the day before Christmas. Christmas Eve they let us out. And I never will forget one of the guards or whatever you called them at that time, looked at me and said we shouldn't let you go, because my aunt was going to bail me out and I wouldn't go. I told them that I would leave when everybody else was released. Now I can't tell you why I said that other than the fact that I felt that we all should be let out at the same time. I don't recall it being any strong feelings about anything at that time. I just felt that that's the way it should be. Why, I can't tell you, okay. Now if that happened to me today, I could give you some sort of explanation. I couldn't. It was just what I felt I had to do and that was it.*

*But I will never forget that I was in jail when Martin Luther came and they let us out. They let us out.*

Lillian Sue Bethel's first memory of Civil Rights activism was with the Freedom Riders in New York City. After her return to Georgia, her decision to participate in the march and gathering to protect the Freedom Riders who previously faced violence in other cities resulted in her being arrested along with others in Albany. Her refusal to accept the bail money from her aunt reflects her desire for communal justice and not simply individual comfort.

DORIS BRUNSON[284]

[284] Interview conducted with Doris Brunson, July 8, 2010. Transcription pages 17-19.

So when you started doing what you were doing, did you think about what your family had done? Or was it….

*You know, I think it was just so engrained; I didn't feel that I was carrying on the torch more or less. I think that this is what you are asking me. I just felt that I needed to be where I could be part of the voice for change for making it possible for us to have the same respect as any other race. I felt, if I weren't a part of that, you know, then I would be more or less letting my family down. I had to be a part of this opportunity. I didn't create any of the marches; I just would go to the marches and, you know, just walk down the street. "Black Power!" or whatever you know.*

How did you find about them?

*Well, they would often be in the local papers. They would say that there's gonna be a march on such and such and such. You just go on out there, and sometimes you'd be walking down the street and you'd see people on a march, you would just go out in the middle of the street, and you didn't even know. You'd see a big sign saying SOLIDARITY, and you just 'oh yeah, okay', and you'd just go on out there in the middle of the street, never mind what you were doing. Wherever you were going, it wasn't that important. Get on out there and walk!*

So did you do this stuff by yourself or did you have friends or cousins?

*Well, it was mainly by myself, but there were times when if it was really a big one, other people would say, "Oh yeah, I'm going to that. I'll meet you there." Sometimes we'd say we couldn't find each other. When we had the March on Washington, I decided I was going down there to march. And I did go.*

How'd you get there?

*I'm thinking now I went down by train. I think I went down by train. They had buses where you could go. I think they gave us like a little hat. You could put the little hat on. I remember marching, and it was very sort-of strange to me, but there was a white person who just sort of started walking with me and talking, because there were white people in the march too, and I didn't anticipate being around any whites, but the person was saying that this was something that we need to do in this country. That was very nice.*

So why did you go?

*I wanted to be there. First of all, I felt that Martin Luther King was so special. I was so proud of him, and I was so proud of Rosa Parks and Fannie Lou Hamer - all of the leaders. I just felt I needed to be there. I just wanted to be in that number. I don't know whether my being there would make a difference, but I just want to be there. I want to clap when he speaks. I want to say YES, and I want to say 'Black Power' and all the rest of it. And I just went. I don't remember what happened with some of my cousins, but I was there on my own. I was there on my own. I don't remember now whether they went*

*down a different way, and they were in the march, and we just didn't see each other or what, but I know that I was there. It was a very good experience. It was a good experience, and I felt, I felt valuable.*

How so?

*I felt that even though nobody knew me or no one would ever know whether I was there or not, I felt that I was making a difference by just being there; to have the numbers swell. Let them count. You know, let them see that there're people from all over. This person is coming from New York, from Harlem. This person is coming from Virginia. This person is coming from Colorado. You know, it was just you wanted to be a part of the whole experience. You wanted to be able to say I did make that effort. I got there, and I heard him in person. I didn't have to see him on television or anything. I was there, and my body was one of the bodies they had to count. It was really special. I think anybody who went on that march would say that they had a special time. I'm always glad that I did it. I was very glad.*

Brunson was working as a high school teacher when she became actively involved in Civil Rights protests in New York. Unlike many of the teachers in the South, she was not concerned about losing her job due to her participation. She joined some protests spontaneously if she saw something near her. She also made plans for others like those she read about in the newspapers, and the March on Washington. She captures the significance of individual efforts that were able to combine to make greater changes.

PEGGY LUCAS[285]

*...while at Miles College in Fairfield, Alabama, Carlton Reese who was the choir director was also the choir director for New Bethlehem Baptist Church in Dolomite, Alabama, and he asked me to sing with them at the mass meetings, the Monday night meetings. My father was already going. He would come back and tell us about different speakers, you know, like Dr. King and Reverend Abernathy and Reverend Fred Shuttlesworth, so I started going to the meetings and I started singing in the choir, and in 1963, April, the civil rights group gathered at A.G. Gaston Motel in Birmingham. That was like their headquarters for the sit ins.*

A. G. Gaskins?

[285] Interview with Peggy Lucas on November 6, 2010. Transcription pages 2-4, 8, also see Harvard Sitkoff, *The Struggle for Black Equality 1954-1980* (New York, NY: Hill and Wang, 1981), 135-150.

*A.G. Gaston was a black owned hotel. And so they asked some students from Miles to participate in the sit ins and they told us what to expect, what to do, you know, and I was at J.J. Newberry's, which is in downtown Birmingham, and we walked into a J.J. Newberry's and ordered a hamburger. Wanted to order a hamburger really, but we didn't get a chance to do anything. We were told by an officer that we were being asked to leave because we were in violation, and if we didn't leave they would—something about trespassing after, but anyway, we had already been prompted and told that this was going to happen and then we were also anxious to get in the—back then they called them the paddy wagons.*

*We felt safe after we got there.*

You felt safe after you got—

*In the paddy wagons because the people would stare at you and they'd do mean things to you back then just for participating in a sit in demonstration, so after we got there we went to—we were put in jail for five days, and then my older sister found out I was there, Shirley, and so she came. I had some legal documents, an injunction also that was trying to stop us from the sit ins and I'm going to try to find those legal documents that has our names. Only thing I have today is this—here are the foot soldiers which identifies my name and my sister's name that we were participants and that was April, 1963.*

*But when* [we] *were in jail for five days we took the mattress off the beds and we stayed together and we slept like in the hallway and we slept in rounds. Somebody was awake while, you know, we—just for safety, precaution and the people knew why we were there and they would just look at us. They never said anything to us, but they knew. The other inmates knew why we were there, and we sang and we prayed, and at one incident, the warden, we heard her screaming "if you all don't shut up" and she was crying.*

It was a female warden?

*A female warden. She said "if you all don't shut up, they're going to put you in solitary confinement," but she was crying, and so that Sunday morning we had a worship service and Carlton Reese who played for the choir was playing the piano and he chose to start singing the freedom songs, and of course we all started singing and after that they put us in solitary confinement. Solitary confinement has been somewhat of a blur, and I asked my sister, were we in there with each other or were we alone. I just can't remember. It was like a blur, but I knew—immediately after they found out that we were in solitary confinement, the warriors, they immediately got us out because they knew that was dangerous.*

So this worship service was something that was combined?

*Yes. It was combined and we were able to, you know, see the guys in there and he took over the service, and after that we were found out we were in confinement, solitary*

*confinement, and they got us out. But all this took place I think it was the week before Easter, and I think it was that Friday when Dr. King came in jail because when the water and the fire hoses when Bull Connor did that, we were already in jail so I guess if we had been out we would have gotten caught up in that part.*

[She discussed involvement in the Movement with her dad]

*We had everything we needed, and when I think back, I don't think we had a whole lot of money or stuff, but we had love and Dad believed education was number one, and he and I would go door to door doing voter registration drives, and we were trying to teach people how to read the Preamble to the Constitution at that time.*

About how old were you during that time?

*I was probably about 16, 17. And he was a very proud man, and he would talk about how things were and how, you know, the next generation could make it better. So I remember the morning I went to jail. I said to him, I said daddy, I'm—I was singing in the choir and I was active in the movement. I said daddy well I think I'm going to jail. They came out to Miles and they asked some of the students to participate in the sit-ins and I had my little personal items together and he just looked. He just looked. He didn't say yes and he didn't say no. I know he was proud, and so he was. He was very proud.*

Peggy Lucas' father was both a role model for and a supporter of her activism. Beyond using her voice as a part of the soundtrack of the Movement, Lucas intentionally volunteered to participate in a sit-in that she knew would result in her arrest in Birmingham, the seat of the contemporary confederacy under the enforcement of staunch segregationist Eugene "Bull" Connor.

ROSE SCHOFIELD[286]

Where were you singing "We Shall Overcome"?

*We would be at church and then sometimes we would also be on the picket line carrying our signs and what have you.*

Where were you picketing?

[286] Interview conducted with Rose Schofield on May 10, 2010. Transcription pages 5-6, 7-8.

*We were picketing in front of the jail. They were trying to add on an addition to the city jail, no it was actually the county jail, and the jail it was across the street from our church which was Mt. Teman, which they changed the name to Greater Mt. Teman AME Church. And while they were doing this, there were no black construction companies or workers. And there were black construction companies in the town and in the surrounding areas. And Cotton was one of the black construction companies, and we were trying to see if they would give him the contract, you know, it was a biddable contract and why couldn't he bid for the contract. They didn't even want him to bid for the contract.*

Wow.

*Yeah, that wasn't right. So our pastor, Pastor Watts at that time, during the Civil Rights movements pertaining to Martin Luther King, he decided that this is something that we needed to do as our church, and we would be the headquarters for it even though we were a little tiny church. I don't even think we were as big as the bottom part of this church, but he decided that this is something that he had to do and wanted to do. So a lot of times we would meet at our church and then we would meet at other churches too in town, but our church was the spearhead of the project. And so we started demonstrating, and a lot of the adults would get arrested and clog up the system which was really part of what was going on. We knew these people were arrested but then we started running out of adults, so they came up with the idea that the children would be arrested, and it was like oh, yay, we're finally going to be able to something. But what had to be done though is that your parents had to sign a paper saying that it was okay for you to be arrested.*

Who was coordinating the signing of the papers, like you were signing and giving it to who? Was it an organization?

*Yes NAACP was involved in it and we all belonged to the NAACP. The churches made sure that all the church members would belong to the NAACP, which was cool. You didn't have to beg them like they do now.*

*I just assumed I've never been arrested, but I have. You know what I'm saying, I've been arrested for, I guess, civil—*

Disobedience in some way, I guess.

*Right. In some way because I did get arrested one day and I was very disappointed because I wound up going in the police car and I wanted to go in the paddy wagon [laughter]. Everybody was getting in the paddy wagon, and I was getting ready to get in the paddy wagon and they said oh, no, there is not enough room. I said but I want to go on the paddy wagon, they said but there is not enough room. I was like so hurt I didn't know what to do.*

Ok so why did you get arrested?

*Oh because we were chained and there was this Big Mac truck and it was coming to unload something in that area where they were building, and we were all sitting there chained together. I mean it was something that they could unlock because we were all children, but I guess we were about, I guess I had to be about 15 or 16 years old something like that in that age group. The truck just kept coming and coming and then I'm like oh no is he really going to hit us and I'm like they took a picture and I'm like just like this looking at the truck and you could see the dog and the emblem.*

*And he stopped.*

*I wasn't just on the sidewalk or somebody's house or at the church. We were in the street. We were blocking the street. So traffic could not come up and down that street that's for sure. We made sure of that. And we were up early in the morning, so you know what it had to be during the summer, it had to be during the summer that we were doing this, because we were up in the morning and up late at night, because sometimes we didn't leave church 'till 10 - 11o'clock at night, 12 o'clock at night because they would do their planning, and we would be there with the adults.*

*I also went to the March on Washington too… I was 16 and my aunt and 'nem said no I couldn't go, they would never let me go anywhere. And then my grandfather happened to say I think she should go. I think it would be a good experience. And they said well she's 16. She'll be down there by herself. She won't know anybody, and she doesn't know how to take care of herself, and I wasn't streetwise, so you know I probably could have gotten in a lot of trouble if it was nowadays. But you know back then people looked out for you and so there was a bus ride leaving out of either Rahway or Roselle and somehow my grandfather dug up the money, and I wound up on the bus and he knew these people, because it was going from some bar that had gotten up a bus load of people and they told him we'll look out for her. And then my uncle was going and we thought we would meet each other there… But it didn't happen. And I got pretty close up there like you know how the reflecting pond is and then you know you have to walk up this way and then this is where Martin was up here in this area. Well I got up past the pond…So I was a little tiny so I could maneuver and I was by myself and you know everybody was excusing themselves for me because you know they thought I was going back I guess to my parents or something like that. So I got up there pretty close. I was kind of glad. But I didn't have a camera during those days because …we didn't.*

Wow. What made you want to go, what made you even ask to be able to go?

*I knew this was history. I knew this was history in the making and it was going to make a difference.*

Rose Schofield later explains that she did not have the support of the women in her family, but that her grandfather signed the consent form for her to be arrested if

necessary, and that after she was arrested, her grandfather went to the jail to get her after she was released. The excitement of youth getting the opportunity to participate in something that would make a real difference is captured through her reflections. We are also able to see some distinctions between the rights efforts in North and the South since the majority of her protests were around gaining equal opportunities to bid for a county contract for building a jail.

BESSIE SELLAWAY[287]

Can you describe some of your experiences with Dr. King and his brother?

*…so when Dr. King—he'd been to Alabama and all the different places with the movement, but when he came to Atlanta to do the movement, he had many, many mass meetings for adults, whomever to come to participate and so being at Spelman at the time, I guess it was just in my heart and spirit that I wanted to participate, so I went to many of the mass rallies and meetings, and he would always stress and let us know that if you could not be non-violent, then you must go home and pray and raise money and do something else. And so I decided that I could be non-violent and that I would participate and there were many times when we went downtown maybe to try to integrate a restaurant or 5 and 10 cent store, whatever, those places would get the wind because they were always trying to be a step ahead and so if they were a step ahead they would close up their facilities and therefore, we couldn't go in. And many times we just would walk in front of various places and picketed the places, but then the first time that I was arrested was when we went to Woolworth which was on Peachtree Street, and when we went in there, everything was planned according to Dr. King to timing. And so we went in and we rushed in and sat on those stools, you know, at the lunch counter? And then, of course, the hecklers were always out there. They would come up, pull your hair, pull on your clothes, spray you with fly spray or whatever they could to try to pick on us or get us to maybe be non-violent, but, of course, we had vowed not to be violent and then according to their law we were not supposed to be in there, so, of course, the managers, owners would ask us out, and then we had been given instruction to follow. So when I was in Woolworth, of course, they arrested us and Dr. King had lawyers, the team, and we were arrested and then the lawyers was there, but for that particular time, we were sent to the Atlanta prison farm. Forgot exactly where it is. I think it's on the West side some place, but anyway, it was a prison farm.…at night, we had to watch out for one another because they had like the three stacked beds, but there were, you know, all the women were together and all the men were together but there were some women in there*

[287] Interview conducted with Bessie Sellaway on November 10, 2010. Transcription pages 9-13.

*who would, you know, come, you know, want to molest you or whatever so you have to watch out for—I know I remember that was happening.*

*And then on the other occasions, as I said, we were not arrested. It was like a—we would go back home and then he would plan another strategy, then we would go out again. So the other time when I was arrested, there were many of us in groups and segments, but it was like three of us in this segment or group, in my group, and we went to some little café downtown, and it was probably on the next street over from Peachtree. Forgot what the name of it was now, but it was a coffee shop, and so Dr. King knew they weren't going to let us in, but outside the coffee shop was a little area about as large as this table and it was called the apron, and so if someone asked you to move off their apron and you didn't move, you were breaking the law. So, of course, we just stood right there, you know, for the law to be broken, because they were being tested, so we were arrested again all of us downtown in that group, and this time they sent us to the Atlanta Fulton Jail as opposed to the prison farm, and Dr. King and all of the men were on one side and all of us ladies were on another side and what they would do, you'd have to get up early in the morning, get up at 6 o'clock and then you'd be dressed and ready with your books. We had to take our books and then study so you can come out at 7 o'clock and they serve you breakfast, so they would serve you breakfast and you could sit on—they were like benches around these tables and you eat your breakfast but as punishment you had to sit on the floor until it was mealtime again and then you didn't go to bed, back in there where the beds were until 6 o'clock, and your pastor or your parents could come visit you …I had I think a couple of my receipts when your momma would come, they could leave you like a dollar, 25 cents and so I have to, you know, find those things.*

*But anyway, I think they didn't keep us in that jail but three days. When we went to the prison farm, they kept us seven days. They sent us for 10 days, but they kept us in there seven days and they let us out for good time, you know, something like that, but they mainly didn't want to keep us in there because the news was going around the world as to what was happening and that segregation, you know, was going on.…And then as I say when things had settled down and laws had been changed, and I was still in school because I didn't finish Spelman until '63, but I can remember three incidents on the bus where it's like some terrible experiences.*

*So one day I was going to school and I sat down beside a man, and he literally took his body and swept me off the seat, and so I crawled over to the pole, you know, instead of just falling totally on the floor. Well then knowing what had happened so I said, you know, I would tell the bus driver, so the bus driver told me, this was his answer. He said "do you think I have eyes in the back of my head?" In other words, don't come tell him nothing. It's like he's the bus driver so he's not in charge of anything that was going on. But much longer after that and I can remember when we had an opportunity to go to the Fox Theatre, you know, had enough money to go and you had to walk up—I can't even count how many stairs you had to walk because blacks had to sit upstairs. So after the buses were integrating, the theatres and what have it, I went to the Fox Theatre I think it was one Sunday and I was coming home on the bus, got the bus way out on Peachtree Street and then I sat down beside a man, and I've always loved umbrellas and I had an*

*umbrella because maybe it was expected—it rained that day. But when I sat down beside the man, he became so furious, so angry, so the whole time I'm sitting there on the bus and I'm riding, the pole that's on the bus where you hold onto it if the bus is crowded, he was just beating on that pole, just beating on the pole, and I knew he was very angry, but I said to myself, I said dear God, the movement is over. I said Dr. King said be non-violent. I said but today if this man touch me I am—he was an older man too. I am going to lay him out with this umbrella, so he moaned and he groaned and whatever and we got downtown and I was able to get off the bus and use my transfer and come on home, but I was—I said, maybe I wouldn't have, but I said in my heart if he had touched me I wouldn't be waiting on the bus driver or nobody else. (inaudible) said what? I said yeah, that's—I'm just stating what I was thinking and I was feeling at the time.*

Bessie began some of her activism as a young girl on a bus, and her admissions about what her heart felt after experiencing mistreatment in many ways show the complexity and challenges of maintaining non-violent practices. She increased her activism as a young married college student when she agreed to be a part of the non-violent direct action efforts in Atlanta that were led by King and the Atlanta Student Movement. Her multiple protests and double arrests are indicative of a spirit of resistance that would not accept mistreatment.

MARJORIE SMYTH[288]

What can you tell me about that period for you?

*I was the feisty one that always would, when we went shopping to a store called Parisian and they had the White water and the Colored water, and I would rush to the white water to see how it would taste and my sister would get so angry, "You're not supposed to do that!" I said, oh we'll try. And how they had where my father worked, we had to go for our shots, we had to go for you know, for regular dental and whatever, health things. And it was like a house and one side was for the Colored side and one side was for the White side. We had a Black nurse. The White people had the White nurse, but we had the same doctors. But they had a waiting room for the Coloreds and a waiting room for the Whites… it was the same waiting area, it was just a partition between us. We say, this is amazing how they thought and how expensive it was to do all these things.*

[288] Interview conducted with Marjorie Wallace Smyth January 7, 2012. Transcription pages 2-4.

You spoke before about your niece Linda…

*What happened was that we had decided we were supposed to be in school, and my responsibility, we always had to take care of the one that was under you. So I had a niece that was three years, I was three years older than she was so it was my responsibility to take care of her. So I had to drag her, fussed the whole time, drag her wherever I was going. So that day we decided in high school that we were going to go to downtown to the Movement. So I had to bring her with me. So my girlfriend, Jackie and I, said come on, Linda, you're going with us. So after we did the pep rally, you did all the songs, we had to march out in two's but she was in front of me with my girlfriend Jackie so as we came through the park and walked on, they stopped us. Lo and behold they decided to arrest us, put us in these wagons. But when they got to me, they stopped. So here's my little niece going and I'm screaming, oh my dad is going to kill me.*

Did he know that you were out there?

*No! I'm supposed to be in school! After school go home, do your homework. So it's after school, so I'm down at the march.*

What made you go?

*Oh, we were determined. We knew it was right, it had to be right. It was wrong for them to do this to us. We thought we were the brightest of bright, you know? Why you want to treat us any different? We looked—the only thing different was the color of our skin. So we were taught that God created us all. So we figured we were…We just didn't understand.*

BEATRICE SOUBLET[289]

Beatrice described her experiences sitting-in in Greensboro, NC.

*I took a book—the first time that we sat in, although we had been trained in non-violence, I wanted to be distracted from anything that might be going on around me that might be unpleasant, so I remember vividly taking* Plato's Republic*, and I figured okay, if I'm reading this, I certainly have to focus, and, you know, keep my attention.*
*…these were people from CORE, and we would come to training sessions and they—what you do is they would have someone pretend to be heckling you verbally maybe pushing on you or something and you would just have to sit there and you'd have to learn to clear your mind and not react in any way to what people were doing, don't say anything, and so we would watch somebody role play it and then we would have to go through that ourselves, and there wasn't really a point at which they would say okay, I think you're ready because you don't know. I mean you have this information and you're told how*

[289] Interview conducted with Beatrice Perry Soublet on April 14, 2010. Transcription pages 3-4, 10, 11

*you can react and how you should react and how you should not, but you really don't know until you go through it, and fortunately, at the time that we were in Greensboro, the kind of ugliness that you saw, people see now with people pouring sugar and stuff, people did not do that. People said ugly things to us and called us ugly names, but I never had, you know, like these people who had cigarettes put out on them, that is just so horrible. I did not experience that, but we were prepared for whatever. We had been told to be prepared for whatever would occur and not to respond in kind at all and not to respond at all, and now the one thing that we had a choice about, when you were arrested you had the choice to go limp and make them carry you, and so in essence you are refusing to cooperate with their taking you in or you can walk. Well I decided I was going to walk. We had on dresses. At that time we didn't wear pants. I don't even know if we wore pants off campus at that point because they were very serious about how you dressed, but be that as it may, I didn't want to have my dress messy, but yeah. That was the one thing that I can recall there was a choice. You had a choice of those two, but the other kinds of training was just to prepare your mind for what could happen when people are being ugly to you and abusive and how are you going to respond to this, so that was kind of what the training was.*

Were you anticipating being arrested, and what was going on around that?

*So it was a Thanksgiving weekend or something and they had had this big ad in the paper. Bring your family to dinner at S&W Cafeteria, so we had with us a young man who was a Quaker. He was a European American guy, and so we—there were 50 of us in all that were arrested, so I think all 50 of us. Yeah. So we all came and we sat down at the seats in these people's cafeteria, and I'm reading my book and he said, this guy, 'I brought my family. You advertised. I brought my family for Thanksgiving dinner.' 'Oh no. We don't serve colored,' so we just sat and we sat and we knew we'd be arrested. We just sat and we sat until the police came and people were eating around us and people were looking at us like we were inhuman. What are you doing here, you must be crazy kind of thing, but again, I didn't make eye contact with anybody. My little face was right in my book, and then the police came and took us away and there were other people who—I'm not sure if they—they must have been outside while we were inside because they were singing. They were outside. I remember the singing, and so some people were not ever to have come in and sat down. It was very, very planned, and so those—we were arrested and we were released on our own reconnaissance. They did fingerprinting and then they sent you. You went back.*

*... the second time I was arrested, by then, this was at the end of my sophomore year, and a lot of the students at Bennett had been detained in this large—there were so many students being arrested that they couldn't keep them. There wasn't enough room in the jails, so they had them at this tuberculosis clinic. It was no longer a clinic for that, but that's the purpose of it and they were detaining these students there, and so I had determined that I was not going back and be arrested until I had taken my final exams because I had been chosen to go on this exchange program and I didn't want to mess up my grades, so a lot of people lost their sophomore year because they left without finishing their exams. Well I was not going to let that happen to me, but the day—my last final*

*exam, I walked from that final, I came in my room and I was packing a little bag so my roommate said where are you going. I said I'm going to jail… When you sat in, it was that you were intending to be arrested, so wherever we went, I wish I could remember where we went, but we were arrested and taken to the large arena because they didn't have any room for us. They didn't have any room for us and we were there. It was two o'clock in the morning. They were trying to figure out what are they going to do with us, and so I had my little overnight case, but they released us.*

Like some others, Beatrice Soublet planned to take the level of risk that would result in her arrest as she defied the segregation laws of the time. She exercised choice and autonomy as she decided to walk rather than be carried out by police, to read instead of being distracted by stares and insults, and to complete her final exams in order not to risk her grades declining, before packing a small bag with the intention of being arrested.

## A. LENORA TAITT-MAGUBANE[290]

Taitt-Magubane described an event in Atlanta that generated more publicity than she anticipated.

*I remember that Dr. Howard Zinn said to me, Lenora, would you like to see "My Fair Lady"? And I said, oh, I'd love to, I'd love to see it. He said, now, you might get arrested. I said oh, you know I didn't think too much of it. It seemed absolutely ridiculous that it could happen, but I said fine, I'd like to go. And on the given day, he didn't go. And I'd forgotten the professor that bought the tickets, it might have been Starten Lynn who was a professor at Spelman, bought the tickets and there were four of us that went; Dr. J.P. Cochran, who was the drama instructor, Jim Murray, myself and there was another student which I could probably find for you if I look in the papers. And we went and J.P. Cochran had the tickets and we went up to give the tickets and the man looked at us and it was like, oh, let me go inside. And he took the tickets and J.P. said let me have the tickets back, and he took the tickets back, and the man went wherever he was going, we went inside and found our seats and we sat down.*

*So then someone came to us and said if we didn't leave, that they in fact, you know, the show would not go on and all these people would not be able to see the show. And we said, you know, we came to see it as well, and what we found out happened was that they called the mayor's office and the mayor said to them – it was mayor Hartsfield – he said, go on with the show, turn off the lights, and the show will go on. So suddenly the lights went down. I mean, there was no human cry as I remember in the theater, it was the*

[290] Interview with A. Lenora Taitt-Magubane July 29, 2010. Transcription pages 2-5. Also see Jet magazine in the Appendix.

*municipal auditorium. And there was no like people saying – people were told oh, you don't have to sit there, you know, you don't have to. And the show went on and when intermission came we stood up and when the lights came on, we realized what they had done was, it was almost like a number of rows in front, and a number of rows behind us and to the side were isolated, so that I guess so that we wouldn't contaminate anyone. So people were told, you don't have to sit there. And when the show was over we thought, well maybe we should take a side door to get out, and when we went out the door, the press was there. And so the next day, so we got out, and the next day it was in the paper, and that's when it was known that I had gone off campus. I went off campus.*

Oh yeah, I forgot about Spelman. That was the bigger deal.

*And someone said what did you do? I said what do you mean, what did I do? And there was a picture and the picture is in the Jet Magazine…And the story was in there, but it was in the, what is it, the Atlanta Constitution ran the story. I cannot even remember the year, I just remember the incident.*

As a student Taitt-Magubane continued to maintain a very active role helping to organize various protests.

*I was part of a Committee on Appeal for Human Rights and was responsible for strategy like planning the sit-ins. If a counter had 25 seats at noon, how many people were seated so that you didn't – when we were planning so that you did come down with 25 people and then they couldn't get in, and you have one law inside and one law outside…*

*And so when we had the first sit-in, Rich's was the target. And Rich's was the target because they made more money than any of the stores put together, all of the stores put together. And we went down to Rich's and Dr. King went with us actually, and I remember that when we went down, we had coordinated everything. People were arrested. We also went to some other places. We went to Davison's, some other store, which was a part of Macy's, and some other stores on Peachtree. And what happened was that there was a lunch counter, Sprayberry's or I can't remember the name of it, and I know it doesn't exist anymore so it really, I don't want to give you the wrong name but I remember that we went and sat in there and then the overflow – we went to the train station cause some people were arrested at the train station, and we went to the train station and I remember that A.D. King, who was Dr. King's brother was to meet me at the door, he said 11:15. And at 11:15 we were there and the man was about ready to lock the door, and he wasn't there, so we went in to be served. Then he came up afterwards and the man had locked the door already, which meant there were two sets of charges. One was city and one was county, inside the station, outside the station–inside the concession, whatever it is. And we got arrested. And I know it was different because those who were on the outside, I believe, probably went to the city farm. They went to a different jail, and we didn't know that. I didn't know that until we were in the paddy wagon, and someone was tooting their horn and mouthing to me and I looked and she was telling me where the others were.*

*And so that's how I knew, but it was just one girl with me, and I can't remember her name. But we got there, we were taken immediately to the Fulton County jail, the Fulton bars. And we got there and we were held all day, and the jails by this time were pretty much full but you could hear the officers over the phone saying, they are all over the place. You know, they couldn't get that paddy wagons back and forth, which was the point that you in fact fill up the jails in order that they are not – you know, you keep them busy. It's like, you know, they're all over. And you can hear them talking, we don't have any place, we don't. So I remember getting to the Fulton County and finally–and I remember it very well because I was planning a dinner for with Father Scott for the chaplain at Yale University... And he had come down and as we did in the Canterbury Association, whenever anyone came in, Father Scott knew it, and they would come over and it would be a lovely time for dialogue. We'd invite students, invite faculty and discuss certain things. And that happened to have been my birthday and I was in jail, so I couldn't plan it. And the next morning Father Scott came in and he went to my roommate once he found out I was in and told her to pull some clothes together for me. And he came over and then the next day he brought the chaplain over because going back, I remember when we were arrested and we were in the jail and the lady came down, her name was Ms. Pratt, and Ms. Pratt came down and she said, you know, the jail was full with students. And there were two other ladies who were, they knew the ropes of the jail, let's say. So when they got into this room, the thing was–the procedure was you stripped. And these ladies immediately stripped and I'm looking at them like, what? I'm not stripping. And the lady said, open your clothes. You know, I opened my blouse and that was it. And they had a trustee and she came over and said, you're one of those students, aren't you, darling? I said, yes, ma'am. And she said, don't worry about it, and she just sort of did like this and did like that, patted me down and that was it. By now it had been all day, and I remember getting up to–as we got to the gates to where they let us in, the other students heard that we were coming, and they began singing "We Shall Overcome." And it was a very moving experience. It was the first time, I think, that the emotions of the day were released. And once I got myself together I remember that everyone wanted to know what was going on outside. And I told them what had happened that day and we were in, and I remember that we–while we were in there, I remember saying that we needed our books and we needed certain things. Oh, we had them actually, and then the lady took them, they took them back. And I also remember that I said we needed certain funds for canteen, and so they said they couldn't get canteen. So I wrote a letter to the head of the jail and I said to him that he had to allow me to get a certain amount of money, which would be coming in so that people could order whatever they needed; deodorant, snacks, whatever they wanted, but it would be one account, and they would do that. And regarding the books. I also made a request for that. I remember just before we were the minister was going back from Yale–why can't I remember his name because he's very, very prominent, and I even went up to–he's known in the civil rights movement for his work at Yale, and he was the minister up here at Riverside. He was very, very prominent and before he left, Father Scott used to come and see us everyday and he would bring him. And I said to him, I said well, I was supposed to have a dinner for you but unfortunately I'm not able to do it. But he came and before he left, Father Scott came and ... What he did was he got permission for us to have communion. So he was able to come*

*inside because before we were speaking through glasses and then they allowed him to come in and we were able to have communion and kneel on the concrete and what have you. He asked if there was anything that we needed, and I said well, they've taken away our books and we don't have the canteen services, and I gave the things that we should have, and I spoke to him because I knew that when he was going back, he would have the ear of the press and it would be in the paper.*

Lenora Taitt-Magubane continued to become very involved in public acts within Atlanta, Southwest Georgia, and in New York City and did not let fear stop her, even when she was threatened to be expelled from school for her activism.

Shaped within the context of segregation and discrimination in the South and the North, these stories illustrate how young Black women decided to participate in the Movement, sometimes without support from family members and friends. In spite of their age, they understood the significance of their actions in light of the possibility of systemic change. Through their actions, we are able to see examples of faith, and courage. What we also see are examples of the moral agency exercised by these women in their desire to ensure that the world they lived in and the world those who would come after them would live in, would be one that was more just and free than the one they currently faced. There is a consistency in the belief that what they were doing was bigger than simply their individual actions. This was something they had to do as a part of a larger project involving those who believed that the time for change had come.

# Appendix C – Lyrics for Civil Rights Movement Songs

# LYRICS OF MOVEMENT SONGS

## We Shall Overcome

(Trad.)

Mass Meeting participants

Recorded in Hattiesburg, MS, February 1964

Note: Led by Fannie Lou Hamer, the theme song of the Movement closed a mass meeting in Hattiesburg, Mississippi, in 1964

We Shall Overcome, we shall overcome, we shall overcome some day
Oh-oh-oh deep in my heart, (I know that) I do believe, (oh-oh-oh) we shall overcome some day
[songleader] God is on our side
God is on our side, God is on our side, God is on our side to day
Oh-oh-oh deep in my heart, (I know that) I do believe, (oh-oh-oh) we shall overcome some day
[songleader] We'll walk hand in hand
We'll walk hand in hand, we'll walk hand in hand, we'll walk hand in hand some day
Oh-oh-oh deep in my heart, (I know that) I do believe, (oh-oh-oh) we shall overcome some day
[songleader] We shall overcome
We shall overcome, we shall overcome, we shall overcome some day
Oh-oh-oh deep in my heart, (I know that) I do believe, (oh-oh-oh) we shall overcome some day

**Oh Freedom**
(Trad. – arr. Freedom Singers)
Lined by Hollis Watkins, SNCC Field Secretary from McComb, MS
Mass Meeting

[Recording appears to pick up as the song has already begun]
And before I be a slave, I'll be buried in my grave
and go home to my Lord, and be free, and be free

[songleader] No segregation
No segregation, no segregation, no segregation over me, over me
and before I be a slave, I'll be buried in my grave
and go home to my Lord, and be free, and be free

[songleader] No more dogs
No more dogs, no more dogs, no more dogs, biting me [songleader yells], biting me
and before I be a slave, I'll be buried in my grave
and go home to my Lord, and be free, and be free

[songleader] Nothing but freedom
Nothing but freedom, nothing but freedom, nothing but freedom over me, over me
and before I be a slave, I'll be buried in my grave
and go home to my Lord, and be free, and be free

[songleader] No more shooting
No more shooting, no more shooting, no more shooting over me, over me
and before I be a slave, I'll be buried in my grave
and go home to my Lord, and be free, and be free

[songleader] No more moaning
No more moaning, no more moaning, no more moaning over me, over me
and before I be a slave, I'll be buried in my grave
and go home to my Lord, and be free, and be free

[songleader] Oh Freedom
Oh Freedom, oh freedom, oh freedom, over me, over me
and before I be a slave, I'll be buried in my grave
and go home to my Lord, and be free, and be free

**Ain't Gonna Let Nobody Turn Me 'Round**
(Trad. – arr. Freedom Singers)
SNCC Singers, led by Cordell Reagon
Recorded in Los Angeles, CA, August 1963

[songleader] Ain' gonna let nobody, lordy
[singers] Turn me 'round, turn me 'round, (oh no) turn me 'round
Ain' gonna let nobody, lordy
Turn me 'round, (well I) keep on a walkin' (yeah), keep on a talkin' (lordy)
Marchin' up to freedom land

[songleader] Ain' gonna let Chief Pritchett, lordy
[singers] Turn me 'round, turn me 'round, (oh no) turn me 'round
Ain' gonna let Chief Pritchett, lordy
Turn me 'round, keep on a walkin' (yeah), keep on a talkin' (oh lordy)
Marchin' up to freedom land

[songleader] Ain' gonna let no city commissioner, lordy
[singers] Turn me 'round, (oh no no) turn me 'round, (oh no) turn me 'round
Ain' gonna let no city commissioner, lordy
Turn me 'round, keep on a walkin' (yeah), keep on a talkin' (oh lordy)
Marchin' up to freedom land

[songleader] Ain' gonna let segregation, oh lordy
[singers] Turn me 'round, turn me 'round, (oh no) turn me 'round
Ain' gonna let segregation, lordy
Turn me 'round, keep on a walkin' (yeah), keep on a talkin' (oh lordy)
Marchin' up to freedom land

[songleader] Ain' gonna let nobody, lordy
[singers] Turn me 'round, turn me 'round, (oh no) turn me 'round
Ain' gonna let nobody, lordy
Turn me 'round, (well I) keep on a walkin' (yeah), keep on a talkin' (lordy)
Marchin' up to freedom land

**This Little Light of Mine** (Trad. – arranged B. M. Fikes)
Led by Betty Mae Fikes with the Selma Youth Freedom Choir
Recorded in Selma, AL, October 1963
Mass Meeting

(Well) This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine, (ehhh)
This little light of mine (ehhh), I'm gonna let it shine,
This little light of mine (ehhh), I'm gonna let it shine, let it shine, let it shine, let it shine;

(Well) Tell Governor Wallace, I'm gonna let it shine, (ehhh)
Tell Governor Wallace (well), I'm gonna let it shine,
Tell Governor Wallace (well), I'm gonna let it shine, let it shine, let it shine, let it shine;

(Well) Tell Jim Clark, I'm gonna let it shine
Tell Jim Clark, I'm gonna let it shine
Tell Jim Clark, I'm gonna let it shine, let it shine, let it shine, let it shine;

(Oh) Tell Judge ___ [??], I'm gonna let it shine
Tell Judge ____, I'm gonna let it shine
Tell Judge ____, I'm gonna let it shine, let it shine, let it shine, let it shine

(Well) Every where I go, I'm gonna let it shine
Every where I go, I'm gonna let it shine
Every where I go, I'm gonna let it shine

(Well, My Lord) My God give it to me, I'm gonna let it shine
My God give it to me, I'm gonna let it shine, (let me tell you)
My God give it to me, I'm gonna let it shine, let it shine, let it shine, let it shine.

(Well, let me tell you) Tell Mayor Hare [??], I'm gonna let it shine
Tell Mayor Hare, I'm gonna let it shine (let me tell you)
Tell Mayor Hare, I'm gonna let it shine, let it shine, let it shine, let it shine

(Oh) This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine
This little light of mine, (Good Lord) I'm gonna let it shine (let me tell you)
This little light of mine, (Oh yeah) I'm gonna let it shine, let it shine, let it shine, let it shine

**Guide My Feet While I Run This Race**
Transcription by Ethel Raim in *Everybody Says Freedom* (xix)

Guide my feet, while I run this race (Oh)
Guide my feet, while I run this race
Guide my feet, while I run this race, ‘cause I don’t want to run this race in vain (race in vain)

Never turn back, while I run this race
Never turn back, while I run this race
Never turn back, while I run this race, ‘cause I don’t want to run this race in vain (race in vain)

Guide my heart, while I run this race
Guide my heart, while I run this race
Guide my heart, while I run this race, ‘cause I don’t want to run this race in vain (race in vain)

Guide my tongue, while I run this race
Guide my tongue, while I run this race
Guide my tongue, while I run this race, ‘cause I don’t want to run this race in vain (race in vain)

Guide my vote, while I run this race
Guide my vote, while I run this race
Guide my vote, while I run this race, ‘cause I don’t want to run this race in vain (race in vain)

Guide my mind, while I run this race
Guide my mind, while I run this race
Guide my mind, while I run this race, ‘cause I don’t want to run this race in vain (race in vain)

# Appendix D – History of Churches

## RESEARCH SITES – DESCRIPTIONS OF CHURCHES

*Big Bethel A.M.E., Atlanta, GA*

Dating back before the Civil War, Big Bethel African Methodist Episcopal (A.M.E.) Church, located on historic Auburn Avenue in downtown Atlanta, Georgia, is the oldest Black church in the city of Atlanta. Since its beginning in 1847, and it has continued in the tradition of religio-sociopolitical action. From the early Twentieth Century, Big Bethel was a place for communal gatherings in Black Atlanta. It was also one of the few buildings to survive the Fourth Ward fire in 1917. Functioning as a central hub in the Black Community of Atlanta, many mass meetings were held at Big Bethel during the Civil Rights Movement.[291] Because it was one of the largest Black owned buildings and was often the site for large meetings including the first national NAACP meeting in the south in 1920, graduation ceremonies for Black schools, and more Big Bethel became known at Auburn Avenue's City Hall.

Members played significant roles in social activism within the community while they remained faithfully connected to the church. Three members provide examples of the types of activist who were also leading members of the church. Jesse Hill, Jr. whose position as the CEO at the Atlanta Life Insurance Company enabled him to play a significant role during the Civil Rights movement and resulted in his deep personal relationship with the King Family in 2002, the former Butler Street was named after him in downtown Atlanta. The financial resources that Hill was able to secure were helpful for persons who needed to be bonded out of jail during the Civil Rights Movement. Hill served in many leadership capacities including as the Chair of the Trustee Board. Evelyn

[291] Big Bethel A.M.E. Church, 150th Church Anniversary, "Preserving Our Heritage While Preparing for the Future: A Celebration of 150 Years," (1997), 10.

Jones Frazier opened her first restaurant in 1937 and later her second restaurant, Frazier's Café, became one of the main locations on the Westside where Civil Rights leaders would gather to strategically plan for the Movement prior to meetings being held at Pascal's restaurant which opened in 1947 and often receives most of the recognition as a strategy planning site in the Atlanta area. Meetings that were held at Frazier's Cafe included several of the early meetings of the SNCC, and some of the only multi-racial planning and strategy meetings on the Westside since it was illegal at the time for Blacks and Whites to come together in that way. Frazier had a room on the backside of her restaurant that allowed them to meet without being seen by those driving by. Active throughout the city, Frazier was also elected the first woman Steward at Big Bethel, she served on the Executive Board of the Atlanta NAACP, and was active in the Republican Party on a national level.[292] John H. Calhoun, helped form the Atlanta Negro voting league in 1940 and became the president of the Atlanta chapter of the NAACP in 1956. Calhoun helped coordinate the "Protective Strategy" that helped to save jobs for those whose employment was endangered because they were exercising their right to vote.[293] One woman from Big Bethel recalled Calhoun jumping from the window of an office building with the list of NAACP members to prevent it from being obtained by a White mob who wanted to do harm to members.

As a result of the itinerancy within Methodist denominations, to date there have been thirty-seven pastors of Big Bethel since its founding. During the long Civil Rights Movement era, four pastors served Big Bethel: Reverend Dewitt Talmadge Babcock,

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[292] Evelyn Jones Frazier, *The Silent Warrior* (Lithonia, GA: Nia Pages II, 2008)
[293] John H. Calhoun Obituary, *The New York Times*, http://www.nytimes.com/1988/05/10/obituaries/john-calhoun-88-a-longtime-fighter-for-rights-in-south.html Accessed January 14, 2012

1934-1948; Reverend Dwight V. Kyle, 1948-1951; Reverend Harold I. Bearden, 1951-1964; and Reverend Reuben T. Bussey, 1964-1977.[294]

*Ebenezer Baptist, Atlanta, GA*

Ebenezer Baptist Church was established in 1886 during the period of Reconstruction that saw many temporary advancements in the South especially among Black leaders. After a few locations, Ebenezer settled on Auburn Avenue where the progressive Black community of Atlanta found unity and strength. Three generations of one family served as leaders of Ebenezer from 1894 to 1975. Of the five senior pastors who have led the church since its founding through the present day, the most famous minister, Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., was never actually pastor of the church, but served as an assistant to his father, who was loving known by his congregants as "Daddy King." In 1960, after pastoring the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church in Montgomery, Alabama, and taking on a greater role of responsibility within the Civil Rights Movement, Martin Luther King, Jr. became the first co-pastor of Ebenezer.[295] During the turbulent times that the nation faced during much of the Twentieth Century, it was "Daddy King" who provided strong and consistent social and spiritual leadership for the Church during his pastorate from 1931 through 1975 when he passed the mantle to Reverend Joseph Roberts, Jr.[296]

Women from this study who were members of Ebenezer during the Civil Rights Movement, recall their pastor, Daddy King, as one minister who did not readily

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[294] Big Bethel AME Church, (1997), 15.
[295] Benjamin C. Ridgeway, *Images of America: Atlanta's Ebenezer Baptist Church* (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2009), 7, 8. Also see: Harry G. Lefever and Michael C. Page, *Sacred Places: A Guide to the Civil Rights Sites in Atlanta, Georgia* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2008), 64-68.
[296] Ridgeway, 19, 83-85.

participate directly in the non-violent direct action that his son was leading around the nation and in Atlanta, and therefore he did not encourage his members to become active.[297] Bessie Sellaway recalled going to meetings at Ebenezer when she was a student at Spelman College, but Shirley Barnhart, who was a member of Ebenezer at the time, explained that Daddy King did not want them to be involved on the front line. Daddy King was afraid for his son's life and did not want to put the lives of his members in harms way, but he did always encourage his congregants to become educated about the world around them, to become politically active and vote, and to love as God loved.[298] From 1960 until his assassination in 1968, Martin Luther King, Jr., or "M.L." as many who grew up with him called him, assisted his father and would often preach, teach, and develop ministries at the church that he had been born into and raised in. Paulette Scott recalls when she was a teenager that King, Jr. brought Catholic, Jewish, and other White youth together at Ebenezer where he helped all of them realize that they shared the same teenage problems, and therefore had a place of commonality to begin to build from. This type of ecumenical and interfaith work helped expand their understandings and encouraged more interactions.[299]

Beyond the famed King, Jr., other members of Ebenezer who were active in the Civil Rights Movement included Lonnie King who became a leader within the Atlanta Student Movement. Other teachers from the Atlanta University Center colleges were active members of the church, and well as businesswomen such as Malinda K. O'Neal,

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[297] See interviews with author from Bessie Sellaway, November 10, 2010 and Shirley Barnhart, November 12, 2010.
[298] Interviews with author conducted with Paulette Scott, November 12, 2010 and Shirley Barnhart, November 12, 2010.
[299] Paulette Scott, November 12, 2010.

whose printing company continues to provide high quality production service to the community.

*First A.M.E.: Bethel, Harlem, NY*

First African Methodist Episcopal Church: Bethel was established in 1819 when the denomination's founder, Richard Allen sent a pastor up from Philadelphia to establish an independent church in New York. After moving locations a few times, the church eventually settled in Harlem as it followed the movement of the Black community in New York City. Pastors of this historic church have included the outspoken socio-political activist Rev. Reverdy C. Ransom from 1907 to 1912, and Rev. Richard Allen Hildebrand who served throughout the heavy periods of social activism from 1950 through 1965. Both Reverends Ransom and Hildebrand would later become Bishops of the A.M.E. Church.[300]

Famed labor organizer A. Philip Randolph founder and leader of the International Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, was a member of First A.M.E. Bethel during the height of the Movement from 1958-1973. Labor and Civil Rights activist Annie B. Martin, served as the first vice president of the Black Trade Unionist Association, the state assistant commissioner of labor under three New York governors beginning during the Civil Rights Movement, and she served fifteen terms as the president of the New York City chapter of the NAACP.

*Abyssinian Baptist, Harlem, NY*

[300] Church history compiled for the 2009 Church anniversary service. An electronic copy of the brief history is in my possession.

Abyssinian Baptist Church was established in 1808 after Blacks refused to accept the racial segregation they were forced to endure while attending the First Baptist Church in Manhattan. Formally organized in July 1809 by four men and twelve women, Abyssinian became the first African American Baptist church in the state of New York.[301] Since the church's founding, Abyssinian has continuously served as a beacon of hope for social reform, transformation, and self-determination within the Black community of New York. The early leadership of the church is associated with the Bostonian religious leader Rev. Thomas Paul, whose family, including his brothers, son and daughter, all pushed for social reform including working as antislavery activists, and women's rights activists. Reverend Adam Clayton Powell, Jr. succeeded his father as the pastor of Abyssinian in 1937, and served in that role until his retirement in 1971.[302]

Annual Women's Day speakers reflected Abyssinian's strong commitment to the Christian faith and social change. The March 8th to March 14th, 1954 Women's Week featured Dr. Nannie Burroughs, President of the Women's Auxiliary of the National Baptist Convention as the Sunday noonday speaker. Dr. Burroughs would often speak at the church, including for their Women's Day in 1958. In 1962, Abyssinian's Women's Day speaker was listed as Mrs. Martin Luther King of Atlanta, Georgia. More Civil Rights leaders continued to be welcomed as annual Women's Day speakers including Gloria Richardson in 1964, The Honorable Constance Baker Motley in 1966, and The Honorable Shirley Chisholm served as the Women's Day speaker in 1969.[303]

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[301] Bob Gore, *We've Come This Far: The Abyssinian Baptist Church, A Photographic Journal* (New York, NY: Stewart, Tabori, & Chang, 2001), 28-29; and Wil Haygood, *King of the Cats: The Life and Times of Adam Clayton Powell, Jr.* (New York, NY: Harper Collins, 1993, 2006).
[302] Gore, 33.
[303] The Abyssinian Baptist Church Archives, Programs and Events, Women's Week March 8-14, 1954; Worship bulletin March 30, 1958; Women's Day Program 1962; Women's Day Program 1964; Women's Day Program 1966; and Women's Day Program 1969.

The membership of Abyssinian has long reflected the names of many of the leaders within the political, entertainment, and business arenas including Jackie “Moms” Mabley.

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