

"OUR GOD IS MARCHING ON":  
JAMES HUDSON AND THE THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATION  
OF THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT

By

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## INTRODUCTION

This dissertation is an intellectual biography of James Hudson (1903-1980), a black minister and philosopher of religion. It focuses on his contributions to the theological foundation of the American Civil Rights Movement. Hudson viewed his call to the ministry as a charge to close the gap between social facts and spiritual realities. The social fact of segregation divided him from whites and relegated him and other blacks to second-class citizenship. An amputated right arm - a result of the shoddy medical treatment blacks had received in his hometown of Birmingham, Alabama - became his most poignant daily reminder of the cruel inequalities he constantly confronted. Hudson's upbringing in a loving family and the black church, however, led him to believe that manmade divisions were incompatible with the spiritual realities rooted in a universal moral order. According to Hudson, God had instilled sacred value in every human being and connected all peoples to a common humanity. This view of spiritual reality, which Hudson refined through his study of the philosophy of Personalism, shaped his perception of Jesus Christ and the purpose of religion. To Hudson, Jesus' greatest gift to the world was his vision for a

Kingdom of God, a society which merged social facts and spiritual realities. Those who wanted to follow Jesus must thus, adhere to his example of fighting evil with what Hudson called "militant reconciling love." This love, characterized by sacrifice and nonviolence, was best demonstrated by Jesus as he rode into Jerusalem on what Christians celebrate as Palm Sunday, knowing that death awaited him. That Jerusalem journey led to Jesus' suffering on the cross and triumphal resurrection. When Hudson preached on this topic, he often referred to the line "Our God is Marching On" from the *Battle Hymn of the Republic*. Hudson's life's work centered on teaching men and women to "march on" with Jesus by battling social evil with love-based, nonviolent methods that healed the human family.<sup>1</sup>

Emerging out of Hudson's theological and philosophical grounding was an ironclad commitment to rid American society of legalized segregation and discrimination. His emphasis on reconciling social facts with spiritual realities required activism in an emerging civil rights struggle aimed at the destruction of Jim Crow through a militant application of love and nonviolence. Tallahassee, Florida became the principle venue in which he pursued these objectives. In church, campus, and community

organizations, Hudson - along with students, professors, pastors, parishioners, and rank-and-file activists - helped invigorate a successful local movement for black equality.

Throughout his tenure as Florida Agricultural & Mechanical University's (FAMU) chaplain, Hudson connected Tallahassee to a powerful network of black religious intellectuals that, with his avid participation, built a "freedom curriculum" which systematized a militant nonviolent Jesus concept. By teaching from this curriculum, he inspired local students and churchgoers to engage in noncooperation against segregation, beginning with the 1956 Tallahassee Bus Boycott. The Inter-Civic Council (ICC) Hudson and others subsequently founded to coordinate this protest, which followed the lead of similar boycott organizations in Baton Rouge and Montgomery, became an integral part of what sociologist Aldon Moris called the "institutional soil from which the [Southern Christian Leadership Conference] would emerge." Furthermore, as a widely read Personalist philosopher whose writings reached millions of black Baptists on the eve of the Civil Rights Movement, Hudson laid a critical foundation for Martin Luther King, Jr.'s subsequent entry onto the national stage.<sup>2</sup>



By examining Hudson, this study aims to add to a small but growing body of literature about the movement's ideational foundations. During the late 1970s, social history trends entered the field of Civil Rights Movement scholarship. These studies challenged the popular perception that national-level personalities were the key historical actors who shaped social change. Instead, reflecting social history's emphasis on local citizens, scholars began investigating how the movement transpired in individual communities. Currently, historians focus on local crusades against Jim Crow and the "long civil rights movement," but are paying closer attention to the role of ideas in these struggles. In particular, scholars are examining what language, moral standards, and intellectual sources people used when they challenged or defended segregation. The Hudson narrative illustrates how ideas helped mobilize Tallahassee's black community and large numbers of black Baptist churchgoers across the South to engage in organized, nonviolent resistance against second-class citizenship.<sup>3</sup>

### **Formative Foundations**

Hudson's background sheds critical light on his development into an activist. Born in 1903 to a railway

worker father and school teacher mother in Birmingham, Alabama, he encountered two major hardships early in life: physical disability and racial discrimination. At six years of age, Hudson lost his right arm to amputation after a playground accident fractured it. He was also conscious of segregation in Birmingham's schools, stores, and public facilities. Hudson made a childhood commitment to overcome both these obstacles. He learned how to function independently - teaching himself how to write, dress himself, and even drive with one arm. Additionally, he resolved to choose a career path that would help him strike back against racial injustice. This led him to dream of becoming a minister and professor.

As a student at Morehouse College and later Colgate-Rochester Divinity School, Hudson closely studied the black Social Gospel and nonviolence, two systems of thought he saw as viable tools for broad social change. The black Social Gospel, which taught that God wanted Christians to function as His tools for moral order and social justice, created prototypes for incorporating social scientific methodologies into black church community outreach projects. This concept became the crux of Hudson's approach to ministry. From watching Birmingham's black and white laborers use strikes to challenge oppressive

conditions, he also developed a strong interest in noncooperation as a potential weapon against Jim Crow. Specifically, he saw great possibilities for bringing Mohandas K. Gandhi's self-described "science of nonviolence" into black Social Gospel work. Shortly after completing his Ph.D. at Boston University and becoming a professor at the black Florida A&M College in Tallahassee, he joined a national body that shared his passion for exploring this ideational terrain: the Andrew Rankin Chapel network.

### **The Rankin Network and Tallahassee**

The Rankin network emerged from Howard University, a preeminent center of black intellectual life during the first half of the twentieth century (where the Rankin Chapel stood at the helm of religious activities and discourse). Under Mordecai Johnson, the institution's first black president, Howard developed into the nation's premier historically black research university. Over a period that stretched from the prosperous 1920s New Era until the Cold War, Johnson raised millions, tripled the faculty, increased academic and admissions standards, initiated the first Ph.D. programs, and secured statutory authority for Howard's annual Congressional appropriation.

As the university's capacity for supporting research increased, its share of the country's best and brightest black scholars swelled. The professors who served during Johnson's tenure included Carter G. Woodson, Charles H. Wesley, and Rayford Logan in history, Charles Drew in medicine, E. Franklin Frazier in sociology, and Ralph Bunche in political science. One of Johnson's most important appointees was Charles Hamilton Houston, a Harvard-educated attorney whom the president chose to lead Howard's law school. Houston developed the litigation plan that the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) used to bring an end to legalized segregation and mentored future NAACP general counsel Thurgood Marshall.<sup>4</sup>

While Howard's legal scholars outlined a judicial assault against racial injustice, its theologians devised a spiritual offensive against Jim Crow. As a Harvard Divinity School alumnus, Johnson took particular interest in building a robust School of Religion capable of giving students the same quality instruction he had received. To make this vision a reality, he hired a vanguard of highly-trained black professors to lead the program. Howard Thurman, Rankin Chapel's dean from 1932 to 1944, studied at Rochester Theological Seminary and had served as director

of religious life for Morehouse and Spelman Colleges in Atlanta. Benjamin E. Mays the school's dean from 1934 to 1940, had earned a Ph.D. in Christian theology from the University of Chicago after a brief stint on Morehouse's faculty. During graduate school, he co-authored a groundbreaking sociological study entitled *The Negro's Church*, which offered exhaustive statistical and historical analysis on America's local black Christian congregations. Finally, William Stuart Nelson, the school's dean from 1940 to 1948, was a Yale Divinity School graduate who had been president at both Shaw and Dillard Universities.

Thurman, Mays, and Nelson all traveled to India in the 1930s and 1940s, met with Gandhi, and sought his advice on using nonviolence to destroy Jim Crow. Each year, they also traveled black church and college speaking circuits, invited numerous colleagues to give guest talks in Howard's chapel and classrooms, sponsored large conferences, and published a wide variety of articles in the *Journal of Religious Thought* (founded in 1943). Through such meetings and exchanges, the School of Religion became the convergence point for a national community of black religious scholars dedicated to finding militant, Christian responses to America's race relations problems. During the 1940s, the Rankin network formed when members of this

scholarly community were organized into two organizations: the Fellowship of Religious Workers in Colleges and Universities for Negroes (headed by Thurman) and Institute of Religion (headed by Nelson). In 1948, Hudson joined the Institute and steadily rose as influential member within its ranks.<sup>5</sup>

Hudson and others in this Rankin network advanced a *Jesus concept* that stood in stark contrast to the widespread idea of a meek, passive Son of God who had avoided political affairs and limited his concern to helping men and women reach heaven. Instead, it depicted Jesus as an irreverent, anti-imperialistic rabble-rouser who had urged nonviolent resistance against the world's most powerful government and was ultimately executed as a result of his sedition. According to this view, the sin that Jesus sought to conquer existed within the manmade divisions that inherently transgressed against God by rejecting his will for human beings to live in a harmonious, egalitarian manner. Salvation, or deliverance from sin, meant toppling these obstacles - a principle best exemplified by Jesus' own self-sacrificial love-in-action. Thus, to the group of black religious leaders who wished to apply this idea of Jesus to United States race relations, Christian discipleship required them to engage in

noncooperation against segregation. In their eyes, such modern-day confrontation based on Jesus' example was necessary not only to liberate blacks, but also to save America's soul.

To move their goals forward, many Rankin network members downplayed their socialist leanings and fierce opposition to modern empire-building when they addressed white audiences. Instead, consistent with Cold War-era America's strict limitations on "respectable dissent," they strategically draped this Jesus concept in the language of American civil religion and of the post-World War II liberal consensus. Specifically, they identified the principles of liberty, equality, and justice in the Declaration of Independence and U.S. Constitution as God's ideals for humanity. Racial segregation, they asserted, stood in diametric opposition to those ideals as a sin that hindered the implementation of God's will. Hence, the United States' efforts to spread democracy across the globe must also include the American South; this was an essential step toward turning Jesus' teachings into lived realities. This interpretation of Jesus can be called *militant reconciliation theology*, a Christian ethics that promoted the science of nonviolence as a spiritually sound

methodology to deliver humanity from the evil of segregation.

During the March on Washington Movement (MOWM), the Rankin network had vigorously supported labor leader A. Philip Randolph's call for "nonviolent goodwill direct action," defined as applied Christianity and democracy. Toward this end, Randolph had begun working with the pacifist Fellowship of Reconciliation and Congress of Racial Equality - founded in 1942 by a group of FOR student activists that included 1941 Howard divinity alumnus James Farmer, Jr. - to design a training program that would teach MOWM members how to launch Gandhian noncooperation campaigns against Jim Crow street cars, buses, trains, waiting rooms, and restrooms. In targeting public transportation, Randolph aimed to build on the foundation provided by the existing culture of opposition in which blacks regularly "jumped Jim Crow" through resistance methods such as brazenly sitting in "whites-only" sections or avoiding the segregated vehicles altogether by walking and sharing privately-owned cars. Although the MOWM's post-1943 decline stifled these plans, Rankin network leaders still believed black churchgoers could become instrumental soldiers within a future "nonviolent army" against transportation segregation if groups such as theirs



produced well-trained generals to lead them. To achieve this goal, they worked to expand the network's influence upon the black college divinity faculties and chapel programs that touched thousands of students.<sup>6</sup>

Hudson eagerly assisted the effort to spread militant reconciliation theology by regularly presenting papers at network conferences, speaking at Howard's chapel, and bringing ideas from these dialogues back to Tallahassee. As FAMU's chaplain, he preached the theology and brought individuals such as Mays, Thurman, and Nelson to campus to lecture about Gandhian philosophy and tactics. Hudson's connections to the Rankin network and its militant reconciliation theology served as critical resources to the ICC, the *local movement center* that coordinated the Tallahassee Bus Boycott. Throughout the Civil Rights Movement, local movement centers marshaled a black community's indigenous financial, organizational, leadership, and cultural resources and then implemented protest strategies which transformed these resources into leverage to force specific social, political and economic changes.<sup>7</sup>

The Rankin network's role as a source of ideas for the Tallahassee Bus Boycott specifically illustrates how parallel organizations developed by black professionals

helped blacks create the agency, or ability to exert power, they used during the Civil Rights Movement. As historian Darlene Clark Hine noted, black professionals founded such associations in an effort to take advantage of Jim Crow's "Achilles' heel." Despite segregation's orientation as an instrument of white supremacy, black men and women understood that they still had the opportunity to form self-controlled institutions within this system. These institutions empowered blacks to forge relationships across the country, weave large networks, and spread innovative ideas about social change. As part of a Howard-based parallel organization, the Rankin network's members discussed ways to make the militant Jesus concept they shared part of a new oppositional consciousness, or belief-system that defined the status quo as unjust and vulnerable to change through collective action. They hoped such a consciousness could inspire local black communities to undertake nonviolent noncooperation campaigns. The Tallahassee Bus Boycott grew out of an intellectual environment shaped by Hudson and his predecessor David Hedgley - black scholar-preachers who had read, debated, and sought chances to apply the insights from studies that had extended from such Howard dialogues. In this way, the

protest represented a realization of the Rankin network's vision.<sup>8</sup>

Many Tallahassee civil rights activists cited Hudson as a key teacher and inspiration. During the Tallahassee Bus Boycott, Hudson coordinated the ICC's nonviolent training workshops. In 1957, the ICC became a constituent organization of the SCLC, headed by King. A number of Hudson's students also became major leaders in the city's downtown sit-ins and pickets. Additionally, Hudson participated in protests against segregated drug store lunch counters, led a large voter registration drive, and launched a bold lobbying initiative to improve city services in black neighborhoods. As Tallahassee's foremost educational leader in Christian nonviolence, Hudson's intellectual imprints occupy a prominent place on the city's crusade for social change.

### **Two Personalist Preacher, Protest Leaders in the Deep South**

The details of how James Hudson and Martin Luther King, Jr. used their philosophical training on the civil rights battlefield reveal much about the role theological liberalism, and specifically Personalism, played in two of the bus boycotts that opened the Civil Rights Movement. For example, in his role as author of the 1953-1954 *Young*

*Adult Quarterly* Sunday School lessons for the National Baptist Convention, USA (NBC) - America's largest black religious organization - Hudson helped pave the way for King's rise as the movement's premier spokesman. At Boston University, Hudson completed his work under the direction of Professor Edgar Sheffield Brightman. There, he embraced Personalism as his basic philosophical position, just as King would years later after studying under the same advisor. At the lay level, personalism is the belief that all human life is created in God's image and, therefore, has dignity, value, and a fraternal linkage. What laypersons might call the "soul," academic Personalists call "personality": self-conscious experience capable of rational thought and moral judgment. Such scholars considered personality to be the most useful clue toward understanding reality. In Personalism, Hudson and King found a philosophical framework that permitted them to approach their long-held convictions in a more systematic manner. As a liberal theology, Personalism fulfilled their need for an explanation of God and the meaning of life that went beyond evangelicalism's dogmatic boundaries but remained true to their roots in the black church.<sup>9</sup>

Brightman's *Moral Laws*, which attempted to move the field of ethics from a philosophical discipline to a social

science, had a particularly strong influence on the Personalistic rhetoric King and Hudson used (although neither accepted Brightman's arguments uncritically). As a theologian, Hudson heavily appropriated Brightman's moral law structure into his Sunday School lessons, using it to explain why apathy in the face of social evil was immoral and how there was an the urgent need for Christians to engage in immediate nonviolent confrontation against Jim Crow. These grassroots publications expanded Hudson's theological influence far beyond Tallahassee, reaching millions of NBC congregants. This brought Personalism to the forefront of the NBC education curriculum and helped standardize it as a protest language within those churches. When King later used Personalistic verbiage to articulate the moral dimensions of the civil rights struggle during his ascent to national leadership in 1955, his word choice carried an air of familiarity with the millions of teenaged students, parents, youth ministers, and Sunday School superintendents who had studied Hudson's lessons.

This dissertation's five chapters chronicle Hudson's development into what philosopher Cornel West termed an organic intellectual, a scholar who "linked the life of the mind to social change." Chapter One covers Hudson's childhood in Birmingham and matriculation through Morehouse

College, focusing on the personal and educational experiences that cemented his passion for fighting racial injustice. The second chapter surveys his years as a student at Colgate-Rochester Divinity School, chaplain of Leland College, and a graduate student at Boston University. During this period, Hudson achieved important victories over insecurities that had threatened his personal and professional goals. He also began connecting ideas derived from his scholarly studies to activist programs. Chapter Three examines Hudson's Personalistic philosophy of life, which became the intellectual framework for the educational programs and organizing efforts he led in Tallahassee. The fourth chapter reveals Hudson's role in setting the ideational and organizational foundation for the Civil Rights Movement's emergence in the 1950s. Finally, Chapter Five focuses on Hudson's participation in the Tallahassee Bus Boycott, the event that ushered in the beginning of the end of Jim Crow in Florida's capital city and aided the SCLC's creation. The dissertation ends with an epilogue that compares Hudson's Personalism with King's and summarizes the remaining years of Hudson's life.<sup>10</sup>

## ENDNOTES

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<sup>1</sup> James Hudson, "Where to Look for Victory," 25 March 1956, Folder 1, Box 14, James Hudson Papers, Southeastern Regional Black Archives, Research Center and Museum, Florida Agricultural & Mechanical University, Tallahassee, Fla.; James Hudson's concept of the "Kingdom of God" parallels Martin Luther King, Jr.'s "Beloved Kingdom." See: Andre C. Willis, "Why Martin Luther King, Jr. Stands Alone," *The Root* 18 January 2010.

<sup>2</sup> Aldon D. Morris, *The Origins of the Civil Rights Movement: Black Communities Organizing for Change* (New York: Free Press, 1984), 80.

<sup>3</sup> Ted Ownby, ed., *The Role of Ideas in the Civil Rights South* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2002), ix; Steven F. Lawson, *Civil Rights Crossroads* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2003), 3-28.

<sup>4</sup> Rayford W. Logan, *Howard University: the First Hundred Years, 1867-1967* (New York: New York University Press, 1969), 247-449; Richard I. McKinney, *Mordecai, The Man and His Message: The Story of Mordecai Wyatt Johnson* (Washington, D.C.: Howard University Press, 1997), 17-24; Charles Hamilton Houston built upon an initial plan developed by fellow Harvard Law School alumnus Nathan Margold. See: Genna Rae McNeil, *Groundwork: Charles Hamilton Houston and the Struggle for Civil Rights* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1983), 114-117.

<sup>5</sup> See: Dennis C. Dickerson, "African American Religious Intellectuals and the Theological Foundations of the Civil Rights Movement, 1930-55," *Church History* 74 (June 2005): 217-235.

<sup>6</sup> Cynthia Taylor, *A. Philip Randolph: The Religious Journey of an African American Labor Leader* (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 160-166, 174. On the black culture of resistance, see: Robin D.G. Kelley, "'We Are Not What We Seem': Rethinking Black Working-Class Opposition in the Jim Crow South," *Journal of American History* 80 (June 1993): 75-112; "Summary of the Third Conference, Fellowship

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of Religious Workers in Colleges and Universities for Negroes: The Christian Approach to Racial Tension in the United States," 26-28 February 1943, Greensboro, North Carolina, Box 4045, Howard Thurman Papers, Manuscript Division, Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University, Washington, D.C.

<sup>7</sup> Morris, 40.

<sup>8</sup> Darlene Clark Hine, "Black Professionals and Race Consciousness: Origins of the Civil Rights Movement, 1890-1950," *Journal of American History* 89 (March 2003): 1279-1294; Aldon D. Morris, "A Retrospective on the Civil Rights Movement: Political and Intellectual Landmarks," *Annual Review of Sociology* 25 (1999): 517-539.

<sup>9</sup> Edgar Sheffield Brightman, *Personality and Religion* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1934), 17; on liberal theology, see: Gary Dorrien, *The Making of American Liberal Theology: Idealism, Realism, & Modernity, 1900-1950* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003); on King, Personalism, and Boston University, see: Clayborne Carson, ed., *The Autobiography of Martin Luther King, Jr.* (New York: Warner Books, 1998), 27-33.

<sup>10</sup> Cornel West, "Prophetic Christian as Organic Intellectual: Martin Luther King, Jr." in Cornel West, ed., *The Cornel West Reader* (New York: Civitas Books, 1999), 425.



## CHAPTER I

### THE SACRED CALL

James Hudson's story began far from the site of his future ministry and teaching career. He was born October 2, 1903 in Birmingham, Alabama. In 1871, the "Magic City" had come into existence as a communal embodiment of the New South Movement, which aimed to transform the war-torn former Confederacy into a robust economic engine. Ambitious southern entrepreneurs placed their hopes for fortune and fame in Jones Valley's rich deposits of iron ore, coal and limestone. Birmingham soon emerged as an industrial town to support the system of rolling mills, foundries, blast furnaces, and other factories that turned those raw materials into valuable steel and pig iron products that were then shipped across America by train. The city's population swelled as tens of thousands of migrants, black and white, came in search of work. One was Berry Henry Hudson - born September 10, 1873 in Georgia - who arrived shortly after the turn of the century.<sup>1</sup>

Financier J.P. Morgan created the corporation that employed Berry for nearly 37 years. In 1894, Morgan formed the Southern Railway Company by acquiring and consolidating

a set of bankrupt railroads. Berry found a job in the engineering department as a rodman. Generally, rodmen held measuring poles that were used to assist with calculations during the land surveying process. The job, which required long hours in the blistering Southern sun and heavy travel, paid modestly.<sup>2</sup>

In the early 1900s, Berry met and married Alta C. Hawkins, a schoolteacher and Alabama native. The couple had five children: Theodore, James, Millage, Florence, and Gertrude. Berry and Alta rented a home inside in a neighborhood filled with the black working-class and poor. Conditions were harsh. Although blacks made up 52,305 - 39 percent - of the city's 132,685 residents in 1910, they suffered greatly as a result of their political disenfranchisement. In 1888, Birmingham's all-white Democratic Party primary had barred blacks from any meaningful participation in local elections. The action was followed by a string of Jim Crow constitutional provisions, laws, and ordinances that instituted a poll tax and separate public accommodations. Unable to challenge inequality in the voting booth, blacks faced an increasing tide of segregation in the public school system, trains, streetcars, shops, parks, zoos, and theatres. The convict leasing system also took a heavy toll on local black men,

who comprised 80 to 92 percent of Birmingham's chain gangs from 1890 to 1918.<sup>3</sup>

While Birmingham's lack of sufficient healthcare and sanitation service affected all citizens, it hurt blacks disproportionately. In order to avoid local taxes, many factory owners placed their sites outside the city limits. As observed by historian Lynne B. Feldman, "This socially irresponsible attitude resulted in trashlined streets, a high mortality rate from scarlet fever and small pox, particularly among African Americans, and the absence of an efficient and widespread sewage system." To complicate matters, blacks lacked any adequate hospital of their own. For a brief period, black doctors and a local nursing school ran a treatment facility at the Alabama Colored Orphans and Old Folks Home. But for the most part, blacks who required medical attention had to seek it from the segregated wards within Hillman and St. Vincent's hospitals. There, they often waited long periods and received inferior assistance.<sup>4</sup>

The paucity of good health conditions and medical treatment inflicted deep wounds on the Hudson family. One son named Berry Jr. died as an infant. At age six, incompetent primary care left a permanent mark on young James. While playing a game of baseball outside his home,

James stood close to a friend who was in the batting position. A bat, meant to be caught by the batter, was inadvertently thrown in James' direction. In order to keep it from hitting him in the face, James threw up his arms. The bat struck him on his right elbow. Although the accident seemed to be insignificant at first, the elbow injury grew progressively worse. James' father took him to a local doctor who said the arm only had a slight fracture and was not broken. The physician bandaged the injury and sent James home.<sup>5</sup>

That same doctor continued to treat James for about two months. But still, the young boy's arm did not get better. On many nights, the pain was so severe that James could not sleep. One day, after James and his father had just left the doctor, a family friend suggested that they seek out a second opinion. Berry agreed and took his son to another physician who re-examined the arm and told them he believed it was, indeed, broken. In order to be sure, the doctor performed a diagnostic operation on the arm which confirmed his assessment. Believing he could save the arm, the doctor performed a second, corrective operation. When the fracture continued to worsen, the doctor finally informed the Hudsons that James' arm would have to be amputated in forty-eight hours if he wanted to

live. Because of the lack of good medical advice and facilities for blacks in Birmingham, Hudson lost his right arm at the age of six or seven.<sup>6</sup>

Details are sketchy about the races of the two doctors who treated James, though family members believe the second physician was white. Following the amputation, James did the best he could to adjust. With his family's support, he trained himself to eat, write, and dress himself with one arm. "I learned to do a number of things which I just had to do," he recalled. "Like lacing and tying my shoestrings and doing just about anything that is necessary to make one's self presentable to the public." Although the small child already knew Birmingham's schools and public accommodations were segregated, the series of events that cost him his right arm made him more acutely aware of Alabama's racial inequalities. The tragic experience profoundly impacted James's attitudes, values, and beliefs; he was convinced that society had to be changed in order to give all people - black and white - an opportunity for fair treatment.<sup>7</sup>

At home, the Hudson parents instilled their children with a deep passion for education. Alta, who had taught grade school before marrying Berry, assisted the children with their homework and added her own lessons.

Additionally, Berry urged his sons and daughters to take advantage of educational opportunities he had not received. While living in Georgia, he had completed two years of elementary school at Atlanta's Morris Brown College, where he learned to read and write. As James described, his father had "a thirst for education" and would have loved to continue his studies. However, he had to stop and look for work to support himself. As a result, Berry, the family's primary breadwinner, took personal pride in earning enough money to afford the tuition required to send his children through the local "colored" schools.<sup>8</sup>

James, along with his brothers and sisters, attended Birmingham's Industrial High School. Founded in 1900, its first principal was Arthur Harold Parker, a former barbershop owner who began teaching in the late 1880s. Throughout his 39 years as Industrial High's leader, Parker shaped the school's curriculum to match the educational philosophy advanced by Booker T. Washington, the man he described as his "patron saint." True to Washington's model at Tuskegee Institute, Parker focused on equipping students with the vocational and moral instruction he believed would make them effective skilled workers, small business owners, and parents. The school offered standard courses in English, algebra, geometry, biology, physiology,

physiography, history, and literature. Its manual training areas included cooking, laundry, sewing, printing, and woodworking. Most graduates entered housekeeping, business, or teaching.<sup>9</sup>

Parker viewed teaching as a sacred duty and encouraged his best students to pursue it as a profession. As he wrote in his autobiography, "The boys and girls of to-day must draw in deep and holy inspirations and form noble and lofty ideals. The profession of teaching needs the best product that the race produces. It needs men and women who are morally, mentally, and physically strong and sound." He also viewed the pulpit as a critical teaching platform that was critical to the race's uplift. "We need ministers to teach the people how to live honestly, how to be faithful, how to pay their debts, and how to live pure and true lives, by example as well as precept." Parker's fiery passion for educating youth, coupled with Alta Hudson's example, encouraged James to select teaching as his future career. Alta's unfortunate death from typhoid fever shortly before the United States entered World War I also strengthened James' desire to honor her memory and follow in her footsteps. Moreover, the supportive environment at Industrial High encouraged his budding interest in ministry.<sup>10</sup>

WWI touched the Hudsons very personally. On September 12, 1918, Berry joined the millions of American men who registered for the draft. Having just lost their mother, the children trembled at thought of losing their last remaining parent to military service in Europe. To their relief, he was not called to enlist. The war and its aftermath ushered in a new era of increased black opposition to Jim Crow. Many blacks challenged exploitive working conditions and wages with their feet. Around them, the Hudsons watched many of their black neighbors pack their possessions and purchase train tickets for cities such as Detroit, Chicago, and Cleveland. With hundreds of thousands of European immigrants returning home to fight for their birth countries, Northern manufacturers aggressively courted black Birminghamians with promises of better pay. Desperate to preserve their biggest source of cheap labor, Birmingham's industry captains successfully pushed for a new vagrancy ordinance and used the federal "work-or-fight" order to conscript black men. Locked into what amounted to peonage, local black miners and factory workers filed into unions and engaged in wildcat strikes. The broader black community's strong support of the war effort also made it less patient with segregated norms. Throughout the city, blacks bought bonds, disseminated



government literature about the conflict, and supported loved ones throughout their tours of duty. Like many other blacks across the United States, black Birminghamians believed that their wartime loyalty and sacrifices entitled them to first-class citizenship. Thus, when local segregation remained firm after the Allied/Associated Powers victory, the city's black community sharpened its resistance.<sup>11</sup>

James observed the local black clergy's leadership against Jim Crow with particular interest. Before the war, the ministers deferentially followed Booker T. Washington's lead, using conciliatory language to express grievances. But three years after Washington's death, when the war ended, they reflected the growing restlessness within their congregations. The flood of black northern migration loomed large in this shift. In order to keep their pews full and protect their livelihoods, the pastors knew they had to fight to create a better quality of life for their parishioners. In 1918, the Interdenominational Ministerial Alliance, an organization of black preachers, protested the rampant mistreatment of black streetcar patrons. One year later, black pastors supported a campaign to establish a local chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), an interracial body

that targeted racial injustice through demands for unabridged enforcement of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments. The Alliance soon joined the NAACP and other civil groups in publicly denouncing the motion picture, *The Birth of a Nation*, which glorified the Ku Klux Klan. Although the ministers avoided calling for an immediate halt to all segregation, some began to call for black suffrage.<sup>12</sup>

No black pastor was more concerned about curtailing northbound migration than the Rev. A.C. Williams, who headed the Hudson family's spiritual home: Sixteenth Street Baptist Church. Although it attracted men and women of all classes, the church enjoyed prominence as home of the city's largest black middle class congregation. Accordingly, Williams worked feverishly to help the doctors, dentists, principals, and business owners on his membership roll keep their clientele. In 1916, he established a Social Service Association at the church that gave numerous forms of aid to black factory and mine workers. They included a kindergarten for small children and a community extension department that provided various welfare programs. Additionally, he urged black laborers to develop black-only trade organizations to advance their interests before industrial operators. Williams coated the

later message in a language that specifically discouraged affiliation with white-led unions and disruptive strikes, urging blacks not to hinder the city's economy. Instead, he called upon his listeners to "promote efficiency" and seek the "co-operation and sympathy of the employer." In order to maintain their position as the race's brokers before the white establishment, Williams and similarly situated black leaders knew they had to protect the flow of capital. When black laborers left town or dropped their tools in protest, there was less money for the services the black middle class provided. That threatened the black middle class' ability to maintain the leverage and respect it valued as a group of property owners, major political contributors, and spokespersons for the masses.<sup>13</sup>

Williams' accomodationist message failed to gain traction with most black workers, who had grown increasingly impatient with paltry pay, seemingly endless hours, and dangerous job environments. As more blacks joined white-led unions and engaged in work stoppages, belligerent reprisals erupted. A resurgence of the Ku Klux Klan in Birmingham came largely in response to interracial unionizing. On May 6, 1918, 150 robed Klansmen rode through the city on horseback, delivering an unmistakable warning to striking steelworkers. Additionally, a

paramilitary group known as the "Vigilantes" regularly accosted black workers who tried to join labor organizations. A bitter, 1920 coalfield strike supported by thousands of black miners further escalated tensions. After six months filled with pickets, mob violence, and murder, Gov. Thomas Kilby dispatched state guardsmen and undercover law enforcement officers to crush the uprising. Facing overwhelming force and a dead-end in the courts, the strikers relented. Beaten, hungry, and displaced by strikebreakers, scores of unemployed black miners headed out of the city and toward the North. Within the black community that remained, the middle class faced a credibility crisis. On one side, the black middle class encountered resentment from black laborers who felt their "race leaders" had abandoned them. On the other side, white government and company officials decried the uselessness of "race leaders" who could not control popular unrest. In a development that symbolized this conundrum, Williams was ousted from his pastorship the year the strike began.<sup>14</sup>

The coalfield rebellion, which took place during James' late teenage years, was a spectacle unlike any he had ever witnessed. Its aftermath likely led him to reflect on his values and future ambitions. As the son of

a low-wage worker, James sympathized with the black miners who sought better pay and dignified treatment. The strike illustrated the vast possibilities of noncooperation campaigns against systems of exploitation, especially when done in an interracial fashion. It also showed that those who engaged in such economic protests did so at the peril of their jobs, family stability, and personal safety. State-led and extralegal violence were among the possible consequences. Furthermore, with James aspiring to become a preacher and teacher, Williams' fall gave him early exposure to a potential stumbling block that awaited those who had to navigate class and racial politics. While working class blacks normally gave their leaders space to meet white powerbrokers' negotiation terms and pursue middle class self-interest, they expected unabridged loyalty whenever their lives and livelihoods were in jeopardy.

Williams' successor, Charles L. Fisher, became a close friend and mentor to James. Having previously served as Sixteenth Street Baptist's pastor from 1898 to 1911, he brought welcome stability back to the splintered congregation. Fisher's familiarity with Birmingham's institutions, people, and politics made him a figure who could help heal the community's divides. Additionally, he

commanded respect as the best educated black clergyman in the city. Fisher had earned degrees from Leland College in Louisiana and Baptist Union Theological Seminary (which later became the University of Chicago's Divinity School). On Sundays, James listened intently as the new minister stressed the themes of black equality, education, entrepreneurship, group economy, and moral living. In the broader community, Fisher petitioned against Jim Crow residential ordinances and other forms of second-class citizenship, especially in his position as president of the Interdenominational Ministerial Alliance. Moreover, Fisher held a number of coveted posts within the black National Baptist Convention; he served as a lecturer on Baptist history at annual meetings and edited a series for the national Sunday School lesson booklets. Fisher gave young James a living example of a black, seminary-educated preacher who had completed advanced studies at a prestigious, predominantly white northern university and returned to the South to help his race. In many respects, Fisher's career path served as a prototype for James.<sup>15</sup>

James' good grades and hard work ethic pleased his father, who did everything he could to place him on the path to college. Since Industrial High did not offer Latin or French, two standard admissions requirements for

baccalaureate programs, Berry paid for James to take extra courses at the nearby Central Alabama Institute. It was very likely that his brother, Millage, accompanied him. Once they became teenagers, James and Millage, similar to their brother Theodore, worked as shoe shiners at a local barbershop; the extra money helped supplement tuition costs. A small school founded in 1872 by the Methodist Episcopal Church and operated by blacks, Central Alabama Institute had begun as Rust Normal Institute in Huntsville, Alabama. In 1904, it moved to the Birmingham suburb Mason City, where church leaders believed its proximity to tens of thousands of blacks would attract a larger enrollment. Along with his foreign and classical language studies there, James took additional courses in English, English history, biology, and education. It is possible that the aspiring preacher also enrolled in the school's Bible courses.<sup>16</sup>

Complementing the race leadership teachings he received at Industrial High School, the Central Alabama Institute helped James embrace what he believed was a *sacred call*. The term sacred call refers to a broad tradition that has informed black leadership action since the end of the Civil War. Blacks educated in missionary institutions became what sociologist E. Franklin Frazier

called "a responsible elite" that viewed racial uplift as a moral obligation. Some specifically adopted this sense of "noblesse oblige" as a religious duty, which produced the sacred call in their minds. Convinced that God wanted them to fight against ignorance, poverty, discrimination, disenfranchisement and other social problems that handicapped the black masses, these men and women sought professions that would help them fulfill this role. The tradition differed from the principles taught by Tuskegee disciples such as Parker in that it stressed advanced liberal arts training as a critical necessity and had a more militant orientation. Fisher, as a graduate of a missionary institution (Leland) and activist preacher, embodied the sacred call concept. James left Central Alabama with a better grasp of the ideas that undergirded his pastor's ministry.<sup>17</sup>

By the time he graduated in 1921, James had chosen to attend Morehouse College. The Atlanta institution had a strong reputation for training black teachers and ministers, making it an ideal match for him. But, despite his eagerness to begin, he decided to remain in Birmingham for one more year. Millage, who also wanted to study at Morehouse, needed to finish his final year of high school in 1921-1922. The two planned to move to Atlanta at the



same time and begin their freshman year together. The brief hiatus also gave James a chance to earn additional money for his tuition and learning expenses. To build up his savings, he continued his shoe shining job.

During that time, the teenager encountered more racial hostilities that inflamed his passion to fight back. James had grown up hearing stories about KKK lynchings. In 1922, the Klan held a large march through Birmingham's black neighborhoods. James remembered that the owner of the barbershop at which he worked had received word about the planned demonstration in advance and let him go home early. He also recalled an incident in which the KKK pursued a black man in the streets, blasting at him with guns. "The KKK was very strong then," he recollected. "For sheer survival, we had to stay close or stay inside. It was just that bad."<sup>18</sup>

When James and Millage moved to Atlanta in fall 1922, they entered a city with race relations that were much different from what they had experienced in their hometown. The city's black population (31 percent) was actually smaller than that of Birmingham's. But nonetheless, the local black middle class tended to resist segregation with greater militancy. Where blacks in Birmingham had no community identity before the New South Movement, Atlanta's

modern black elite and leadership tradition dated back to Reconstruction. During that time, blacks had held powerful elected offices, run lucrative businesses, bought property, published independent newspapers, and built powerful community associations. And even in the midst of the increasingly repressive racial environment that emerged during the Redemption era, many black families had managed to pass money and land to their children. A well-established nexus of black churches, schools, fraternities, sororities, and social clubs continued to provide another important source of agency. Morehouse and the five other Reconstruction-born missionary institutions clustered around it - Atlanta University, Spelman College, Clark University, Morris Brown University, and Gammon Theological Seminary - formed a critical part of this empowering social structure. Even as New South spokesmen such as *Atlanta Constitution* editor Henry Grady had called for vocational training to be the top priority in black education, Morehouse and its sister institutions persisted in their focus on producing a liberal arts-trained black vanguard. Collectively, the schools helped perpetuate the black community's group economy and self-sufficiency by increasing black upward mobility into high-paying skilled professions. They also provided vehicles through which the

black learned community could network, study, and strategize against racial injustice.<sup>19</sup>

Thus, much unlike Birmingham's black leadership - which was just beginning to take small steps away Booker T. Washington's example of accommodation/polite protest - Atlanta's black city fathers had maintained a more confrontational posture against Jim Crow for decades. During James' birth year an Atlanta University professor, W.E.B. Du Bois, had emerged as the leading spokesman against Washington's Tuskegee Idea. In his 1903 *The Souls of Black Folk*, he blasted Washington's negative public stance against liberal arts education and call for blacks to wait patiently for first-class citizenship. Additionally, Du Bois favorably noted how black Atlantans had struggled against Jim Crow during the early 1900s, writing: "They had fought disfranchisement; they had resented the city Carnegie Library which admitted no Negroes; they had boycotted unfair stores, railroads and street cars." Atlanta's blacks also used violent resistance when their neighborhoods were attacked by white mobs in 1906. The ensuing, bitter race riot brought the entire city to a standstill, leaving at least 32 blacks and three whites dead. That incident - which happened 11 years after Washington's famed "Atlanta Exposition Address"

lauded southern whites as generous and genuinely interested in racial harmony - led more local blacks to scorn his conciliatory approach to race relations.<sup>20</sup>

Upon entering college, James immediately embraced Morehouse President John Hope as his top role model. One of Du Bois' close friends and colleagues, Hope had joined the Atlanta University professor as a member of the Niagara Movement, which aimed to keep the militant tradition of interracial human rights advocacy characteristic of abolitionism alive in post-Reconstruction America. Highly critical of Washington, the Niagarites called for unfettered black suffrage, better assistance for black public and liberal arts education, and social equality. During the movement's inaugural year in 1905, Hope took on the job of "state secretary for organization" in Georgia. Hope also played an important organizing role in the 1906 Georgia Equal Rights Convention, which insisted on an end to lynching, segregated railroad cars, excessive judicial sentences for blacks, and political disenfranchisement. As the Niagara Movement withered, Hope took part in the National Negro Committee, which became the NAACP in 1909. Eight years later, he helped found Atlanta's NAACP branch. Walter White, a future national NAACP executive secretary, was another charter member.<sup>21</sup>

Morehouse's academic environment mirrored Hope's militancy, which soon made the college an anchor for the New Negro Movement's presence in Georgia. Consistent with the New Negro emphasis on racial equality, Hope stressed resistance to Jim Crow. As observed by historian LeRoy Davis, "In principle, students were taught that segregation was wrong and that Morehouse men were not expected to take part in any voluntary segregation." Toward this end, Hope encouraged his pupils to join organizations such as the NAACP. He also urged them to become "race men" who would use their education as a tool to build black institutions and strike back against social injustice. Every Tuesday morning, James anxiously awaited the president's weekly address in the college chapel. The fiery talks made him eager to personally exemplify Hope's fond saying that: "A Morehouse man cannot fail."<sup>22</sup>

As a student in Morehouse's School of Religion, James studied under the tutelage of Charles Dubois Hubert, the program's director. An alumnus of Atlanta Baptist College (later Morehouse), Hubert had gone on to earn a bachelor of divinity from Rochester Theological Seminary, a leading intellectual center for the Social Gospel movement. Created by liberal white Protestants, the Social Gospel's central message was that God regularly intervened in world

affairs to bring moral order and social justice, using people as his tools. It reached its pinnacle from 1890 to 1914 as an attempt to apply Christianity to the problems associated with industrialization, urbanization, and immigration. Based upon the belief that God wanted humans to build His divine kingdom on earth, it promoted and emphasized social, rather than metaphysical, definitions of sin and salvation. Sin equaled the social systems that pushed people into poverty, poor health, and unlawful behavior. Accordingly, salvation required social activism through activities such as agitating for better wages, fighting slum conditions, and expanding job and educational opportunities. Rochester faculty member Walter Rauschenbusch, the Social Gospel's most prominent writer, was part of the Christian socialist wing of the movement. He taught that capitalism was "the unregenerate section of our social order" and advocated democratic socialism as the economic system that best matched Jesus' teachings.<sup>23</sup>

While many Social Gospellers echoed Social Darwinism's position on white supremacy, black leaders saw great potential in the religiously-based urban outreach models it inspired. In particular, institutional churches and settlement houses provided an innovative blueprint for modernizing the black church's long-running tradition of

community uplift. Both transformed the Social Gospel's theological principles into social scientific projects, using insights from the newly developing field of sociology to create professional welfare services for individuals struggling in harsh surroundings. There were, however, important differences between the institutional churches and settlement houses. The former primarily served those on the congregation's membership roll; the later ministered to a much broader constituency. Worship was only a secondary concern within settlements. Such programs considered human physical, mental, and economic well-being to be ends, rather than simple means for proselytizing. Examples included Jane Addams' Hull House and Graham Taylor's Chicago Commons, which helped European immigrants acclimate to city life.<sup>24</sup>

In 1900, African Methodist Episcopal minister Reverdy C. Ransom established Chicago's Institutional Church and Social Settlement in an effort to adapt the settlement house concept to the needs of the city's growing black population. Ransom shaped the church's program and goals, in large part, as a response to findings published by W.E.B. Du Bois in his 1899 *The Philadelphia Negro*. Rejecting Social Darwinist theses that cited biological inferiority as the source of widespread black destitution,

Du Bois had argued that racism operated as a fundamental, structural force that thrust large numbers of inner-city blacks into a cycle of joblessness, sickness, crime, and broken families. Further, he criticized the black clergy for its weak response to this crisis. Ransom helped pioneer a black Social Gospel by articulating racism as another component of institutionalized-societal sin and using his church to combat it by offering social services such as an employment bureau, literacy courses, medical treatment, public bathing facilities, and vocational training. His activities created an early prototype for incorporating social scientific analysis and methodologies into black ministry. And like Rauschenbusch, he called for democratic socialism. Later, as a Harlem pastor from 1907 to 1912, Ransom's blend of Biblically-centered neighborhood outreach and class analysis also influenced a young A. Philip Randolph's ideas regarding the black church's potential for activism.<sup>25</sup>

James arrived in Atlanta just two years after one of the earliest and most successful experiments in bringing Ransom's institutional church model into the South had ended. With much of black Atlanta's business, recreation, and charity infrastructure crippled by the 1906 race riot, Rev. Henry Hugh Proctor believed the institutional church



design could help rebuild the community. And similar to Ransom, he looked to sociological studies such as Du Bois' for guidance. In 1908, Proctor's First Congregational Church opened a new building that housed a gymnasium, clinic, employment bureau, showers, lavatories, library, auditorium, ladies parlor, kindergarten, and homes for working women and black girls. Although it did not adopt the title "settlement house," the church functioned in a manner that paralleled such programs. It operated many of its services and facilities 24 hours every day and reached out to a citywide constituency. Following Proctor's resignation in 1919 the church gradually dissolved its institutional arm, letting organizations such as the city's National Urban League and Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) take the lead in professional social welfare activities. Nonetheless, First Congregational's record of success - along with subsequent black southern institutional ministries such as the one led by the Rev. Gordon Blaine Hancock in Richmond, Virginia - provided important case studies for Hubert and other Morehouse divinity instructors to cite in the classroom. From Hubert's teachings, Hudson gained more detailed knowledge about the origins and scientific basis of the black institutional ministry model he first encountered at

Sixteenth Street Baptist. The young man also took pride in promoting the black YMCA's Social Gospel mission, serving as a student vice-president while at Morehouse.<sup>26</sup>

Several other campus figures complemented Hubert's teachings on fighting social evil. Lugenia Burns Hope, the wife of Morehouse's president and a former Hull House worker, was a tenacious advocate for the low-income black families that lived close to the college. As historian Jacqueline Rouse described, Mrs. Hope "tried to impart to the young [Morehouse] men her sensitivity toward the needs of the community and the necessity of alleviating them." Through the Neighborhood Union, which she founded in 1908, Morehouse's first lady waged a long and ultimately fruitful battle to bring better health programs, housing, sewage lines, electric power, and paved streets to the area. Paralleling her husband's militancy, she used petitions and lawsuits to push her cause. Mrs. Hope frequently reached out to sociology classes for help in staffing her social programs and conducting house-to-house surveys. E. Franklin Frazier, a young sociology professor, eagerly assisted the effort to encourage ministry students who wanted to apply Ransom's social science-informed outreach model. As director of the Atlanta School of Social Work from 1922 to 1927, he introduced students to the most

recent data on the black plight in America, as well as the latest professional methods for ameliorating those conditions. Benjamin Mays, a black Social Gospel advocate who pastored the nearby Shiloh Baptist Church, taught mathematics, psychology, and religious education from 1921 to 1924. He also coached the debate team. In 1923, the members consisted of Howard Thurman and James Nabrit, Jr., two students who would soon become prominent scholars, themselves.<sup>27</sup>

Although they were not members of Morehouse's faculty, John Wesley Edward Bowen and William Jefferson King, two professors at the neighboring Gammon Theological Seminary, also had an important influence on James. As only the second black American to earn a Ph.D., Bowen was a larger-than-life figure. In 1887, he had completed a doctorate in historical theology from Boston University, becoming the institution's first black Ph.D. recipient. Six years later, Bowen joined Gammon as its chair of historical theology, a position he held for 30 years. He also served as Gammon's first black president from 1906 to 1910. Throughout his career, he was an outspoken advocate of black access to liberal arts training, even though he supported Washington's pragmatic approach to race relations. King, who graduated from Boston in 1921 with a

Ph.D. in Old Testament studies, followed Bowen's example as a theologian dedicated to the racial uplift through higher education. From 1918 to 1930, King taught Old Testament and Christian sociology courses at Gammon. King later served as president of two institutions: Samuel Houston College from 1930 to 1932 and Gammon from 1932 to 1948.<sup>28</sup>

James took Mrs. Hope's neighborhood advocacy example to heart. He also came to share several intellectual interests that paralleled those of Frazier, who taught his introduction to sociology and social problems courses. They included a Marxist critique of world affairs, workers' rights, and democratic socialism. Having come from a household headed by a low-wage, industrial laborer - and a hometown filled with people who shared that plight - these ideas strongly resonated with him. Additionally, Hudson watched with great admiration as Frazier and Mays went on to earn doctorates from the prestigious University of Chicago; their success heightened his interest in pursuing advanced studies at a top-rate Northern institution. But Bowen and King best demonstrated, at that early point in James' life, how doctoral training in theology could enhance his potential as a spiritual and educational leader.<sup>29</sup>

The young minister-in-training's courses focused on preparing him for the classroom and pulpit. Although Morehouse accepted the elementary-level Latin credits James had earned from Central Alabama Institute, it required him to pass intermediate Latin as an entrance condition. Reflecting his desire to ultimately pursue a doctorate in the philosophy of religion, James continued his Latin studies by taking two advanced courses in Cicero and Virgil. He also enrolled in advanced Greek. After receiving Bs in homiletics, English Bible, church history, he achieved his first A- in a religion course during his junior year. It came from his "Teachings of Jesus" class, followed by another in ethics. The two grades showed his deep interest in discovering ways in which Jesus' moral message could be applied to social challenges. In the area of education, James dedicated most of his attention to understanding how the human mind affected the learning process. This led to A- marks in general psychology, adolescent psychology, and educational psychology. Overall, James's Morehouse performance was very strong. Out of the 17 courses he took during his upperclassman years, he earned mostly A and A- grades. In 1926, he graduated as salutatorian of his class.<sup>30</sup>

James Hudson grew up learning how to persevere through adversity. At an early age, he faced obstacles stemming from his race, class, and physical disability. With his family's support, he used hard work and education as his bridge across those turbulent waters. The impediments he faced during his early life drove him to search for ways to challenge the social structures that created and enforced inequality. Birmingham's labor strikes gave him his first view of wide-scale noncooperation against an oppressive structure. Additionally, James eagerly embraced the sacred call tradition exemplified by his hometown pastor and taught at Central Alabama Institute and Morehouse College. His role models at Morehouse, in particular, equipped him with conceptual tools and skills that he could use to fight social injustice. Specifically, his college studies helped him develop a deeper understanding of the black Social Gospel and institutional ministry. During his years in Atlanta, he also admired and resolved to emulate the local black professors who used their doctoral training as an asset in the race's freedom struggle. Armed with this knowledge, instruction, and self-confidence, he headed back to his home state ready to teach and prepare for his bachelor of divinity studies.

## ENDNOTES

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<sup>1</sup> Lynne B. Feldman, *A Sense of Place: Birmingham's Black Middle-Class Community, 1890-1930* (Tuscaloosa, Ala.: University of Alabama Press), 6-7; Draft registration card for Berry Henry Hudson, U.S. Selective Service System, *World War I Selective Service System Draft Registration Cards 1917-1918*, Registration Location: Jefferson County, Alabama, Roll 1509359, Draft Board 6, Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 1987-1988, hereinafter "B.H. Hudson draft card."

<sup>2</sup> James Hudson, interview by Jackson Ice, 1978, transcript, Tallahassee Civil Rights Oral History Collection, Special Collections, Florida State University Library, Tallahassee, Fla., n.p., hereinafter "Ice interview with Hudson"; Scott Reynolds Nelson, *Iron Confederacies: Southern Railways, Klan Violence, and Reconstruction* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 181.

<sup>3</sup> U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Twelfth Census of the United States, 1900*, East Lake, Jefferson County, Alabama, Roll T62320, 24A, Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 1900; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Thirteenth Census of the United States, 1910*, Birmingham Ward 15, Jefferson County, Alabama, Roll T624\_20, 2A; 1910 U.S. Census, Vol. 2: *Population 1910: Reports by States, with Statistics for Counties, Cities, and other Civil Divisions, Alabama - Montana* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1913), 36, 60; Feldman, 8-23.

<sup>4</sup> Feldman, 6-7, 160; Nina Mjagkij, *Organizing Black America: An Encyclopedia of African American Associations* (New York: Taylor & Francis, 2001), 96.

<sup>5</sup> Ice interview with Hudson.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

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<sup>9</sup> Arthur Harold Parker, *A Dream that Came True* (Birmingham, Ala.: Printing Department of the Industrial High School, 1932-33), 37-38; Feldman, 126-127; James Hudson, Morehouse College A.B. transcript, 1922-1926, in James L. Hudson Family Collection, Washington, D.C., hereinafter "Hudson Morehouse transcript."

<sup>10</sup> Parker, 18, 20; B.H. Hudson draft card; James Lagarde Hudson, son of James Hudson, interview by author, 8 July 2008, Washington, D.C., hereinafter "J.L. Hudson interview."

<sup>11</sup> B.H. Hudson draft card; Brian Kelly, *Race, Class, and Power in the Alabama Coalfields, 1908-21* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001), 134-152; Wilson Fallin, Jr., *The African American Church in Birmingham, Alabama, 1815-1963: A Shelter in the Storm* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1997), 77.

<sup>12</sup> Fallin, 77-78; 92-93.

<sup>13</sup> James Hudson was baptized at Sixteenth Street Baptist Church in 1915. James Hudson, Application to Colgate-Rochester Divinity School, 21 May 1929; Daniel Letwin, *The Challenge of Interracial Unionism: Alabama Coal Miners, 1878-1921* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 251, n36; "Race Workers Advised to form their own Organizations for Better Conditions," *Norfolk Journal and Guide*, 28 July 1917 in Philip S. Foner and Ronald L. Lewis., eds., *The Black Worker: A Documentary History from Colonial Times to the Present, Vol. 5., The Black Worker from 1900 to 1919* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1980), 433.

<sup>14</sup> Kelly, 153-154, 162-202; Feldman, 260, n39.

<sup>15</sup> Fallin, 90-93.

<sup>16</sup> U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Fourteenth Census of the United States, 1920*, Birmingham, Jefferson County, Alabama, Roll T625\_25, 23A, Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 1920; J.L. Hudson interview; Hudson Morehouse transcript; Jay Samuel Sowell, *Methodist Adventures in Negro Education* (New York: Methodist Book of Concern, 1922), 133; U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Education, "Negro Education: A Study of the



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Private and Higher Schools for Colored People in the United States, Volume II" 39 *Bulletin* (1916), Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1917.

<sup>17</sup> Dennis C. Dickerson, "George E. Cannon: Black Churchman, Physician, and Republican Politician," *Journal of Presbyterian History* 4 (Winter 1973): 415-416, n22.

<sup>18</sup> Ice interview with Hudson; Feldman, 21.

<sup>19</sup> In 1920, blacks were 62,796 of Atlanta's 200,616 citizens. 1920 U.S. Census, Vol. 3: *Population 1920: Composition and Characteristics of the Population by States* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1922), 222; See: Allison Dorsey, *To Build Our Lives Together: Community Formation in Black Atlanta, 1875-1906* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2004) 2, 40-53, 95-99, 123, 127-130.

<sup>20</sup> See: W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (Chicago: A.C. McClurg and Company, 1903); W.E.B. Du Bois, "Postscript: Looking Seventy-Five Years Backward: Being the Personal Recollections of the Tower on Stone Hall," *Phylon* 3 (1942): 244-245; see: Gregory Mixon, *The Atlanta Riot: Race, Class, and Violence in a New South City* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2005), 1.

<sup>21</sup> J.L. Hudson interview; Walter White, *A Man Called White: The Autobiography of Walter White* (New York: Viking Press, 1948; reprint, Athens, Ga.: University of Georgia Press, 1995), 30-32; Leroy Davis, *A Clashing of the Soul: John Hope and the Dilemma of African American Leadership and Black Higher Education in the Early Twentieth Century* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1998), 152-154, 188, 218.

<sup>22</sup> Davis, 199, 257, 278; Ridgely Torrence, *The Story of John Hope* (New York: Macmillan, 1948), 190-191.

<sup>23</sup> Benjamin Griffith Brawley, *History of Morehouse College* (Atlanta: Morehouse College, 1917), 111, 204; Gary Dorrien, *The Making of American liberal Theology: Idealism, Realism, and Modernity, 1900-1950* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), 108-117; Walter Rauschenbusch, *Christianizing the Social Order* (New York: Macmillan, 1912) 156.

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<sup>24</sup> Ralph E. Luker, *The Social Gospel in Black and White: American Racial Reform, 1885-1912* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 170-174, 178.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 173-176; Cornelius L. Bynum, "'An Equal Chance in the Race for Life': Reverdy C. Ransom, Socialism, and the Social Gospel Movement, 1890-1920," *Journal of African American History* 93 (Winter 2008): 1-20.

<sup>26</sup> Luker, 163-165; 183-190; Edyth L. Ross, "Black Heritage in Social Welfare: A Case Study of Atlanta," *Phylon* 37 (4th Qtr., 1976): 302-303; Roswell F. Jackson and Rosalyn M. Patterson, "A Brief History of Selected Black Churches in Atlanta, Georgia," *Journal of Negro History* 74 (Winter-Autumn, 1989): 37; on the Rev. Gordon Blaine Hancock's institutional ministry see: Raymond Gavins, *The Perils and Prospects of Southern Black Leadership: Gordon Blaine Hancock, 1884-1970* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1977), 33-35.

<sup>27</sup> Davis, 266-267; Torrence, 138-140, 237-238; Jacqueline Anne Rouse, *Lugenia Burns Hope, Black Southern Reformer* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1989), 17, 47, 65-66; Benjamin E. Mays, *Born to Rebel: An Autobiography* (New York: Scribner, 1971; reprint, Athens, Ga.: University of Georgia Press, 2003), 66-99; Jonathan Scott Holloway, *Confronting the Veil: Abram Harris, Jr., E. Franklin Frazier, and Ralph Bunche, 1919-1941* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 124-126, 137-138.

<sup>28</sup> See: Rufus Burrow, Jr., "The Personalism of John Wesley Edward Bowen" *Journal of Negro History* 82 (Spring 1997): 244-256; Rufus Burrow, Jr. "Afrikan American Contributions to Personalism" *Encounter* 60 (Spring 1999): 153-158.

<sup>29</sup> Hudson Morehouse transcript; "List of Faculty of Morehouse College for Year 1923-1924," Reel 7, Alton Hornsby, Jr., ed., *Papers of John and Lugenia Burns Hope*, Frederick, Md: University Publications of America, 1984.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.; Ice interview with Hudson.

## CHAPTER II

### "WORK AND WAIT"

Following his graduation from Morehouse, James Hudson accepted a grade school teaching job in Lehigh, Alabama. After only a few months, he left that position in favor of a faculty post at Lincoln Junior High School in his hometown. There, he resumed living with his family and attending Sixteenth Street Baptist Church. On August 15, 1926, the church licensed him to preach. As a new pulpit associate, Hudson played active leadership roles in the congregation's Baptist Young People's Union, juvenile delinquency ministry, Sunday School, and public Bible classes. Additionally, he delivered regular guest sermons for Pastor Charles L. Fisher, who continued to help him develop his homiletical skills. While saving money and gaining experience as a clergyman, Hudson filled out and submitted applications to seminary programs. Two prominent Social Gospel institutions, Oberlin College in Ohio and Colgate-Rochester Divinity School in New York, were his top choices. Both reserved a limited number of seats for black students each year and frequently selected Morehouse men for those slots.<sup>1</sup>

Oberlin was the first to respond to Hudson. Anxious to begin his studies, he enrolled there in 1928. In attending this college, he followed in the footsteps of black Social Gospel pioneer Reverdy C. Ransom, whom had studied there until he lost his scholarship after coordinating a protest against the segregated Ladies Dining Hall. That spring, Hudson became friends with fellow Morehouse alumnus Howard Thurman, who pastored the local Mount Zion Baptist Church. The two spoke at length about Thurman's days at Rochester Theological Seminary, which had since merged with another nearby divinity school to become Colgate-Rochester that year. As Hudson listened to Thurman's stories about his life-changing experience in upstate New York, he began to reconsider his decision to attend Oberlin.<sup>2</sup>

Like Hudson, Thurman had looked up to Morehouse School of Religion Director Charles Dubois Hubert, a Rochester graduate. Hubert had attended the school while Walter Rauschenbusch, the Social Gospel's leading scholar, was on the faculty. In his subsequent role as Morehouse's chief divinity instructor, Hubert brought the knowledge and fiery inspiration from his Rochester studies into the classroom, which led many of his best students to try and follow in his footsteps by applying to the highly-selective

institution. Thurman was admitted there in 1923, grateful to have earned one of the two spots the seminary held open for black students, annually.<sup>3</sup>

Although Rauschenbusch had died in 1918, several of his former colleagues built upon the intellectual and pedagogical foundation he established. They included: Conrad Henry Moehlman and Henry Burke Robins, two professors of church history, George Cross, who taught systematic theology, and Justin Wroe Nixon, an Old Testament instructor. Similar to Rauschenbusch, these men were liberal theologians. A movement stemming from the early nineteenth century, liberal theology's founders conceptualized it as a "third way" between the extremes of Christian orthodoxy and secularism. Grounded in intellectual currents stemming back to the Enlightenment and American evangelicalism, liberal theology held that human reason and experience must be the basis for all truth claims. It also carried an optimistic view of society's capacity for progress.<sup>4</sup>

Thurman developed a deep affinity for liberal Christianity at Rochester and enjoyed close relationships with many of his professors. He loved hearing their lectures against religious orthodoxy and social apathy, reading their meticulous scholarship, and holding long one-

on-one discussions with them in their offices. Outside campus, he generally received cordial treatment despite his race, recalling: "I was never refused service or otherwise insulted in any of the stores." However, danger still lurked within and around the small western New York town. The Ku Klux Klan had a strong and growing presence there, stemming from its national revival during the 1920s. Since there were few blacks in the area, the KKK mainly targeted Jews and Catholics. Still, Thurman had his share of encounters with the group. One day, Klansmen assembled outside a church that had invited him as a guest preacher in an unsuccessful effort to scare him away. Later, a plainclothes Klan spy let Thurman know that his sermons were being monitored.<sup>5</sup>

Stirred by Thurman's glowing endorsement of the seminary, Hudson applied for a transfer to Colgate-Rochester in 1929. Fisher, Hubert, and Morehouse President John Hope were his recommenders. To his delight, the school admitted him; he formally enrolled in September, 1929. Like Thurman, Hudson relished the school's rigorous coursework, vast library resources, and daily chapel services - which attracted nationally guest speakers. He also reveled in the faculty's stories about how the late Professor Rauschenbusch had overcome a physical disability

of his own - hearing loss - to become a nationally renowned figure. Though he was generally at ease with his white classmates and instructors, he was happy to have a handful of black peers. One was Joseph Harrison Jackson, a graduate of Mississippi's Jackson College and future president of the National Baptist Convention, USA. As a seminarian, Hudson eagerly embraced liberal theology's anti-dogmatism and idealism even as world events soon tested the later tenet to an extent few had anticipated during the economically prosperous early 1920s. One month after Hudson began school in New York, the Stock Market crashed and the country plunged into a financial crisis. As historian Robert T. Handy noted: "By the early 1930's, liberals were finding it increasingly difficult, in terms of their optimistic orientation and idealistic heritage, to deal satisfactorily with the realities of depression, the rise of totalitarianism, and the resurgence of barbarism on the world scene."<sup>6</sup>

The Great Depression's advent reinforced the Marxist viewpoint Hudson had adopted at Morehouse and deepened his interest in the Rauschenbuschian Christian socialism he studied at Colgate-Rochester. His later writings suggest that he saw democratic socialism as the governing system that was most likely to accomplish the Social Gospel's

ends. Years after he had graduated with his bachelor of divinity, he published a scholarly article entitled: "Socialist Thought in America in the Light of Christianity." In it, Hudson traced American socialist thought's history with particular attention to the works of Rauschenbusch and others who built the intellectual framework for Christian Socialism. At the conclusion, he wrote that "the Socialist ethic of collective responsibility for the welfare of all members of society is an expression of the Christian concept of a brotherhood and the bearing of one another's burdens. This is a germinal idea in the Christian church." He also noted - with great favor - the gradualist approach generally advocated by socialist organizing efforts, saying: "the Christian standard of social change by individual regeneration has a parallel in the Socialist standard of winning support by rational and emotional appeal." Lastly, Hudson expressed that through the cooperative embrace of both these ideas the "divine Kingdom has its possibility of realization" in the present world.<sup>7</sup>

Hudson pursued the "philosophy of religion" sequence at Colgate-Rochester, which asked questions about God's nature, existence, relationship to evil, and presence in human value systems. He performed well in core classes



such as: "Religion in Current Philosophy" and "Religion in Western Philosophy." Courses on "Humanism and Religion" and "Mysticism" further aided his liberal theological development by showing him additional non-dogmatic approaches to defining social ethics. The list of Biblical course selections on his transcript suggest that he was more interested in the God of universal human brotherhood in the New Testament than the more tribally-focused God of the Old Testament. Among his classes were: "Matthew," "Life of Jesus," "Johannine Literature," "Religion of the New Testament," and "Practice Interpretation of the New Testament." Throughout his two years, he only took one class on the Old Testament, which focused on its literature. Additionally, fascinated by the evolution of Christian orthodoxy and institutions, Hudson enrolled in: "Christianity in Modern Civilization," "History of American Christianity," and "American Religion Products." Moreover, his courses on "Current Problems in Religion," and "Modern Church Schools" prepared him to introduce students to scholarly debates concerning God and society.<sup>8</sup>

In response to the seminary application's question about the type of religious leadership career he wished to pursue, Hudson answered: a pastor. Thus, Colgate-Rochester immediately assigned him to courses in "Liturgics" (or

church rituals) and "Pastoral Duties" during his first semester. These were followed by a "Practice Preaching" class during his final year. He received a B, similar to his Bs he earned in "Homiletics" and "Public Speaking" at Morehouse. One wonders why Hudson - who scored As in tough subjects such as Greek, Latin, and philosophy - failed to ever impress any college or faculty member enough to earn a top grade in verbal communication. Perhaps anxiety over his bodily appearance made him nervous whenever it was time to stand up and speak. A preacher's physical stature played no small role in his ability to establish authority over the audience. Hudson was only about five-feet tall and had a thin build. And before he even opened his mouth, people noticed that he lacked a right arm. Consciously or subconsciously, that disability translated into a symbol of weakness in many viewers' minds - and Hudson knew it. His missing limb also restricted his mobility in the pulpit. With a minister's legs hidden by the podium, the arms were very important in providing a body language that engaged the viewers and moved the narrative, especially in the lively Baptist preaching tradition. Hudson only had one arm and hand for gesturing, flipping the pages in his notes, or grasping a glass of water. That limited his range of motion, which could result in a stiff presence.

These problems might shed light on another, unstated reason why Hudson later sought a Ph.D. When introduced in the pulpit, he would be "Dr. Hudson," a man who had proven his great mental acumen by becoming one of the few blacks to earn the academy's highest degree. With the power of his intellect clearly established through that credential, he would have an early answer for the eyes that saw the deficits in his physical composition. The degree could help him garner high expectations before he rose to utter a single word.<sup>9</sup>

As part of his final semester at Colgate-Rochester, Hudson sat for a course entitled: "Political and Social Movements in India, China and Japan." At that time, the most-watched Indian social movement was led by Mohandas K. Gandhi, who challenged British colonial rule with nonviolent noncooperation. Similar to many other socially-conscious blacks, Hudson had likely heard about Gandhi through the black press, which had closely monitored the Mahatma's campaigns since the early 1900s. The seminary course marked the beginning of Hudson's in-depth, academic study of Gandhi and prepared him to take part in a broader dialogue among black intellectual leaders.<sup>10</sup>

Gandhi's success at coordinating a sweeping boycott of British taxes and goods in 1920 led some black scholars to

increasingly articulate similarities between him and Jesus. The following year, while historian Carter G. Woodson's *The Negro Church* advanced the idea that Jesus was a political insurgent, W.E.B. Du Bois and Ransom both described Gandhi as a "messiah" and "saint" who stood as an heir to that same revolutionary legacy. In doing so, the two writers meshed the black Social Gospel with the New Negro era's search for innovative tactics in the fight for political equality. As historian Dennis C. Dickerson noted, this syncretic Hindu *satyagraha* (nonviolent resistance)-black Social Gospel interpretive tradition experienced even greater growth after the Great Depression's 1929 advent and the Mahatma's 1930 Salt Act protests.<sup>11</sup>

During the later year, Atlanta Baptist College alumnus and Howard University President Mordecai Johnson urged blacks to carefully study Gandhi's ministry and create a similar religious movement in America. A subsequent 1931 Yale conference titled "Whither the Negro Church?" - organized by black divinity students - took a critical step toward what the Howard president envisioned. There, a group of attendees that included Benjamin Mays (a former Pullman porter) and Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters (BSCP) founder A. Philip Randolph built upon Ransom's empirical-community outreach model by constructing an early

framework to bring Gandhi's self-described "science of nonviolence" into the black church. Paralleling Ransom's brand of Christian socialism and contemporary Marxist sentiments that associated the country's financial breakdown with bourgeois exploitation, the conference participants passed a resolution defining America's entire economic order as a form of social sin, declaring: "the existing capitalistic system is in fundamental and diametric opposition to the spirit and teachings of Jesus." Further, the group argued that the black church, as a "proletarian" institution and center of the race's agency, should take the lead in challenging such sin by increasing black participation in the labor movement and uniting workers across interracial lines. Lastly, they concluded that "every Negro Church must discover and develop a type of leadership that would do for America and the Negro race what Gandhi has done for India and Jesus has done for the world." These ideas aligned well with Hudson's own values and outlook on the black freedom struggle. As his seminary studies came to a close, he continued to take great interest in this new chapter within the black Social Gospel's development.<sup>12</sup>

On March 24, 1931, Hudson was ordained by the Baptist Union of Rochester and Monroe County, making him a full-

fledged minister with the authority to administer sacraments. Then, on May 25, he received his bachelor of divinity. Still carrying fond memories of John Wesley Edward Bowen and William Jefferson King, the black scholar-educational activist ministers he had admired while in Atlanta, Hudson decided to pursue graduate study at their alma mater: the Boston University School of Theology. Although he originally planned to enroll at Boston immediately after earning his B.D., an attractive job offer led him to delay his plan.<sup>13</sup>

John Alvin Bacoats, one of Hudson's former classmates at Oberlin, had been appointed in 1929 to lead Leland College in Baker, Louisiana (outside Baton Rouge). Founded in 1870, Leland was a private American Baptist Home Mission Society (ABHMS) institution that focused on producing black preachers and teachers, similar to Morehouse. It boasted many notable alumni, including one Hudson knew well: Rev. Charles L. Fisher. Having just reopened in 1923 after a hurricane destroyed the original campus in New Orleans, Leland was still rebuilding its academic programs when Bacoats was hired. Eager to establish a scholarly, black Social Gospel-centered religious life program and still impressed with his former classmate's academic prowess, Bacoats offered Hudson the college's pastorship. The

Leland president, who had earned a master of arts from Oberlin, applauded Hudson's desire to earn a master's degree and viewed it as an investment that would help his institution become the state's flagship for black ministerial training. Thus, the two men came to an understanding: Hudson would spend the 1931-1932 school year at Leland setting a new foundation for its religious education department, spend the next year in residence at Boston, and then return as a fulltime faculty member in 1933-1934.<sup>14</sup>

At Leland, Hudson coordinated with broader national efforts to create a better-trained black ministry. Ever since Emancipation, missionary organizations such as the ABHMS had worked to spread the Gospel and increase their denominational membership rolls by training black ministers who could, in turn, create new black churches. But well into the post-WWI period, many white Baptist leaders still expressed frustration over the large number of poorly educated black preachers within their fellowship. One was George Rice Hovey. Having studied at Brown University and Newton Theological Institute, he became one of the denomination's premier scholars while teaching Hebrew, Greek, theology, and philosophy at various seminaries. This led to prestigious appointments. The ABHMS tapped

Hovey to head Virginia Union University (VUU), another one of its black schools, from 1905 to 1919 and then called upon him to serve as its national secretary of education until 1930. In those two posts, Hovey lamented the fact that many black clerics still lacked access to collegiate-level religious courses, which in his estimation left them ignorant of "true Christianity." This was tragic, he expressed, because black ministers were in the best position to lead their race out of its poor social conditions. To address this problem, Hovey took the helm of the National Minister's Institute (NMI), a body that taught theology to black preachers who had no formal instruction in that field. In 1930, he tapped Bacoats to lead the NMI's Louisiana region. The Leland president subsequently asked Hudson to serve as his co-director.<sup>15</sup>

Similar to Morehouse's School of Religion, the Leland-based Louisiana NMI urged its pupils to join the black Social Gospel movement. This meant developing ministries that applied the latest social scientific findings to social problems, just as Ransom and Henry Hugh Proctor crafted their urban outreach programs in response to Du Bois' sociological studies. Du Bois' colleagues in the American Negro Academy (ANA) had worked with him to produce a strong body of literature to assist such efforts. ANA



members Woodson, Orishatukeh Faduma and Jesse E. Moorland conducted particularly deep probes into the black church's historical role, contemporary challenges, and future possibilities. While crediting black America's oldest institution with producing many fine leaders and promoting values such as self-respect, industriousness, and perseverance, they also noted numerous obstacles that prevented the church from fulfilling its full potential. The problem-areas included: a lack of education among the clergy and laity, severe indebtedness, and a "magic"-oriented religion that urged blacks to fight social injustice by simply praying for supernatural miracles rather than engaging in activism. Shortly after Hudson began teaching at Leland, Benjamin Mays, one of Hovey's former students at VUU, published a groundbreaking study that built upon those insights. His 1933 *The Negro's Church* added detail to the organizational, pedagogical, and financial challenges facing black congregations. He encouraged pastors to make their pulpits forums for world issues and practical advice, offer adult education ministries to the poor and uneducated, stimulate intellectual exchange, give moral training, and to practice shared governance so their congregants could prepare to be participants in their country's republican democracy.<sup>16</sup>

The Louisiana NMI operated 32 weeks each year. Hudson and Bacoats taught a variety of classes that included: Science, Baptist History, Church History, the Land of Israel, Letters of Paul, the Holy Spirit, Christian Theology, Christian Ethics, Christian Stewardship, Church Pedagogy, and Worship in the Church. Following the annual convention, students continued their training within 12 study clubs stationed at strategic locations across the state. The Leland professors urged participants to forge alliances with other local ministers when they returned home, especially their white counterparts. John Henry Scott was one black preacher who dutifully attended Louisiana NMI meetings from 1930 to 1940. He remembered believing, prior to his coursework there, that the Holy Spirit was a mere emotional response that drove people to shout, clap, and dance. But from Hudson and Bacoats' lectures, he began to understand it as "God himself living inside of the people who would accept him." Scott further recalled that "the more I learned, the more my relationship with God grew. I could feel his presence with me all the time." He credited this with equipping him with the strength he needed to later organize an NAACP branch in his hometown of East Carroll, a majority black cotton farming community in the Delta. As the chapter's president for 30

years, Scott waged a long battle to challenge the legal impediments to black suffrage. Despite bitter retaliation from local whites, which at one point left him wounded from shotgun pellets, he ultimately succeeded in registering nearly 90 percent of the local black voters and securing equal access to the ballot. Indeed, Scott stood as an example of how the Louisiana NMI inspired students to undertake black Social Gospel activism.<sup>17</sup>

On September 20, 1932, Hudson entered the master's of philosophy program at Boston University. Though Boston was much larger than the only other northern city in which he had lived (Rochester), it placed him in the familiar situation of being one of only a few black post-baccalaureate students in a community with a small black population. Of Boston's 781,188 residents in 1930, just 20,574 (or 2 percent), were black. But besides some subtle racial restrictions, Hudson generally enjoyed cordial treatment in the city. He remembered being served at all the restaurants he visited and having the freedom to sit wherever he wanted on public transportation vehicles. His professors, in particular, defended his right to be an equal member of the student body and community. "They were most congenial to sort of come to your aid, rescue, or support and to make apologies or to say 'Well we're sorry

that that happened' and so forth," Hudson recalled. "But there were very few if any [overt racial indignities]. Most of the things as I think of it now were such a relatively mild nature that it really didn't present any problem."<sup>18</sup>

In his new surroundings, Hudson's major professor, Edgar Sheffield Brightman, became like a new family member to him - functioning as his biggest source of encouragement and support. Born in 1884, Brightman studied at Brown University (A.B., 1906; A.M., 1908) and later received his bachelor of sacred theology (1910) and Ph.D. (1912) from Boston. After teaching at Wesleyan University for three years, he accepted a faculty appointment at Boston in 1919. Reflecting his eminent standing among academics who subscribed to the Boston-based Personalist philosophy, the institution appointed him to a chair named after his former teacher, Borden Parker Bowne, the intellectual father of that school of thought. Like Bowne, who had advised John Wesley Edward Bowen, Brightman took pride in mentoring a black student interested in using Personalism to aid racial uplift.<sup>19</sup>

Hudson's initial classroom encounters with Brightman were very humbling. Despite having made an A in his final Colgate-Rochester philosophy course, he hardly impressed

his major professor during his first months at Boston. Brightman gave him Bs for his first semester performance in "Theoretical Ethics," "Metaphysics," and "Research in Philosophy." Hudson's "Formal Logic" class grade was a C. Brightman's rigorous teaching style left many students struggling to keep pace. At the beginning of each semester, pupils received a syllabus that sometimes reached 50 pages - filled with an extensive bibliography and deadlines for reading assignments, book reports, and term papers. Unannounced quizzes pushed students to prepare thoroughly before class. 3x5 note cards were an absolute necessity. For book reports, Brightman instructed students to read about 50 pages, summarize the major ideas in 50 words or less on one note card, and then place a critical comment about the text on each one of 3-4 more cards. He also encouraged students to write out questions on note cards and submit them to him at the beginning of class, which aided the direction of his lectures. Although he urged students to engage him in debate during such meetings, few did. Brightman always picked their arguments apart with the same meticulous criticism that he used against senior scholars.<sup>20</sup>

Outside of class, Brightman invited students to join him for dialogue during his early morning office hours,

walks on campus, or meals at restaurants near the university. Hudson took advantage of every one of these opportunities he could. The young preacher dutifully wrote out questions, listened intently as Brightman addressed them point-by-point, followed up on the reading suggestions he received, and then returned with even more questions. Hudson's habit of carrying a dictionary with him at all times and constantly looking up new words on the spot made his advisor chuckle. The regular one-on-one discussions with Brightman and daily trips to the library resulted in much better grades during Hudson's second semester. While Brightman gave him another B in "Metaphysics," he awarded him a B+ in "The Teaching of Philosophy" and finally an A in "Problems of Philosophy." Hudson finished his first year at Boston excited about how his studies on the nature of truth enhanced his depth as a liberal theologian and teacher to other ministers. As he told Brightman, "You are quite right about religious education without philosophical grounding being empty and dogmatic. You have certainly helped me to get a more adequate philosophical background."<sup>21</sup>

The long year in a new city left Hudson longing to see his family and friends. On July 31, 1933, he packed his belongings and headed off on a long bus trip en route to

his final destination of Birmingham. Hudson first stopped for four weeks in Detroit, where his brothers Theodore and Millage were living and working for Ford Motor Company. Then, after briefly visiting some acquaintances in Chicago, he set off on a scenic bus ride through Indiana, Kentucky, and Tennessee, until he eventually reached his hometown in Alabama. Journeys such as these gave him long periods to reflect on the differences between black life in the North and South and ponder whether he wanted to continue facing Jim Crow during the years to come. He was amassing academic credentials, knowledge, and professional experiences that would soon open numerous opportunities for him to move away from the segregated region of his birth and enjoy a well-paying career elsewhere. But at that time, Leland College still seemed the best place for him to grow and prepare for the future. It provided pay that was sufficient for defraying his basic living expenses and much of his Boston tuition, flexibility for him to continue his studies during summers, and a chance for him to further develop as a pastor and professor. He concluded there was no reason for him to rush away from his current job or town.<sup>22</sup>

Upon Hudson's return to Baker, President Bacoats requested yet another clerical service from him. In 1932,

the Mount Zion First African Baptist Church in Baton Rouge had appointed Bacoats as its pastor. He faced a daunting challenge. Following the death of Rev. Washington Monroe Taylor, who had led the congregation for about 30 years, the church fell onto hard times. It had an outstanding mortgage of \$6,000, \$500 in funeral bills, a storm-torn building, internal morale problems, and a shrinking membership that stood at fewer than 350. Bacoats asked Hudson to serve as a pulpit associate and join him in restoring Mount Zion to its previous level of vitality. Hudson accepted and dutifully assisted the pastor in paying off the debt, securing \$5,000 to repair the edifice, raising \$12,000 for a new church building, and increasing the membership to 800. He also took a keen interest in Bacoats' efforts to battle the humiliating treatment that local blacks encountered on a daily basis. During his tenure, Bacoats protested the *State-Times* newspaper's use of the term "darkies" and rallied local black preachers to sign a petition that criticized the city's unjust termination of numerous black firemen. The pastor struck his boldest blow against Jim Crow when he braved a hostile crowd of sheriff's deputies to deliver grand jury testimony against some officers who beat a group of black men and women. Hudson consistently stood by Bacoats' side as he



led such church and community campaigns against Jim Crow indignities. From his years at Mount Zion, Hudson developed a strong knowledge of effective church administration practices and learned how stand resolutely in the face of powerful city officials who sought to denigrate or intimidate black citizens.<sup>23</sup>

Gardner C. Taylor, son of the late Rev. Taylor, became one of Hudson's best students. The young man was only 12 years old when his father passed. He recalled that the death left him with a feeling of emptiness that led to a cynical attitude toward spirituality. "I felt that there was something a little foolish about religious faith," he said. While attending Leland College, Taylor resolved to become an attorney and politician. By his senior year in 1937, he had received an offer of admission from the University of Michigan Law School. But despite his seemingly bright future, a harrowing incident threatened to take that and everything else away from him. Throughout college, Taylor served as Bacoats' chauffeur. Late one April afternoon, he was hurrying back to campus in the president's car when two white men in a Model T Ford suddenly swerved into his path. Taylor hit the brakes and tried to steer the car into a ditch but still crashed into the vehicle. The two white passengers were badly injured.

Immediately, Taylor feared that he might be lynched. But to his surprise, two white bystanders appeared at the inquest the next morning and testified that he was not responsible for the collision. He was released without any charges or threats of harm.<sup>24</sup>

Taylor considered the turn of events a miracle and recounted that it made God real to him again. From that point on, he could feel a divine presence standing by his side. Inspired to commit his life to the Lord, he sought direction from Hudson and Bacoats. Hudson, from whom he had taken a religion course, urged him to enter the seminary at Colgate-Rochester. Taylor ultimately went with Bacoats' suggestion to attend Oberlin. In his subsequent clerical career, he became a towering civil rights advocate and a key advisor and companion to the Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. Taylor gave Bacoats and Hudson great credit for shaping the direction of his ministry. "Reverends Bacoats and Hudson both strongly influenced my thoughts on the problems of race," Taylor recounted. "They brought those matters into a better perspective. Growing up in the South, we always had a feeling that the status quo was wrong. But these men expressed that issue in terms that were direct, understandable, and challenging."<sup>25</sup>

While teaching students such as Taylor, Hudson also worked diligently to complete his master's thesis, which evaluated the concept of God and religion promoted by philosopher Alfred North Whitehead. Shortly before the school year closed, his faculty committee approved the 125-page paper. Throughout the summers of 1934 and 1935, Hudson returned to Boston to finish the remaining four courses he needed for his master's degree. In 1934, he took three classes from Brightman, making a B+ in both "Principles of Social Philosophy" and "Research in Philosophy" as well as an A- in the "Seminar on Realism." The next summer, he sat for Professor C.H. Patterson's "Research in Philosophy" and "Seminary in Dewey's Philosophy of Religion," earning As in both. With his credit hour and research requirements satisfied, he received his master of arts in philosophy on August 10, 1935. As often as he could, the Leland chaplain wrote his advisor and detailed how his Boston studies were helping him develop better lectures, reading assignments, and tests for his Louisiana students. For example, Hudson created a "Theoretical Ethics" class for the state NMI using Brightman's *Moral Laws* as the primary text. Additionally, after Brightman's "Principles of Social Philosophy" seminar sparked his interest in political theory, he began

incorporating sources from that field into a number of his own syllabi.<sup>26</sup>

In letter after letter, Hudson told Brightman how much he missed their daily conversations and the vibrant exchanges he enjoyed with the department's other professors and graduate students. Although the young preacher enjoyed his ministry in the Baton Rouge area, he had embraced Boston University as his intellectual home and felt a strong need to return there to continue his scholarly maturation. With his heart homesick and eyes set on the long-desired dream of a Ph.D., Hudson submitted an application to the Boston's doctoral program in philosophy in 1936. On April 25, Brightman wrote him with the sad news that the department had denied him admission. The "determining factor," Brightman said, was the fact that a standard graduate fellowship or scholarship would be insufficient to cover Hudson's financial needs. "We are aware of the tragic difficulty which negroes face in securing employment in Boston," the professor lamented. "We do not feel that it would be right to encourage you to come here when the economic basis of your existence would be so very unsure. It would be unfair to you and your work." Though disappointed, Hudson informed Brightman that he understood the faculty's reasoning and would try to save

up enough money during the next year or so to afford Boston's cost of living again. "My motto is 'work and wait,'" he said. In response, Brightman lauded him as "a real man and real philosopher" and promised to recommend him for a fellowship or assistantship when he reapplied. He also encouraged Hudson to start preparing for the doctoral program's French, German, and background reading requirements.<sup>27</sup>

A combination of adverse and fortuitous family developments delayed Hudson's reapplication for a number of years. During his visit to Birmingham for Christmas 1936, a car struck his father, leaving him with a "broken left leg and a bruised right arm." Remembering how Berry had tended to him throughout the injury and eventual amputation of his own right arm, Hudson immediately made his 63-year old father's care his top priority. With his two brothers hundreds of miles away in Detroit, he was the only the son who could make frequent weekend or holiday trips back to their Alabama hometown. As he explained to Brightman: "The brothers help some but it seems that most of the burden has fallen upon me. Anxious to do a good part by my father while he is incapacitated I have assured these larger duties with pleasure." Expressing deep regret, he

informed Brightman that he had to hold off his Ph.D. plans for at least another year.<sup>28</sup>

Around this same period, a young woman - Augustine Lagarde - began to receive more and more of Hudson's attention. She was born in Barrow, Louisiana - a town about 15 minutes outside of Baton Rouge. Both of her parents worked as administrators in the colored school district; her mother was a principal and her father was a mid-level faculty supervisor. Augustine earned her associate of arts degree from Leland College and then began teaching English in the local school system. Later, she completed a baccalaureate at Southern University in Baton Rouge. One of her brothers, Charles Lowell, had attended Morehouse while Hudson was there. Another younger brother, Malcolm, was one of Hudson's students at Leland. At Malcolm's invitation, Hudson visited the Lagarde home one evening to eat dinner with the family. There, he and Augustine met.<sup>29</sup>

As a man who shared very little about his personal life, even around close friends and family members, Hudson left few details about his courtship of Augustine or his dating life prior to meeting her. One could imagine that with his physical disability and introverted personality, he had been shy around women for most of his life.

Traditional high school and college social activities such as dances would have been difficult for a young man with only one arm. The early loss of his mother might have also complicated his relationships; Alta Hudson became a cherished ideal who likely set a very tough standard for other women. He did state that Augustine's career choice - teaching - was a characteristic he greatly admired. Alta had worked as a grade school teacher and inspired Hudson to become an educator himself. Augustine, who also instructed young pupils, probably reminded him of his mother's warmth and passion. Furthermore, Hudson's attainment of two advanced degrees and a steady job gave a critical boost to his self-confidence around Augustine. Those achievements proved that despite his missing appendage, he could play the standard gendered role of "breadwinner," an important prerequisite for any potential wife who desired financial stability within a possible future marriage. Additionally, his status as a college professor and minister placed him in the black middle class, which meant he could offer a woman a reasonably comfortable lifestyle and a respectable social rank. The flirting, long talks, hand-holding, and kissing with Augustine all provided Hudson welcome distractions from his intellectual work. He had spent much of his life building his mind as way to help compensate for

the perceived weakness in his bodily composition. It was comforting to know that when Augustine looked at him, she did not see what he lacked. Instead, she saw a man she desired at an emotional and physically intimate level. The two married on December 29, 1938.<sup>30</sup>

Fatherhood led Hudson to further postpone his planned return to Boston. On November 6, 1939, Augustine gave birth to a healthy seven pound, 13 ounce baby boy whom they named James Lagarde Hudson. Still, while tending to his recuperating wife and infant son, Hudson continued his intellectual development. Having finished a two-part *A.M.E. Zion Quarterly Review* article entitled "Reflections on John Dewey's Philosophy of Religion," a revised version of a 1935 seminar paper, he asked Brightman for a new no-credit assignment to help him prepare for his Ph.D. studies. The Boston professor obliged, sending him a book title to read and review. As Hudson worked on this task, he also engaged Brightman in an extended conversation about the moral implications of the global conflict triggered by Germany's September 1, 1939 invasion of Poland. On April 12, he sent Brightman his detailed summary of a lecture he attended on the subject "Which Way to Peace?" by Bertrand Russell, a British philosopher and colleague of Whitehead. Hudson noted, with particular interest, Russell's pacifism



and anti-colonialism. In the talk, Russell had urged America to embrace "strict neutrality" and work to eliminate "a frequent cause of national conflicts" by supporting a strong League of Nations that would take control of all colonies currently occupied by imperialistic states. This, according to Russell would replace the "private property idea in colonies" with "the idea of international responsibility." These arguments resonated with Hudson's interest in nonviolence and socialism. Brightman responded with comments about his own pacifism, saying: "If there is a war only those who refrain from supporting it will be able to maintain the ideal of justice and be torch bearers for the new civilization that will have to [be] built up." Although he stopped short of advocating pacifism, Hudson shared the view that world leaders had chosen armed conflict before even attempting to resolve differences through the methods God taught humankind to use: love and reason. "The Christian ethic of victory appears to be falling on evil days," he lamented.<sup>31</sup>

With the money he had saved from his work at Leland - including the extra teaching he did during summer sessions - and the additional income from Augustine's return to the classroom, Hudson finally had enough to afford Boston's

living expenses. As promised, Brightman helped him secure an assistantship that provided a tuition waiver. Soon, he acquired two more sources of financial support. The Bradley Memorial Church - a congregation of mainly black students in Oak Bluffs, Massachusetts - hired him as its new pastor and provided a small salary. Additionally, the black Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, which he had joined during his early years in Louisiana, awarded him a one-year scholarship. On September 23, 1942, Boston formally admitted Hudson to its Ph.D. program in philosophy. Bidding goodbye to his wife and son, he returned to residence in Boston for the spring 1943 semester. Working vigorously, Hudson completed his required seven courses during the next year and a half. He began with a "Principles of Christian Ethics" course from Professor L. Harold DeWolf. He then took the remainder of his courses from Brightman. They consisted of seminars on "Kant in German," "Philosophical Problems," and "Plato's Theory of Knowledge," as well as directed studies on "Twentieth Century Philosophy" and "Thesis and Dissertation Writing." His performance was very strong. He made a B+ in two courses; the rest of his grades were either A-s or As. Despite his hectic schedule of studying and preaching, Hudson still found time to hold an extra-curricular office.

In 1944, he served as editor-in-chief of the university's *Philosophical Forum* publication. The following school year, Hudson completed his dissertation entitled "The Doctrine of the Actual Occasion in Whitehead." In 1946, Boston awarded him the Ph.D. degree.<sup>32</sup>

Beginning with his formative years in Birmingham, James Hudson considered his mind to be the key to overcoming the physical and social limitations that hindered his upward mobility. While his skin color, class, and lack of a right arm restricted his life opportunities, he believed there were no boundaries on the transformative power of ideas. As such, he used his post-baccalaureate studies to deepen his knowledge on nonviolence and the black Social Gospel, two systems of thought he saw as viable tools for broad societal change. The liberal theology he encountered at Colgate-Rochester and Boston University added a new dimension to his study of those ideas, opening the way for him to seamlessly mesh them with insights from groundbreaking scientific discoveries and comparative religion. His "race man" leadership roles at Leland College and Mount Zion First African Baptist Church gave him platforms from which he could regularly teach and apply these concepts. In addition to helping him answer the *sacred call*, his advanced degrees also led to a salary

and black middle class position that let him fully assume a traditional "manly" gendered role. Accordingly, he could function as a provider to family members who needed him. This played no small part in his success as a caregiver to his injured father, suitor to an attractive potential wife, and head of household - experiences that all raised the self-image harmed by his tragic childhood amputation. Next to these personal developments, the philosophy of life he began building at Boston University was his most cherished attainment from this period. With it, Hudson looked to move from simply chipping away at local Jim Crow obstacles to fracturing the unjust system's national foundation.

## ENDNOTES

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<sup>1</sup> James Hudson, interview by Jackson Ice, 1978, transcript, Tallahassee Civil Rights Oral History Collection, Special Collections, Florida State University Library, Tallahassee, Fla., n.p., hereinafter "Ice interview with Hudson"; James Hudson, Application to Colgate-Rochester Divinity School, 21 May 1929, hereinafter "Hudson CRDS application"; Gary Dorrien, *The Making of American Liberal Theology: Idealism, Realism, & Modernity, 1900-1950* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), 71, 105-106.

<sup>2</sup> Ice interview with Hudson; Ralph E. Luker, *The Social Gospel in Black and White: American Racial Reform, 1885-1912* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 173.

<sup>3</sup> Howard Thurman, *With Head and Heart; the Autobiography of Howard Thurman* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1979), 46.

<sup>4</sup> Dorrien, 1-2, 4, 127; Robert T. Handy, "Conrad Henry Moehlman," *Church History* 31 (June 1962): 234; William H. Brackney, *A Genetic History of Baptist Thought: With Special Reference to Baptists in Britain and North America* (Mercer, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 2004), 340, 338.

<sup>5</sup> Thurman, 46-61.

<sup>6</sup> Ice interview with Hudson; Dorrien, 80, 88-89; Clayborne Carson, Tenisha Armstrong, Susan Carson, Erin Cook, and Susan Englander, eds., *The Martin Luther King, Jr., Encyclopedia* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 2008), 155-156; Robert T. Handy "The American Religious Depression, 1925-1935" *Church History* 29 (March 1960): 10.

<sup>7</sup> James Hudson, "Socialist Thought in America in the Light of Christianity," *Journal of Religious Thought* 6 (Spring-Summer 1949): 108-146.

<sup>8</sup> James Hudson, Colgate-Rochester Divinity School B.D. transcript, 1929-1931, hereinafter "Hudson CRDS transcript."

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid.; Hudson CRDS application; on the importance of mannerisms in black preaching, see: Henry H. Mitchell, *Black Preaching: The Recovery of a Powerful Art* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990), 88-89.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Dennis C. Dickerson, "African American Religious Intellectuals and the Theological Foundations of the Civil Rights Movement, 1930-55," *Church History* 74 (June 2005): 217-235.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.; "Wither the Negro Church?" (seminar held at Yale Divinity School, New Haven, Connecticut, April 13-15, 1931), 5-10, 39-44, 46-47; Benjamin E. Mays, *Born to Rebel: An Autobiography* (New York: Scribner, 1971; reprint, Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2003), 25, 46.

<sup>13</sup> Hudson CRDS transcript.

<sup>14</sup> Ice interview with Hudson; Inez Bacoats, *Echoes from a Well-Spent Life: A Biography of John Alvin Bacoats and Eight Addresses* (Columbia, S.C.: State Printing Company, 1970), 11-14; Wilson Fallin, Jr., *The African American Church in Birmingham, Alabama, 1815-1963: A Shelter in the Storm* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1997), 90.

<sup>15</sup> Joseph B. Earnest, Jr., *The Religious Development of the Negro in Virginia* (Charlottesville, Va.: Michie Company, 1914), 116; *Who Was Who in America: A Companion Biographical Reference Work to "Who's Who in America." Vol. 2, 1943-1950* (Chicago: A.N. Marquis Company, 1963); "Church Efficiency," *Biblical World* 45 (February 1915): 113; Bacoats, 16-17.

<sup>16</sup> Alfred A. Moss, Jr., *The American Negro Academy: Voice of the Talented Tenth* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1981), 150-151, 164-165, 194-195; See: Benjamin E. Mays and Joseph Nicholson, *The Negro's Church* (New York: Institute of Social and Religious Research, 1933).

<sup>17</sup> Bacoats, 16-17; John Henry Scott and Cleo Scott Brown, *Witness to the Truth: My Struggle for Human Rights in*

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Louisiana (Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 2003), 60-61.

<sup>18</sup> Ice interview with Hudson; James Hudson, Boston University A.M. transcript, 1932-1935, hereinafter "Hudson BU A.M. transcript;" U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Fifteenth Census of the United States, 1930, vol. 3: Population 1930: Reports by States, Showing the Composition and Characteristics of the Population for Counties, Cities, and Townships or other Minor Civil Divisions, part 1: Alabama-Missouri* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1932), 1091.

<sup>19</sup> Walter G. Muelder, "Edgar S. Brightman: Person and Moral Philosopher," in Paul Deats and Carol Robb, eds., *The Boston Personalist Tradition in Philosophy, Social Ethics, and Theology* (Mercer, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 1986), 105-106; see: Rufus Burrow, Jr., "The Personalism of John Wesley Edward Bowen" *Journal of Negro History* 82 (Spring 1997): 244-256.

<sup>20</sup> Hudson BU A.M. transcript; Muelder, 107-109.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*; Ice interview with Hudson; James Hudson to Edgar S. Brightman, 19 November 1933, in Folder 9, Box 17, Edgar Sheffield Brightman Papers, Howard Gotlieb Archival Research Center, Boston University, Boston, Mass., hereinafter "Brightman Papers."

<sup>22</sup> Hudson to Brightman, 1 October 1933, Brightman Papers; Ice interview with Hudson.

<sup>23</sup> Bacoats, 17-18; Carol Anne Blitzer, "'The Mother Congregation': Mount Zion First Baptist Church is BR's Oldest Black Church," *Advocate* 28 June 1999.

<sup>24</sup> See Gardner C. Taylor's chapter in Howard Thurman, ed., *Why I Believe There Is A God: Sixteen Essays by Negro Clergymen* (Chicago: Johnson Publishing Company, 1965), 103-107.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*; Gardner C. Taylor, telephone interview by author, 6 May 2009.

<sup>26</sup> Hudson BU A.M. transcript; James Hudson, "Whitehead's Conceptions of God and Religion" (M.A. thesis, Boston

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University, 1934); Hudson to Brightman, 28 January 1934, 21 May 1934, 5 January 1935, 16 April 1935, 16 February 1936, 8 March 1936, Brightman Papers.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.; Brightman to Hudson, 25 April 1936, 15 May 1936; Hudson to Brightman, 11 May 1936, Brightman Papers.

<sup>28</sup> Hudson to Brightman, 18 January 1937, 5 March 1937, 15 May 1937, 28 November 1937; Brightman to Hudson, 14 February 1937, 11 March 1937, Brightman Papers.

<sup>29</sup> James Lagarde Hudson, son of James Hudson, interview by author, 8 July 2008, Washington, D.C.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.; Hudson to Brightman, 20 January 1938, 15 February 1938, Brightman Papers.

<sup>31</sup> Hudson to Brightman, 28 November 1937, 20 January 1938, 15 February 1938, 12 April 1939, 14 May 1939, 24 November 1939; Brightman to Hudson, 22 April 1939, Brightman Papers.

<sup>32</sup> Ice interview with Hudson; James Hudson, Boston University Ph.D. transcript, 1942-1946; Hudson to Brightman, 1 September 1941, 21 November 1941, 8 February 1942; Brightman to Hudson, 5 September 1941, 25 November 1941, Brightman Papers; James Hudson Vita, Folder 2, Box 16, James Hudson Papers, Southeastern Regional Black Archives, Research Center and Museum, Florida Agricultural & Mechanical University, Tallahassee, Fla.; James Hudson, "The Doctrine of the Actual Occasion in Whitehead" (Ph.D. diss., Boston University, 1946).



## CHAPTER III

### THE KINGDOM OF GOD

James Hudson considered segregation a pernicious social evil that assaulted the dignity of everyone it touched - especially blacks, its intended victims. As such, he believed segregationists held a worldview which could not be reconciled with the idea of universal human brotherhood espoused by Personalism, his basic philosophical position. In his Personalistic interpretation of Jesus' life and ministry, Hudson described him as one who had embodied divine goodness and challenged humankind to follow his example in order to build a "Kingdom of God" on earth. Within the Kingdom of God, all men and women would live as a single family undivided by superficial distinctions such as race. Here, Hudson's encounter with Personalism provided foundational ideas upon which he constructed an activism that he applied to the civil rights struggle. This effort aimed to affirm the fundamental Personalist ideas of human value and brotherhood that segregation rejected.

### **Hudson's Homespun Personalistic Critique of Segregation**

At the lay level, personalism is the belief that all human life is created in God's image and, thus, has dignity, worth, and a fraternal linkage. What laypersons might call the "soul," Boston University Personalists call the "person" or "personality": self-conscious experience capable of rational thought and moral judgment. The ontological (nature of existence) interpretations of this concept differ. At minimum, they hold that personality is part of the highest plane of reality; at maximum, they consider personality to be the only reality. Although Hudson never explicitly identified himself as a Personalist, he subscribed to three fundamental tenants of that philosophy of religion: (1) mind offered the best clue toward understanding reality; (2) humanity had sacred value; and (3) all human life was divinely interconnected. In 1936, he affirmed his support for Personalism's emphasis on the human mind as the key to understanding God, saying: "I think mind is the only satisfactory basis of explaining cosmic activity, or better the 'method' in cosmic activity." He subsequently reiterated that belief in his 1969 Philosophy of Life with the words: "I am an idealist in asserting the primacy of spirit over nature or mind over matter...It is an article of my idealistic faith that mind

and spirit are the highest forms of creativity and reality. Indeed the moral and aesthetic nature of nature of man tells us fundamentally about the world process." Additionally, Hudson consistently asserted that all men and women shared a common, divinely instituted, humanity. Considering these statements, it appears that Personalism did indeed serve as Hudson's philosophical lens for viewing the world.<sup>1</sup>

Hudson used lay personalism, which stood at the very center of his upbringing, to develop his earliest critique of segregation. In Birmingham, his attentive father and mother raised him to believe that his life had worth. They vigorously guarded his developing self-image against the social stigmas commonly attached to those who lacked wealth, white privilege, or a bodily appendage. This was particularly evident in their focus on education, which they viewed as a pathway to a better future for him and a means through which he could demonstrate and develop his talents for the world to see. Berry and Alta Hudson's message was reinforced by Sixteenth Street Baptist Church, which told their son he was a child of God. Such teachings instilled him with confidence that his existence had a sacred value that was equal to every other human being's. These early beliefs in human equality and the power of

education led Hudson to follow the constructive development strand of black religious thought, which held that God wanted blacks to mobilize against socially structured injustice rather than waiting for Him to "magically" deliver them from evil. The sacred call and black Social Gospel - emphasized at his home church, Central Alabama Institute, and Morehouse College - further stressed his responsibility to attack social systems that rejected the idea of universal human brotherhood. Clearly, Hudson had internalized a personalistic value system long before he studied at Boston University's School of Theology. Boston Personalism simply provided philosophical refinement to theological positions he had adopted during his formative years. It provided a scholarly language that permitted him to place his religious views in dialogue with those of the ancient philosophers and explore ontological questions in greater depth. Using this foundation, Hudson worked to translate his homespun personalistic view of segregation into Boston Personalism's more systematic and sophisticated terminology.<sup>2</sup>

### **God's Goodness, Power, and the Problem of Segregation**

Personalism's orientation as an "integrating" philosophy opened the way for Hudson to forge his own

unique approach that spoke to his encounters with racial injustice. As detailed by theologian Rufus Burrow, Jr., Personalism branched into a wide spectrum of categories, each employing different conceptual lenses through which to study ontology (the nature of existence). The types, from least to most common, included: atheistic, pantheistic or critical, absolutistic, relativistic, teleological, realistic, panpsychistic, anthropomorphic, political, phenomenological, and theistic. Although Hudson initially subscribed to the theistic form, his intellectual struggle with the idea of God's goodness soon led him to abandon it and construct his own eclectic and syncretic strand of Personalism.<sup>3</sup>

At the beginning of his graduate studies, Hudson found theistic Personalism adequate for explaining why segregation was an abomination before God. Theistic Personalism - which he studied under his major professor Edgar Sheffield Brightman - considered God to be a Supreme Person. It was also idealistic, holding that mind (or person) - rather than material substance - was the basis of reality. While theistic Personalism's idealism viewed human persons as dependent upon God and participants in God's being, it maintained that individuals still retained a strong degree of individual freedom. Brightman described

this Supreme Person-human person relationship as a "relative quantitative pluralism" (there is not simply one mind present in the world, but many). Thus, theistic Personalists conceptualized existence as a society of interdependent human persons who were free within limits and part of a larger system of experience within the Supreme Person. Throughout his early years at Boston, Hudson considered these core premises sufficient for proving human equality and God's love for all persons. These ideas negated the concept and practice of white supremacy.<sup>4</sup>

Hudson remained a theistic Personalist until he finished his master's degree at Boston. From that point on, his once firm belief in a personal God gradually faded. His struggle with the subject of theodicy (how and why evil coexists with God), along with his maturation as a scholar, led to this dramatic change in his thought. As a product of the black church, Hudson initially found comfort in theistic Personalism because it echoed familiar teachings from his religious upbringing. Additionally, as a young and impressionable master's degree student who greatly admired his advisor, he eagerly adopted Brightman's theistic position on God's being during his early days at Boston. However, Hudson's graduate studies introduced him

to new philosophical arguments that challenged him to rethink his conception of God in light of his life experiences. From his formative years, he had grappled with the question of how an omnipotent or omnibenevolent God could permit evil to persist. The medical injustice that cost him his right arm and typhoid fever that claimed his mother's life had both left permanent wounds upon his body and psyche. Theodicy gave him the tough task of making sense of those tragedies at a philosophical level. Unsurprisingly, he had enormous trouble with the idea that a caring God allowed such social or physical evil to occur. This, in turn, raised the question of why God would not or could not immediately eradicate segregation. In the end, Hudson concluded that segregation and other forms of evil existed because God was had no consciousness and possessed only a finite amount of love.<sup>5</sup>

Hudson's embrace of panentheism, strongly influenced by the work of philosopher Alfred North Whitehead, helped him define the perimeters of God's goodness and power against evil. Panentheism can be defined as "the belief that the Being of God includes and penetrates the whole universe, so that every part of it exists in Him but (as against pantheism) that His Being is more than, and is not exhausted by, the universe." Panentheists do not usually

identify God as the Creator. They credit God with being the primary creative force that gives design and purpose to cosmic activity, but not necessarily the source of all existence. Thus, while panentheism was open to all the general beliefs of Personalism, it permitted more ambiguity. Hudson's panentheism led him to identify two forms of God: immanent (ever-present in the world) and transcendent (greater than the rest of existence). He considered the broad, immanent God to be "an eternal fabric of spiritual creativity." The more nuanced, transcendent God was "a cooperative grace available to all who seek with earnestness and humility to bring into being a heavenly kingdom of values." The former was passive and imperfect, simply the pliable substance and cosmic laws that made up reality; the later was the active agent that advanced the cosmic creative process. The transcendent God had reached perfection and represented all that was good and right. As Hudson said of the transcendent God: "Thou, O Lord, art spirit and truth, and justice and love and the hope that endureth forever."<sup>6</sup>

The *panentheistic Personalism* Hudson developed did not consider God's love omnipresent or omnipotent. Instead, it held that the presence and power of God's love were growing in the world through an evolutionary process. To Hudson,



the cooperative grace's stature as the limited part of the universe that had reached perfection - functioning as the source of love and all other forms of good - made it a transcendent God. Human personalities were essential to achieving the transcendent God's divine ends due to their ability to exercise moral judgment. This meant they could understand and react to the "moral order" sustained by the immanent God. Hudson observed that "there appear to be at work laws of reward and punishment." This belief, which pointed to an objective moral order that coexisted with an objective physical order, paralleled a doctrine Brightman presented in his 1933 text *Moral Laws*. Brightman asserted that since the moral laws God had placed into motion were every bit as real as His laws of physics, ethics should be approached as a scientific discipline. A person or group's failure to abide by moral laws could lead to disastrous consequences, just as ignoring physical laws could. For example, a man or woman who intentionally disregarded the law of gravity by leaping from a tall building would suffer a debilitating injury or death. Similar calamity could occur at the individual or societal level when moral laws were violated. Thus, Hudson viewed segregation as a social evil that violated moral laws and threatened humanity's

very existence. He believed that men and women needed to work with the cooperative grace to eliminate it.<sup>7</sup>

In *Moral Laws*, Brightman identified 11 principles that needed to be followed in order to achieve a harmonious relationship with God's moral order. Three of these moral laws - the Logical Law, Law of Consequences, and Law of Autonomy - had a clear presence in the ethical guidelines Hudson adopted for combating segregation and other forms of social evil. In his "Philosophy of Life," Hudson said: "I believe we ought to do what we feel is right. My belief however, incorporates the conjunctive duty of considering the full consequences of our actions. The praise or blame of others should not be allowed to prompt our conscience." The call for individuals do what they felt was right reflected the Logical Law, which required people to exercise consistency in their intentions, thereby avoiding self-contradiction. By urging people to consider the consequences of their actions, Hudson also demonstrated his agreement with the Law of Consequences, which said men and women should make decisions with the long-term impact of their choices in-mind. And finally, Hudson's statement saying that an individual's conscience should be free from "the praise or blame of others" paralleled the Law of Autonomy, which said people were obligated to base their

choices upon the ideals and values they acknowledged. These principles stood at the foundation of Hudson's activism against Jim Crow.<sup>8</sup>

### **Jesus and the Kingdom of God**

Of all history's great figures, Hudson considered Jesus to be the person who had understood how to work with the objective moral order of the immanent God and "cooperative grace" of the transcendent God better than anyone else. As Hudson stated in his "Philosophy of Life," the cooperative grace was "available to all who seek with earnestness and humility to bring into being a heavenly kingdom of values. This is basically what Jesus called the Kingdom of God." In a 1950 sermon entitled "Credentials for Kingship," Hudson explained why he thought Jesus' example offered the best pathway toward making the Kingdom of God ideal a reality. Specifically, he argued that Jesus had embodied boundless love, service, and self-sacrifice. Jesus, according to Hudson, out-loved and out-served any individual in history. Jesus had also demonstrated a willingness to "suffer in an unlimited way for men." Hudson believed those qualities were essential for any person who desired to become a "location of God" and help maximize the cooperative grace's influence in global

affairs. The more that people followed Jesus' example, the closer the world would come to being in perfect harmony with the objective moral order, thus setting the foundation for the Kingdom of God to finally emerge.<sup>9</sup>

Prayer, which Hudson defined as "a means of participation in the spiritual economy of the world," was a critical part of the toolkit needed by those who desired to build the Kingdom of God. His description of the term "spiritual economy" aligned with the concept of an objective moral order. Using Biblical scripture to support this idea, he pointed to Romans 8:28's statement that "all things work together for good to them that love God." To Hudson, this verse affirmed his and Brightman's belief that moral laws - which reacted positively to the stimuli of virtuous actions - were part of world's structure. Jesus, according to Hudson, had laid down his life while trying to teach humankind how to tap into the full power of this spiritual economy. Rejecting a supernatural interpretation of Jesus' sacrifice on the cross, he spoke against the common interpretation of Jesus as the one and only intercessor between God and man. Instead, while recognizing Jesus as history's best spiritual teacher, Hudson said that every person had the power to become an intercessor between the divine and humanity. Prayer was

one way to do this. Through prayer, people helped move the transcendent God or "Spirit" to intervene in human affairs and spread blessings. "By their prayers Christians may establish a fellowship of the spirit which will operate to restrain the wayward and inspire the weak. Prayers of the saints will prosper the cause of Christ and materially aid in the advance of the gospel," Hudson said. But before a person could use prayer, Hudson warned, he or she had to be living in harmony with the objective moral order. "Conduct and character are to support prayer. Only thus can prayer be effective," Hudson taught.<sup>10</sup>

When people of faith used their prayers and altruistic actions to aid the transcendent God, Hudson believed they delivered sharp blows against evils such as segregation. This type of conflict, in his eyes, was essential to moving the universe in the right direction. In a Hegelian fashion, Hudson viewed struggle as the key to progress. The fight for a better world began inside each individual's heart; it generated additional momentum each time a person resisted the temptation to live selfishly and, instead, exhibited trust in the objective moral order by doing good. Hudson wrote: "Let it be remembered that a good life is achievement, not a gift. The law of excellence is also the law of effort or struggle. As one strives toward a worthy

life the job become[s] simplified when he realizes that victory is a matter of using good to overcome evil." As encouragement to those undertook this task, Hudson urged them to take comfort in the fact that love - which he defined as "goodwill operating with the hope of redemption" - was "a stronger cosmic force than hate." To him, this was not a matter of sentimentality, but instead, a matter of hard logic grounded in his belief in the objective moral order. "The difference between the actions in the two realms - physical and spiritual," Hudson wrote, "is mainly that more depends upon voluntary action in the spiritual realm. Hence the logic of deliberate action in the formula - overcome evil with good." Thus, Hudson concluded that mankind could only achieve the ideal of the Kingdom of God by mirroring Jesus' sacrificial spirit and laboring in concert with the moral laws. "Yours is the kingdom if you work hard enough, seek diligently enough, pray long enough," Hudson asserted in his interpretation of Jesus' message. The Kingdom of God could not, he continued, "belong to anyone who does not seek and work in sweat, blood, and tears. It does belong to you if [you] are willing to pay the price; in fact, God takes pleasure in giving us the kingdom providing we fulfill the conditions."<sup>11</sup>

## **Segregation and Religion**

True to his theological liberalism, Hudson rejected fundamentalist doctrines that depicted Christianity as the one and only legitimate religion. "I believe religion is the symbolic expression of a people's highest values," he wrote. "It is the sum of our highest values and deepest intuitions. I believe God has spoken to man in the story of the Christian faith. However, God's voice may be heard in other religions of the world. It is possible to hear his voice in these other religious faiths if we have ears to hear." Accordingly, Hudson did not define proselytism as an attempt to save non-Christian men and women's souls from the threat of eternal damnation in hell. Instead, he considered it a means to build the Kingdom of God by leading people to a faith-based system of ethics that was both individually and socially beneficial. Christianity was just one of many options for achieving this end. Hudson, thus, described religious conversion as "that type of spiritual growth or development which involves an appreciable change of direction concerning religions and behavior." To him, Christian evangelism's emphasis on "the needed for atonement for sin and rebirth of the individual" was particularly important. In order for a person to live in harmony with the objective moral order and divine

cooperative grace, he or she had to embrace the proper values. Evangelism's job, in Hudson's view, was to help people take their first steps on that path - regardless of whether they selected Christianity as their road. Men and women of all religious faiths could, in this way, be part of the Kingdom of God.<sup>12</sup>

In Hudson's view, a religion that supported any form of segregation was illegitimate. "Any religion or morality which sanctions superficial distinctions or supports arrogance among man is not acceptable before God," he said. Pointing to Peter's declaration in Acts 10:34-35, "God hath shown me that I should not call any man common or unclean," Hudson argued that no person had no authority to label another as inferior. "There are no divinely instituted sanctuaries of exclusiveness based on clan, race, or nation. No incidental or superficial arrangements of men contain any justification for separations into clean and unclean, acceptable and unacceptable," he wrote. To Hudson's dismay, he frequently saw religion standing in opposition to the principle of human equality, especially across racial lines. "It is in the area of race that religion has a record of mixed glory and shame," he lamented. The answer to the problem was conflict; the men and women who truly believed in Jesus' message of universal



brotherhood had to shed their complacency and stand up against the self-professed Christians who did not. "Acceptability before God can be based on no other foundation than working righteousness or seeking the good life," Hudson declared. "To discover this dynamic and strive to live by it will make us restless until our fellowship in the spirit is inclusive of all men. We shall then act on the conviction that under God there is one and only one human race."<sup>13</sup>

### **Courage Through Hope for Eternal Life**

A literal idea of heaven was not present in Hudson's philosophy. He never expressed a belief that human personality went on to live in an otherworldly location after the physical body died. But nonetheless, he embraced a concept of immortality which emboldened him in his fight against segregation. "I believe everyone leaves a trace in the world," he wrote. "This is in part the message of life's triumph over death, the hope of the enduring value of righteousness in the face of the threat of annihilation. We can and do live in the generations that follow us," he said. From his Personalistic view of existence, Hudson believed that each person's actions impacted God either positively or negatively; the effects were felt by the

human personalities that lived after them. To him, rebirth meant choosing to align one's life in harmony with the cooperative grace of the transcendent God. By opting to become a "location of God" a person of goodwill helped strengthen the transcendent God; the effects of that individual's contribution continued to live on in the transcendent God even after the individual's physical death.<sup>14</sup>

Placing this idea into laymen's terms, Hudson wrote: "To be born of the Spirit is to comprehend the fullness of the divine drama in the life of Jesus. God has magnificently and uniquely revealed himself in Jesus. To grasp the new way of life in Jesus is to possess for oneself the eternal life which was incarnate in him." This belief gave Hudson courage as he faced life-threatening hostilities throughout his crusade for social justice. Even if he lost his life fighting Jim Crow, he knew his sacrifice would have everlasting meaning and value to God's ends. Hudson passionately expressed this conviction in his reflections on Jesus' crucifixion. "The man who loves, that is, saves his life will in his selfishness destroy the fruitfulness of his existence. This means death of spirit," he wrote. "On the other hand the man who gives his life fully or freely in service to others, that is, in

the kingdom of God will discover life's fruitfulness. He will possess eternal life. The possession he will possess is based upon sacrifice."<sup>15</sup>

In a Palm Sunday sermon, Hudson pointed to Jesus' march from Bethpage to Jerusalem as the ultimate example of the type of courage American civil rights activists needed. Although Jesus was greeted by an adoring crowd that laid garments and palm fronds in front of him, Hudson said the "triumphal march was realistically the prelude to the cross." It took enormous bravery and love for Christ to head willingly to his own death. His valorous display was undergirded by his faith that by forfeiting his life, he would shine light on the true path to victory. Referring to a quote by theologian Reinhold Niebuhr, Hudson said that human personalities reached the destination of victory when they reconciled their destinies as both "children of nature" and "servants of the absolute." This required men and women to do as much as they could to bring their worldly realities, filled with conflict and despair, in line with their spiritual realities, characterized by universal brotherhood. The task was dangerous. But when people learned to march to the beat of the "drummer in the sky," they too could emulate the gallantry shown by Jesus. Ending with a stanza from the "Battle Hymn of the

Republic," written by abolitionist Julia Ward Howe, Hudson exclaimed: "In the beauty of the lilies Christ was born across the sea with a glory in his bosom that transfigures you and me. As He died to make men holy, let us die to make men free. Our God is marching on. Glory, Glory, Hallelujah! Our God is marching on."<sup>16</sup>

### **Fashioning Language for Social Mobilization**

Having chosen to minister mainly to black congregations, Hudson usually found himself preaching to men and women who did not share his theological liberalism. In response, he engaged in what can be termed a *politics of meaning making*. Hudson knew that if he explicitly revealed his rejection of dogma, scriptural literalism, and the idea of a personal God, it would alienate the majority of black churchgoers. In response, he used carefully crafted religious modalities - metaphors which encoded his theological ideas in a way his lay audiences could digest. This concession cleared the way for him to use his position of clerical authority to mobilize his flocks to action against segregation. For example, even though Hudson did not believe in a literal heaven, he used the idea of heaven to illustrate why segregation was wrong and needed to be confronted. Referring to Jesus' prayer in Matthew 6:10

asking: "Thy kingdom come. They will be done in earth, as it is in heaven," Hudson explained why segregation, as a social evil, was inconsistent with this ideal. "The full coming of the kingdom [of God] requires the perfect execution of the will of God," Hudson wrote in a Sunday School lesson. "God's will it is assumed is perfectly carried out in heaven. So must it be carried out on earth, that is perfectly...It may be inferred that our failure in letting the will of God find perfect embodiment and execution in our lives means that the Kingdom of God is accordingly unfulfilled and unrealized. The failure in achieving a *corporate or social expression* of the will of God is similarly a failure in the embodiment and execution of the will the God." Here, using a logical argument based upon an ostensibly literal interpretation of a Biblical passage, Hudson made a case for why Christians had a moral duty to challenge Jim Crow norms.<sup>17</sup>

### **Creating a Militant Racial Justice Liberal Theology**

Hudson's Personalistic critique of segregation differed from that of his white professors through its sense of urgency for eliminating racial injustice. While Brightman and a number of other Boston Personalists openly denounced racial discrimination, they - like most white

liberal theologians - viewed it as a low priority issue and did little (if anything) to challenge it at the institutional level. John Wesley Edward Bowen, the first black to earn a Ph.D. from Boston, had faced a similar issue while studying under Borden Parker Bowne, Boston Personalism's father. Bowne's work argued for universal human equality, but failed to speak specifically to the realities of the black freedom struggle. Thus, Bowen had to carve his own path as he sought methods to practically apply Personalism to the fight against racial oppression. There were many possible causes for the dichotomy between black liberal theology students and their white professors on the issue of race in America. For one, the professors enjoyed a state of privilege which made it hard for them to understand the truly exploitive and deadly nature of Jim Crow. Additionally, due to their experiential and physical distance from blacks in general, they might not have considered themselves qualified to engage in a dialogue about black advancement. But fortunately for Hudson there was a growing community of black formally-trained theologians who, like him, wanted to use their liberal Christian graduate education to develop a militant response to the racial status quo. Many of the leaders in the group - such as Howard Thurman, Benjamin Mays, and Mordecai

Johnson - also had a direct connection to Morehouse. Shortly after earning his Ph.D. from Boston and returning to the South, Hudson would join these men in their efforts to build a better religious-oriented and community-based structure for opposing Jim Crow.

### **Conclusion**

In summary, Hudson used Boston Personalism to give philosophical character to his long-standing opposition to Jim Crow. As a child, he adopted a lay personalism which affirmed his dignity and duty to fight social evils which rejected the idea of human equality. Boston Personalism permitted him to explore the moral implications of segregation in a more systematic language. The panentheistic Personalism he developed held that segregation and other evils existed because God lacked consciousness and possessed limited (though still perfect) love. Human personalities could help the power and presence of God's love grow within the world by aligning their lives with the objective moral order and becoming "locations of God." Jesus provided the best example for achieving this objective. Through their prayers and altruistic actions, men and women could help build a Kingdom of God that would embody the ideal of universal

human brotherhood. If humanity failed to reach this ideal, its continued violation of moral laws would trigger severe consequences. Thus, any religion which sanctioned segregation or other demeaning superficial distinctions within the human family was both illegitimate and dangerous. Throughout his battles against racial oppression, Hudson received courage from his belief that the divine value of his sacrifices would outlive his physical life. This fortitude was a cornerstone of his public teachings against segregation, which he expressed through careful religious modalities designed to cover his theological liberalism and inspire people to action. Although few white liberal Christians approached the issue of Jim Crow with a sense of urgency, Hudson's post-Boston years soon led him to a group of black theological liberals who shared his passion for devising a militant response to this problem.



## ENDNOTES

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<sup>1</sup> James Hudson, "My Philosophy of Life," 19 August 1969, in James L. Hudson Family Collection, Washington, D.C.; Ralph E. Luker, *The Social Gospel in Black and White: American Racial Reform, 1885-1912* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 245-247; Edgar S. Brightman, *Personality and Religion* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1934), 15; James Hudson to Edgar S. Brightman, 11 May 1936, in Folder 9, Box 17, Edgar Sheffield Brightman Papers, Howard Gotlieb Archival Research Center, Boston University, Boston, Mass.

<sup>2</sup> Compare with the "homespun personalism" of Martin Luther King, Jr. in Rufus Burrow, Jr., "Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Objective Moral Order: Some Ethical Implications," *Encounter* 61 (Spring 2000): 221-223. On the constructive development, see: Benjamin E. Mays, *The Negro's God: As Reflected in His Literature* (Boston: Mount Vernon Press, 1938), 14-18.

<sup>3</sup> Paul Deats, "Introduction to Boston Personalism," in Paul Deats and Carol Robb, eds., *The Boston Personalist Tradition in Philosophy, Social Ethics, and Theology* (Mercer, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 1986), 7; Rufus Burrow, Jr., "Afrikan American Contributions to Personalism," *Encounter* 60 (1999): 149.

<sup>4</sup> Rufus Burrow, Jr., *Personalism: A Critical Introduction* (St. Louis, Mo.: Chalice Press, 1999), 11-12, 61.

<sup>5</sup> See: James Hudson, "Whitehead's Conceptions of God and Religion" (M.A. thesis, Boston University, 1934), 93, 95, 97, 99-100, 102; James Hudson, "The Doctrine of the Actual Occasion in Whitehead" (Ph.D. diss., Boston University, 1946), 176-178.

<sup>6</sup> F. L. Cross, ed., *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* (London: Oxford University Press, 1957), 1010; Hudson, "My Philosophy of Life."

<sup>7</sup> Hudson, "My Philosophy of Life"; Burrow, "Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Objective Moral Order," 231; Edgar

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S. Brightman, *Moral Laws* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1933), 286.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.; Brightman, *Moral Laws*, 97-124; 142-155.

<sup>9</sup> Hudson, "My Philosophy of Life"; James Hudson, "Credentials for Kingship," n.d. 1950, Folder 2, Box 14, James Hudson Papers, Southeastern Regional Black Archives, Research Center and Museum, Florida Agricultural & Mechanical University, Tallahassee, Fla., hereinafter "Hudson Papers."

<sup>10</sup> James Hudson, "The Christian's Prayer Life," *Young Adult Quarterly* [Drafts], 23 August 1953, Folder 7, Box 14, Hudson Papers.

<sup>11</sup> Hudson, "My Philosophy of Life"; James Hudson, "A Formula for Victorious Living," *Young Adult Quarterly* [Drafts], n.d., Folder 9, Box 14; James Hudson, "Yours is the Kingdom," *Young Adult Quarterly* [Drafts], n.d., Folder 9, Box 13, Hudson Papers.

<sup>12</sup> Hudson, "My Philosophy of Life"; James Hudson, "The Supreme Importance of Evangelism," 26 April 1961, Folder 11, Box 13, Hudson Papers; James Hudson, "Thy Kingdom Come," *Young Adult Quarterly* [Drafts], 27 December 1953, Folder 8, Box 14, Hudson Papers.

<sup>13</sup> James Hudson, "One Human Race," *Young Adult Quarterly* [Drafts], 13 December 1953, Folder 8, Box 14, Hudson Papers.

<sup>14</sup> Hudson, "My Philosophy of Life."

<sup>15</sup> Hudson, "The New Birth," 17 January 1954 and "Jesus Faces the Cross," 14 March 1954, both in *Young Adult Quarterly* [Drafts], Folder 9, Box 14, Hudson Papers.

<sup>16</sup> James Hudson, "Where to Look for Victory," 25 March 1956, Folder 1, Box 14, Hudson Papers; Julia Ward Howe, "The Battle Hymn of the Republic," *Atlantic Monthly* 9 (February 1862): 10; see also: Reinhold Niebuhr, *Does Civilization Need Religion? A Study in the Social Resources and Limitations of Religion* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1927).

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<sup>17</sup> Hudson, "Thy Kingdom Come."

## CHAPTER IV

### "TOWARD WORLD BROTHERHOOD"

James Hudson, now credentialed with a Ph.D. from Boston University, entered the new chapter of his academic career determined to connect the theological positions he had refined in the classroom with multiple networks of black scholars and clergy. The fundamental ideas from his higher education - particularly the sacred call and black Social Gospel - became building blocks of his Personalistic philosophy of life; this provided an intellectual foundation for his post-World War II lectures, sermons, and writings against Jim Crow. While participating in an array of local, state, and national associations, he used his activist philosophy to spread ideational seeds which aided the emergence of the Civil Rights Movement in the mid-1950s. The key networks that aided Hudson's work during this period were: Howard University's Andrew Rankin Chapel network, the guest speaker rotation for Florida Agricultural & Mechanical University's (FAMU) religious life program, Tallahassee's Interdenominational Ministerial Alliance (IMA), and the National Baptist Convention, U.S.A (NBC-USA).

Each network helped Hudson apply Personalism in a distinctive way. The Rankin network brought Hudson into a national community of black theologians that pioneered what can be termed *militant reconciliation theology*. This branch of Christian ethics advanced Mohandas K. Gandhi's "science of nonviolence" as a moral, practical method for applying the spirit of Jesus' social teachings to the destruction of segregation. The theology resonated with Hudson because it was consistent with the core principles of his Personalism. Accordingly, he adopted it as a pillar of the religious life program he led at FAMU. As FAMU's chaplain, Hudson continued the institution's tradition of hosting prominent Rankin network speakers on campus. Additionally, he invited leading black Social Gospel pastors to preach about their experiences in mobilizing grassroots campaigns against political exploitation and disenfranchisement. These sermons, which complemented Hudson's classroom lectures, created a rich intellectual environment that taught students about the theology and tactics of nonviolent resistance. Tallahassee's IMA, an organization Hudson co-founded, assisted him as he strove to raise the level of social consciousness and militancy within the local black community. Like Hudson, the ministers in this group wanted to speed the process of

eradicating Tallahassee's Jim Crow norms, rather than patiently waiting for white city officials to make small concessions. Finally, the NBC-USA Sunday School Board, which hired Hudson as its youth lesson writer, gave him an influential national platform to articulate the same ideas he taught on FAMU's campus. Reaching millions each Sunday, Hudson's writings helped crystallize Personalism as a protest language designed to invigorate the growing civil rights struggle.

### **The Rankin Network**

In the early 1940s, the Rankin network emerged as a close-knit group of black intellectuals who were members of two organizations headquartered at Howard University's School of Religion, where the Andrew Rankin Chapel stood at the center of religious life. These groups were the Fellowship of Religious Workers in Colleges and Universities for Negroes (FRWCUN) and Institute of Religion. The network promoted a number of ambitious aims which included building a better educated black ministry and producing scholarship that interpreted Jesus in dialogue with modern moral challenges - particularly in the area of race relations. Its members hoped to ultimately produce a vanguard of insurgent black clerical leaders

capable of leading a nonviolent, grassroots struggle against segregation. As historian Dennis C. Dickerson observed, Howard professors Benjamin Mays, Howard Thurman, and William Stuart Nelson - all crucial members of the Rankin network - traveled to India and sought Gandhi's advice on launching nonviolence campaigns in the United States. Over time, the network became the convergence point for molding a practical theology that (1) advanced a militant Jesus concept depicting the Biblical figure as a fierce opponent of manmade inequalities such as segregation; (2) identified universal human brotherhood as its ultimate goal; and (3) offered insights derived from the scholarly study of nonviolence to help spur new applied science projects inside black Social Gospel ministries. This school of thought can be termed *militant reconciliation theology*, a system of Christian ethics that promoted nonviolence as a spiritually sound methodology to deliver humanity from the evil of segregation.<sup>1</sup>

Florida Agricultural & Mechanical College's (FAMC) close association with the Rankin network dated back to the World War II era. Chaplain David Hedgley, who had studied at Virginia Union University and later earned a master's degree from the University of Chicago, regularly attended meetings of the FRWCUN. He and FAMC President J.R.E. Lee

were particularly fond of Fellowship head Thurman and regularly brought him to speak to their students. In January 1943, for example, Thurman accepted an invitation to visit FAMC despite his very busy schedule, telling Lee: "This is the most difficult time for me to be away, but I am so anxious to keep alive my contacts with the students particularly at your school, that I am coming anyway." The following month, Hedgley brought the largest delegation - 33 people - to a FRWCUN conference in Greensboro, North Carolina.<sup>2</sup>

In 1946, Hudson stepped into Hedgley's former role as FAMC's chaplain, finding it the most appealing option out of all his employment offers. A number of early job inquiries had resulted in disappointment. His alma mater, Morehouse, informed him that it had just filled its only open position in philosophy a few weeks before he wrote. Howard did not have any vacancies in his field of study, either. A Presbyterian church in Detroit mailed him to express interest in his services as a minister. The job was very attractive. It offered him a chance to live in the same city as his brothers, enjoy the company of a large middle class black community, and raise his child far away from the rigid Jim Crow environment he had faced during his youth. Nonetheless, Hudson's passion for teaching led him



back to the South. Thousands of young black servicemen were returning to America and applying to the only colleges that would accept them en masse: segregated southern institutions. These men needed more than just patient instruction; they needed compassionate spiritual counseling. By going to Detroit, Hudson would not be able to help those students and might not get a chance to teach college at all. Additionally, he was uncomfortable with the idea of leaving the Baptist tradition of his upbringing and ordination. Thus, Hudson welcomed the opportunity to work at FAMC as chaplain and a professor of philosophy.<sup>3</sup>

Since its founding in 1887 as Florida's only public black college, FAMC had produced skilled laborers for jobs that were critical to keeping the segregated economic and educational systems running, including: agricultural technicians, domestic workers, nurses, principals, and teachers. Nonetheless Thomas DeSaille Tucker, the black Oberlin College alumnus and W.E.B. Du Bois admirer who served as the institution's first president, managed to establish a thriving tradition of liberal arts education within the school despite the state government's opposition. Appointed to FAMC's presidency in 1944, William Herbert Gray, Jr. desired to build upon that foundation by hiring many humanities and social science

professors to replace the faculty FAMC had lost to wartime budget cuts or better-paying defense industry jobs.

Similar to Tucker, Gray openly challenged state leaders who wanted FAMC to simply produce manpower that would keep the machinery of segregation working. Instead, he aimed to train thinkers who would embrace a sacred call to dismantle Jim Crow's cogs and gears.<sup>4</sup>

Gray and Hudson had met in Baton Rouge during the late 1930s, while Gray was serving as an education professor at Southern University. Gray's spouse, Helen, was related to Mrs. Hudson's family. Like Hudson, Gray was a Baptist minister and black Social Gospeler who boasted an impressive academic pedigree. He earned his bachelor's degree in education from West Virginia's Bluefield State (Teachers) college in 1933, followed by a M.S. from the University of Pennsylvania (Penn) the very next year. He then worked at Southern University for seven years, holding positions such as principal of the Demonstration Schools and field director of Extension Services. In 1941, Gray became president of Florida Normal and Industrial College in St. Augustine. While heading that institution, he completed his Ph.D. studies at Penn in 1942. Coming to the 812-student FAMC with a reputation for visionary leadership, Gray looked to individuals such as Hudson to

help him accomplish an ambitious agenda. The new president shared Hudson's passion for encouraging students to engage in activism against social injustice. As he once stated, he hoped students would "knock some of the oldsters out of their state of apathy and complacency."<sup>5</sup>

At Gray's direction, FAMC gave Hudson a 12-month contract for \$3,600 and the promise of a \$400 raise the next year. Leaving his wife and son in Baton Rouge, Hudson reported for work on September 1, 1946. While waiting for his family to join him, he temporarily shared a room in the campus' Nathan B. Young Hall with another newly hired professor. The small space had two sets of beds and mattresses, chairs, a dresser, and a study table. His roommate was Charles U. Smith, a sociology instructor who had studied at Tuskegee Institute and Fisk University. Smith remembered Hudson as a somewhat reserved man who suddenly brimmed with passion whenever he spoke about the classroom. He added that Hudson's seemingly effortless ability to complete so many small daily tasks people take for-granted, such as tying his tie each morning with only one arm, never ceased to amaze him. Although generally happy with his first year at FAMC, Hudson expressed "regret" that his initial teaching assignments were mainly in the field of social sciences as opposed to philosophy.

Since the college had no philosophy or religion departments, the curriculum had little space for Hudson's preferred teaching areas. Hudson's duties required him to work seven days a week. He taught courses on "The Family," "Social Origins," and "The History of Philosophy." Two of the classes met on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. The other one met on Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday. As chaplain, he led Sunday morning worship, Sunday School, Sunday Vesper, and a Thursday evening prayer meeting. There were also chapel services on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. The assemblies took place inside Lee Hall, which had a 1,600-seat auditorium as well as "seating for a 150 voice choir, a Western Electric motion picture machine, and a two-manual Wurlitzer pipe organ and chimes." Lastly, Hudson served as faculty advisor for the campus' YMCA.<sup>6</sup>

To Hudson's delight, Gray "began to talk more pointedly" about expanding FAMC's religious studies curriculum throughout that first school year. The chaplain eagerly followed up on these discussions by convening a summer 1947 meeting of professors and local ministers to develop a detailed proposal for Gray's consideration. In the end, the committee recommended that FAMC establish a department of religious education, an idea the president approved. Appointed founding chairman, Hudson proudly

tapped a fellow faculty member to help him build the academic program: Emory A. Wadlowe. Wadlowe was an English instructor who had earned a bachelor of divinity from Howard University and a master of sacred theology from Oberlin College. He also pastored the local St. James Colored Methodist Episopal Church. In recognition of those credentials, Hudson arranged for Wadlowe to receive a joint appointment as an instructor in religious education.<sup>7</sup>

While getting started, Hudson and Wadlowe sought advice from the man who held the most coveted black divinity school deanship in the United States: William Stuart Nelson of the Howard School of Religion. Nelson, who attended Howard for college and earned his bachelor of divinity from Yale University, had accepted his present position in 1940 after serving as president of Shaw University and later Dillard University. In fall 1947, he spoke at FAMC, sharing vivid details from his visit to India the previous year. During his tenure as a representative of the American Friends Service Committee in that country, Nelson had met with Indian Independence Leader Mohandas K. Gandhi and held long discussions with him about how blacks could apply what the Mahatma termed *satyagraha* - "love-force" expressed through nonviolent resistance - to their own freedom struggle. Hudson later

wrote Nelson a glowing thank-you letter expressing deep appreciation for the insights on Gandhi. He stated that he and Wadlowe "were helped a great deal by your suggestions regarding the work of our Department of Religious Education here."<sup>8</sup>

During Nelson's FAMC speaking engagement, he and Hudson began what would become a long friendship. Impressed with Hudson's academic credentials and early accomplishments in Tallahassee, Nelson urged him to seek membership in the Institute of Religion. The Institute, housed inside Howard's School of Religion and directed by Nelson, was a national association of black religious intellectuals that convened at least once annually "to stimulate reflection upon religion's relation to the world." Hudson followed Nelson's recommendation; the Institute extended him a membership invitation the very next year. The Institute connected Hudson to a close-knit network of scholars who shared his passion for raising the caliber of black clerical leadership in America. For many years Nelson - also a member of the FRWCUN - had voiced deep concern about black college students' widespread lack of interest in vocational ministry, which resulted in low numbers of black college-educated ministers. In founding the Institute of Religion during Howard's 1940-1941 school

year, Nelson announced that it would "assist materially in the development among college students of a more favorable attitude toward religion and religious institutions."

Hudson expressed heartfelt agreement with that goal, as it paralleled his previous mission within the Louisiana region of the National Ministers' Institute (NMI).<sup>9</sup>

On March 12, 1948, an excited Hudson wrote Edgar S. Brightman with the news that the Institute of Religion had invited him to present a paper at its upcoming meeting in the nation's capital. Hudson's assigned topic, "American Socialist Thought," was part of the larger conference theme that grappled with a central issue of the Cold War: "The Relation of Christianity to the Great Current Socialist Experiments of the World." The other scheduled papers included ones on "Communism," "British Socialism," "Christian Socialism," and "National Socialism." Brightman applauded his former student's willingness to take on a difficult subject that, in his opinion, suffered from a "shortage of first-class literature." Aided by Brightman's list of suggested readings, Hudson arrived for his Saturday, April 24, 1948 presentation with a paper that countered the popular argument that socialism was inconsistent with Christianity and democracy. Directing particularly close attention to the Christian Socialist

thought that had emerged from the Social Gospel movement, Hudson argued that democratic socialism's ideal of providing for the welfare of all men and women aligned with Christianity's concept of universal brotherhood. Further, he declared that "the Socialist standard of winning support by rational and emotional appeal" was consistent with Christianity's standard of influencing social change through individual regeneration. As such, he considered democratic socialism a system that could help create the Kingdom of God. After receiving suggestions and criticisms from his Institute colleagues, Hudson subsequently published the paper as an article in the Howard School of Religion's *Journal of Religious Thought*.<sup>10</sup>

In 1948, insights from dialogues within the FRWCUN, Institute of Religion, and Journal of Religion had led to a 1948 compilation titled *The Christian Way in Race Relations* - militant reconciliation theology's definitive text. In the introduction, Nelson traced its 13 chapters back to papers presented at and critiqued within Rankin network forums, remarking that the volume "may very properly be regarded as a product of group enterprise." Published the same year that Soviet-United States tensions resulted in the Berlin Airlift, *The Christian Way's* authors wrote within the boundaries of the "liberal consensus" that



shaped political discourse in Cold War America. As historian William Chafe observed, this paradigm held that: (1) capitalism, rather than socialism, was the best economic system, (2) capitalism and democracy were complementary and indispensable to one another, (3) the American way of life was inherently moral and fair - meaning that it should be reformed rather than radically restructured, (4) economic growth (creating a larger pie to be divided) was the best path to reform and greater opportunity, and (5) patriotism required complete opposition to communism. The writers also followed labor leader A. Philip Randolph's lead in combining the black jeremiad, a tradition of spiritually-centered public appeals for racial justice, with American civil religion, a set of sacred beliefs pertaining to the country's origins and purpose. During public prayer rallies he organized as part of his 1941-1947 March on Washington Movement (MOWM), Randolph had pragmatically silenced the pro-socialism, anti-imperialism message in the Jesus concept he shared with many of Howard's leading religion professors in favor of a less threatening Christ figure who would not alienate the Capitol Hill powerbrokers he was lobbying. Nelson, a vigorous supporter of the MOWM, took particular interest in the Randolph's vision for a national movement rooted in

"nonviolent, goodwill direct action," defined as "applied Christianity" and "applied democracy" and used *The Christian Way* as a vehicle to discuss its possibilities.<sup>11</sup>

Employing the rhetorical strategy of the civil religious black jeremiad, Nelson had opened the first chapter of *The Christian Way* with quotations from George Washington, Henry Clay, and Millard Fillmore about America's responsibility to be a worldwide example of freedom, democracy, and justice. Morehouse ethicist George Kelsey, challenging the idea that segregation could ever produce social equality, argued that social equality should be understood as full, unfettered citizenship and human rights because "this meaning harmonizes with the Declaration of Independence." Mays added a reference to the U.S. Constitution's message on "equality of opportunity for all." Also, expounding upon the theme of spreading democracy worldwide, he stated that "Negroes are obligated to practice democracy in those areas where they have the last word - in their schools, in their homes, and in their churches - if they are to condemn America for un-democratic practices." While the book eschewed an outright call for socialism, North Carolina College for Negroes minister and professor J. Neal Hughley called on Americans to re-evaluate their present economic system in light of

Christian values, asserting that the "selfish, profit-seeking...ethos of capitalism must be rejected as a diabolical enemy of the Christian spirit." And although a proposed chapter on "The Challenge of New Religious Movements" authored James L. Farmer - a 1941 Howard divinity alumnus and former Nelson student - did not appear in the final version, YMCA leader George Hayes lauded the efforts of Farmer and other Congress of Racial Equality members in their ongoing campaigns that connected Christianity with nonviolent direct action.<sup>12</sup>

All in all, the book offered a prelude to the Cold War-conscious black Social Gospel Jesus concept of the Civil Rights Movement: Christ, a nonviolent activist, gave his life while challenging social institutions that prevented people from living like brothers and sisters; thus, Christians - bound by their loyalty to Jesus and the divine principle of equality outlined in America's founding documents - must use moral means to fight anti-democratic, inhumane social sin both at home and abroad. In this way, *The Christian Way* functioned as a manifesto that outlined the "freedom curriculum" Rankin network members would use to inspire black college students to launch nonviolent rebellions against Jim Crow. Over subsequent years, the Jesus concept articulated in *The Christian Way* continued to

appear in sermons, lectures, and publications by Rankin network members. A particularly notable example came from *The Christian Way* contributor Thurman in his popular 1949 book entitled *Jesus and the Disinherited*. In it, the minister provided a narrative account of how Jesus, a poor man and Jew living under Roman oppression, had personally identified with those who suffered from persecution and taught them to use love as a weapon of resistance. These publications signaled a watershed event for black theological education, as they became core textbooks for training students how to connect the black Social Gospel's ideas with Gandhi's methods and the language of Cold War political discourse.<sup>13</sup>

The theological positions in militant reconciliation theology aligned well with Hudson's belief in a Jesus who had preached universal brotherhood, abhorred superficial distinctions among men, and urged his followers to engage in nonviolent confrontation against obstacles that hindered equality. Similar to numerous other Rankin network members, Hudson's theological liberalism led him to explicitly reject the fundamentalist idea that Christianity held a monopoly on spiritual truth. Instead, he thought God's voice was present in a wide variety of world religions. As a result, he had no problem with Thurman and

Nelson's argument that Mohandas K. Gandhi, a Hindu, had performed God's work through his efforts to liberate the oppressed. In concert with his Rankin network colleagues, Hudson began to use the strategic language of militant reconciliation theology to encourage nonviolent conflict against Jim Crow. It helped him to avoid antagonizing those who might balk at his support for democratic socialism.

Under Nelson, the Howard School of Religion sought interracial support for "nonviolent goodwill direct action" by reaching out to white liberal theologians. Union Theological Seminary professor Reinhold Niebuhr - a former chairman of the pacifist Fellowship of Reconciliation who urged blacks to consider Gandhian boycotts against Jim Crow "public service corporations" - boasted one of the closest relationships with the school. During the 1944-1945 school year, he delivered four classroom talks at Howard as part of a lecture series co-sponsored by the divinity school and Washington Federation of Churches. Other contributors to Howard's discussions about the church and social change included Union theologian Paul Tillich and two of Hudson's former Boston professors, Edgar S. Brightman and L. Harold DeWolf. Frank T. Wilson, a FRWCUN member and contributor to *The Christian Way in Race Relations*, continued to

coordinate such dialogues when he succeeded Nelson as the school's dean in 1950 (following Nelson's promotion to dean of the university). In 1951, Wilson made plans for an Institute meeting on the subject: "The Social Thought of Contemporary Theologians." He asked Hudson to write a paper on Brightman for this event, a task the FAMC chaplain eagerly accepted. Hudson immediately wrote his former advisor and requested a list of books he should consult. Brightman, suffering from "below par" health at the time, urged him to use his social philosophy course syllabus and familiar titles such as *Moral Laws*. Hudson thanked him and sent a special birthday gift to boost his spirits throughout his illness: two neckties. Brightman wrote Hudson back and told him "you take the prize for being very nearly the most thoughtful and generous of my former students."<sup>14</sup>

Presenting his essay entitled "The Social Thought of E.S. Brightman" before the Institute in March 1951, Hudson spoke at length about "organic pluralism" - Brightman's conception of an ideal social structure. Organic pluralism was a synthesis between the arguments that "society is an organic whole" and the "ultimate units in the social structure are individual persons." Democracy, according to Hudson, was most consistent with Brightman's organic

pluralism because: "it unites all; it frequently reforms itself; it provides for voluntary group cooperation; [and] it develops character, being in harmony with the Christian view of personality." While noting that his former advisor did not explicitly endorse specific economic system, Hudson explained how Brightman had stressed that all economic activity should conform to moral laws such as the Logical Law. "If persons engaged in economic activity live according to the moral law," Hudson observed, "there is reasonable assurance, [Brightman] thinks, of economic well-being. The individual and the group should strive toward maximum consistency and coherence of values." Hudson went on to state that democratic socialism appealed to Brightman as the instrument that could most likely create a more moral social structure. In the concluding paragraph, Hudson identified Brightman's social thought as a "union of a reason and love" that challenged humanity work with God to reach a "higher purpose" and "noble destiny." The paper received a favorable response from Hudson's audience on Howard's campus. Wilson asked him to revise and resubmit it for publication in the *Journal of Religious Thought*. Hudson sent a copy to Brightman, requesting his feedback. Much to his dismay, a response never came. On February 25, 1953, Brightman succumbed to his long bout with sickness.<sup>15</sup>

### **FAMC'S Religious Life Program and the IMA**

Hudson's activist, Personalistic philosophy guided him as he led FAMC's religious life program and participated in off-campus spiritual activities. He firmly believed that Tallahassee's system of segregation assailed the dignity of blacks and prevented local citizens from living like brothers and sisters. These views, in addition to his experience living in Boston's much less restrictive racial climate, made it difficult for him to adjust to Tallahassee's Jim Crow norms. As a result, he worked to build broad community support for activities designed to undermine segregation. Like his colleagues in the Institute of Religion, he encouraged his students to connect high religious ideals with social action. He also guided the creation of the Interdenominational Ministerial Alliance, a new organization designed to bring local black ministers to the forefront of Tallahassee's civil rights struggle. Moreover, Hudson attempted to improve communication, understanding, and cooperation across racial lines.

As a first step toward improving FAMC's religious life program, Hudson worked to understand the issues that discouraged so many FAMC students from seeking lay,



ministerial, or scholarly leadership positions within the field of religion. In 1949, the department of religious education conducted "A Study of Religious Attitudes and Concepts of Florida A. and M. College Students" by distributing hundreds of questionnaires across the campus. The feedback from this survey brought a long list of serious problems to Hudson and Wadlowe's attention and led them to contemplate sweeping changes for FAMC's entire religious life program.<sup>16</sup>

427 students filled out the questionnaire and returned it to the department. The data revealed that the overwhelming majority of the respondents believed in prayer, held membership in a church, considered churches critical to modern society, and felt churches "should take an active part in the social, economic, and political life of the community." About half said they benefited from FAMC's worship services and were interested in taking courses in religion. Large numbers provided ambiguous definitions for terms "religion," "sin," and "salvation" (or simply left those sections blank). A sizable portion of the respondents also struggled with the questions of whether the Bible should be interpreted literally or if Christianity and war could be reconciled. When asked "Why do young people show such little interest in entering the

field of religion as a vocation?" the students gave a wide range of answers. Many complained that the ministry did not pay enough money, religious workers were expected to "live as saints and angels," religion was too "old-fashioned," and that religion stood against fun activities such as dancing and card-playing. Others admitted that they simply knew very little about the field of religion. In response to a question asking them to list their biggest criticisms of the church, the students pointed to uneducated ministers, sermons which suffered from an obvious lack of preparation, hypocritical behavior among the membership, quarrelling and bitterness within the congregations, too much begging for money, and the church's lack of involvement in their communities. The students said that both their home churches and FAMC's chapel should hold shorter services and give young people a greater role in planning the programs. Most were against FAMC's policy of compulsory attendance at religious exercises.<sup>17</sup>

From the answers, Wadlowe drew up a list of conclusions. First, while most FAMC students felt religion was important, many were unsure about their faith and had a tenuous grasp on Christianity's core teachings. Wadlowe believed "that a large majority of the students took over their religious ideas and beliefs from adult persons in

wholesale fashion, and they have given little or no thought in interpreting these ideas in terms of their own experiences." The data, he continued, showed that FAMC had a great opportunity to make a difference in the students' spiritual lives. "Most of our students still believe that the church is indispensable to society and that the church has a mission no other organization can perform," Wadlowe wrote. "However, these young people are calling and pleading for a program and leadership that they and the world can respect and follow." In his recommendations, the professor suggested expanding the religious education department's curriculum and budget, giving students a greater role in planning the campus' religious activities, encouraging students to become active in Tallahassee churches, inviting more guest ministers to FAMC, spreading information about career opportunities in the field of religion, and reconsidering the compulsory attendance policy for campus religious services. Hudson supported all those ideas and submitted the final report to the president's office.<sup>18</sup>

Gray responded favorably to the report, particularly the suggestion to provide more funds for guest preachers. Hudson used the increased speakers budget to help make the emerging field of militant reconciliation theology a

central part of FAMC's religious education curriculum. Hudson used the growing budget of the department of religious education (later renamed the "department of philosophy and religion") to bring fellow militant reconciliation theologians to speak on campus. They included Mays, Thurman, and Johnson. In coordinating these activities, he worked closely with the city's black Interdenominational Ministerial Alliance (IMA), an organization he played a lead role in founding during the late 1940s. The purpose of the organization, Hudson noted, was to use the "resources of the church to help implement social changes in Tallahassee." Its membership consisted of men who, like him, wanted the black church to become more active in challenging Tallahassee's segregated norms. Two early members, FAMC alumni Moses General Miles and David Henry Brooks, were young instructors who lived on campus with their families and pastored local congregations. Miles, appointed dean of men in 1944, taught math and later became pastor of Philadelphia Primitive Baptist Church in 1948. Brooks, who held a bachelor of divinity from Bishop Payne Divinity School and taught sociology, had returned to Tallahassee in 1947 to serve St. Michael Episcopal Church. Others included the Reverends William M. Burns of Bethel Missionary Baptist

Church and J.A. Porter of Bethel African Methodist Episcopal; these men led two of the largest black churches in the city.<sup>19</sup>

Heeding the "Religious Attitudes and Concepts" study's recommendation to encourage greater student participation in local churches, Hudson secured the administration's approval to schedule Sunday chapel and vesper services on a bi-weekly rather than weekly basis. On the free Sundays, Hudson urged students to worship with congregations outside the campus (particularly those headed by fellow IMA members). Back at FAMC, the IMA assisted Hudson with the publicity and logistics associated with bringing militant, out-of-town ministers to address the student body. The list of guest speakers included: Maynard Jackson, Sr., pastor of Friendship Baptist Church in Atlanta, Georgia; Williams Holmes Borders, pastor of Wheat Street Baptist Church in Atlanta; and Hudson's former student Gardner C. Taylor, pastor of Mount Zion First African Baptist Church in Baton Rouge, Louisiana and later Concord Baptist Church of Christ in Brooklyn, New York. All these men had vigorously supported black voter registration and mobilization efforts in the South, facing the constant threat white reprisals. Additionally, in an effort to combat the problem of poorly educated preachers, the IMA

and department of religious education held "Minister's Institutes" on the campus. The gatherings typically included workshops on theology, sermon preparation, pastoral counseling, and church administration.<sup>20</sup>

Consistent with his previous work in the Louisiana NMI and the example of Rankin network leaders who invited white liberals into their discussions, Hudson also attempted to develop relationships with white ministers in Tallahassee. Two chaplains of the neighboring white Florida State University, Samuel Neel and Edwin R. Hartz, maintained a cordial rapport with him. The city's larger white Christian community frequently exhibited a less accommodating posture. One example came in spring 1949, when Pastor T.A. Corbett of the white Capital Christian Church invited Hudson to preach before his congregation. The church's board of deacons cancelled Hudson's appearance shortly before the service was scheduled to begin, explaining that Corbett "had invited Dr. Hudson without consulting them and they feared controversy." Julius Kravetz, rabbi of Tallahassee's Temple Israel synagogue from 1947 to 1954, responded enthusiastically to Hudson's requests for help in bringing Jewish lecturers to his school. One visiting speaker, Rabbi Solomon E. Cherniak, gave talks on "What Every Christian Should Know About

Judaism," "What Judaism Teaches About God, Man, and the Universe," and "What We Jews Believe." For these types of activities, Hudson often coordinated with the Jewish Chautauqua Society, an organization dedicated to educating the public about Jewish history and faith. As Hudson once wrote to Sylvan Lebow, the Society's executive director: "I am convinced that the Chautauqua program is a wonderful investment in better social relations." He added a suggestion that the Society work to bring more black Christian ministers to address Jewish audiences. "The thought strikes me that there are persons among us as a group who would welcome opportunities to interpret the best in Negro Life to Jewish Communities," Hudson said. By bringing such diverse guest speakers to campus, Hudson emphasized the Personalistic idea of human brotherhood across racial and religious lines.<sup>21</sup>

Other Personalistic concepts, particularly the belief in the sacred worth and dignity of all humanity, had a prominent presence in Hudson's campus ministry. When Hudson moved to Tallahassee his son was almost seven years old, about the same age he had been when he lost his right arm to inept medical treatment. Additionally, Hudson could never forget the harrowing memory of watching his mother die from typhoid fever. He remembered how his father had

done his best to secure treatment for family members who suffered injury or illness. Berry Hudson's efforts, however, were hindered by the daunting obstacles of meager pay and segregation. Determined to prevent his wife and son from experiencing similar life-altering consequences as a result of poor healthcare, Hudson vigorously supported Gray's efforts to modernize FAMC's hospital. Built in 1911, the facility was the only medical center open to blacks in Tallahassee and nearby rural areas. Serving as the home of FAMC's nursing program, it had a modest number of beds and an X-ray unit. Upon being tapped to lead FAMC, Gray picked up where his predecessor - the late FAMC President J.R.E. Lee - left off by organizing a university-wide hospital fundraising committee. The group reached out to federal and state officials, city fathers, and private citizens for donations. The city government's efforts to move the local white hospital from a make-shift air force base facility into a new building inadvertently helped FAMC's cause. Tallahassee received a federal grant to assist it in constructing its new hospital, but its stipulations required city leaders to either integrate the facility or provide "separate-but-equal" accommodations for blacks. In the end, the mayor and Tallahassee commissioners negotiated a deal to provide FAMC with



\$641,039 from the grant plus an additional \$250,000 from the city itself. This brought the total amount raised during Gray's tenure to \$1,480,177. In 1951 Gray's successor, George W. Gore, Jr., presided over the opening of a new "five-story, fire-resistant hospital with a total bed capacity of 105, including 24 youth beds and pediatric cribs." It cost \$2,014,380.<sup>22</sup>

With its patient register swelling, FAMC's hospital witnessed an increased demand for on-site spiritual counseling services. Hudson met this need by working with the Rev. Elvis W. Spearman, the college postmaster. In 1951, Spearman began assisting a physical therapy program at the hospital. Hudson subsequently appointed him to direct the college's Sunday School extension activities at the facility. The IMA aided Spearman by opening a second-floor "Meditation Room" which they adorned with symbolic religious items. As Spearman remarked, "A number of people visit this room both day and night, and receive comfort and direction for their many problems." Eager to create a more academically-grounded religious life environment for the patients and staffers, Hudson and Spearman collaborated to organize a "project in mental health and spiritual therapy" in conjunction with an on-campus medical clinic held February 9-12, 1954. Hudson designed the program to convey

a Personalistic perspective on sickness and health. At the recommendation of Paul E. Johnson, a Boston University professor of philosophy and pastoral counseling who had also earned his Ph.D. under Brightman, Hudson invited another Boston School of Theology professor named Robert C. Leslie to speak at the event. Leslie, a Methodist minister who had received his Ph.D. in the psychology of religion from Boston, served as the teaching chaplain for the Boston State Hospital and Boston Psychopathic Hospital. His writings lauded nursing as "Christianity with its sleeves rolled up." As he once observed: "By bringing the spiritual qualities of faith, hope, and love into her performance of even the most routine tasks the nurse helps to strengthen the patient's conviction that life is worth living and thus she helps to meet the needs of the whole person - body, mind, and soul." An excited Hudson recalled that Leslie's address introduced him and fellow observers "to new visions of service in the care of the sick and hospitalized." This led him to recommend that the hospital superintendent establish a paid, in-house chaplaincy and hire Spearman for the job.<sup>23</sup>

While tending to his teaching and clerical duties, Hudson settled into his new life with his wife and son. During their first years together in Tallahassee, the

Hudsons lived in FAMC's Polkinghorne Village. After patiently saving money, Hudson finally had enough to purchase a newly built house from agriculture professor Benjamin L. Perry, Sr. In 1951, the family moved into their new residence: a one-story home adjacent to the campus. The three-lot, corner property sat on 712 Gamble Street, an unpaved road enveloped by Spanish moss covered trees and evergreen shrubbery. Hudson turned one bedroom into a study, filling shelf after shelf with books. At dusk, he and James Lagarde often came outside to play with the family dog. Augustine, who opted not to teach while in Tallahassee, spent her days as a homemaker and "amateur horticulturalist." Throughout weekdays, she cared for her sizable home orchard and attended local black women's garden club meetings. James Lagarde attended the nearby Lucy Moten Laboratory Training School, run by FAMC's division of education. On nights and weekends, the family enjoyed going to campus for lectures, theatre productions, Lee Hall movies, and sporting events. Overall, they kept their distance from Tallahassee's segregated eateries, stores, and parks. Hudson, for example, usually shopped for clothes whenever he traveled north for conferences or family visits in cities such as Boston and Detroit. The Hudsons' decision to purchase a car soon permitted them to

attend even more black community gatherings across town without patronizing the Jim Crow bus system. A family friend, Emmett W. Bashful, helped Hudson prepare for car ownership by teaching him how to drive an automatic shift vehicle during the late 1940s.<sup>24</sup>

Bashful, a WWII veteran and alumnus of both Southern University and the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, had known the Hudsons in Baton Rouge as a fellow member of Mount Zion First African Baptist Church. He and Hudson shared a commitment to expanding student and church participation in the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). Bashful advised the campus NAACP chapter and appeared at Minister's Institutes to lecture on topics such as "The Church and Political Activity." The two were particularly excited by the NAACP's groundbreaking victory in the 1946 *Smith v. Allwright* U.S. Supreme Court case, which struck down "white primaries" and opened the way for millions of black southerners to help select Democratic nominees. Another watershed event occurred when President Harry S. Truman - targeting black northern voters in his uphill 1948 election battle - desegregated the armed forces and announced his support for federal legislation against lynching, poll taxes, and other forms of racial injustice. Truman's

subsequent triumph - despite a Dixiecrat rebellion that cost him South Carolina, Mississippi, Louisiana, and Alabama - illustrated the increasing leverage black voters now held in Democratic Party and national affairs. Hudson and Bashful applauded Florida NAACP leader Harry T. Moore's work to capitalize on the new opportunity to use the ballot in the black freedom struggle by launching voter registration drives, lobbying against legislation designed to obstruct black voting rights, and endorsing candidates. They also looked favorably upon his support for two major NAACP court battles that began in 1949: the legal defense of four black Groveland men falsely accused of raping a white woman and a desegregation lawsuit against the University of Florida. The increasingly aggressive push for black civil rights escalated racial tensions across the state, as revealed by a rash of violence acts directed against Jewish, Catholic and black residential areas. It culminated on Christmas Day 1951, when a house bombing claimed the lives of Moore and his wife, Henrietta. Moore's assassination was a setback for Hudson, Bashful, and the IMA members who hoped to get Tallahassee's black middle class more involved in local NAACP campaigns against Jim Crow. It showed there was a growing backlash against

Florida civil rights activism that threatened to destroy the lives of those who stood up against the status quo.<sup>25</sup>

"Civility" presented another obstacle to galvanizing Tallahassee's black community against segregation. Similar to numerous other southern communities, Tallahassee's white city fathers used civility as a device to control the community's race relations agenda by regulating the boundaries of acceptable discourse. Civility established consensus as the prerequisite to social change, meaning that white leaders would only alter the status quo voluntary on their own terms and timeline. Blacks had to remain patient. Civility also placed a gentler face on racial oppression. Whites emphasized that they did not want violence and would remain open to discussing social change as long blacks approached them in a "reasonable" and "dignified" fashion. Blacks could not be disruptive. In this way, civility emphasized good manners over substantive action. Additionally, civility prohibited questioning the American system of governance. Blacks could request changes, but only through a carefully worded script of patriotism and capitalism that emphasized the governance system's inherent "goodness." All together, civility functioned as a type of social contract in individual communities. Blacks received guarantees of relative

safety, open communication, and incremental (though often only symbolic) progress toward ameliorating racial hardships as long as they did not obstruct everyday business, political, or social norms. To many black Tallahasseeans, this arrangement seemed to work well. For example, even after the 1944 *Smith V. Allwright* ruling, blacks in Tallahassee saw very little (if any) of the intimidation and threats directed at potential black voters in other Florida cities. As numerous black citizens across Florida received death threats, were attacked, or had their houses bombed when they attempted to vote in the 1946 Democratic primary, Tallahassee's black men and women cast their ballots without any significant hostility.<sup>26</sup>

Having formed their organization during the mid-1940s, a period during which civility appeared to be producing peace and progress, the IMA members found little support for their message that blacks needed to exhibit greater militancy against segregation. Whenever a major racial incident occurred, white city officials summoned older conservative black leaders to help them resolve it. The local power structure largely ignored the IMA ministers. A fortuitous development in 1952, however, set the stage for the IMA to become a stronger force in city affairs. That year, an energetic 38-year old preacher named Charles

Kenzie Steele accepted the pastorship of one of Tallahassee's most influential black churches and, shortly afterward, joined the IMA. A native of Bluefield, West Virginia, Steele had earned his baccalaureate degree from Morehouse College. There he, like Hudson, became a mentee of School of Religion Director and then-interim President Charles DuBois Hubert. An exemplar of the sacred call tradition and black Social Gospel leadership, Steele worked vigorously to improve the lives of the black congregations he subsequently led in Georgia and Alabama. He served Montgomery's Hall Street Baptist Church from 1938 to 1945 and again from 1949 to 1952. In 1944, Steele backed a lawsuit against the state "competency test" used to bar black voter registration. During his second stint in Montgomery, he continued to fight for black voting rights along with another minister with whom he developed strong camaraderie, Dexter Avenue Baptist Pastor Vernon Johns. Johns, a graduate of Oberlin College and the University of Chicago, was another one of the activist ministers whom Hudson had brought to speak at FAMC. Johns bluntly condemned white Christians who justified racism in Jesus' name and blasted black docility that abetted the race's disenfranchisement and dehumanization. He personally resisted humiliating treatment on public accommodations



such as buses and encouraged all other black citizens to do the same. Steele's friendship with Johns further inflamed his sense of increasing impatience with segregated norms and desire to use the church to combat them. In 1952, Steele brought this passion for social justice to Tallahassee's Bethel Missionary Baptist Church, a large congregation comprised of a broad cross section of the black community. As a Bethel pulpit associate, Hudson responded with excitement to Steele's appointment and welcomed him into the IMA. Like his predecessor William M. Burns, a former IMA president, Steele became an active member of the alliance. He also regularly spoke at FAMC's religious activities. Steele, more than any other minister in Tallahassee, shared Hudson's zeal for social change; his arrival brought a new boost of vigor to the IMA's efforts.<sup>27</sup>

### **Preaching Personalism on the National Stage**

Edgar S. Brightman's 1953 death had brought a new sense of sentimental value to a project Hudson started the previous year. After turning down at least one earlier offer, Hudson had accepted the position of editor (and sole writer) of the *Young Adult Quarterly* lessons for the Sunday School Board of the National Baptist Convention, U.S.A. (NBC-USA). The job gave him an opportunity to reach

millions of teenaged youths, Sunday School teachers, and ministers in America's largest black religious denomination. In 1953, NBC-USA boasted 24,415 churches and 4,526,847 members. Hudson's lessons reflected his desire to promote Personalistic social ethics, spread militant reconciliation theology, and prompt young people to action against Jim Crow. In the wake of Brightman's passing, they also permitted him to pay homage to his late advisor's influence upon his philosophical thought.<sup>28</sup>

Consistent with his theological liberalism, Hudson challenged his readers not to dwell on "stultifying literalisms" when they studied the Bible. He urged men and women to seek truth by reflecting upon their personal experiences in attempting to lead virtuous lives, rather than relying upon dogma to answer their questions about the divine. "Christian theology is subject to the test of Christians in action," he wrote. Additionally, in his instructions to Sunday School teachers, Hudson suggested that they embrace scientific discovery as a complement to faith by bringing philosophers, sociologists, and cultural anthropologists into their classrooms. Brightman's *Moral Laws* also had a strong presence in Hudson's articles. For example, in a lesson entitled "Problems of the Christian Conscience," he emphasized the importance of what Brightman

had termed the "Law of Consequences." "We are still under obligation to be concerned about the consequences of our action upon others and upon ourselves as the actors or agents," Hudson said. "The law of consequences is binding upon all moral agents. Otherwise moral action is rendered vacuous." Militant reconciliation theology stood as another key component of Hudson's weekly teachings. He described Jesus as a man who was "impatient when faced with most man-made barriers. He saw in them something that was inimical to life at its moral and spiritual best." Going into detail, Hudson noted that "nationality, race, caste, sex, age, and wealth are some of the situations which mark man-made barriers. Religion itself too frequently becomes a participant rather than a corrector." The answer, Hudson declared, was for Christians to follow Jesus' example by actively combating all man-made barriers which inhibited the creation of the Kingdom of God. "Jesus may be looked upon today as our exhibit number one in the transcendence or removal of barriers that violate the highest interest of the human spirit," he stated. Christians had a moral duty to approach this task in a bold manner, even if it placed them at odds with the government. "It can be observed that freedom in our times is not infrequently threatened by the appointed guardians of the state," Hudson wrote. "The

problems of minority groups on the national and international basis reveal situations in which there is [a] critical need for courage and Christian statesmanship." Through this verbiage, Hudson affirmed militant reconciliation theology's call for nonviolent, civil disobedience against Jim Crow.<sup>29</sup>

Hudson's lessons shaped the NBC-USA Sunday School discussions which struggled with the spiritual meanings of two ground-shaking assaults against Jim Crow. On June 18, 1953, Hudson's former church home in Baton Rouge, Louisiana became the headquarters for a citywide boycott against the segregated bus system. The Rev. Theodore Judson Jemison, pastor of Mount Zion Baptist, emerged as the protest's leader. As president of the United Defense League (UDL) - a body that brought various black civic organizations together to coordinate the effort - he supervised the strategy sessions, carpool, mass meetings, and fundraising activities. After a six-day standoff that forced the bus company to lose \$1,600 per day, the UDL accepted a compromise that reserved the two side front seats of each bus for whites and the long rear seat for blacks. Men and women of any race could sit in between those areas on a first-come, first-served basis. Additionally, having started writing his lessons shortly after the NAACP bundled

a group of public school desegregation lawsuits into the "Brown v. Board of Education" case, Hudson crafted his Personalistic messages against "superficial distinctions among men" to complement the court challenge's opposition to "separate-but-equal." As *Brown* went through its second round of U.S. Supreme Court oral arguments under newly installed Chief Justice Earl Warren, NBC-USA Sunday School teachers and students read Hudson's words which depicted nonviolent social conflict against segregation as a tool for building the Kingdom of God. On May 17, 1954, just over a month after Hudson's final *Young Adult Quarterly* lesson appeared in print, the Supreme Court issued a favorable ruling in the Brown case.<sup>30</sup>

Riding *Brown's* momentum, Hudson and the IMA attempted to rally Tallahassee's black community into new campaigns against Jim Crow norms. That year, the group wrote the downtown McCrory's Store with a complaint about its refusal to seat or serve blacks at its front counter. They asked the manager to "take steps immediately to remedy this condition." The IMA ministers also supported their colleague Steele in his successful bid for the local NAACP's presidency. Beginning his new duties in 1954, Steele joined Harry T. Moore's successor - NAACP Field Secretary Robert W. Saunders - in speaking out against

discrimination in state employment as well as all legal and extralegal devices designed to delay *Brown's* implementation. At Florida A&M (which had become a university with the abbreviation "FAMU" in 1953), Hudson worked to bring additional speakers who would encourage the campus' students to join the post-*Brown* fight against segregation. One was his Colgate-Rochester friend and NBC-USA President Joseph H. Jackson. On May 31, 1954 - just two weeks after the *Brown* decision's announcement, Jackson delivered FAMU's baccalaureate ceremony sermon. In his address, Jackson hailed *Brown* as an affirmation of the U.S. Constitution's guarantee of equal rights for all and a step forward in the Cold War's battles against communism. Despite his democratic socialist leanings, Hudson echoed similar themes in his campus talks by using the black civil religious jeremiad promoted by the Rankin network. For example, Hudson's February 26, 1955 sermon entitled "Toward World Brotherhood" urged a FAMU audience to fight for racial justice as a way of applying Jesus' teachings and exemplifying America's best values. In it, he declared that "the ideal of Brotherhood is a Christian ideal. It represents the essence of the teachings of Jesus." He also identified brotherhood as a fundamental American value by quoting from the patriotic song "America the Beautiful":

"America, America. God shed his grace on Thee, and crown thy good with Brotherhood from sea to shining sea."

Building upon those two points, Hudson asserted: "When man sees man just as a man and not his skin, creed, or color Justice will be given to every man as you would a brother." His talk outlined four critical steps toward this goal in race relations: respecting differences, acknowledging the accomplishments of others, recognizing the human family's interdependence, and practicing the Golden Rule.<sup>31</sup>

### **Conclusion**

Between 1946 and 1955, Hudson applied his Personalistic philosophy by working to bring new momentum to the fight for social justice in Tallahassee, the community he embraced as his permanent home. A critical part of his efforts centered on improving the quality of the city's black leadership and black religious education. With the support of FAMU's administration, he strengthened the campus' connection to the Rankin network and adopted militant reconciliation theology as a cornerstone of the institution's worship and religious study activities. As another reflection of his Personalistic value system, Hudson also used his chaplaincy to fight for better black hospital services and build interracial/interfaith clerical

alliances where ever he could. Frustrated by the slow pace of "civil" racial progress, he and other black ministers founded the IMA to agitate for faster social change. The group assisted Hudson as he coordinated campus programs designed to inspire students and local ministers to action against Jim Crow oppression. C.K. Steele's entry into the IMA's ranks, as well as his subsequent election to the city's NAACP presidency, gave the organization increased visibility and influence. While working locally, Hudson also sought to reach black churchgoers far beyond Tallahassee. On the eve of the Baton Rouge Bus Boycott and *Brown* decision, NBC-USA began publishing Hudson's *Young Adult Quarterly* articles. The lessons brought Hudson's teachings on Personalistic moral laws and militant reconciliation theology to the forefront black Baptist youth Sunday School education during a time of exciting possibilities for the civil rights cause. As another part of his strategic public language, Hudson used the black civil religious jeremiad to navigate the Cold War's rigid limitations on socially-acceptable protest. With this carefully crafted rhetoric, he pushed harder against segregation and attempted to galvanize greater black support behind his efforts to make its walls come tumbling down. In 1956, Hudson's FAMU students would fulfill his



high hopes by striking a blow against segregation that brought international attention to Florida's capital city.

## ENDNOTES

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<sup>1</sup> Dennis C. Dickerson, "African American Religious Intellectuals and the Theological Foundations of the Civil Rights Movement, 1930-55," *Church History* 74 (June 2005): 217-235.

<sup>2</sup> On the Fellowship of Religious Workers in Colleges and Universities for Negroes hereinafter "FRWCUN," see: Undated FRWCUN Rosters; "Summary of the Third Conference, FRWCUN: The Christian Approach to Racial Tension in the United States," 26-28 February 1943, Greensboro, North Carolina; J.R.E. Lee to Howard Thurman, 19 November 1942; Thurman to Lee, 7 January 1942; Thurman to Lee, 21 January 1943, all in Box 4045, Howard Thurman Papers, Manuscript Division, Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University, Washington, D.C.; Florida Agricultural & Mechanical College (FAMC) Bulletin, 1941-1942, 5, Southeastern Regional Black Archives, Research Center and Museum, Florida Agricultural & Mechanical University, Tallahassee, Fla., hereinafter "Black Archives."

<sup>3</sup> James Hudson, interview by Jackson Ice, 1978, transcript, Tallahassee Civil Rights Oral History Collection, Special Collections, Florida State University Library, Tallahassee, Fla., n.p., hereinafter "Ice interview with Hudson"; James Hudson to Edgar S. Brightman, 21 June 1946, in Folder 9, Box 17, Edgar Sheffield Brightman Papers, Howard Gotlieb Archival Research Center, Boston University, Boston, Mass., hereinafter "Brightman Papers."

<sup>4</sup> Leedell W. Neyland, *Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University: A Centennial History, 1887-1987*, 2nd ed. (Tallahassee: Florida A&M University Foundation, 1987), 12-46, 171-185.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 168, 172-73; William H. Gray, Jr. to Martin Luther King, Jr., 6 April 1960, 408-409, Clayborne Carson, Tenisha Armstrong, Susan Carson, Adrienne Clay, Kieran Taylor, eds., *The Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr., Volume V: Threshold of a New Decade, January 1959-December 1960* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).

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<sup>6</sup> Charles U. Smith, interview by author, 19 July 2006, Tallahassee, Fla.; Hudson to Brightman, 10 July 1946, 23 July 1946 and 10 October 1946, Brightman Papers; FAMC Bulletin, 1947-1948, 16; FAMC Bulletin, 1948-1949, 28.

<sup>7</sup> Ice interview with Hudson; FAMC Bulletin, 1947-1948, 5; FAMC Bulletin, 1948-1949, 15; "Ministerial Unit Installs Officers," *Evening Independent*, 6 April 1949.

<sup>8</sup> James Hudson to William Stuart Nelson, 5 March 1948, Folder 4, Box 4, James Hudson Papers, Black Archives, hereinafter, "Hudson Papers;" Dennis C. Dickerson, "Religion and the Civil Rights Movement in Transnational Perspective: The Nelsons in India, 1946-1947," paper presented at Vanderbilt University History Seminar, 18 February 2008, Nashville, Tenn.

<sup>9</sup> William Stuart Nelson, 1940-1941 Annual Report of the Howard University School of Religion, Moorland-Spingarn Library, Howard University, Washington, D.C., hereinafter "HUSR Annual Report"; James Hudson and Emory A. Wadlowe, "A Study of Religious Attitudes and Concepts of Florida A. and M. College Students," n.p., Folder 4, Box 4, Hudson Papers.

<sup>10</sup> Hudson to Brightman, 12 March 1948, Brightman to Hudson, 15 March 1948; Hudson to Brightman, 26 July 1948, all in Brightman Papers; Conference Program, Institute of Religion, 23-24 April 1948, Howard University, Washington, D.C., 1947-48 HUSR Annual Report; James Hudson, "Socialist Thought in America in the Light of Christianity," *Journal of Religious Thought* 6 (Spring-Summer 1949): 108-146.

<sup>11</sup> William Stuart Nelson, ed., *The Christian Way in Race Relations* (New York: Harper, 1948), vii; William Chafe, ed., *The Achievement of American Liberalism: The New Deal and Its Legacies* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), xi; Cynthia Taylor, *A. Philip Randolph: The Religious Journey of an African American Labor Leader* (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 174.

<sup>12</sup> List of Proposed Chapters for *The Christian Way in Race Relations*, 1945-46 HUSR Annual Report, appendix; Nelson, 4, 45, 57, 198, 219, 224.

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<sup>13</sup> Howard Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited* (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1949; reprint, Boston: Beacon Press, 1996).

<sup>14</sup> Reinhold Niebuhr, *Moral Man and Immoral Society: A Study in Ethics and Politics* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1932; reprint, 1934), 254; 1945-46 HUSR Annual Report, 15; Paul Tillich, "Redemption in Cosmic and Social History" *Journal of Religious Thought*, 3 (Autumn-Winter 1946): 17-27; Richard Niebuhr, "The Norm of the Church," *ibid.*, 4 (Autumn-Winter 1946-47): 5-15; Edgar Brightman, "Autonomy and Theonomy," *ibid.*, 9 (Autumn-Winter 1951-52): 6-39; Reinhold Niebuhr, "Love and Law in Protestantism and Catholicism," *ibid.*, 9 (Spring-Summer 1952): 95-111; Harold DeWolf, "The Theological Rejection of Natural Theology: An Evaluation," *ibid.*, 15 (Spring-Summer 1958): 91-106; Frank T. Wilson, "The Role of the Young Men's Christian Association," in Nelson, 143-161; Frank T. Wilson to James Hudson, 3 December 1951; Hudson to Brightman, 6 December 1951; Hudson to Wilson, 6 December 1951; Brightman to Hudson, 14 December 1951; Hudson to Brightman, 3 January 1952; Hudson to Brightman, 17 March 1952, all in Brightman Papers.

<sup>15</sup> Brightman to Hudson, 24 September 1952 and Hudson to Brightman, 10 January 1953, Brightman Papers; James Hudson, "The Social Thought of E.S. Brightman," [draft] Folder 4, Box 14, Hudson Papers; James Hudson, "The Social Thought of E.S. Brightman," *Journal of Religious Thought* 10 (Autumn-Winter 1952-53): 18-24; "Notes and News," *Journal of Philosophy* 50 (April 1953): 283.

<sup>16</sup> Hudson and Wadlowe, "A Study of Religious Attitudes and Concepts of Florida A. and M. College Students," n.p.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> Mordecai W. Johnson to James Hudson, 1 May 1951, Folder 4, Box 2; Benjamin E. Mays to Hudson, 8 November 1951, Folder 4, Box 2; Howard Thurman to Hudson, 10 July 1953, Folder 7, Box 2, all in Hudson Papers; "Moses G. Miles" and "David H. Brooks," in G. James Fleming and Christian E. Burckel, eds., *Who's Who in Colored America* [Supplement] 7th ed. (Yonkers-on-Hudson: Christian E.

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Burkel & Associates, 1950), 373, 590; "Ministerial Unit Installs Officers"; "Ministerial Group in Tallahassee to Install Officers," *Evening Independent*, 24 March 1949.

<sup>20</sup> Hudson to Vernon Johns, 8 February 1952, Folder 6, Box 4; Hudson to Maynard Jackson, 21 November 1950, Folder 4, Box 4; Hudson to William Holmes Borders, 26 January 1950, Folder 3, Box 2; Hudson to Gardner C. Taylor, 26 February 1954, Folder 8, Box 4, all in Hudson Papers; "Religious Week Services Close With Prayers," *St. Petersburg Times* 5 March 1954; "Maynard Jackson Jr." (Family-Placed Death Notice), *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, 25-28 June 2003; Clayborne Carson, Tenisha Armstrong, Susan Carson, Erin Cook, and Susan Englander, *The Martin Luther King, Jr., Encyclopedia* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 2008), 36-37; Adam Fairclough, *Race & Democracy: The Civil Rights Struggle in Louisiana, 1915-1972* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1995), 102; Program for Minister's Institute held 31 July-4 August 1950 at Florida Agricultural & Mechanical College, Tallahassee, Fla., Brightman Papers.

<sup>21</sup> Hudson to George W. Gore, Jr., 8 February 1954, Folder 8, Box 4; Edwin R. Hartz to Hudson 2 April 1958, Folder 2, Box 3; Hudson to Julius Kravetz, 27 April 1954, Folder 8, Box 4; Hudson to Sylvan Lebow, 4 September 1956, Folder 15, Box 5; Lebow to Hudson, 26 February 1958, all in Hudson Papers; "White Church Cancels Chaplain's Address," *Chicago Defender*, 5 March 1949.

<sup>22</sup> FAMC Bulletin, 1948-1949, 27; Neyland, 176-177; Julianne Hare, *Tallahassee: A Capital City History* (Charleston: Arcadia Publishing, 2005), 114-116.

<sup>23</sup> S. Paul Schilling, "Paul E. Johnson," *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association* 48 (1974-1975): 174-175; Robert C. Leslie, "Religion and the Mentally Ill," *American Journal of Nursing* 51 (April 1951): 255-256; E.W. Spearman to George W. Gore, Jr., 13 December 1955, Folder 9, Box 2, Hudson Papers; Hudson to Robert C. Leslie, 11 January 1954; Hudson to S.T. Stafford, 19 March 1954; Hudson to S.T. Stafford, 18 August 1954; Hudson to Daniel H. Sandstedt, 22 October 1954, all in Folder 8, Box 4, Hudson Papers.

<sup>24</sup> James Lagarde Hudson, son of James Hudson, interview by author, 8 July 2008, Washington, D.C., hereinafter "J.L.

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Hudson interview;" Emmett W. Bashful, telephone interview by author, 27 June 2007, hereinafter "Bashful interview."

<sup>25</sup> Bashful interview; see: Darlene Clark Hine, *Black Victory: The Rise and Fall of the White Primary in Texas* (Columbia, Mo.: University of Missouri Press, 2003); John Egerton, *Speak Now Against the Day: The Generation Before the Civil Rights Movement in the South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995); Larry O. Rivers, "Leaning on the Everlasting Arms": Virgil Darnell Hawkins's Early Life and Entry into the Civil Rights Struggle" *Florida Historical Quarterly* 86 (Winter 2008): 279-308; on Harry T. Moore, see: Ben Green, *Before His Time: The Untold Story of Harry T. Moore, America's First Civil Rights Martyr* (New York: Free Press, 1999).

<sup>26</sup> See: William H. Chafe, *Civilities and Civil Rights: Greensboro, North Carolina and the Black Struggle for Freedom* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981); Charles U. Smith and Lewis M. Killian, *The Tallahassee Bus Protest* (New York: Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith, 1958), 5.

<sup>27</sup> Gregory Padgett, "C.K. Steele: A Biography," (Ph.D. diss., Florida State University, 1994), 17-30, 39-55; Ralph E. Luker, "Johns the Baptist," *A.M.E. Church Review*, 118 (July-September 2002): 26-31; Taylor Branch, *Parting the Waters: America in the King Years, 1954-63* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1989), 14; Hudson to C.K. Steele, 4 May 1953, Folder 7, Box 4, Hudson Papers; "Ministerial Unit Installs Officers."

<sup>28</sup> On the National Baptist Convention, USA's membership, see: Frank S. Mead, *Handbook of Denominations in the United States*, rev. and enlarged ed. (New York: Abingdon Press, 1955), 216; George W. Harvey to James Hudson, 16 August 1950, Folder 3, Box 2; Hudson to Harvey, 18 August 1950, Folder 4, Box 4; Harvey to Hudson, 18 November 1952 and Harvey to Hudson, 10 December 1952, Folder 6, Box 2, all in Hudson Papers.

<sup>29</sup> For James Hudson's Sunday School lessons, see the following titles in the drafts of his *Young Adult Quarterly* articles: "The Whole Armor of God (Temperance)," 9 August 1953, Folder 7, Box 14; "Christian Behavior," 12 July 1953, Folder 7, Box 14; "Problems of the Christian Conscience,"

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24 May 1953, Folder 6, Box 14; "Crossing Man-Made Barriers" 24 January 1954, Folder 9, Box 14; "Courage for Christian Living," 13 September 1953, Folder 7, Box 14, all in Hudson Papers.

<sup>30</sup> Hudson stopped writing for the *Young Adult Quarterly* after the 1953-1954 year due to the NBC-USA's long delay in paying him. See: Hudson to T.J. Jemison, 3 November 1953, Folder 7, Box 4; Hudson to Joseph H. Jackson, 4 December 1953, Folder Folder 7, Box 4; A.M. Townsend to Hudson, 19 January 1954, Folder 8, Box 2, all in Hudson Papers; on the Baton Rouge Bus Boycott, see: Aldon D. Morris, *The Origins of the Civil Rights Movement: Black Communities Organizing for Change* (New York: Free Press, 1984), 17-24; on the Brown case, see: Waldo E. Martin, Jr., *Brown v. Board of Education: A Brief History with Documents* (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 1998).

<sup>31</sup> Moses G. Miles to C.E. Johnson, 16 November 1954, Folder 8, Box 4; Hudson to Joseph H. Jackson, 14 July 1954, Folder 7, Box 4; Hudson, "Toward World Brotherhood," *Young Adult Quarterly* [Drafts] 26 February 1955, Folder 1, Box 14, all in Hudson Papers; Padgett, 53-54; Robert W. Saunders, Sr., *Bridging the Gap: Continuing the Florida NAACP Legacy of Harry T. Moore* (Tampa: University of Tampa Press, 2000), 97-98; Cal Adams, "FAMU Presents Degrees to 222," *St. Petersburg Times*, 1 June 1954.

## CHAPTER V

### "TAKING JESUS SERIOUSLY"

In 1956, the ideational and organizational seeds James Hudson sowed in Tallahassee bloomed into foundational components of the Inter-Civic Council (ICC), the local movement center that coordinated the Tallahassee Bus Boycott. As defined by sociologist Aldon D. Morris, a local movement center is "a social organization within the community of a subordinate group, which mobilizes, organizes, and coordinates collective action." Local movement centers function through an "indigenous base" which includes the dominated group's institutions, networks, leaders, money, and cultural elements. The militant reconciliation theology Hudson channeled through the curriculum and speaker rotation for Florida Agricultural & Mechanical University's (FAMU) religious life program directly informed the actions of the students who initiated a May 28, 1956 boycott against Tallahassee's segregated bus system. The student body's bold move gave Hudson momentum to transform the Interdenominational Ministerial Alliance (IMA), which he had played a lead role in founding, into a leadership structure for the ensuing



transportation protest. IMA members brought the black community together to form the ICC and became its top officers. Throughout the boycott, Hudson used militant reconciliation theology to help shape the ICC's public pronouncements. His Rankin network connections also assisted him as he led the ICC's internal education program on noncooperation. Indeed, the ideas and organizations to which Hudson belonged played an instrumental role in the ICC's establishment and operation.<sup>1</sup>

Rankin network members such as Hudson smiled like proud fathers as the Montgomery Bus Boycott unfolded. On March 25, 1956, close to four months after the protest started, Hudson rose to the pulpit lectern of Howard University's Andrew Rankin Chapel in Washington, D.C. to deliver the Palm Sunday sermon. There, less than three miles away from a White House funneling billions into a nuclear arms race against the Soviet Union, he pointed to the ongoing Alabama noncooperation campaign as proof that there was a better way to resolve conflicts. In his steady and brisk-cadenced voice, Hudson went on to describe the southern city's ongoing struggle as a direct application of the teachings advanced by the national community of religious intellectuals associated with Howard. The president of the boycott's coordinating organization,

Martin Luther King, Jr., was a student of the militant reconciliation theology that Rankin network members had developed during their early academic and clerical careers. King embraced prominent network figures such as Benjamin Mays, Mordecai Johnson, and Howard Thurman as mentors and role models; they inspired him to become a dedicated pupil of the black Social Gospel concept they had fused with Mohandas K. Gandhi's "science of nonviolence." In his 1956 Palm Sunday sermon, Hudson proudly identified King as a minister who shared the Rankin network membership's core belief that Jesus had called for nonviolent uprisings against tyranny in order to show the world "the road to victory is not the sword, but militant reconciling love."<sup>2</sup> He further commented:

Isn't it strange that there are those today in church and state who, whatever lip service they would pay to Christ, would think it worse than unfortunate if many people should take him seriously? The Rev. [Martin Luther] King of Montgomery is apparently taking Jesus seriously in his effort to secure justice for people of color. What is this unheard of before that the unarmed make war, and the slain hath the gain?<sup>3</sup>

Two months after that address, the hostile white response to two FAMU students who defied Tallahassee's Jim Crow bus system pushed blacks in Hudson's own community to follow Montgomery's lead. On May 27, 1956 two FAMU students - Wilhemina Jakes and Carrie Patterson - stepped

onto a city bus and dropped their ten-cent fares into the meter. Finding the vehicle crowded, the two friends sat down in the only seats that were available, located next to a white woman sitting behind the driver. "You girls can't sit there," bus operator Max Coggins snapped. "Why?" Jakes asked. "You just can't sit there," he said with a tone of finality. Jakes stood up, walked over to Coggins and told him: "Give me back my dime and I will get off." "I can't give you your dime," he retorted. With that, Jakes silently turned around and returned to her seat, where she and Patterson remained put. The act of defiance echoed a similar incident that had occurred over five months earlier in Montgomery, Alabama. On December 1, 1955 a 42-year old department store worker named Rosa Parks had refused a bus driver's order to relinquish her colored section seat to white passengers. Having also challenged a white driver's authority, Jakes and Patterson headed toward the same as outcome as the Montgomery seamstress. Coggins pulled the bus into a nearby service station, parked, and called the police. Officers soon arrived, escorted Jakes and Patterson off the bus, and drove them to the police station. There, the women were charged with "being in a position to incite a riot." A fellow student, who had been on the bus with them, called FAMU. Moses General Miles,

Hudson's friend and the dean of students, arrived at the jail and posted a \$25.00 bond to release the women. Later that night, a cross was burned in front of the off-campus house Jakes and Patterson shared. The women fled the residence and moved to a campus dormitory for the rest of the night.<sup>4</sup>

Although Jakes and Patterson's arrests occurred in 1956, local white reactions were rooted in a long history of unease with the black population. For more than 100 years, blacks had been the majority in Leon County. Ever since blacks tilled local cotton plantations as slaves, police powers and social norms were structured around maintaining control of them. At the turn of the century in 1900, blacks still comprised more than 80 percent of the population. Beginning with the Great Migration, that percentage steadily declined as African Americans left for the north. The exodus, though, did not signal the end of white anxiety over the community's large black population. Even after the 1950 U.S. Census revealed that the number of blacks had fallen below 51 percent, whites remained outnumbered by blacks in the heart of the Tallahassee. Unlike whites, who were dispersed in suburban areas across the county, blacks were concentrated in the city. Most lived in areas such as the Bond community that surrounded

FAMU's campus or the Frenchtown and Smokey Hollow neighborhoods near downtown. The bus system served as a bridge between the black and white communities. It was used largely by black women who worked as domestics for whites. All together, blacks comprised 60 to 70 percent of the bus company's ridership.<sup>5</sup>

During World War II, local buses became a bitterly contested space between white residents and black soldiers stationed at nearby Camp Gordon Johnston and Dale Mabry Airfield. Young black servicemen deliberately engaged in fractious behavior which challenged traditional southern racial etiquette. Many refused to sit at the back of buses. These racial tensions spread beyond the bounds of public transportation into the broader community. Denied access to most of the on-base recreational facilities provided for their white counterparts, black GIs looked forward to spending their leaves at Frenchtown's restaurants, theaters, and night clubs. En route to and inside this district, they frequently clashed with local whites. Examples are numerous. In November 1942, violence erupted when a group of white civilian workers reacted angrily to a black soldier's attempt to purchase a drink from a "Whites-only" vending machine. A fight between the white workers and a number of black servicemen followed,

resulting in injuries to eight people. Another serious confrontation happened in October 1944. On that occasion, a group of black Dale Mabry military police (MP) attempted to arrest a black soldier. White Tallahassee police officers with drawn pistols arrived on the scene and demanded custody of the suspect. The white officers' presence angered the black soldiers, who quickly surrounded the Tallahassee policemen and refused to let them take the black suspect. The worst clash occurred in April 1945. After receiving their overseas combat orders, approximately 250 black soldiers from Dale Mabry and Gordon Johnston raced into Frenchtown to enjoy the final evening before their deployment. Some unruly troops heavily damaged the neighborhood by hurling bottles and rocks and looting black-owned businesses. The declaration of martial law only served to further inflame the situation, leading black GIs to riot against tear gas-throwing city police and tommy gun-armed MPs for several hours.<sup>6</sup> Following this occurrence, a detachment of MPs was left in the city temporarily at the request of the Tallahassee city manager.

Although Jakes and Patterson's defiant act took place more than a decade after the Frenchtown disturbances, it reopened old wounds and aggravated new worries. The two women were arrested for "placing themselves in a position

to incite a riot." The charge reflected the perceived danger unarmed white bus operators faced as they enforced segregation in a majority black area with a history of violent racial conflict. Drivers knew they stood no chance in a brawl against a bus filled with irate black passengers. Thus, any affront to the operator's authority was a cause for fright. Paranoia ignited by Red Scare-induced fears of "Communists" urging blacks to rise against whites and topple democracy further escalated the alarm surrounding the incident. Many white southerners already believed the *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling and Montgomery Bus Boycott were part of a "Communist conspiracy" to destroy America one city at time. To some white Tallahasseeans, the bus debacle seemed to bring that unnerving national pattern to the doorsteps. The burning cross placed in front of Jakes and Patterson's house carried an unmistakable symbolism. There were local whites who were ready to barge into black residential areas for the purpose of reasserting their notions of "Christian" racial superiority against the specter of "godless," Communist-inspired anarchy.<sup>7</sup>

Later that night, FAMU President George W. Gore, Jr. summoned Hudson and a handful of other faculty members, administrators, and student leaders to his home. The

chaplain recalled that Gore "was not at ease" with what had transpired and "was hoping that somehow this might be contained." Hudson believed that white city officials had contacted the president and told him to discourage FAMU's students from launching disruptive demonstrations. Gore faced a tough situation which paralleled the one Alabama State College President H. Councill Trenholm, Jr. had encountered when the Montgomery Bus Boycott started. Like Alabama State, FAMU depended upon the state legislature for funding; any protest linked to campus could result in financial repercussions. Additionally, the thin veneer of Tallahassee's "progressive mystique," the unwritten code of race relations etiquette which consciously avoided public or violent racial confrontations, was cracking. If FAMU students engaged in "uncivil" protests, white leaders might not restrain violent elements in their community. "Uncivil" student unrest could also poison FAMU's relationship with the sizable number of local whites who displayed a large amount of pride in the university. Touting what they called a "Golden Age of Racial Harmony," white Tallahasseans frequently attended special campus events, such as concerts and seminars (although Florida State University, in most circumstances, remained off-limits to blacks). Coach Alonzo "Jake" Gaither's



championship football teams also received high accolades from white citizens. Additionally, city officials regularly reserved a place for band director William P. Foster's much beloved Marching 100 in all major parades. Moreover, each fall, local merchants enthusiastically welcomed returning black students into the back entrances and segregated sections of their businesses. Gore called upon Hudson and the others in attendance to help him protect FAMU from the backlash that an out-of-control student response might trigger.<sup>8</sup>

Although he believed Gore had FAMU's best interests at heart, Hudson knew it was too late to contain student anger. The hundreds of soldiers-in-training and black veterans in FAMU's student body were particularly outraged by what had occurred on Jakes and Patterson's lawn. As part of its federal land-grant mission, FAMU provided military training in its curriculum. Beginning in 1902 all male students were required to participate in the "Auxiliary Cadet Corps," in which a "college commandant" introduced them to drills such as marching, physical training, and daily inspection. Auxiliary cadets were not expected to join the armed services upon graduation; the regimentation was simply a tool to teach them discipline and respect for authority. Former President William H.

Gray, Jr. built upon this foundation by persuading the U.S. Army to establish a Senior Anti-Aircraft Unit of the Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC) at the institution, which he believed would enhance FAMU's national reputation. Launched during the 1948-1949 school year, FAMU's ROTC consisted of a two-year basic program that was mandatory for all male students and a two-year advanced program which led to a post-graduation reserve commission in the Army. The advanced program, which required an application, was popular due to its generous perks. Individuals enrolled in the senior unit received a monthly monetary allowance and free uniforms which they were permitted to wear at non-ROTC activities; these two benefits were welcomed by the large number of young men who came from poor backgrounds. Additionally, Gray successfully lobbied the state government and federal Veterans' Housing Authority to build a Veterans Housing Project at FAMU. Opened in 1948, it was named after James R. Polkinghorne, a former FAMU student and Tuskegee Airman who had lost his life on May 5, 1944 while leading a squadron of P-39 fighter planes in Italy. Polkinghorne Village had 170 units for married veterans and eleven barracks to house 250 single veterans. By 1949-1950, veterans utilizing their GI Bill benefits accounted for 415 of FAMU's 1,811 students. For several years,

Hudson and his family had lived in Polkinghorne, where the chaplain personally counseled his neighbors. Hudson understood that the presence of so many black men who had engaged in, or were preparing for, military combat had contributed to a campus atmosphere that had little tolerance for racial abuse.<sup>9</sup>

On Monday May 28, 1956, several factors converged to catalyze the student-initiated bus boycott. They were: the notions of black masculinity challenged by the cross burning, the defiant posture of the former and future soldiers in FAMU's student body, and the oppositional consciousness promoted by Hudson's religious life program. The blazing cross placed in front Jakes and Patterson's home carried an unambiguous gendered message. Whites had brought a symbol of self-professed "Christian" male superiority to the doorstep of unarmed black women who lived alone. The racialized image appealed to a long history of black female vulnerability to white male violence. After seeing it, Jakes and Patterson immediately fled to the campus for protection. If the male students had failed to display a strong public response to the incident, they would have appeared impotent in front of the women who looked to them for safety. The senior ROTC members and veterans quickly took the lead in organizing

their fellow students to strike back against the offense. Having received training in hand-to-hand fighting and munitions, these men were not ones to be easily intimidated by the threat of violence. Additionally, as individuals who had recently completed or committed themselves to military service, these students had little concern about being labeled "Communists" by detractors. All had publicly affirmed their willingness to place their lives at risk for their country; in doing so, they had professed their patriotism and personal claims to first-class citizenship. FAMU alumni remembered Hudson's role in their weekly training regimen. Hudson's Wednesday afternoon and Sunday morning chapel services were mandatory for all students. Auxiliary cadets were required to attend these assemblies wearing the official uniform of "a navy blue suit, black shoes, black tie, white shirt, and a blue garrison gap" bearing FAMU's initials. ROTC members wore their Army-issued attire. Frederick S. Humphries, a former senior ROTC member who took Hudson's logic course, attended the Lee Hall meeting at which students voted to launch the boycott. He recalled that the (Personalistic) language Hudson used in his sermons paralleled the language students chose to use as they started the protest. A Roman Catholic, Humphries remembered how Hudson emphasized the

dignity, value, and equality of all human life as well the moral obligation to resist evil. Brodes Hartley, the student body president who convened the Monday meeting, agreed. Also an ROTC cadet who had taken Hudson's logic course, Hartley credited the chaplain and visiting chapel speakers as sources of inspiration. Although he did not hold an off-campus church membership, Hartley remembered how themes Hudson had stressed in chapel - such as self-respect and fairness - were on his mind as he delivered his speech urging the student body to rise against the white aggression directed toward Jakes and Patterson.<sup>10</sup>

The Interdenominational Ministerial Alliance, which Hudson led as president, became the organizational vehicle that brought Tallahassee's adult black leadership into the boycott. Hudson and C.K. Steele decided to discuss the student protest at the IMA's regularly scheduled meeting on Tuesday, May 29 and invited a cross section of local black leaders to attend. The midday gathering at Bethel A.M.E. Church attracted representatives from the NAACP, Community Defense Club, Tallahassee Civic League, and state and local Business League. Passions flared as the group debated the best course of action. Some wanted to do nothing. Others said they were comfortable with backing the boycott only if it remained confined to FAMU. At the far end of the

spectrum, men like Hudson and Steele wanted the boycott to become a citywide campaign. In a final compromise, the attendees agreed to appoint a nine-member committee to meet with the city manager and bus company manager. The delegation, which included Hudson and Steele, was to express the group's support for the student protest and submit grievances about the treatment black riders received. Finally, an 8:00 P.M. meeting was scheduled at Bethel Missionary Baptist Church. There, the committee would report the city officials' responses to the broader black community.<sup>11</sup>

Tallahassee's black bus patrons frequently complained about irascible drivers who demeaned them on a daily basis. The Cities Transit Company operated under an ordinance that required it to "make and enforce reasonable rules and regulations providing for the segregation of the human races when more than one race is transported on the same bus." As noted by historian Glenda Alice Rabby, "Black riders sat from the rear of the bus forward to a white painted line, and whites sat in front of the line. Particularly galling to blacks were the requirements that they stand when a front row double or triple seat was occupied by one white person on predominantly black routes and that a black passenger had to relinquish a seat to a

white passenger if the bus was full." Hartley said that many FAMU students had clashed with bus operators over those brusque practices. "There have been series of incidents in which the bus drivers have humiliated the students of Florida A. and M. University," he told the Washington *Afro-American* newspaper in 1956. Although he had no knowledge of any students being arrested prior to Jakes and Patterson, he recalled: "In the past drivers have often called for the police to make a student stand up rather than sit in the white section."<sup>12</sup>

The dismissive posture of the city manager and bus company manager, who both told the IMA committee they could do nothing without the city commission's consent, helped push the greater black community toward Hudson and Steele's position. At the evening meeting at Bethel Missionary Baptist Church's sanctuary, a crowd of 1,500 unanimously voted to participate in the bus boycott and create a new umbrella organization to encompass the various civic groups which comprised Tallahassee's black leadership. This led to the Inter-Civic Council's (ICC) formation. IMA members dominated the officer list, with Steele elected president and Hudson tapped as chaplain. From the outset, the ICC modeled itself after the Montgomery Improvement Association (MIA), which was coordinating the bus boycott in Alabama's

capital city. Like the MIA, the ICC pledged itself to nonviolence. It also adopted an identical list of demands, calling for: (1) The right to be seated on a first come, first serve basis, (2) More courtesy by bus drivers, and (3) The employment of colored bus drivers on predominantly black routes. Additionally, the ICC began planning carpool operations to transport members who did not own automobiles and/or could not walk to work. Hudson, his wife Augustine, and son James Lagarde all volunteered to be drivers. With the ICC's creation, the boycott's leadership base moved from FAMU's campus to Tallahassee's autonomous black churches. The students had agreed to stay off the buses for the remaining two weeks of the school semester. They had neither the money nor organizational capacity to sustain a large scale protest. Black churches - with their built in-systems for fundraising, communication, and sharing critical resources such as cars - provided a better foundation for a local movement center.<sup>13</sup>

Anticipating threats and violence from white opponents, Hudson conducted a series of seminars on nonviolent resistance at Bethel M.B. ICC member Laura Dixie, who attended some of the sessions, recalled that Hudson walked the audience through hostile scenarios which could occur while they carpooling or walking to work and



advised them on how to respond. While it is unclear when or where Hudson gained knowledge about the practical application of Gandhian satyagraha, it is known that he reached out to Martin Luther King, Jr. for advisement. Hudson and the other ICC leaders sneaked King into town on numerous occasions to help them plan the boycott's strategy. King, who was still leading the MIA boycott at the time, had been receiving practical instruction in nonviolence from members of the Fellowship of Reconciliation, namely Bayard Rustin and Glenn Smiley. Accordingly, King was in a position to offer much valuable advice to Hudson on the specifics of applying Gandhian resistance methods. Hudson also mentioned that the ICC's commitment to nonviolence "has been accentuated in our movement by a close relationship with the Fellowship of Reconciliation," although he did not detail when this relationship began or what type of aid it entailed. Through his work to anchor the ICC in nonviolent philosophy and tactics, Hudson joined King in challenging boycotters to view their struggle as an effort to heal racial divisions - rather than a simple campaign to cripple bus segregation with the black community's economic power.<sup>14</sup>

Hudson's nonviolence workshops helped him bring militant reconciliation theology to the forefront of the

ICC's public identity. In a letter to William Stuart Nelson, who was then serving as the dean of Howard University, Hudson mentioned how he and other ICC officials constantly invoked Mohandas K. Gandhi's memory as they led the boycott. As Hudson explained to his friend and colleague, "the story of Gandhi and the Indian movement for freedom" were regularly referenced throughout the boycott and became a staple of its "religious character." Mentions of the Mahatma went hand-in-hand with the use of prayers, hymn selections, and preaching. Despite the fact that Gandhi was a Hindu, ICC members still considered his tactics to be appropriate methods for what Hudson had described as "taking Jesus seriously." According to Hudson, this reflected "a new social awakening and a demand that religion be relevant to the interest in social justice." The Rankin network's influence was also evident in the black civil religious jeremiad language Hudson incorporated into key ICC public statements. An ICC executive board declaration entitled "An Appeal to the People of Tallahassee for Moral Justice" offered an example. Appearing as a full page advertisement in the *Tallahassee Democrat*, the message countered claims that "outside agitators" had catalyzed the bus protest. The ICC, it said, "had its birth in the Church" and was "guided

by high religious and moral principles." The ad continued with an argument that Tallahassee's black citizens were "loyal Americans" who would have had no reason to boycott at all "if all bus patrons were treated as Americans." Hudson's nonviolence seminars - along with the regular use of militant reconciliation theology's language of Christianity, peace, and patriotism - urged boycotters to remain calm and disciplined in the face of aggression. This helped ICC members avoid angry outbursts or bellicose reactions that the protest's critics could use to paint the campaign as hate-filled and anti-American.<sup>15</sup>

Throughout the boycott, C.K. Steele and James Hudson played different but complementary roles. Steele was the charismatic spokesman who used the strength of his personality to help hold the ICC together. He was a powerful orator whose words made audiences stand, shout, stomp, and clap. Steele also served as a formidable enforcer, arguing down dissenters who wanted the ICC to compromise and publicly berating those who stirred up internal conflict. He was the symbol of the bus boycott. Hudson, on the other hand, became the struggle's schoolmaster. He quietly advised Steele on strategic decisions and helped draft public statements. Unlike the ICC president, Hudson did not pontificate in his sermons.

His nonviolence seminars appealed to rationality, calm, and discipline rather than emotion. "Dr. Hudson was not a profound speaker, but he was an immensely deep thinker and chief behind-the-scenes philosopher" said Jesse J. McCrary, Jr., a student activist who studied political science and later law at FAMU. "I'd probably call him the dean of the movement." In many respects, Hudson and Steele's relationship as leaders foreshadowed the dynamic that existed between James M. Lawson, Jr. and Kelly Miller Smith during the Nashville movement. Rev. Lawson, who had studied nonviolence with Gandhi's disciples in India, quietly coordinated the training sessions which preceded the city's 1960 sit-ins. Rev. Smith, the Morehouse and Howard alumnus who led Nashville's Southern Christian Leadership Conference affiliate, was the public voice of the campaign. Furthermore, while Hudson and Steele - like Martin Luther King, Jr. - were both Morehouse men who had embraced the sacred call and black Social Gospel, Hudson was the one who connected the ICC to the MIA at a philosophical level. He and King were both Personalists who had earned their doctorates from Boston University's School of Theology. Hudson's National Baptist Convention, USA Sunday School lessons had prepared millions of black Baptists to view the emerging Civil Rights Movement through

the lens of Personalism. Now, as King used Personalism to articulate the MIA's mission and goals, Hudson used his advisory role to bring the same language into the ICC's public messages.<sup>16</sup>

The ICC's minister-dominated officer list, distinctively religious mission, and church-based operational structure represented a critical departure from the style of black leadership to which Tallahassee's white city officials were accustomed. Whenever a racial matter emerged, white leaders usually summoned their preferred black "spokesmen" - a small group of administrators and teachers from FAMU and the segregated Lincoln High School. These men dutifully abided by the perimeters of "civility." While many of these black "spokesmen" initially supported the protest, they were the first to push for a compromise after city leaders called them to a private meeting to warn that boycott threatened to collapse the bus system. By June, 90 percent of former black bus patrons refused to ride, creating a disastrous hole in the Cities Transit Company's revenue. City officials, who still refused to recognize the ICC as the black community's bargaining agent, asked their handpicked black "spokesmen" to present what was termed a solution. The proposal - read before a packed ICC meeting at Bethel M.B. on June 3, 1956 - assured

blacks that they could ride the buses on a "first come, first served" basis, provided that the "three person seat at the front of the bus was reserved for whites only." Courtesy, the bus company felt, was already enforced by its policies.<sup>17</sup>

Steele rallied the ICC's membership to unanimously reject the city's offer. The organization's executive board later drafted a statement decrying Jim Crow seating as "economically unsound, humiliating, arbitrary, inequitable, inconvenient and morally unjustifiable." It also sent a resolution to the city commission demanding that bus patrons be permitted to "sit wherever they choose on any bus or buses." This position made city's black "spokesmen" uncomfortable. Unlike the ICC's officers - who were mainly pastors and/or independent business owners such as grocers, morticians, and barbers - these detractors were educators who were more susceptible to economic reprisals. As ICC member Daisy Young recounted, these "blacks had a little money and cars and they did not want trouble." From this point on, the older conservative black leaders who did not support an immediate end to bus segregation were frequently labeled "Judases" or "Jefferson Davis negotiators." Despite the city's refusal to recognize it as so, the ICC executive board - an offshoot of the IMA -

had become the most powerful black leadership vehicle in the city. As *Tallahassee Democrat* editor Malcolm Johnson, a boycott critic, stated: "The preachers took over from the teachers."<sup>18</sup>

With its firm rejection of the city's "compromise," the ICC joined the MIA in moving beyond its initial goal of simply ameliorating segregated conditions to the new objective of achieving full integration. MIA attorney Fred David Gray had filed a lawsuit challenging the constitutionality of bus segregation. Believing that the Montgomery case would settle the issue of Jim Crow buses once and for all, the ICC opted against taking any similar legal action on its own. The June 5, 1956 news that a three-judge federal panel had ruled in favor of the plaintiffs in the Montgomery case was a welcome sign of hope for the Tallahassee struggle. It came the same day that the ICC's opponents suffered another critical setback. In the wake of its escalating monetary losses, the Cities Transit Company discontinued the FAMU and Frenchtown routes. By the third week of the boycott, the bus company announced a possible, indefinite suspension of service. The city commission, finally accepting that it had to negotiate with the ICC, scheduled a series of meetings with the organization. After several days, the conferences

ended at an impasse, with commissioners steadfastly refusing to lift the segregation ordinance. On midnight of June 30, 1956, Tallahassee's bus services ground to a halt. The next day, the commission released a statement expressing its regret over the loss of the bus operation, claiming it had done everything possible to prevent the mishap. Stetson Coleman, the Cities Transit company president, said he would keep his drivers on the payroll until Tallahasseeans decided "to take the city back" from the ICC.<sup>19</sup>

Over a span of several weeks, city officials had gone from refusing to even talk with the ICC to grudgingly opening a dialogue with the group. Their next move sharply tested the boycotters' commitment to the nonviolent methodology Hudson had taught in his workshops. At the city's behest, Police Chief Frank Stoutamire launched a "crackdown" on traffic violations designed to intimidate the carpoolers. His officers arrested ICC motorists for minor traffic offenses, arrived at black homes during late night hours and "asked" the residents to come down to the station for questioning, and tried to pressure boycotters to sign affidavits about the internal workings of the carpool. The police harassment coincided with a legal assault designed to permanently break the car sharing



operation. During late August 1956, city attorneys made preparations to prosecute eleven black drivers for violating the state's "for hire" tag law. In early October, they dropped this strategy in favor of another that targeted the ICC as a corporate entity. Hudson and the entire ICC executive board were arrested for running a transportation system without a franchise. The trials began on October 17 and lasted four days. The defendants were all convicted, sentenced to 60 days in jail, and fined \$500 each. The jail sentences were suspended on the condition that the defendants engage in no further "illegal" activities for a year. At the advice of its attorneys, the ICC disbanded the carpool but continued the boycott. Despite a limited resumption of bus service and the hiring of black drivers on the Frenchtown route, most black citizens continued to stay off the vehicles - opting to walk, ride bicycles, or share private cars.<sup>20</sup>

Throughout the boycott, Hudson was saddened by the lack of white support for the ICC. The city's only integrated civic organization seemed to do little more than hold dialogues. In the late 1950s, a chapter of the Florida Council on Human Relations was founded in Tallahassee. It was an auxiliary of the Southern Regional Council, an interracial organization dedicated to improving

race relations. While Hudson applauded the group's establishment as a "gesture of coming together and trying to relate to each other," he had trouble naming any concrete accomplishments that resulted from its activities. The council failed to support the bus protest or even serve as a mediating body between the ICC and city officials. "I guess we wondered whether the interracial group was really doing much good," Hudson said. "But I'm a little hesitant to be negative about that." Hudson did recall that there were a few local white ministers who let him know they agreed with the ICC's goals, but not to "the extent of making a public expression of it." He believed the white ministers were afraid of angering their churches and losing their jobs. "I guess that dominating element in their congregations made them cautious about statements and support or sympathy with the bus protest," he said.<sup>21</sup>

The beginning of the end of Tallahassee bus segregation arrived when the financially struggling Cities Transit Company began to fight the city commission over its demand for Jim Crow seating. On November 13, 1956, the U.S. Supreme Court upheld the lower court's ruling in the MIA-backed *Browder v. Gayle* decision, which had declared Jim Crow bus laws unconstitutional. In late December, the ICC voted to end the boycott and encouraged its members to

ride the buses as long as they were permitted to do so in a "non-segregated manner." Successful test-rides took place on December 23 and 24, with bus drivers generally ignoring blacks who sat in the front seats. However, the ICC canceled a planned "front ride demonstration" on December 27 when participants encountered a heckling crowd of 200 whites, many of whom carried weapons. That same day, tensions between the bus company and city commission resulted in the arrest of the Cities Transit Company's manager and nine drivers. They were charged with operating a transportation line without a franchise, as the city commission had revoked the company's franchise after it bluntly rejected orders to enforce segregation. The bus company sued the city for \$100,000 (citing damages from the boycott) and requested an injunction to block city officials from interfering with its operations. The city counter-sued with a request for clarification over its authority to enforce segregation. In the end, the dueling parties dropped their suits, with the company agreeing to enforce a new "seating assignment plan." As Hudson described, "the new law gave the bus operator the power to assign seats according to health, weight, and publicly safety. It is obviously a subterfuge designed to preserve the old order." On January 20, 1957 a group of blacks and

whites were arrested after they participated in an ICC "sightseeing" ride to test the policy. The ICC initially used the "sightseeing" case as an opportunity to challenge the seating-assignment policy in court. Nonetheless, after a series of disappointing rulings, it abandoned the suit in exchange for an order that freed the defendants from jail. Despite the disappointing outcome, the actual enforcement of segregated seating gradually declined, as an increasing number of bus drivers simply disregarded it. By spring 1957, Jim Crow had suffered a quiet death on Tallahassee's bus routes.<sup>22</sup>

Historians Adam Fairclough and Glenda Alice Rabby argue that the Tallahassee Bus Boycott "failed to achieve a clear victory." Indeed, the ICC never won a federal court case that specifically overturned the local bus segregation ordinance. Nor did the city commission explicitly repeal the ordinance in response to ICC demands. Still, a "clear victory" can be found in the boycott's success in breaking the bus company's will to enforce Jim Crow seating. Tallahassee's black community knew and effectively exploited the fact that there were critical weaknesses within their city's system of segregation. Specifically, they understood that local whites were divided with respect to what economic cost they were willing to pay in order to

maintain Jim Crow norms. The Cities Transit Company's management and drivers were not willing to sacrifice their jobs and livelihoods in order to protect segregated customs. When the boycott led the bus company to begin to resisting the city's orders to uphold the segregation ordinance and using its financial resources to challenge that Jim Crow regulation in court, the ICC succeeded in converting an adversary into a reluctant ally. This sped the process of desegregating Tallahassee's public transportation lines.<sup>23</sup>

Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Fellowship of Reconciliation considered the Tallahassee Bus Boycott important because it, long before the Montgomery protest had ended, showed the possibility for the MIA model to spread across the South. During a conference held in Atlanta January 9-10, 1957, King met with nearly 100 black ministers who were "committed to the idea of a Southern movement to implement the Supreme Court's decision against bus segregation through nonviolent means." The group voted to form the "Southern Leadership Conference on Transportation and Nonviolent Integration." On February 14, this became the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), with the ICC registered as an affiliate organization. Delegates elected King president and Steele

first vice-president. Several months later, on the Tallahassee Bus Boycott's one year anniversary, the ICC hosted a meeting of the Institute on Non-Violent Social Change the MIA had established shortly after its own bus protest ended. King, MIA Vice-President Ralph Abernathy, and Theodore J. Jemison - leader of the 1953 Baton Rouge Bus Boycott - all spoke. FOR Field Secretary and Institute Director Glenn Smiley later told Steele that the ICC-hosted event was "in many respects superior to the first such gathering in Montgomery."<sup>24</sup>

Reflecting upon the Tallahassee boycott in 1958, Hudson praised it as the watershed event that had birthed a new movement for social change in Florida's capital city. He proudly noted how black protesters had clung to the nonviolent discipline taught by his seminars in the midst of fierce hostilities from opponents, particularly those which took place after the ICC commenced its "Ride the Bus Integrated" demonstrations in December 1956. "At times it has been difficult to keep the movement on the level of love and nonviolence," Hudson said. "It is to the credit of the Inter-Civic Council that throughout its history of more than two years it does not have one case of violence on its record. This record has been maintained in the face of the burning of crosses, the firing of guns, and the

throwing of stones." He added: "Non-violence has been largely accepted as a method or technique by the followers of the movement. For an encouraging few the commitment to nonviolence has become a way of life as well as a technique for social change." To Hudson's delight, many black citizens had expressed a willingness to use nonviolence in a series of new, brewing battles against the remaining vestiges of second-class citizenship in Tallahassee. "We are taken beyond the bus situation to the problems of strategy for school integration, registration and voting, and better job opportunities. There is a feeling among many that we have entered a struggle from which there can be no retreat," he said. As the bus struggle waned, Hudson began preparing the ICC for the new challenges by attempting to deepen the membership's understanding of Gandhian satyagraha. As part of this, he opened his home to William Stuart Nelson, who visited him as a personal guest in June 1957 and presented a seminar on Gandhi's teachings at a special ICC meeting in Hudson's living room.<sup>25</sup>

In conclusion, Hudson's teachings and organizational efforts profoundly shaped the origins of Tallahassee's Civil Rights Movement. FAMU students cited the ideas from his campus religious education program, steeped in militant

reconciliation theology, when they launched a noncooperation campaign against bus segregation. He also effectively used the Interdenominational Ministerial Alliance, which he had played an instrumental role in founding, to draw Tallahassee's adult black community into the student protest. The IMA provided a leadership structure for the future Inter-Civic Council, which assumed command of the bus boycott and became the city's most powerful vehicle for black activism. As ICC chaplain, Hudson conducted nonviolence training seminars that prepared the boycotters to face the threat of personal harm with courage, confidence, and discipline. This helped sustain the ICC members throughout the toughest days of harassment and potentially deadly attacks. Additionally, Hudson continued to use strategies influenced by the Rankin network, such as the black civil religious jeremiad, to assist the ICC with the process of creating public pronouncements which fit the confines of Cold War-era "respectable dissent." The ICC-led bus boycott helped crack the Cities Transit Company's willingness to enforce Jim Crow seating. It also gave critical momentum to Montgomery and FOR activists who desired to build a larger nonviolent movement across the South. In 1957, the ICC joined the MIA and other similar community-based activism



groups in creating the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. As the bus protest came to a gradual conclusion, Hudson and other black Tallahasseeans looked ahead to a new era of nonviolent battles for social change in their city and across the nation.

## ENDNOTES

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<sup>2</sup> Dennis C. Dickerson, "African American Religious Intellectuals and the Theological Foundations of the Civil Rights Movement, 1930-55," *Church History* 74 (June 2005): 217-235.

<sup>3</sup> James Hudson, "Where to Look for Victory," 25 March 1956, Folder 1, Box 14, James Hudson Papers, Southeastern Regional Black Archives, Research Center and Museum, Florida Agricultural & Mechanical University, Tallahassee, Fla., hereinafter "Hudson Papers" in "Black Archives."

<sup>4</sup> Lewis M. Killian, "Organization, Rationality and Spontaneity in the Civil Rights Movement," *American Sociological Review* 49 (December 1984): 772-773; Glenda Alice Rabby, *The Pain and the Promise: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Tallahassee, Florida* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1999), 9-12; Fred D. Gray, *Bus Ride to Justice: Changing the System by the System, the Life and Work of Fred D. Gray* (Montgomery: Black Belt Press, 1995), 36-51.

<sup>5</sup> U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Twelfth Census of the United States, 1900, Part 1: Population* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Census Office, 1901), 532; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Seventeenth Census of the United States, Vol. 2: Characteristics of the Population, Part 10: Florida* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1952), 55, 87; Charles U. Smith and Lewis M. Killian, *The Tallahassee Bus Protest* (New York: Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith, 1958), 3-4, 9.

<sup>6</sup> David J. Coles, "'Hell-By-The-Sea': Florida's Camp Gordon Johnston in World War II," *Florida Historical Quarterly* 73 (July 1994): 18-19; Gary R. Mormino, "GI Joe Meets Jim Crow: Racial Violence and Reform in World War II Florida," *Florida Historical Quarterly* 73 (July 1994): 23-26; Julianne Hare, *Historic Frenchtown: Heart and Heritage in Tallahassee* (Charleston: History Press, 2006), 73-75.

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<sup>7</sup> See: Mary L. Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights: Race and the Image of American Democracy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 110-113, 118; Thomas Borstelmann, *The Cold War and the Color Line: American Race Relations in the Global Arena* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), 97-100.

<sup>8</sup> James Hudson, interview by Jackson Ice, 1978, transcript, Tallahassee Civil Rights Oral History Collection, Special Collections, Florida State University Library, Tallahassee, Fla., n.p., hereinafter "Ice interview with Hudson"; William H. Chafe, *Civilities and Civil Rights: Greensboro, North Carolina and the Black Struggle for Freedom* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), 8; Jo Ann Gibson Robinson, *The Montgomery Bus Boycott and the Women Who Started It* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1987), 48-52; Smith and Killian, 4-5.

<sup>9</sup> Ice interview with Hudson; Florida Agricultural & Mechanical College (FAMC) Bulletin, 1948-1949, 30-31, "Black Archives"; Leedell W. Neyland, *Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University: A Centennial History, 1887-1987*, 2nd ed. (Tallahassee: Florida A&M University Foundation, 1987), 51, 175, 182; Julianne Hare, *Tallahassee: A Capital City History* (Charleston: Arcadia Publishing, 2002), 120; James Lagarde Hudson, son of James Hudson, interview by author, 8 July 2008, Washington, D.C., hereinafter "J.L. Hudson interview."

<sup>10</sup> Frederick S. Humphries, interview by author, 14 November 2007, Nashville, Tenn.; Brodes Hartley, telephone interview by author, 27 January 2009.

<sup>11</sup> Rabby, 13-14; Smith and Killian, 8; "A&M Gets Bus Cases Moved from City Court: Boycott is Now Full Scale," *Tallahassee Democrat*, 30 May 1956.

<sup>12</sup> Rabby, 14; Arthur Randall, "Town Sick and Tired of Jim Crow," *Washington Afro-American*, 5 June 1956.

<sup>13</sup> Randall, "Town Sick and Tired of Jim Crow"; "Lawyers Seek Bus Boycott Clarification," *Tallahassee Democrat*, 1 June 1956; Smith and Killian, 8; on the MIA's demands, see: Robinson, 80; J.L. Hudson interview.

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<sup>14</sup> Cornelius Speed, Inter-Civic Council member, interview by author, 10 February 1996, Tallahassee, Fla.; Laura Dixie, Inter-Civic Council member, interview by author, 26 June 2007, Tallahassee, Fla.; on King's advisement by Bayard Rustin and Glenn Smiley, see: James M. Washington, ed., *The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr.* (New York: HarperCollins, 1986), 82; James Hudson to William Stuart Nelson, 26 July 1958, "Chapel Folder," Box 392/1936, William Stuart Nelson Papers, Manuscript Division, Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University, Washington, D.C.

<sup>15</sup> Hudson to Nelson, 26 July 1958; ICC Executive Board, "An Appeal to the People of Tallahassee for Moral Justice," *Tallahassee Democrat*, 20 June 1956.

<sup>16</sup> Eugene Morris, "Historians Hail Hudson for Civil-Rights Work," *Tallahassee Democrat* 4 March 1990; Rabby, 21-23, 42-43; David Halberstam, *The Children* (New York: Random House, 1998) 51-76.

<sup>17</sup> "City Commission Moves to End Boycott," *Tallahassee Democrat* 3 June 1956; Smith and Killian, 8-9;

<sup>18</sup> "Company Wants to Halt Bus Run: Negroes Reject City's Answer to Suggested Plan for Seating," *Tallahassee Democrat*, 4 June 1956; Daisy Young, interview by Zanetta Jones, 11 April 1995, Tallahassee, Fla.; Rabby, 15, 21-23, 26-27; Malcolm Johnson, interview by Jackson Ice, 1978, Tallahassee Civil Rights Oral History Collection.

<sup>19</sup> "Bus Service to Frenchtown FAMU, Canceled," *Tallahassee Democrat* 5 June 1956; "Bus Boycotts Continuing in Two Cities," *Tallahassee Democrat*, 6 June 1956; "Bus Settlement Proposal Heard But Not Adopted," *Tallahassee Democrat*, 7 June 1956; "Miami Test Seen on Segregation," *Tallahassee Democrat*, 12 June 1956; "Glimmer of Hope Dawns in Negro Bus Boycott," *Tallahassee Democrat*, 14 June 1956; "Bus Firm May Suspend July 1; City Makes Plea," *Tallahassee Democrat*, 15 June 1956; "Negro Council Explains Stand in Bus Boycott," *Tallahassee Democrat*, 20 June 1956; "Anti-Boycott Efforts Made," *Tallahassee Democrat*, 29 June 1956; "Capital Loses Bus Service After 17 Years," *Tallahassee Democrat*, 1 July 1956; "So the buses Stopped," *Tallahassee Democrat*, 1 July 1956; Gray, 259-260; Rabby, 19-23.

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<sup>21</sup> Ice interview Hudson; Rabby, 25.

<sup>22</sup> Hudson to Nelson, 26 July 1958; Smith and Killian, 12-15; Rabby, 45-64.

<sup>23</sup> Rabby, 54; Adam Fairclough, *To Redeem the Soul of America: The Southern Christian Leadership Conference and Martin Luther King, Jr.* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1987), 42-43; see: David L. Chappell, *Inside Agitators: White Southerners in the Civil Rights Movement* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1994) and Elizabeth Jacoway and David R. Colburn, *Southern Businessmen and Desegregation* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982).

<sup>24</sup> Fairclough 32-38; Clayborne Carson, ed., *The Autobiography of Martin Luther King, Jr.* (New York: Warner Books, 1998), 100-102; Institute of Non-Violence and Social Change [Program], 26-31 May 1957, Tallahassee, Fla.; Glenn Smiley to C.K. Steele, 10 June 1957, Folder 1, Box 3, Hudson Papers.

<sup>25</sup> Hudson to Nelson, 26 July 1958, Nelson Papers; Nelson to Hudson, 3 May 1957, 17 May 1957, 10 June 1957, and 28 June 1957; George W. Gore, Jr. to Hudson, 21 May 1957, all in Folder 1, Box 3, Hudson Papers.

## EPILOGUE

James Hudson's work in Tallahassee helped set the stage for Martin Luther King, Jr.'s rise to national prominence. Hudson's Sunday School lessons for the National Baptist Convention, USA (NBC-USA), published during the 1953-1954 year, used Personalism to articulate the militant interpretation of Jesus he shared with other members of the Rankin network. In the *Young Adult Quarterly*, Hudson emphasized the fundamentals of Personalistic philosophy. He urged his readers to look beyond the social fact of segregation, which told blacks that their lives had less value than those of whites, and instead focus on the spiritual reality of universal human brotherhood. Combining this Personalistic view of existence with a message of activism, Hudson further asserted that those who believed in the sacred value of all human life should personally affirm their worth by resisting social evil while also respecting the worth of the men and women who operated iniquitous social systems. This required a dedication to nonviolence and a sacrificial spirit, qualities best exemplified by Jesus. By following Jesus' lead and working in concert with moral laws, people of faith could help create the Kingdom of God, a society in

which social facts and spiritual realities were one and the same. Hudson's lessons guided thousands of NBC-USA Sunday School discussions which took place during the 1953 Baton Rouge Bus Boycott and *Brown v. Board of Education* U.S. Supreme Court battle. The lessons helped popularize Personalism as the philosophy and spiritual language of the emergent Civil Rights Movement. This laid a critical foundation for King, another Personalist, to become the movement's premier spokesman. King's references to the "Beloved Kingdom," "network of mutuality," and a "moral universe" all carried an air of familiarity to those who had read Hudson's lessons. Hudson and King's Personalistic verbiage had credibility with black churchgoers because it aligned with fundamental tenants of black Christianity, namely the belief that blacks were equal to whites and idea that God was supporting the race's freedom struggle.<sup>1</sup>

Tallahassee's Inter-Denominational Ministerial Alliance, which Hudson had played an integral role in founding, became the leadership structure for the Inter-Civic Council (ICC), the coordinating body for the Tallahassee Bus Boycott. Modeled after the Montgomery Improvement Association (MIA) led by King, the ICC's creation garnered momentum for an idea the Rankin network had promoted for over a decade: a nonviolent

noncooperation movement against Jim Crow public transportation. Tallahassee proved that other southern black communities were ready to use the MIA as a prototype to launch similar campaigns against their local segregated bus systems. It also provided further evidence that grassroots black citizens responded favorably to Personalism's use as a means for communicating their grievances against the segregated status quo and articulating their vision for a new America. King and Hudson used their roles as officers within the MIA and ICC, respectively, to make Personalism the philosophical position of both organizations. In permitting King and Hudson to do this, the MIA and ICC's membership selected a language of love, brotherhood, and reconciliation - rather than one centered on hostility or vengeance. While this decision certainly had a pragmatic element, as blacks understood that bellicose rhetoric could increase the chances for violent white reprisals and alienate white moderates and liberals, it showed that Montgomery and Tallahassee's black communities were comfortable with Personalism being used to shape the public perception of their struggle. In 1957, Personalism - a defining characteristic of the MIA and ICC - became a defining characteristic of a body those two associations helped



establish: the Southern Leadership Conference on Transportation and Nonviolent Integration (later the Southern Christian Leadership Conference or SCLC). The Personalism-infused sermons by SCLC President Martin Luther King, Jr. galvanized thousands to action against Jim Crow, attracted international attention, and made him the symbol of the growing nonviolent movement.

Like Hudson, King incorporated militant reconciliation theology into a Personalistic framework. King's introduction to this activist theology began at the Morehouse College School of Religion, an institution filled with Rankin network members. While working collectively to produce works such as *The Christian Way in Race Relations*, many Rankin network professors had simultaneously competed against one another for the chance to join the faculty of either Morehouse or Howard University. Howard President Mordecai Johnson and Morehouse President Benjamin Mays had budgets that enabled them to provide research and travel funding that went far beyond what most other black institutions could offer. They wanted divinity professors who excelled at scholarly publishing and shared their commitment to training ministers who would fight segregation. At network meetings, the two presidents watched carefully to see which individuals delivered the

best sermons and paper presentations; those who caught their attention made the short list for job openings. Melvin H. Watson and Samuel W. Williams were two examples. As dean of men and a professor of religion at Dillard University, Watson regularly attended the conferences of the Fellowship of Religious Workers in Colleges and Universities for Negroes (FRWCUN). At the organization's 1942 retreat, he presented a paper entitled: "Reflections on the Christian's View of God," which argued that "it is the tangled world of misery that reveals the underlying love of God." Three years later, when Howard Thurman left Howard University to co-found an interracial church in California, Johnson appointed Watson acting dean of Rankin chapel. Then, in 1946, Mays hired Watson to head Morehouse's School of Religion. Williams, who had represented Alcorn Agricultural & Mechanical College at FRWCUN functions, joined Watson at Morehouse the next year after accepting an invitation to chair the Department of Philosophy and Religion.<sup>2</sup>

Morehouse's Rankin network professors - Mays, Williams, and Watson - all became important teachers and mentors to Martin Luther King, Jr., who attended the college from 1944 to 1948. They encouraged him to embrace Morehouse's long-held tradition of scholar-activism. For

years, King had struggled with the question of "whether religion can be intellectually respectable as well as emotionally satisfying." The theologians he met at Morehouse helped him develop an affirmative answer to that query and discover his passion for ministry. Early on, King forged a close relationship with Mays, who introduced many students to Gandhism. He later reflected that he saw in Mays "the ideal of what I wanted a minister to be." Also, as a freshman, King enrolled in Williams' introduction to philosophy class, in which he first read Henry David Thoreau's essay "On Civil Disobedience." Williams, a leader in the People's Progressive Party of Georgia, gave the young man another example of an academic-activist minister. In 1947, Williams joined Mays and Martin Luther King Sr. as members of the young preacher-in-training's ordination committee. Watson, a long-time friend of King's father, also developed a strong friendship with the ambitious Morehouse student. Following graduation, King continued to seek Watson's advice on sermons. At the Watson's request, the Institute of Religion - which was always highly selective about which scholars it brought into its ranks - placed King on its mailing list.<sup>3</sup>

The Morehouse Rankin network professors all saw great potential in King and encouraged him to earn advanced degrees. Throughout his graduate education, King followed in their footsteps by reading the works of and studying with a number of the white liberal theologians who were revered within the network. He began by enrolling at Crozer Theological Seminary, where Mays' former Chicago instructor, Edwin Aubrey, was still president. As a seminarian, he also found pivotal inspiration in the words of Mordecai Johnson. In 1950, King attended a Philadelphia sermon at which Johnson spoke about his recent pilgrimage to India and reflections on Mohandas K. Gandhi's work. The message prompted King to start his serious study of Gandhism; shortly after the Howard president's talk, he acquired and read as many books as he could about the martyred Indian leader.<sup>4</sup>

At Crozer, King studied Reinhold Niebuhr's work, which helped him forge his critique of Gandhism and determine his path toward a doctorate degree. King recalled that Niebuhr influenced his thought in a number of ways. First, he credited Niebuhr for alerting him to the dangers presented by the "naïve optimism" in much of Protestant liberalism. Nonetheless, he also expressed many disagreements with Niebuhr's philosophy. In particular, King rejected

Niebuhr's assertion that agape, or the love of God operating in man's heart, was only possible in individual relationships and could not be practiced at an inter-group level. The Crozer student also believed that Niebuhr had incorrectly identified Gandhi's nonviolent resistance to evil as passive nonresistance. Instead, King saw nonviolent resistance as a powerful vehicle that used agape-based means to overcome evil and accomplish agape ends socially. In these ways, King expressed a much more optimistic view of humanity's collective nature than Niebuhr. To him, Niebuhr had placed far too much emphasis on the negative aspects of human nature. He concluded that Niebuhr failed to consider how the destructive characteristics in humanity were balanced by the constructive characteristics of God's nature.<sup>5</sup>

King found the rational idealism in Boston University Personalism much more attractive than Niebuhrian pessimism. In particular, he greatly admired the work of Edgar Sheffield Brightman, a leading Personalist, during his seminary days and believed Brightman's religious thought closely paralleled his own. This led him to enroll at the Boston University School of Theology's doctoral program in the systematic theology in 1951, where Brightman and, following that professor's 1953 death, L. Harold DeWolf

advised him. While there, he identified his support of democratic socialism, similar to many other Rankin network members. Additionally, Thurman, Boston's dean of chapel and a personal friend of King's father, provided him with another source of tutelage and support. The friendship led King to hold Thurman's work in regard; *Jesus and the Disinherited* became one of his favorite texts.<sup>6</sup>

While at Boston, King adopted Personalism as his "basic philosophical position." Reflecting on his graduate school experience, he recounted that Personalism "strengthened me in two convictions: it gave me metaphysical and philosophical grounding for the idea of a personal God, and it gave me a metaphysical basis for the dignity and worth of all human personality." Unlike James Hudson, King believed God was a conscious, Supreme Person. And in stark contrast to both Hudson and Brightman, King (like DeWolf) was a theistic absolutist who saw God as omnipotent and omnibenevolent. As he wrote: "To suggest a finite God as a solution to the problem [of evil] is to fall in the pit of humanizing God." For him, the best answer to the problem of theodicy (how and why evil coexists with God) was an abiding faith that God was in control and would ultimately prevail over any obstacles to His divine purpose. Despite these differences, there was

still much common ground between Hudson and King. The two men had both begun their serious study of Gandhian nonviolence in the seminary, embraced democratic socialism as system of the governance that best matched Jesus' ethical teachings, and regularly spoke of the interconnectedness of human personalities. An illustration of the later point is found in King's frequent references to a "network of mutuality," which meant that "whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly." Hudson expressed similar sentiments by asserting that: "I believe no man goes his way alone. What we send into the lives of others rebounds into our own."<sup>7</sup>

Most significantly, Hudson and King both had teleologies (arguments for God's existence based upon the perception of design and purpose in the universe) which identified the physical and moral orders as evidence that God existed. Brightman's *Moral Laws* provided an instrumental foundation for the verbiage both men used to articulate their belief in an objective moral order. However, as black Americans who had endured racial oppression since their early years, neither Hudson nor King could accept Brightman's argument that a passive response to social evil could be morally sound. In his *Law of Specification* ("all persons ought, in any given situation,

to develop the value or values specifically relevant to that situation"), Brightman asserted that passive responses could hold moral value through their "respect for fact and for the personalities of others." In their subsequent civil rights ministries, Hudson and King persistently spoke against passive acceptance of segregation, a social evil they considered to be a rejection of the doctrine of universal brotherhood. Explaining the need for immediate nonviolent confrontations against Jim Crow, King said: "I had hoped that the white moderate would understand that the present tension in the South is merely a necessary phase of the transition from an obnoxious negative peace, where the Negro passively accepted his unjust plight, to a substance-filled positive peace, where all men will respect the dignity and worth of human personality." Similarly, Hudson wrote: "Too often at the level of individual action there seems to be no urgency for implementation of the Christian ethic. Our generation demands of us not only a spirit that voids superficial distractions among men but a faith in collective action to remove the social manifestations of superficial distinctions." To Hudson and King, active responses to social evil - which sought to remedy it rather than adjust to it - were the only responses that respected



the value of human personality. Thus, active responses were the only morally sound responses.<sup>8</sup>

Both Hudson and King had entered Boston University with a desire to develop into professor-preachers who could understand and explore the black freedom struggle's religious dimensions through scholarly terms. After graduating, they returned to the South to lead black Christian congregations. In Personalism, Hudson and King had found a philosophy of religion that fit well with their pre-existing beliefs in the sacred call, nonviolence, the black Social Gospel, and liberal theology. Personalism fulfilled their need for an explanation of God and the meaning of life that went beyond evangelicalism's dogmatic boundaries but remained true to their roots in the black church. It also helped them to reconcile their scientific minds with the reality of their evangelical surroundings in black Southern churches. Personalism was grounded in reason, but its emphasis on Christ's love ethic and prophetic message, as well as its openness to divine providence, gave it common ground with the more supernaturally-oriented and Biblically-centered form of Christianity that dominated the black church.

Hudson and King represented a new brand of what Cornel West termed organic intellectualism or "the life of the

mind involved in public affairs." Both men used their scholarly training to connect programs of action with institutions inside the indigenous, ethnic community of which they were members. As black organic intellectuals, Hudson and King used local movement centers as living laboratories to test theories on God's moral laws. Where black scholars such as Benjamin Mays, Howard Thurman, William Stuart Nelson, and Mordecai Johnson had brought the serious study of Gandhism into black centers of intellectualism, Hudson and King explored the frontiers of Gandhian nonviolence through grassroots social experimentation. Using Personalism to formulate their hypotheses, Hudson and King saw their community experiments as opportunities to learn more about God's nature as revealed through the interactions of human personalities.<sup>9</sup>

As King began to lead SCLC campaigns across the nation, Hudson remained in Tallahassee, focusing on the local struggle for social change. There, he continued urging interracial cooperation for the civil rights cause. "Present situations in our capital city afford us a chance to lead the people toward a finer realization of the sort of religious idealism and democracy which all of us confess in our better moments," he once said to an audience of black and white ministers. The sparse white support for

ICC campaigns disappointed Hudson and continued to frustrate him throughout the rest of his years in Tallahassee. He noted that "slightly more relaxed race relations" followed the Tallahassee Bus Boycott, although the few whites who had actively participated in ICC activities began to attend less frequently. Later, he welcomed the white Tallahassee Ministerial Alliance's decision to desegregate in the late 1960s. Hudson became active in the organization, but lamented the fact the most other black ministers chose not to follow his lead. "There was a reluctance on the part of the black ministers to unite with the whites," he recalled in 1978. "Black ministers have yet to go over in any considerable number to be with the Tallahassee Ministerial Association." To Hudson's dismay, the city's black ministers not only remained detached from their white counterparts, but became less unified among themselves. "We have not, as ministers of the city of Tallahassee, come together in any large way and over any long period of time," Hudson said. "What seems to be the case, and I've heard some Black ministers say it, is that we have let the [black Interdenominational Ministerial Alliance] go by the way and very few of us attend the Tallahassee Ministerial Association so we have lost what we had."<sup>10</sup>

Early during the Tallahassee Bus Boycott, Hudson - along with Florida A&M University (FAMU) economics professor Edward Irons and political science professor Emmett Bashful - launched an ICC "get-out-the-vote" initiative. It was named the "Tallahassee Non-Partisan Voters Crusade," with Hudson serving as its president. The effort helped increase black voter registration from 20 percent in 1956 to 24 percent the next year. Shortly after the protest, though, Irons, Bashful and a number of other FAMU professors who had participated in the campaign left the university, complaining that President George W. Gore, Jr. had told them to stop their ICC activities. During the bus protest, an ICC news release claimed Gore had ordered the university's employees to stay out of the boycott, telling them "either you are loyal to the University or loyal to something out there; cast your lot with this ship or get off." Gore said he was simply trying to protect the institution. "Some of our most loyal [white] friends here have been reluctant to help us now," Gore stated. "I am frankly worried about what will happen when our appropriation requests go before the next Legislature. It behooves all of us to keep our heads to keep this ship from going under." Despite Gore's public statements, Hudson said the president never personally told him to leave the

ICC. "Dr. Gore was under pressure 24 hours a day," Hudson recalled. "I felt his sympathies were with the movement although I think he was much more hedged than me, being president." Hudson added that he, out of his sense of professionalism and desire to protect FAMU, did not let his ICC duties interfere with his teaching responsibilities. While some professors reportedly cancelled class meetings to attend demonstrations or exercised leniency with student activists who failed to complete assignments, Hudson did not. "I never allowed my classroom work to go lacking," he said. Hudson's classes met as scheduled; no student was excused from making up tests or completing term papers. Overall, Hudson had a positive relationship with Gore and thought the president had done the best he could in a difficult situation. "I would be very reluctant to read the history of those years in a way as to put Dr. Gore in a position to say that he was unsympathetic to the cause of freedom," Hudson said. Although Hudson and Gore remained on good terms, the chaplain did suffer repercussions as a result of his activism. After being labeled a "troublemaker" by state and local officials, Hudson received nothing more than minimal raises throughout the rest of his career at FAMU.<sup>11</sup>

Hudson recalled that "the bus protest sort of phased itself into the sit-in movement." In 1959, a chapter of the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) was founded in Tallahassee. An interracial organization founded in 1942, CORE advocated Gandhian, nonviolent civil disobedience against Jim Crow. Hudson became a dues paying member of the group during its first year and vigorously supported its student-led lunch counter sit-ins and pickets against the segregated downtown movie theater. During this period, Hudson worked to make FAMU's mid-week meditation services a place where student activists could pray, fellowship, and hear sermons that encouraged them in their struggle. "When the Civil Rights Movement would reach one plateau or another and then another the students found in the prayer service a medium - religious - albeit a medium of protest," Hudson said. The chaplain permitted groups such as CORE to schedule nights during which they would lead the worship program. Students regularly used these meetings as opportunities to share "their expressions of protest." The content of the services reflected the widespread belief that God stood with the nonviolent demonstrators. "I think that was a divinity beyond our perception at the time that ran through the movement and was on our side or speaking to us or through us," Hudson stated. "God's judgment had

fallen upon the segregated society and glory be to those who had vision, will, [and] persistence to stand up and make it known and to fight against the status quo."<sup>12</sup>

In the 1960s, Hudson became a dedicated participant in the ICC's Operation Breadbasket activities. The SCLC program challenged discriminatory hiring practices. As described by Martin Luther King, Jr., "Operation Breadbasket committees selected a target industry [and] then obtained the employment statistics of individual companies within it. If the proportion of Negro employees was unsatisfactory, or if they were confined to the menial jobs, the company was approached to negotiate a more equitable employment practice. Leverage was applied where necessary through selective buying campaigns by the clergymen through their congregations and through the movement." The ICC's Operation Breadbasket organized boycotts and picket lines against Tallahassee's Winn Dixie grocery, eventually forcing it to hire a black cashier. Two major local banks, Lewis State and First National, agreed to hire black tellers after conferences with the ICC. ICC's Operation Breadbasket also helped black employees at the Morrison's restaurant and Alberta Crate Factory fight for better wages and working conditions.<sup>13</sup>

While contesting obstacles to black political and economic enfranchisement, Hudson also fought civic and educational inequalities. He personally organized petition drives and letter writing campaigns to push city officials to improve city services in black neighborhoods. Specifically, Hudson called for more paved streets, additional sidewalks, more parks, and better sewage treatment plants in Frenchtown and South Side Tallahassee. Furthermore, in the wake of Board of Regents and legislative proposals to merge FAMU with the predominantly white Florida State University, Hudson convened a group of professors to discuss the new challenges black colleges faced in the era of desegregation. This led to a volume entitled: *The Black College in an Age of Ferment: A Collection of Essays*, which Hudson edited. Its central theme revolved around modernizing black colleges to face the problems of inadequate funding, negative perceptions of their academic quality, and competition with formerly all-white colleges for top-performing students and faculty. One essay by retired Morehouse President Benjamin Mays affirmed the continuing need for black colleges - calling upon them prepare blacks for high-demand professions, teach students about their racial heritage, and train leaders for the black community. He added that black colleges should



be "the conscience of nation." "Since the battle has not yet been won in desegregating education, housing, unemployment, it may be the role of the black colleges to wage nonviolent campaigns to win more justice in these areas," he wrote. In his chapter, Hudson agreed with Mays' arguments, especially the point about blending cutting-edge job training with instruction that helped students grapple with the question of black identity. "There is a growing educational realism in the black academic community," Hudson observed. "The idea articulated in this educational realism is that our schools and colleges need to address themselves more specifically to the actual and potential job experiences of students. In all of these explorations black students wish to maintain their linkage with the black heritage. Black Studies Programs point up the existentialist quality of the desire for black identity. Such programs offer a needed balance to the models of the majority society."<sup>14</sup>

In 1973, Hudson retired from FAMU after 27 years of teaching and preaching. Of all his accomplishments, nothing made him prouder than the success of his son, James Lagarde. Following in his father's footsteps, James Lagarde earned a bachelor of arts from Morehouse College in 1961 and then completed law school at Boston University in

1965. He went on to co-found the law firm Hudson, Leftwich & Davenport, which specialized in counseling cities on commercial development, finance, and transportation issues. Reflecting his father's passion for activism, James Lagarde also worked on South African equal rights cases. Hudson's son remembered how his father taught him to stand up for justice. "Dad didn't mind going to jail as long he was standing up for what he believed," James Lagarde said. "He talked matter-of-factly about doing what had to be done. He was a man of true commitment." Often times, the Hudson family opened its home to lawyers who were visiting Tallahassee to wage courtroom battles against Jim Crow. "Many of the people who stayed at our house argued civil rights cases in the courts and were active in the movement," he recalled. "I would, as a youngster, sit around and listen to those arguments and I think that was the genesis of my wanting to be a lawyer."<sup>15</sup>

On September 17, 1980, James Hudson died at age 76 in Tallahassee after a battle with cancer. His death occurred only a month after that of his friend C.K. Steele (another cancer victim). Per Hudson's wishes, his remains were cremated rather than buried. Three days after his passing, the Rev. Moses General Miles presided over a memorial in his honor at Bethel Missionary Baptist Church. The service

paid homage to Hudson's Christology. The mourning audience sang "The Battle Hymn of the Republic," celebrating Hudson's fondness for the refrain "Our God is marching on!" The printed program quoted a Hudson sermon that urged men and women to build upon the social justice foundation Jesus had set. "The language of Jesus was from the field of art and craftsmanship," Hudson had written. "The carpenter from Nazareth knew what was meant to say, the building is complete - the capstone has been set. Jesus spoke of it as tragic when one sets forth to build and neither has the wisdom nor the material to finish what he started." To his family, friends, and students, Hudson's lasting legacy was found in his efforts to help society realize Jesus' vision for a Kingdom of God on earth. He had taught them that this work required courage, selflessness, and a close communion with God. As Hudson once prayed: "Keep, O God, the pressure of thy way upon us. Indeed, we sense a world which extends beyond our grasp. We trudge a path that takes us into the uncertain tomorrow. We seek a truth that baffles our powers of understanding. We behold a vision which cannot be fully contained in our petty pace of time and energy. In it all, help us to possess a belief that our striving for good will not be in vain."<sup>16</sup>

## ENDNOTES

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<sup>1</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., "The Power of Nonviolence," 4 June 1957, 12; *Ibid.*, "A Christmas Sermon on Peace," 24 December 1967, 254; *Ibid.*, "Our God is Marching On!" 25 March 1965, 230, all in James M. Washington, ed., *The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr.* (New York: HarperCollins, 1986); on black perceptions of God, see: Benjamin E. Mays, *The Negro's God: As Reflected in His Literature* (Boston: Mount Vernon Press, 1938).

<sup>2</sup> Undated Fellowship of Religious Workers in Colleges and Universities for Negroes (FRWCUN) Rosters; Minutes of the Fall Retreat of the FRWCUN, 6-7 November 1942, Hanover, Virginia in Howard Thurman Papers, Manuscript Division, Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University, Washington, D.C., 2; Clayborne Carson, Tenisha Armstrong, Susan Carson, Erin Cook, and Susan Englander, eds., *The Martin Luther King, Jr., Encyclopedia* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 2008), 354-355; Wilson N. Flemister, Sr., "Samuel W. Williams Papers, 1932-1974 [Finding Aid]," Atlanta University Center, Robert W. Woodruff Library, Archives and Special Collections, Atlanta, Ga., 8.

<sup>3</sup> Clayborne Carson, ed., *The Autobiography of Martin Luther King, Jr.* (New York: Warner Books, 1998), 14, 16; Clayborne Carson, "Martin Luther King, Jr.: The Morehouse Years," *Journal of Blacks in Higher Education* 15 (Spring 1997): 121-125; David Levering Lewis, *King: A Critical Biography* (New York: Praeger 1970), 19-20, 23, 26; Martin Luther King, Sr. to Charles E. Batten, March 5, 1948, 153-154, in Clayborne Carson, Ralph E. Luker, Penny A. Russell, eds., *The Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr., Volume I: Called to Serve, January 1929-June 1951* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992); Melvin H. Watson to Martin Luther King, Jr., August 14, 1952, 156-157; Watson to King, October 20, 1954, 302-03; Watson to King, May 6, 1955, 553, in Clayborne Carson, Ralph E. Luker, Penny A. Russell, and Peter Holloran, eds. *The Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr., Volume II: Rediscovering Precious Values, July 1951-November 1955* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994); Randal M. Jelks, "Benjamin Elijah Mays and the Creation of an Insurgent Negro Professional Clergy," *A.M.E. Church Review* 118 (July-September 2002): 32-37.

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<sup>4</sup> Carson, ed., *Autobiography*, 23-24.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 25-27.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 27-33, 36; Lerone Bennett, *What Manner of Man: A Biography of Martin Luther King*, 8th rev. ed., (Chicago: Johnson Publishing Company, 1992), 74-75; Howard Thurman, *With Head and Heart: The Autobiography of Howard Thurman* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1979), 254.

<sup>7</sup> Carson, ed., *Autobiography*, 22-24, 31-32, 36; Jimmy L. Kirby and Rufus Burrow Jr., "Conceptions of God in the Thinking of Martin Luther King, Jr. and Edgar S. Brightman," *Encounter* 60 (Summer 1999): 296-297; Rufus Burrow, Jr., *Personalism: A Critical Introduction* (St. Louis, Mo.: Chalice Press, 1999), xii-xiii; Martin Luther King, Jr., "A Christmas Sermon on Peace," 24 December 1967, in Washington, 254; James Hudson, "My Philosophy of Life," 19 August 1969, in James L. Hudson Family Collection, Washington, D.C.

<sup>8</sup> Burrow, *Personalism*, 221-222; Edgar S. Brightman, *Moral Laws* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1933), 171, 181; Martin Luther King, Jr., "Letter from Birmingham Jail," 16 April 1963, in Washington, 295; James Hudson, "Brotherhood in Christ," *Young Adult Quarterly* [Drafts] 27 September 1953, James Hudson Papers, Southeastern Regional Black Archives, Research Center and Museum, Florida Agricultural & Mechanical University, Tallahassee, Fla., hereinafter "Hudson Papers."

<sup>9</sup> On black organic intellectualism, see: Cornel West, "Prophetic Christian as Organic Intellectual: Martin Luther King, Jr.," in Cornel West, ed., *The Cornel West Reader* (New York: Civitas Books, 1999), 434.

<sup>10</sup> James Hudson, interview by Jackson Ice, 1978, transcript, Tallahassee Civil Rights Oral History Collection, Special Collections, Florida State University Library, Tallahassee, Fla., n.p., hereinafter "Ice interview with Hudson"; Eugene Morris, "Historians Hail Hudson for Civil-Rights Work," *Tallahassee Democrat*, 4 March 1990; James Hudson to William Stuart Nelson, 26 July 1958, "Chapel Folder," Box 392/1936, William Stuart Nelson

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<sup>11</sup> Ice interview with Hudson; James Lagarde Hudson, son of James Hudson, interview by author, Washington, D.C., 8 July 2008, hereinafter "J.L. Hudson interview"; Glenda Alice Rabby, *The Pain and the Promise: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Tallahassee, Florida* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1999), 32, 38-40, 61; James Hudson Vita, Folder 2, Box 16, Hudson Papers.

<sup>12</sup> Rabby, 86; Ice interview with Hudson.

<sup>13</sup> Carson, ed., *Autobiography*, 308; Ice interview with Hudson.

<sup>14</sup> Benjamin E. Mays, "The Black Colleges: The Role They Have Played and Can Play," 82-83, and James Hudson, "Philosophical Tendencies in the Black Educational Experience," 78, in James Hudson, ed., *The Black College in an Age of Ferment: A Collection of Essays* (Tallahassee: Florida A&M University, 1974); Leedell W. Neyland, *Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University: A Centennial History, 1887-1987*, 2nd ed. (Tallahassee: Florida A&M University Foundation, 1987), 287-291, 310-344; Morris, "Historians Hail Hudson for Civil-Rights Work"; J.L. Hudson interview.

<sup>15</sup> Morris, "Historians Hail Hudson for Civil-Rights Work"; J.L. Hudson interview.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*; Memorial Service for James Hudson [Program], Folder 2, Box 16 and James Hudson, "Invocation at Commencement," 9 August 1963, Folder 1, Box 14, both in Hudson Papers.

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