

Atlanta Student Movement Project  
Dr. Lonnie King Interview  
Conducted by Jeanne Law Bohannon  
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INTERVIEWER: So, as we discussed earlier, tell me what started everything. Where were you, what were the thoughts that you had. Why did you start this whole movement?

DR. KING: I think I have to begin with my grandfather who raised me from the time I was 2 1/2 years old until I was 8 1/2. He died at that point. I came to Atlanta, Georgia. My grandfather was a Baptist preacher. He was an evangelist; he went around to different churches preaching revivals. He took his baby grandson with everywhere he went almost; like a little mascot I guess you would say. So, I heard my grandfather preaching freedom, liberty, justice, equality within a segregated society. I was young but I heard it.

I came to Atlanta, Georgia to be with my mother after he died. My mother was a member of Ebenezer Baptist Church, pastored by Reverend King, ML King Senior. When I came in February, the spring revival was in the next few days so I went to church with my mother and when they opened up the doors of the church I went down and joined. My mother was a little shocked because I didn't tell her I was going to do it and she was in the choir. So, on the way home she told me "You didn't tell me that you were going to join the church tonight," and I said "Well I didn't know I had to mama." And she didn't say anything else. So that began I guess you would say the relationship between me and the Kings and the church and the different activities at the church. I would say between 1949-1954 every youth activity in the church, they put me in charge of it. Whether it was bringing in speakers, designing the program, or what have you. We formed the group called the Ebenezer Youth Organization and I was the head of it. So, I got the chance to practice leadership skills or develop leadership skills within the church.

Concurrently Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. had gone off to Morehouse College and got his degree and he went off to other places and what have you but he would always come back to the church and preach a sermon. So, if I had to sum it up I would have to say that I was kind of birthed into this idea of freedom, justice and equality from my grandfather and what he used to preach and it was added to King Sr. and of course King Jr. who lived a companion life and tried to push for these matters. And it was because of my relationship with Daddy King, Dr. King Jr. that I was able to get him to come and join us October 19, 1960 when we took on Rich's Department store downtown. In sum, I think you are what you grow up in and I grew up in an environment where most of the folks I was around were preaching liberation theology. Now they were doing more preaching than acting because if you acted out more than the sermons you were getting out of your place and almost any white person had a license to put

you back in your place. That was the kind of environment that we had and that environment was just as prevalent in 1960 as it was in 1930.

INTERVIEWER: So where does the Atlanta Student Movement fall in the general timeline of the lunch counter sit-ins?

DR. KING: Let me give it more of a transition, when I came back from the Navy in 1957, I went back to Morehouse. Now in the Navy I faced some rank discrimination and I battled all the way through the Navy this discrimination and with the help of the Lord I went on my battles. I was able to become an E5 really within 24 months which was unusual, almost unheard of. At that time if you could pass a test you could advance. So, I passed the test and I moved up. I did find a lot of discrimination in the Navy but it was on ship with some of the crew people, some of the officers, and some of the noncommissioned officers but I found a way to battle them through the system and I think that was a part of preparation for what we did in 1960. So therefore, I had a spiritual grounding coming from my granddaddy, through my mother, through the Kings, and I also had the practical experience of battling segregation type things in the US Navy. So, I guess when the young boy sat down in Greensboro in the first of February in 1960, I was ready. Simple as that.

INTERVIEWER: So, did you start putting things in motion when that first one happened?

DR. KING: Yes. When I read in the newspaper that morning, the AJC, that the young fellows had sat down in Greensboro a day or two earlier I said that the South is suffering from segregation. Its ubiquitous, it's everywhere, not just in Greensboro and we need to get involved in Atlanta. We would have been involved in the next few days but for the fact that the college presidents acted on intelligence and learned what we were doing and they slowed us down. So we really didn't get going until we publicized a full page ad on March 9, 1960 called "An Appeal for Human Rights" which laid out a manifesto that we followed for the next two or three years in order to bring about the kind of changes in Atlanta that were finally brought about in the area of theaters, lunch counters, restaurants, hospitals, you name it, voter registration, we did all of that stuff to make freedom ring for people who had never had freedom ring for them in their lives or in their grandchildren or in their grandfathers lives.

INTERVIEWER: So, the Appeal for Human Rights, was that a collaborative work?

DR. KING: It was supposed to be a collaborative work. When the college presidents asked us, the student leaders, to write a manifesto to tell the public why you're going to take to the streets and what have you, you need to have a philosophical foundation. So, we agreed to do it because we wanted to make sure that they wouldn't turn on us. They ask us to do it. So, I appointed Dr. Rosalyn Pope, she is a doctor now but was a student at Spelman and president of the SGA and was an English major. I appointed her to edit the appeal for human rights. I appointed Julian Bonds, an excellent writer to be on the commission, on the committee, Along with Charles Black, an excellent writer. Albert Brinson. they were the ones

who formed that committee. So, we had to get in back to the college presidents in a certain time for them to see it and approve it. Dr. Clements had raised \$12,000 from his sources to pay for it to put it in the newspapers. Dr. Pope, Rosalyn, called me the night before it was due back to the college presidents and said that she had not been able to get anybody to help her, the folks that I had appointed to the committee. I said, "Rosalyn, write the damn thing." I've got too much to do to try to organize the first sit in which was going to be on the 15th a few days later after that was published. So, she wrote it, Julian Bond assisted her by typing it I understand, but it was her work, Dr. Rosalyn Pope.

INTERVIEWER: Who paid for it to go into the paper.

DR. KING: Dr. Clements raised us 12,000 and it cost about 4,000 for it to go into the newspapers. He kept the 8,000 there for our use if we wanted to use it later on. We never did get back- we didn't need the money. Clements did it, Dr. Rufus Clements.

INTERVIEWER: Do you still have a copy of the newspaper?

DR. KING: I have a copy of the appeal, I don't have a copy of the newspaper. I guess I could probably get it.

INTERVIEWER: We are going to try and get a copy of the newspaper, it's on microfiche.

DR. KING: The newspaper, it was March the 9th, 1960. In all three papers, Atlanta Journal, Atlanta Constitution, Atlanta World. It also was reprinted in the New York Times, a full page which someone paid for and sent it to Jacob Jadish in New York, read it into the Congressional Record and its now a part of posterity there in the records of the United States Congress. It was also reproduced by the Harlem Crimson newspaper; it was also reproduced by the Nation Magazine which was around about that time about 100 something years old. It was April 2nd 1960 was when they ran the ad.

INTERVIEWER: Is Rosalyn one of the people we are going to interview?

DR. KING: Yes, I hope so.

INTERVIEWER: Let me think, can you think of a question for me to ask? We're going to rotate some other people through, I have lots more questions for you so we are going to have to sit down another time for us to do some more stuff.

DR. KING: Ok.

INTERVIEWER: So, we stopped when the Appeal for Human Rights made it to New York. What happened after that? Was there more planning?

DR. KING: Yes. We were on two tiers. My good friend Joe Pierce who has been lost in the dust bins of history, he was my major organizer with me. I had

Julian and Rosalyn over there writing the appeal, Rosalyn wrote it but Julian typed it. So, we had a division of labor. We knew we were going to move on the 15th of March- beware the Ides of March- that was why we chose that date. So, we wanted to appeal to go out on the 9th and before people grew accustomed to having read the appeal we wanted to shock them because here we are. And I need to tell you that when that appeal appeared, the governor- Name- at that time said that this appeal was so well written that it could not have been written by any college student in Georgia, it had to have been written in Moscow. Because, mind you now, as late as the 1960's we had this Russian scare. We were allies with Russia as you know during the second World War but somehow or another very quickly after that war ended Stalin and the United States became somewhat enemies and that as you know continued for a long period of time. But we began on the 15th of March at 11 o'clock in the morning. And we went to only public institutions at first. If they were tax supported like the Fulton County Courthouse, the City of Atlanta Cafeteria- all public institutions. The reason for that is because the college presidents wanted us to go, if you're going to do it, you go to those places that are supported by tax payers. The law is such that you win that battle eventually because the Supreme Court had already ruled that you couldn't do those kind of things to tax payers. So that's why we chose all those public institutions. We had about 70 something people arrested on that first day with those simultaneous sit ins going on. Pandemonium broke out in the city because a lot of people did not know you had that many students who were African American going to school because the white Atlanta didn't know a thing about what was happening on the south side of town. They were in shock as to what had happened. Now they had heard about what happened in Greensboro and what had happened in some other places. But I think a lot of people had felt, in fact there was some prominent person as I remember made a comment in the newspaper that "we won't have that in Atlanta because Atlanta students are too intelligent to do that." They were appealing to our egos to go along with the segregation. But once we had that sit in, it galvanized the other college students in town. It also was a shock in the African American community and the white community. But they weren't to shocked that it happened because it happened in Greensboro earlier and other places. But when you have motto coming from the mayor saying that this is a city too busy to hate and you have a history of Atlanta accommodating people's rights, you know give them a little bit so they don't ask for a lot. A lot of that was going on so I think they really wanted us to follow the courts and let the federal courts make the decision so that's why went to all public places. And we ultimately won that case by the way later on. After we appeased the college presidents and we did what they asked us to do we made it very clear that we needed to go over the summit and take on Richs Department Store and downtown Atlanta period. That came from the kind of education I got in economics from Morehouse in terms of how you can leverage economic buying power.

INTERVIEWER:

So, the appeal for human rights came out in the newspaper and you guys started everything on March 15, you actually sat down on March 15. What happened on those days in between?

DR. KING: We were planning.

INTERVIEWER: How were you planning?

DR. KING: Well, we chose all the public institutions that we wanted to go to, it might have been 9 or 11. One of those two numbers. And we chose teams. Jury headed one team that went to city hall. John Mack from AU headed another team. Johnny Parham had a team that went up to the Peachtree 7th Street building, the federal building. So, we had about 9 to 11 teams headed by senior kind of people who were all graduate students for that matter and who were a little bit more mature and who had demonstrated that they had leadership ability and it worked out, it worked out fine. Now what happened is that the police in Atlanta did not treat us the way they were treating people in those smaller towns. The only persons that I heard of who were kind of indirectly abused by the police were the whites who were helping us. I did not know that was happening until when I read some accounts of one of the policeman- a black police man wrote I guess you would say an autobiography. In reading the autobiography he talked about the sit ins and what they did to the white people who really sat in with us. At that time, you know whites and blacks didn't ride in the same paddy wagon. We had segregation from birth to grave. So, what I learned from this gentleman biography, autobiography is that these persons who would drive the whites to jail, they would speed up and stop, hit the brakes, speed up, hit the brakes. I had never heard of something called a rough ride until I started reading this and I said, "Those kids had to go through that." But that also tells you how people really felt when they got behind closed doors like a police van. We'll show you white folks, I'm sure they called them "nigger lovers," that was the expression.

INTERVIEWER: So where did you guys come together to meet?

DR. KING: Well we originally met in a place called Sell Hall Annex at Morehouse's campus. About 23, 24 people came to that meeting. Not one lady, all guys and I was a little stressed cause I thought we ought to have some ladies there. So, I called my mother that night and said, "mother I" told her about the meeting and what have you, "but I'm a little distressed because we had no women there." She said go over to Spelman. I said "mama I don't know a soul at Spelman." She said, "but they know you." I said "how." She said "don't you run that touchdown on Sunday afternoon." I said "yeah." She said, "they know you by name." So, I went to Spelman and she was right we were able to get some people to join us. It's amazing how these things happen. Just before I went over to Spelman I got a call from Dr. Mandy who was the president of Spelman and was a part of the council of college presidents. He wanted me to come over and have a debate with Dr. Roy Wilkins who headed the NAACP. So, I went over there around the 5th of May, no the 5th of April I guess it was to speak to the ladies at Spelman and Sisters Chapel. Mr. Wilkins was first and I was second and of course Dr. Mandy was moderator. Dr. Wilkins got up and spoke and I tell you, he was magnificent. About 6'3, 6'4, well dressed, broken kind of person, highly educated. And when he finished

talking the young ladies were all excited because he was just so great. And I kind of felt like I was a lamb being led to a slaughter, anyway. So, when he sat down Dr. Mandy the president said "Mr. King it's your turn." So, I went to the guillotine and started talking.

Dr. Wilkins wanted us to go back to class, let the NAACP and the legal defense fund handle these matters and when you finish college come and join us because this is a long struggle and we need new troops to come replenish and what have you. It was an excellent speech, it made a lot of sense. But I was reminded before I went up to that slaughter of what I had learned at Spelman by the way when I took Speech from them, that when you are outclassed in a debate find a way to give great praise to your opponent and agree with all the things that opponent might have said and you find come WORD (22:47) if at all of difference in your position and his position. So, when I got up to make my speech I praised the NAACP for what they've done since 1909-long before I was born. And how they've been on the case when we couldn't get on the case because we might get lynched. And then at a certain point after praising Dr. Wilkins I said but the time has come when the class has to speak for itself because if we continue doing it the way you've been doing it, the white south is prepared for another century of litigation and we want freedom now. And I went on to lay out why we were doing what we were trying to do with all due respect to what you have done Dr. Wilkins and Dr. Mandy and when I sat down in a storm, the young ladies were on their feet. They were on their feet. And Dr. Wilkins looked at me and he did this and we were kind of friends until he died.

INTERVIEWER: I just lost all of my questions in that story, that was a great story.

DR. KING: Thank you.

INTERVIEWER: So, let's talk about the day, was there just the one sit in at Rich's or did you do it over a few different times?

DR. KING: Well, let me explain that. We started out, we didn't go to Rich's on March 15, they were all federal places or state supported or tax supported places. We realized that we had to really break down Rich's because

INTERVIEWER: Why Rich's specifically?

DR. KING: Well, let me take you back. John Foster Dallas was Sec. State during Eisenhower days and the big discussion during foreign policy at that time was what are we going to do about the Koreans and the people in North Korea and South Korea and what have you, what are we going to do about the communists. John Foster Dallas position was if we allow the communists to get a foothold in that part of the Pacific Basin, then the rest of those countries over there would fall like dominos. Just one after the other. So, we had to stop communism. Well, from my perspective Rich's was the star leader. They sold over 58 percent of all merchandise in the Southeast, of all the places. It was the largest department store outside of New York coming this way. And if we could break Rich's Department

Store than the rest of the stores would fall like dominos and that was our strategy.

So, I explained to Dr. Mays, President of Morehouse, where we were going with this. And he did not disagree with me, he didn't say yes or no he just listened. So, we began to organize a boycott of Rich's department store with other stores being caught up because they were down there. And we began in June of 1960 when I went down to Rich's Department Store and went to the Magnolia Room to be served and I took with me Dr. Howard Zen and his wife and daughter. They didn't serve us, they closed up. And they took me down to the police station and and we got there they said the chief wants to see you in his conference room.

So, when I got to the conference room and Chief Jenkins is there and Dick Rich who head Rich's was there and I was put on the other side. Rich's was over there, I was here, and Chief was in the middle. He was like the mediator. So, Dick Rich made it very clear that he did not like the fact that we were taking on his store. He told me how much money he had given to the black colleges, he talked about they were the first ones to put Ms. or Mr. on peoples' accounts what have you. He described a very paternalistic system but one wherein Rich's had one eye and the rest of the people were blind. And so, he told me that if I bought my black ass back into his store again that he was going to have the chief put me under the jail. So that was all he had to say, it was my time to speak. And I said Mr. Rich, and I thanked for the contributions he made to the black colleges and all that, and I said we need to end this segregation and I'm coming back in the fall and I'm going to bring thousands of students with me and we're going to make sure that we open up Rich's Department Store. Dick Rich turned red as a beet, jumped up, said a few nasty things and walked out. I never saw him again. So, then they took me back to my office, the police chief did and I then began to plan for the October surprise. I couldn't do it during the summer because the students weren't here.

So, we planned to on October 19th. And while I was planning, we also noticed that was the first year of presidential debates between Richard Nixon and John Kennedy. It was a novelty because this had never happened before. Roosevelt and Truman had talked about debates and what have you on radio but never on TV. So, I decided that we needed to put on the debate calendar some discussion of civil and human rights but the Kennedy's, the Kennedy people and the Nixon people never talked about. Every time almost there were some college students they were raising, saying about segregation.

So, I decided that we needed to put this issue of civil and human rights on the burner and make the Kennedy Nixon people discuss it. As they were discussing foreign policy. So, I called Dr. Martin Luther King Jr who I've known since childhood and told him that I wanted him to join me on October 9th at 10 o'clock at Rich's Department Store on the bridge. I said we got to take this thing out here all the way out. He agreed that he would come.

So, then I started planning all the different places we were going to go on that date because the students were coming in the last week in August and I needed to orient the ones who were going to be new who were taking other people's places who were graduated and get them to agree that we were going to do this on the 19th. And I made my presentation to the new body and it was, my plans were objected to by Barnard Lee who had been a student at Alabama State but had been kicked out by the governor and also believe it or not AD King, Martin King's brother. They joined the little group and they were saying we need to go down now, now, not wait until October. But thanks to the ladies from Spelman who joined the guys from Morehouse I was able to prevail because the point I made was that you had just got back in school, we need to organize this thing so that on the 19th we are ready to go. I said you ought to be getting your classes all signed up and everything and it makes no sense lets plan it and I prevailed on that.

So, on the 19th of October we hit a lot of DIFFERENT places on that date simultaneously. And of course October 19th the day that we took King to jail. The idea was to, in taking him to jail, was to make an international issue. Because he had built a tremendous reputation in Montgomery 5 years earlier but he hadn't done that much since then so we convinced him to go down there and join us. It went all over the world. The Kennedys got involved peripherally. Nixon was going to get involved but then the old man Eisenhower suggested that he not get involved so it was just the Kennedys who, through SGT. Striver and Harris Wofford who was the special assistant, they got involved and were able to be part of the group that got King out of jail from down in Reedsville. I really think they intended to kill him down there because they took him out in the middle of the night in a paddy wagon with him and a German shepherd that was not leashed up in the back so I think they were going to do him in but thank God we had all the other stuff going on. While Richard Nixon was too timid, Kennedy got involved and once we got King out of jail the Kennedys put out 11 million flyers on something called the blue bomb. I can get you a copy of the blue bomb if you would like to see it. That blue bomb was sent out by all the different denominations of the African American community and mind you, two weeks before the election Nixon was leading John Kennedy by double digits.

Once we took King to jail and the blue bomb went out and the votes were held on the first Tuesday of that November. The African American community switched from voting Republican to voting Democrat and voting for Kennedy. That was the difference in that election. You had some people say 'oh we had some WORD (35:01) in Chicago and I don't doubt that might have happened but it was the WORD (35:04) in Los Angeles, San Francisco, in Miami and New York that have been voting Republican since Abraham Lincoln except for Roosevelt time and Truman's time who switched and the switching of people's allegiance by race in this county, in the South, occurred after the 1960 election because the whites in the South from Texas to Maryland from dog catcher to senator and governor, they were all democrats at every level. Once the 1960 thing happened, the whites in the south began to move from being



democrats to republicans. They took over the republican party in the south run by blacks. They just took it over, came to a meeting and took it over. So now every person from dog catcher in Texas all the way up to at least South Carolina, they all now republicans. But they re-appropriated the name conservative to replace segregationist because that's what they were until we met Buckley in 1955 suggested that you change your name from segregationist to conservative in line with the political party in England. So that's why you see people talking about conservatism, it meant race. All that stuff about financial and trickle down, that was all added. It's all about race. And you see it today with Donald Trump. Who still supports him with all of his foibles, who's still lined up in lock step to support this man. It's coming from the South and Southwest. Don't bother me about what he said, my mind is made up. He's our man.

INTERVIEWER: So, going all the way back to March 15th, what did they do when they went to the different federal and city buildings, what did they do while they were there?

DR. KING: Well we sat in, and they all got arrested. I wasn't arrested on March 15th, I was the commander in chief so I was at headquarters.

INTERVIEWER: Not everyone understands what that means when you say sit in.

DR. KING: We went to a segregated lunch counter that only served whites and we sat down and demanded service. In demanding service, we were violating the anti-trespass laws that were passed all over the south to thwart the students from sitting in which means you could go to jail for up to six months if you were convicted. It was designed to use the legal system as a way of supporting segregation.

INTERVIEWER: So, this all happened on March 15. What were you doing while all this was going down?

DR. KING: I was at command center getting reports. At that time, I was at Dr. Rufus Clements conference room, the president of AU so I was there and I had spotters all over the town letting me know what was going on and I took track of it that way. Later on, by October the 19th Dr. Clements had kicked me out of his office and I'd gone to Rush Memorial Church so I was at command central at that day. No, I left command central that day to go to jail down by Rich's.

INTERVIEWER: So, do you recall, you said there were 24-25 men, how many Spelman women joined in on that official —

DR. KING: Well the first meeting was about 23 persons all men but the Spelman ladies, the first time they had a chance to really participate with us was May 17 1960. We had a march in downtown Atlanta ending at Peachtree Baptist Church to commemorate the Brown decision of 54 that had gone on 6 years earlier. The Spelman women were there, that's when they really showed up. That was after I had made that speech over there asking them to join us. So, they were there and they worked with us all

over the summer, those of them who were in town over the summer worked with us to plan for the fall.

INTERVIEWER: Do you remember who were the key leaders of the group? You mentioned Julian Bond and Rosalyn Pope.

DR. KING: Well let me go through. At Spelman the first three representatives from Spelman were Maryann Wright Edelman who heads the children defense fund now. You had Rosalyn Pope who wrote the appeal and you had Josephine Jackson. Josephine was the other representative but she didn't do anything, she went to meetings but didn't go to jail. She was just there. In September the Spelman ladies were Norma June Wilson and Lenora Tate. They were the three official representatives from Spelman. The other ladies from Spelman would come but when it came to voting those three people had the votes legally from Spelman. Of course, you had Morehouse and ITC and Clog and AU. The committee had 19 members, three from each college plus the chairman. We had 6 colleges, 18, and I was the 19th person.

INTERVIEWER: So, when you were at Richs Department Store, what was the scene like?

DR. KING: Well, Dr. King and the two ladies and I went to the Bridge Cafeteria. The Bridge is still there but it's a federal building now. But that building there between on Forsyth street that bridge, that's where we went. When we go there they closed down, the cafeteria snack bar whatever. So, then I said let's go to the sixth floor. So, we turned around and went to the sixth floor to the Magnolia Room. Now the Magnolia Room was the most prestigious I guess restaurant in Atlanta Georgia. And they had these African American ladies who wore these pickaninny outfits. By that I mean they wore those black outfits with the little trimming like Antebellum kind of things. So, when we got there I guess Dick Rich's made the decision to arrest us so they took us down to jail where we were called before the judge. Dr. King had made a great speech, he had written out a speech about the injustice going on and said that if he had to stay in jail whatever then I'll do that. He was the only one who spoke, the rest of us didn't have to speak, it would have been redundant for anyone else to talk. And they put us in jail and they took us out to the new prison on Jefferson Street. Dr. King and I were in this one cell and they had the rest of the young folks in the other. We took up a great part of the jail out there, in fact they had to send for some mattresses from adjoining counties to accommodate us.

INTERVIEWER: How many of you were there?

DR. KING: On the 19th that must have been, we must have had over 100 something people arrested that day. I'd have to go back and look at the actual records but they had to go get beds from other places in order to accommodate us. And it was jail, no bail which really upset them.

INTERVIEWER: So, you all were on the bridge and heading up to the Magnolia Room. What were the other 100 people doing?

DR. KING: They were all over town. Davidson's Department Store, they called it Davidson Paxton. Woolworth's. Wt Grant. HL Green. Every eating place downtown, we covered it. And we are pushing the boycott too. I was in jail so I didn't really see all this but I read about it. We had pickets during that campaign, three feet apart were picket signs that stretched from Forsyth street and Mitchell street down to White Hall which is really Peachtree Street now all the way to Ellis street where Davidson Paxton was and then back down that street Forsyth Street back down to where the line began. There were over 2,000 students three feet apart who were out there demonstrating on the 19th of October.

INTERVIEWER: Which do you think were more effective, the sit ins or the picketing?

DR. KING: I think it's very difficult to say one is superior to the other because they all occurred simultaneously. I'd have to say that the shock was the most effective thing because it did two things. Number one, it aroused the aspirations and hopes and dreams of African Americans whose grandparents were slaves and what have you and whose parents who most of them were in menial jobs so that was a very uplifting thing for them. But it also served notice on the white community that had been very vicious in terms of race relations since 1619, it served notice on them that the young African Americans or young negroes were not going to sit idly by and just watch another century of this going on. It is very clear that if it had not been for the thousands of college kids who got out here and raised holy heck, the south would still be segregated. They did not take down signs voluntarily, that happened, of course the civil rights bill of 64 wiped them out but these young folks were making them take down those signs all over the south before the law was changed.

INTERVIEWER: After the smoke cleared. After Martin Luther King Jr was released from jail. What did you do after, what did you guys do to continue to make sure these things happened?

DR. KING: We started over the summer putting out something called the "Student Movement and You" publication then we helped start the Atlanta Inquirer, a newspaper. So, every Sunday when the paper came out, we were able to use the paper as propaganda for the movement. We also asked people of good will to send me their credit cards from Rich's Department Store. 254 people sent me their credit cards and I ask you rhetorically, would you send your credit card to a college student who was trying to start a movement? But the mere fact that they sent the credit cards and we put them in Citizens Trust Bank and Mr. Charles Black gave them back with the boycott was over and I was gone by that time. That told us that if people are willing to trust a college kid with their credit card that they don't know that we had reached a sin, we had reached the soul of these people and they were prepared to do what they had to do to make it happen. They trusted us and we didn't let them down, everyone got their credit card back. What I did not know until I went out to Rich's and I haven't seen all the files out there. But a number of people sent their credit cards in to Rich's, they didn't trust these kids so they sent them in to Rich's

Department Store. I haven't counted up how many were sent out but I do know there were a few that were sent to Rich's. And they also wrote letters to Rich's indicating that they did not like the segregation that was happening and going on. We also found out belatedly when I did go out there a few years ago to look at the files even before 1960 there were some African Americans in town who were petitioning and writing, asking them to end this segregation. They were middle class ladies, they were doctor's wives and dentist's wives and school teachers and what have you. It's clear to me though that it would never have happened if it weren't for pressure and it was economic pressure that made the difference.

INTERVIEWER: I think that's a good question. These people that sent you their credit cards, why didn't they do something sooner. Why do you think it took for you to ask for them to boycott for them to do it?

DR. KING: Well, I don't think anyone other than God can ask you that. In looking at the history of movements, why is it all of the sudden these folks have been enduring this stuff for centuries or for years what have you all of the sudden eureka, I'm going to take a stand. So, what I can say to you that there must have been an underbelly of resentment for the treatment the African Americans were receiving and I think that the folks did not feel there was any way to overcome this. Because the folks who were mistreating the African Americans had guns and all of the opportunities. The only thing the African Americans were their bodies and their dollars. Once you showed them how they could use their dollars. We became the bodies, the young people became the bodies, the foot soldiers. We didn't have any money, the folks who had the money although it was not that much money but collectively it was a lot of money. So, when you influence that group of folks with their nickels and dimes to hold them and wear old clothes with new dignity, it was a propaganda campaign. And we sold people on standing up for their rights and you can stand up for your rights without risking yourself. We'll take the risks, we'll take the blows. You just don't shop downtown, stay at home and wear old clothes with new dignity. One of my good friends who went to elementary and high school with me, I was talking to her recently and she brought up the whole idea of the boycott so she introduced me to her children and her grandchildren because I had not seen her in a long time so she told me what she did in 1960, she had just gotten married and had a baby in 1960. Her husband was going to go and by the clothes for the baby from Rich's Department Store and she said oh no, no, no. I had a cousin who had a baby and is growing up, I'm going to get these old clothes and my baby is going to wear these old clothes, and they did not buy any clothes, new clothes for the baby until after the boycott was over. So, what am I saying? You had these people whose dreams were deferred. Maybe next year things will be better, maybe next year, maybe next century it will get better. Power give up nothing without a struggle, never has and never will.

INTERVIEWER: We talked about this before, I know that you wanted to say a little bit about Joe Pierce. And I think it's important since he is no longer with us.

He was your right-hand man. He was one of the tragedies instead of the successes of the movement.

DR. KING:

Joe becomes not just a tragedy, Joe becomes a metaphor of the system that was going on, was in place at that time. Joe and I were friends from high school all the way through, same homeroom. Went into the Navy together but he was older than me by 18 months so he had to serve 4 years in the Navy but I only served three because I was younger and got in on a kiddie cruise. About this time, I got back in 57 and he got back in 58 to Morehouse. We had breakfast every morning down at the drug store. When the young people sat down in Greensboro I was reading the newspaper, Joe came in and I said Joe read this. He did. I said Joe we should not let those folks in Greensboro go out there by themselves because segregation is ubiquitous it exists all over the south and southwest. I said you know Joe remember the panty raids, if we could start something like the panty raids it'll catch on all of these campuses because they are similarly situated in terms of being denied opportunities. He said let's do it. I said ok, see that guy over there his name is Julian Bond. I met him when I came back last year, I was in the line registering and at that time you had to be in line almost all day in order to get registered. So, I got to know him after talking to him for about 12 hours. He was a writer, he wrote for Time Magazine, he was an intern when he was in high school. I said we need someone who can tell the story, we're going to create but we need someone to tell it. So, we went over to talk to Julian and I told him what we wanted him to do it. He was reluctant and said someone is going to do it and I said no we want you to do it and he said ok and we all started organizing the three of us. We planned it out for us to have the first sit in on March the 15th, AD King, Martin King's brother recommended that, he talked about the Ides of March, March 15th, that's why we chose it because AD recommend it and that's why we did that.

On March the 15th I got a telephone call at 6:30 in the morning, it was from Joe Pierce, he was crying. I said what's the matter Joe. He said Lonnie I got to let you down today, I can't do it. I said why? He said my aunt thinks she'll lose her job if I get arrested. She was a school teacher, Mrs. Ellen Pierce and his name was Joseph Pierce and I promise they would have looked it up. So, he dropped out because his aunt thought she might lose her job. Joe was never the same. He dropped out of Morehouse and did odd jobs and I only got a chance to see him twice after that before he died. He died a couple of years ago. He wouldn't return my telephone calls. I saw him out once or twice. So finally when I came back to Atlanta in 2006 I called him, left a message, no answer. So finally, I called his sister Ellen and I said Ellen I've been trying to reach your brother for years just to sit down and talk to him. She said Lonnie give me your phone number where you are and he'll call you right back. Sure enough he called me right back in less than a minute. I said man why have you been so difficult for me to talk all these years, I've been trying. He never answered that question so we talked about what he's been doing this that and the other. But he didn't tell me this but I'm speculating but with all of the accolades and other things that have

happened to me and the others in that moment, in Atlanta Ga the second name would have been Joe Pierce with me but for the system that his aunt was in he would have been there but he had to respect his aunts wishes. Not just because she was his aunt but Joe and his sister Ellen, their parents were killed in Athens Ga in an automobile accident at the same time. So, Ms. Ellen took her brothers children and raised them from little kids to where they are so he had a double duty as he saw it to not dishonor the wishes of his aunt. But outstanding brilliant man, much smarter than me, much smarter than I am but the system chewed him up, chewed him up.

INTERVIEWER: After that time, you talked did he ever call you back?

DR. KING: No. His sister called and to tell me he died a year later. She said can I get you to come to the funeral and I said I'd be there. So that was one of the tragedies of the system. But let me point out that it wasn't an isolated thing, it wasn't the boogey man is coming. In 1955 the attorney general in GA trying to follow what happened in Alabama wanted to get rid of the NAACP in GA and specifically in Atlanta so they passed a law, the attorney general has a law in the books were they could fire somebody if they were a member of the NAACP and therefore his aunt was looking out for 'how am I going to pay my bills if I'm fired" that was the kind of system that was going on at that time. It sounds incredulous and most of that stuff is in writing, no one wants to talk about it but it's in writing.

INTERVIEWER: It's a hard situation to be in, you want to march but you could possible lose your job for marching.

DR. KING: Let me tell you something when you look at this thing in retrospect. White women made up the bulk of the abolitionist movement, about 100,000 something thousands of them supported Frederick Douglas and all those people who were involved in that movement. White women position was that if we can get some freedom for African Americans we can get some freedom too. Frederick Douglas made, in my opinion, made a pivotal decision that slowed down black women and white women working together, when they were putting together the 15th amendment, when it came to voting rights, Lincoln conferred with him and the way it was originally drafted was for black men, for women and men of color, women and black folks could get their voting rights, that's how they could have had it. When Frederick Douglas took the position that the black men were the persons who needed the right to vote, she's a homemaker this that and the other, women don't need this law. So, Lincoln bought what he said, so women got left out of the 15th amendment because Douglas didn't push for them so women got mad at Douglas and called him a bunch of names and what have you and then they went on their own and fought until 1920. That's when they got the right to vote. I mean Wyoming may have let a woman vote way out there.

INTERVIEWER: There were only 7 people in the state at the time so.

DR. KING:

But the bottom line is, that was a tragedy that women had to go the other way because if I had been around I would have said Mr. Douglas you're making a mistake. But women came back to the movement in 1960. White women did come back and started working with us and a lot of these laws were pushed through with the help of white women and I think white women have done very well with these laws. You can turn on TV everywhere; women are doing things they were not allowed to do earlier on. They had the ability, but there's this sexual prejudice that kept you out.