INTRODUCTION

In the quiet recesses of my heart, I am fundamentally a clergyman, a Baptist preacher. This is my being and my heritage for I am also the son of a Baptist preacher, the grandson of a Baptist preacher and the great-grandson of a Baptist preacher.

Martin Luther King, Jr., 1965.

Martin Luther King, Jr., was born in Atlanta about noon on Tuesday, 15 January 1929. The difficult delivery occurred in the second-floor master bedroom of the Auburn Avenue home his parents shared with his maternal grandparents. From the moment of his birth, King's extended family connected him to African-American religious traditions. His grandparents A. D. Williams and Jennie Celeste Williams had transformed nearby Ebenezer Baptist Church from a struggling congregation in the 1890s into one of black Atlanta's most prominent institutions. Martin Luther King, Sr., would succeed his father-in-law as Ebenezer's pastor, and Alberta Williams King would follow her mother as a powerful presence in Ebenezer's affairs. Immersed in religion at home and in church, King, Jr., acquired skills and contacts that would serve him well once he accepted his calling as a minister. He saw his father and grandfather as appealing role models who combined pastoring with social activism. Although King's theological curiosity and public ministry would take him far from his Auburn Avenue origins, his basic identity remained rooted in Baptist church religious traditions that were intertwined with his family's history.

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King, Jr.'s family ties to the Baptist church extended back to the slave era. His great-grandfather, Willis Williams, described as "an old slavery time preacher" and an "exhorter," entered the Baptist church during the period of religious and moral fervor that swept the nation in the decades before the Civil War. In 1846, when Willis joined Shiloh Baptist Church in the Penfield district of Greene County, Georgia (seventy miles east of Atlanta), its congregation numbered fifty white and twenty-eight black members; his owner, William N. Williams, joined later. Although subordinate to whites in church governance, blacks actively participated in church affairs and served on church committees. In August 1848, members of such a committee investigated charges of theft against Willis. After listening to the committee's report the church expelled him, but two months later the church minutes reported that "Willis, servant to Bro. W. N. Williams, came forward and made himself confession of his guilt and said that the Lord had forgiven him for his error. He was therefore unanimously received into fellowship with us." Extant records provide no documentation of Willis's ministry, but he probably helped recruit some of the slaves who joined the church during a major revival in 1855. Between April and December of that year, nearly a hundred blacks, more than one-tenth of the slaves in the Penfield district, joined the congregation. Among them was a fifteen-year-old named Lucrecia (or Creecy) Daniel. Shiloh's minutes report that she "related an experience and was received" into church membership in April 1855. She and Willis were married in the late 1850s or early 1860s, and she bore him five children--including Adam Daniel (A. D.), who celebrated 2 January 1863, the day after the effective date of the Emancipation Proclamation, as his birthday.

The family left Shiloh Baptist Church when it, like other southern congregations, divided along racial lines at the end of the Civil War. At war's end, Shiloh's 77 white members were outnumbered by 144 black members, but in the following years all the black members left. Willis Williams and his family may have joined other black members of Shiloh in organizing a large black-controlled Baptist church in Penfield.
A. D.’s desire to follow his father’s calling was evident even as a child, when “it was his greatest pleasure to preach the funeral of snakes, cats, dogs, horses or any thing that died. The children of the community would call him to preach the funeral and they would have a big shout.” Although he was unable to attend school for only three weeks because of the demands of sharecropping, the seven-year-old A. D. reportedly “attracted the people for miles around with his ability to count.”

A. D. Williams spent his childhood on the Williams plantation. After the death of his father in 1874, A. D. and his family moved from the Williams plantation to nearby Scull Shoals, a rural community on the Oconee River. Several years later, in the early 1880s, A. D. and his family joined Bethabara Baptist Church in northern Greene County. With the help of his pastor, the Reverend Parker Poullain, A.D. worked through a blueback speller and the first, second, and third readers. Williams underwent a conversion experience that confirmed his religious commitment. Poullain baptized A. D. in August 1884, and later tutored him in preparation for a preaching career. Finally, in April 1888, Williams earned his license to preach.

The number of black Baptist churches, many of which were affiliated with Georgia’s Missionary Baptist Convention, increased rapidly during the 1870s and 1880s, but general economic conditions in Greene County’s Oconee River Valley declined during the latter decade. Surrounding farmlands were much less profitable than in the past, and many blacks migrated from the area. During the late 1880s and early 1890s, A. D. Williams tried to make a living as an itinerant preacher, while supplementing his income with other work. An injury in a sawmill accident left him with only the nub of a thumb. Seeking better opportunities elsewhere, A. D. Williams joined the black exodus from Greene County. In January 1893 he left for Atlanta. Arriving in Atlanta “with one dime and a five dollar gold piece” during the unusually cold winter of 1893, Williams used the gold piece to secure treatment for a sore throat. At the end of the summer, after working in a machine shop, he accepted invitations to preach at Springfield Baptist Church in Atlanta and a Baptist church in nearby Kennesaw, Georgia.

Finally, on 14 March 1894, Williams was called to the pastorate of Atlanta’s Ebenezer Baptist Church. One of many small Baptist congregations in the city, Ebenezer had recently lost its founding pastor, the Reverend John Andrew Parker, who had organized the church eight years earlier. Williams took over a church with only thirteen members and "no church house at all"—a challenging situation in which he quickly demonstrated his leadership abilities, adding some sixty-five members to the church his first year. His attempt in 1896 to leave for another pastorate was "frustrated by the providence of God"; yet at Ebenezer he was "an overwhelming success." Ebenezer, his biographer recounted, "continued to grow in strength and popularity and so did he."

Williams supplemented his income by serving as minister of other congregations in the Atlanta area before deciding to focus his energies on building Ebenezer. Recognizing that his long-term success as an urban minister required that he overcome academic shortcomings, Williams also enrolled at Atlanta Baptist College, taking both the elementary English and the ministers’ courses of study. In May 1898 Williams received his certificate from the ministerial program.

During the 1890s Williams also met his future wife, Jennie Celeste Parks. Born in Atlanta in April 1873, Jennie Parks was one of thirteen children. Her father, William Parks, supported his family through work as a carpenter. At age fifteen, Jennie Parks began taking classes at Spelman Seminary, becoming, according to one account, "one of Spelman’s lovely girls"; her graces included "culture, unfeigned modesty, and [a] devotion to home life. Parks left Spelman in 1892, however, without graduating. Married to A. D. Williams on 29 October 1899, she was a deeply pious woman who always kept a Bible nearby and was "a model wife for a minister." On 13 September 1903, she gave birth at home to their only surviving child, Alberta Christine Williams, the mother of
Martin Luther King, Jr. During the early years of the century, the family lived in several houses in the Auburn Avenue area, which was then home to both whites and blacks. Like many other contemporary black ministers from similar backgrounds, Williams built his congregation by means of forceful preaching that addressed the everyday concerns of poor and working-class residents. Despite his deficiencies "from a technical educational point of view," a biographer later insisted that Williams’s "experience and profound thought and his intensive practical ways in expounding the gospel, places him easily with the leading preachers of his day and generation." In 1900 the Ebenezer congregation purchased a building at Bell and Gilmore streets that formerly housed the white Fifth Baptist Church, and there they remained for thirteen years. Thanks to Williams’s efforts, the congregation experienced steady growth, attracting ninety-one new members in 1903 for a total membership of four hundred at year’s end. Nevertheless, Ebenezer was still overshadowed by the much larger Big Bethel AME and Wheat Street Baptist churches on Auburn Avenue.

In addition to building his own congregation, Williams participated in the establishment of new regional and national Baptist institutions. In September 1895, Williams joined two thousand other delegates and visitors at Friendship Baptist Church to organize the National Baptist Convention, the largest black organization in the United States. By 1904 Williams was president of the Atlanta Baptist Ministers’ Union, chairman of both the executive board and the finance committee of the General State Baptist Convention, and a member of the Convention’s educational board and its Baptist Young Peoples’ Union and Sunday School board.

Black-white relations in Atlanta were undergoing major changes during the early years of the twentieth century. Booker T. Washington’s historic address delivered at Atlanta’s Cotton States and International Exposition of 1895 had signaled the beginning of a period of rapid economic growth and intensified racial restrictions. Black migrants sought to participate in the city’s economic growth, and by 1900 black Atlantans constituted nearly 40 percent of the city’s population. In 1900, some black residents departed from Washington’s accommodationist strategy by launching an unsuccessful streetcar boycott to protest new regulations requiring segregation on all public transportation. In the same year, the Georgia Democratic Party adopted rules that barred the participation of blacks in the party’s primary.

Williams, along with other black religious leaders, were pioneering advocates of a distinctive African-American version of the social gospel, endorsing a strategy that combined elements of Washington’s emphasis on black business development and W. E. B. Du Bois’s call for civil rights activism. In mid-February 1906, A. D. Williams joined five hundred black Georgians in organizing the Georgia Equal Rights League to protest the white primary system. They elected Williams Jefferson White as president and AME Bishop Henry McNeal Turner and CME Bishop R. S. Williams as vice presidents. White urged the delegates to recognize the importance of both black economic development and civil protest. Turner, one of the most prominent black religious leaders of the period, was outspoken advocate of racial pride and a caustic critic of prevailing racial policies. "To the Negro . . . the American flag is a dirty and contemptible rag," he cried. "Hell is an improvement upon the United States when the Negro is involved."

The convention’s address to the public protested lynching, peonage, the convict lease system, inequitable treatment in the courts, inferior segregated public transportation, unequal distribution of funds for public education, and exclusion of black men from the electorate, juries, and the state militia. A. D. Williams and Turner signed the address along with sixteen other leaders, including Atlanta University professor W. E. B. DuBois; Atlanta Baptist College president-elect John Hope; J. Max Barber, editor of The Voice of the Negro; and Peter James Bryant, pastor of Wheat Street Baptist Church.

Soon after this gathering, in September 1906, African-American advancement efforts received a serious setback when Atlanta experienced a major race riot. Newspaper reports and rumors of black assaults on white women had already inflamed the fears of whites. When white gangs assaulted isolated African Americans, they met little opposition from police. Larger mobs of whites, numbering in the thousands, then attacked and looted black businesses on Auburn Avenue. Rioters derailed trolley cars and beat to death blacks who
happened to be on the streets. Commerce in the city almost ceased for three days as many Atlantans remained in their homes. After five days of violence, the city resumed a sullen peace. Official accounts listed one white and twenty-six black deaths and more than 150 blacks seriously wounded. The riot destroyed the illusion that Atlanta was a New South paradigm of racial harmony and reinforced the trend toward increased residential segregation in the Auburn Avenue neighborhood, which now became the center of African-American economic and social life in Atlanta.

Williams and other black Atlanta residents faced new racial barriers in the years after the riot, but Auburn Avenue businesses thrived during the following two decades as the black community turned inward, supporting its own institutions. Although Williams continued to oppose racial discrimination, he benefitted from the new realities of white flight from and black movement into the Auburn Avenue area. Several years after the riot, Williams purchased the two-story Queen Anne-style building on Auburn Avenue in which King, Jr. would be born.

An Odd Fellow, Williams also served on the order’s Industrial Commission, which planned to develop Odd Fellow City, an African-American community near Elberton, Georgia. He joined Bishop Turner in a controversial business venture, the Silver Queen Mining Company, which sold stock in a silver mine in Mexico. Benjamin Davis, editor of the black newspaper the Atlanta Independent, criticized the venture as "a fake, pure and simple" and offered space in the newspaper to Turner and Williams "to explain their connection with this fraudulent scheme" to the "many thousands of poor Negroes that are being defrauded throughout the state."

Turner responded that stock was sold "to colored people only" because the corporation was a "colored organization" and "a stepping stone to teach our people how to do business, and put some money in their pockets." He said he had visited the mine with two reputable mining engineers. "The reports from these two gentlemen were good," he concluded, "and there is no fake about the Company, but a straight, fair, square proposition." Although Turner’s response did not satisfy Davis, the reputations of the two preacher-entrepreneurs suffered no permanent damage because of the controversy.

Williams continued to involve himself in business ventures that capitalized on and enhanced his success as Ebenezer’s pastor. By the beginning of 1913 the growing congregation had 750 members and was planning further expansion. In January the church purchased a lot on the corner of Auburn Avenue and Jackson Street. Six months later it announced plans to raise $25,000 for a new church building, which would include an auditorium and gallery seating 1,250 people. "Few Churches in the city have made strides more rapidly," conceded the Independent, "nor have contributed more to the moral and intellectual growth of the city. Dr. Williams is an earnest, conscientious and well-informed minister whose influence in the city is acknowledged and appreciated."

In March 1914, Ebenezer celebrated the beginning of Williams’s third decade as its pastor by breaking ground for the new building. While the basement was under construction, the congregation worshipped in a hall above a storefront on Edgewood Avenue. That spring, many of the older children of the church, including ten-year-old Alberta Williams, were converted in a ten-day revival, baptized in a borrowed pool at Wheat Street Baptist Church, and formally admitted to church membership. When the basement was capped with a roof in the late spring of 1914, “there was a great march” as worshippers entered the basement to hold services for the first time. Ebenezer’s building was finally completed in 1922.

As he consolidated his institutional base at Ebenezer, A. D. Williams continued to expand his regional influence. In the fall of 1913 he was elected moderator of the Atlanta Missionary Baptist Association. He played a role in power struggles among Baptist leaders, including a dispute within the National Baptist Convention over ownership of the National Baptist Publishing House. He also served as treasurer of Atlanta’s YMCA campaign and of the Georgia State Baptist Convention, where he had fiduciary responsibility for a new youth reformatory established by the convention in Macon, Georgia. A year after Atlanta Baptist College was renamed Morehouse College (in honor of a white executive of the American Baptist Home Mission Society),
Williams became chairman of the finance committee of the Morehouse College Alumni Association; that same year, the college honored him with a Doctor of Divinity degree. Early in 1917, A. D. Williams became involved in an effort, initiated by Atlanta University graduate Walter White, to organize a local branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). After the branch was chartered, he and other NAACP members, along with members of the Neighborhood Union, a black women's group, launched a prolonged campaign to improve conditions in black schools. The catalyst was the plan by the Board of Education to close seventh-grade classes in its black schools in order to pay for a new junior high school for white students. A committee, which included branch president Harry H. Pace, Lugenia Burns Hope of the Neighborhood Union, and her husband, Morehouse president John Hope, presented a petition protesting the plan to the all-white school board. A. D. Williams represented the black Baptist ministerial alliance at the meeting with the board. "You, with fifty schools, most of them ample, efficient and comfortable, for the education of your children," said the petitioners, "can square neither your conscience with your God nor your conduct with your oaths, and behold Negro children in fourteen unsanitary, dilapidated, unventilated school rooms, with double sessions in half of the grades, no industrial facilities, no preparation for high schools and no high schools for the blacks." In the end, the school board acceded to the petitioners' plea to reinstate the seventh grade for blacks.

The issue of black schools spurred membership in the new NAACP branch, which climbed to four hundred by the end of March. Yet subsequent petitions to the school board—for better school buildings, a commercial and industrial junior high, a high school for black students, and the elimination of double sessions in all public schools—met with no success. Thereafter, wartime mobilization and rebuilding after a devastating fire in May 1917 caused popular commitment to the NAACP to wane. By June 1918, membership had declined to forty-nine due to Walter White's departure for the NAACP's New York office and the resignation of the branch president. The enervated branch appealed to Atlanta's Baptist and Methodist ministerial associations for support. In response, A. D. Williams agreed to serve as branch president and was formally elected on 9 July. Williams—described in one account as "a forceful and impressive speaker, a good organizer and leader, a man of vision and brilliant imagination, which he sometimes finds it necessary to curb"—experienced initial success as an NAACP leader. A month after his election, he announced an ambitious drive to attract five thousand new members. The Atlanta Independent illustrated its confidence in Williams's ability to revive the organization with a front page cartoon depicting a black gladiator, whose shield was the NAACP, slaying the hydra-headed monster of the grandfather clause, lynching, peonage, and segregation. The branch did grow: to 1,400 members within five months. During his tenure, the newly invigorated NAACP spearheaded a major effort to register black voters in anticipation of a local referendum on school taxes and bond issues for public works that would allocate a disproportionate share of the funds raised went to white institutions. The 2,500 black Atlantans who paid the poll tax and overcame other obstacles to become registered voters were able to defeat the education measures in the nonpartisan referendum. When local authorities put the issues to a vote again in April 1919, Atlanta's NAACP submitted a petition to the mayor and the board of education outlining the inadequate conditions in black schools and stating the group's terms for supporting the bond issues and tax increase. Again black Atlantans, not convinced by official promises, helped to defeat the measures.

In June 1919, A. D. Williams led an Atlanta delegation to the NAACP national convention in Cleveland. In a speech there, Williams told how black voters had rejected the referenda in Atlanta and attributed the rapid increase in black voter registration to the work of women. "We got our women organized and put the women in different districts and we had meetings weekly," Williams explained. "There is one gentleman [who] said we couldn't get members by having meetings; we got a number that way. . . . Night after night people came forward and paid their dollar. That was done largely because the women were allowed to make speeches.
They made such speeches you would be surprised." Williams ended by extending an invitation from the governor of Georgia, the mayor of Atlanta, and the Atlanta Chamber of Commerce to hold the organization’s 1920 convention in that city, still notorious as the site of the 1906 riot. "Somebody says it is not time to go down to Atlanta now, but it is, you are due there," Williams asserted. After some hesitation, the NAACP voted to make Atlanta the site of its first national convention in the South.

By May 1920, however, when the NAACP convened at Auburn Avenue's Big Bethel AME Church, Williams had been forced to step down as branch president. The preceding year some NAACP members had moved to boycott the white press in favor of black newspapers such as the Atlanta Independent. Williams opposed the move. In retaliation, the editor of the Independent, Benjamin Davis, lashed out, attacking Williams in scurrilous cartoons and editorials and charging him with "suppression of speech, arbitrary ruling, despotism in the chair," and other misuses of authority. Nevertheless, Williams served on the local host committee for the NAACP conference, an event that enhanced the city’s reputation for racial tolerance. "Atlanta treated us royally," NAACP leader Mary White Ovington recalled, "and there were white men . . . who attended our sessions every evening. The press gave us unusually fine publicity, featuring on its front page our demands for unsegregated traveling accommodations and for the vote."

Williams remained active in racial advancement efforts, achieving another victory in the school bond election of March 1921. With the addition of women to the electorate, black voter registration more than doubled in two years. This rise in representation, combined with the results of the 1919 balloting, convinced white leaders to make firm commitments to the black community. The bond issues now passed overwhelmingly in a record turnout. Several million dollars were earmarked to build eighteen new schools, including four black elementary schools and Atlanta’s first public secondary school for black students. Martin Luther King, Jr., would receive most of his public education in two of the new schools, David T. Howard Elementary School and Booker T. Washington High School.

In the fall of 1922, the Atlanta Independent endorsed Williams for the newly vacant post of president of the General Missionary Baptist Convention of Georgia. "Dr. Williams may not be the most learned philosopher among our preachers, the best scholar or the deepest theologian, but he is easily the best businessman, and that is what the state Baptist convention needs at its head," editor Benjamin Davis argued. That November, however, Williams lost the election. Even so, by then his institutional ties reached broadly and deeply throughout Atlanta’s black community. Williams was on the executive board of the General Missionary Baptist Convention of Georgia, chaired its Mission Board, and served as a trustee of its Central City College in Macon. He had also served the Baptist community as president of the Atlanta Baptist Ministers Union and moderator of the Atlanta Missionary Baptist Association for seven years, as Georgia’s representative on the Foreign Mission Board of the National Baptist Convention for a dozen years, and as floor leader of Georgia’s delegation for six years. In the last of these roles, he had attended the tumultuous National Baptist Convention held in St. Louis in December 1922, where he participated in the unsuccessful effort to elect Peter James Bryant of Atlanta’s Wheat Street Baptist Church to succeed the convention’s first president, Elias Camp Morris. In the end, the Reverend Lacey Kirk Williams of Chicago’s Olivet Baptist Church won the election, after a two-month campaign marked by "bitter feelings" and "the ugliest things ever said by one preacher about another."

A. D. Williams regained some of his earlier prominence as a civil rights leader in February 1924, when he was reelected as president of the moribund Atlanta NAACP branch. Despite earlier criticisms, the Atlanta Independent reported Williams’s return in hopeful terms: "It was the ballot that gave Atlanta Negroes modern . . . schoolhouses and facilities; and it was the inspiration that the race received from the local branch under the leadership of Dr. A. D. Williams that put the fight in their bones." Williams’s program for the
revitalization of the branch called for drives to increase membership to two thousand and to register ten thousand black voters; he also advocated passage of bond issues for more and better schools, boycotts of office buildings where black people were barred from elevators, and improved park and recreational facilities for the black community. Williams and other NAACP leaders aggressively promoted branch membership and voter registration and eventually won additional funding for Atlanta’s beleagured black public schools. In the meantime, Williams was unable to prevent a decline in Ebenezer’s membership, from nine hundred in 1918 to three hundred by 1924. As he entered the seventh decade of his life and his fourth decade as pastor of Ebenezer, he faced strong competition from younger ministers. Some members, too, may have left to join the northern migration. Although Williams himself had thought of moving during the years after World War I, by the mid-1920s he realized that his future, for better or worse, was at Ebenezer. By then he had met Michael King, the man who would become his son-in-law and reinvigorate his pastorate.

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Like A. D. Williams a quarter of a century earlier, King had come to Atlanta from rural Georgia, with little money or education but with a fierce desire to succeed. In 1920, when he first met the Alberta Williams, Reverend Williams’s daughter, King was twenty-three and studying elementary English at a preparatory school. She was sixteen and attending Spelman Seminary’s four-year high school program. Even before meeting her, he had heard about her “gracious manners, captivating smile and scholarly manner” and knew that she had "organized a fine choir in her father’s church.” He told incredulous friends of his plan to marry the daughter of one of Atlanta’s most prominent ministers although he had not yet met her. Driven by his desire to be taken seriously as a suitor and a minister, King struggled to rectify his educational deficiencies by attending night classes until he was able to afford day school. "I had no natural talent for study," he admitted, "and my learning came after long, long hours of going over and over and over the work until I was falling asleep saying my lessons to myself." The school principal drilled King in English syntax. He also encouraged his pupil to register to vote. When King sought to do so, however, he discovered the maze of obstacles placed in the way of black people, including the poll tax, literacy test, and even elevators to the "colored registration office" that did not work. He made several attempts before becoming a registered voter. King’s determination was rooted in his childhood experiences with poverty and racism. His grandfather Jim Long had been used by his owner to breed slaves, conceiving children with several women. Census records show that after the Civil War, Long maintained at least two families in Henry County, where he also registered to vote during Reconstruction. Long’s relationship with Jane Linsey produced a daughter, Delia, who married James Albert King, King, Jr.’s grandfather. Little is known about King’s early life and heritage, except that he was probably of Irish-African ancestry and born outside the South. Following their marriage in Stockbridge on 20 August 1895, twenty-year-old Delia Linsey and thirty-one-year-old James King became sharecroppers, moving from place to place in Henry and Clayton counties. After 1900 they settled in Stockbridge, an area of unexceptional farmland later romanticized in Margaret Mitchell’s Gone With the Wind. Unlike Willis Williams’s Greene County, Henry County never had many large plantations. It was a section of hard-scrabble farms, where black and white people alike scratched a living from hard red clay. Like many families, the Kings were poor; the county tax lists record little personal property for James King. The large King family included nine children (plus one who died in infancy). Michael (or M. L.), the second child and first son, was born on 19 December 1897. During his childhood, M. L. King later recalled, ”my mother had babies, worked the fields, and often went during the winter to wash and iron in the homes of whites around town.” His father’s life followed the unchanging seasonal labors of a sharecropper: spring sowing of cotton in fields fertized with foul-smelling guano; summer weeding; fall picking and chopping; and winter
turning of the resistant soil. The rewards were paltry, made even more so by the inability of powerless blacks to prevent cheating by whites. On one occasion, Michael King remembered accompanying his father to "settle up" with the white landlord. When he pointed out that his father was due more money, the landlord threatened him. A fight was narrowly averted, but the King family was forced off the property and had to seek aid from a white landowner who employed Delia King and Woodie, Michael's older sister, as laundresses. The family then moved into a little frame building on his property.64

For Delia King and her children, the rituals of the black church offered relief from this life of hardship. Although the family occasionally attended a local Methodist as well as the Baptist church, they established enduring ties with Floyd Chapel Baptist Church in Stockbridge. Its Sunday services, Wednesday prayer meetings, baptisms, weddings, funerals, and special Christmas and Easter services offered welcome diversions. "Church was a way to ease the harsh tone of farm life, a way to keep from descending into bitterness," Michael King wrote. "Papa was not religious, and although I don't think he was very enthusiastic about my attending so many church affairs, he never interfered with Mama's taking me." Unable to find solace in religion, James King became increasingly cynical in the face of the economic and racial hardships of his life. His family became targets of his angry outbursts, fueled by alcoholism.65

The King children attended school from three to five months a year at the Stockbridge Colored School. Michael King's teacher, the wife of his pastor, taught 234 children in all the grades. "We had no books, no materials to write with, and no blackboard for her to use in instructing us," King wrote. "But I loved going, particularly when we began learning numbers, which always had a fascination for me."66

According to his memoirs, King experienced a number of brutal incidents as he grew up in a troubled family in the rural South.67 On one occasion, when he was passing a local sawmill fetching milk for his mother, he was stopped by a sawmill owner who demanded that King get a bucket of water for the sawmill workmen. The youngster politely declined, whereupon the white man beat him and kicked over his milk. Mike ran home and explained what had happened. His enraged mother then returned with her son to the mill to confront the owner; when he acknowledged that he had hit the boy, she knocked him down and pummeled him. Jim King, upon hearing of the incident, took his rifle to the mill and threatened to kill the man. That evening, white men mounted on horses visited the King house in search of the father. Having heard that they were after him, however, King had already fled. He lived for months in the woods, and by the time tempers had cooled enough for him to return to his family, he was drinking heavily, and Delia was in poor health. One evening Jim King came home drunk and angry and began to assault his wife. Mike came to his mother's defense and subdued his father. The next day, Mike promised not to challenge his father's authority; Jim, in turn, pledged to never hit his wife again.68

Within the walls of Floyd Chapel Baptist Church, meanwhile, Michael grew to respect the few black preachers who were willing to speak out against racial injustices, despite the risk of violent white retaliation. He also admired ministers, such as his own pastor, the Reverend W. H. Lowe, who could recite Scripture largely from memory, preach in rich cadences, and lead traditional Baptist congregational a capella singing. "The human voice was the rural church's organ and piano," King recalled.69 By age ten Mike King had developed his own talent for singing, and during his teenage years he was a member of an a capella singing group that toured local churches. He gradually developed an interest in preaching, initially practicing eulogies on the family's chickens, which he then dispatched. By the end of 1917 he had decided to become a minister, choosing the Baptist church because its nonhierarchical structure seemed to offer more opportunities for a person, such as himself, with little formal education. (Like many other rural preachers, King was barely literate; his religious training was limited to instruction from his pastor and his experience as a church member. School records indicate that by age fifteen, he had learned to read but could not write.)70 After the minister and deacons of his church licensed him to preach, a small rural church between Jonesboro and Atlanta invited King to become its pastor. Overcoming the resistance of church officers who felt he was too young, King was able to convince
his examiners that he should be ordained. By that time, he had already developed a conception of his role as a pastor concerned about the everyday lives of his congregation.71

In the spring of 1918 King left Stockbridge to make his home in Atlanta, an attractive place for an ambitious young country preacher. He joined his older sister, Woodie, who had left Stockbridge for the city a year or so earlier. King roomed with a family near Auburn Avenue. He worked first in a vulcanizing shop that made tires. When he failed to get a raise, he quit to load cotton bales and then drove a truck for a firm that sold barbers chairs.72

By the summer of 1919 Woodie King had moved from her first residence with a cousin and was boarding at the Williams home. Michael King seized the opportunity to introduce himself to Alberta Williams. He began to see her regularly before asking her to "consider entering a courtship" with him. The courtship persisted even when Alberta Williams, at her father's insistence, departed to attend Hampton Normal and Industrial Institute in Virginia. 73 Her parents welcomed King into the family circle, however, eventually treating him as a son and encouraging the young minister to overcome his educational deficiencies as the elder Williams had done three decades earlier.

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In March 1924, shortly after A. D. Williams celebrated his thirtieth anniversary as pastor of Ebenezer Baptist Church, Alberta returned to Atlanta after completing a two-year teaching program at Hampton. Her engagement to Michael King was announced at Ebenezer's Sunday services. Because the school board did not allow married women in classrooms, Alberta Williams taught only briefly in Rockdale County and at Atlanta's W. H. Crogman Elementary School before her marriage.74 Meanwhile King served as pastor of several churches in nearby College Park, while studying at Bryant Preparatory School. Shortly after the engagement, his mother died, prompting his father to request his return to help on the farm. Instead of complying, he followed the urging of Alberta Williams and her father to finish at Bryant and to seek admission to Morehouse College.75 Despite being twice refused admission owing to poor test scores, King, backed by influential alumnus A. D. Williams, appealed his case to President John Hope and Dean Samuel Howard Archer. He was finally admitted as a beginning student at the Morehouse School of Religion in the fall of 1926.76

Like Williams, King studied in Morehouse's three-year minister's degree program, headed by Dr. Charles Hubert. Although he found the work difficult, he received encouragement from Hubert, who offered helpful criticisms of sermons King prepared. He recalled failing an introductory course in English twice and only receiving a passing grade on his third attempt in summer school. To study for a biology course, he relied on the help of classmate Melvin H. Watson, the son of a longtime clerk at Ebenezer Baptist Church. His closest friend was Sandy Ray of Texas, a fellow seminarian. "We shared an awe of city life, of cars, of the mysteries of college scholarship, and, most of all, of our callings to the ministry," King recalled.77

On Thanksgiving Day 1926, the Reverend Michael Luther King and Alberta Christine Williams were married at Ebenezer. Atlanta's most prominent black Baptist ministers--Bryant of Wheat Street, E. R. Carter of Friendship, and James M. Nabrit of Mt. Olive--performed the ceremony. When the newlyweds moved into an upstairs bedroom of the Williams's house on Auburn Avenue, many people assumed that King would succeed his father-in-law at Ebenezer. Williams encouraged him to consider the possibility, but King initially resisted. He was already serving two congregations at College Park and East Point, and he was still learning the ministry. If he was to be Williams's successor, he wanted to merit the position, not inherit it.78
According to King's recollections, A. D. Williams inspired him in many ways. Both men preached a social-gospel Christianity that combined a belief in personal salvation with the need to apply the teachings of Jesus to the daily problems of their black congregations. Both also avoided an overreliance on emotional oratory, which sometimes was meant to disguise lack of content. King later noted his high regard for Williams's sermons. "[He] could preach with force and power. Some of the things I started off to do as a preacher he corrected . . . He turned me around and put me on the right road."  

The family of M. L. and Alberta Williams grew rapidly. On 11 September 1927, the first child was born to the Kings and named Willie Christine for her grandfather and for her mother. M. L. King, Jr., the first son and grandson in the extended family, was born next on 15 January 1929. A second son—named Alfred Daniel Williams, after his grandfather—arrived on 30 July 1930, a month after King, Sr., received his bachelor's degree in theology.  

The black community into which King, Jr., was born had changed substantially during his grandfather's forty years in Atlanta. The city's population had grown from 65,500 people in 1890 to 270,500 in 1930, while the percentage of blacks in the city had declined from 43 to 33 percent. Because of legal and social restrictions, Atlanta's blacks were now heavily concentrated in the "Sweet Auburn" district and in southwest Atlanta near Morehouse, Spelman, and Atlanta University.  

In 1928, just as Benjamin Davis's Independent was foundering, W. A. Scott launched the Atlanta World. The new paper flourished, becoming the Atlanta Daily World in 1932, the first black-owned daily newspaper in the country. At the same time, older black leaders like A. D. Williams were gradually being replaced by a new generation of ministers that included King, Sr., who was, by then, president of the Atlanta Sunday School and Baptist Young Peoples Union convention and moderator of the Atlanta Missionary Baptist Association.  

A. D. Williams died on 21 March 1931. The massed choirs of Ebenezer, Liberty, Traveler's Rest, and Wheat Street Baptist churches sang at his funeral, "a huge and emotional ceremony," as King, Sr., recalled. The sixteen eulogies included offerings by Benjamin Davis; W. A. Fountain and J. S. Flipper, bishops of the AME church; John Hope, president of Atlanta University and Morehouse; Florence M. Read, president of Spelman; Dr. Will Alexander of the Commission on Inter-racial Cooperation; and Dr. James M. Nabrit of the General Missionary Baptist Convention of Georgia. Letters, resolutions, and telegrams of condolence and tribute came from across the country. The Georgia Baptist's obituary was effusive: "'A. D.' was a sign post among his neighbors, and a mighty oak in the Baptist forest of the nation," it said. "Born in the country and with limited literary preparation, his wealth of native ability, tact and application made him a man among men and a force to be reckoned with in local, state, and national economic and ecclesiastical councils. He was a preacher of unusual power, an appealing experimentalist, a persuasive evangelist, and a convincing doctrinarian."  

As a child, King, Jr., was constantly reminded of the depth of his family's roots in Ebenezer Church and Atlanta's black community. Although his father's increasingly impressive accomplishments would in time overshadow those of his grandfather, Williams's influence at Ebenezer remained strong even after his death. King, Sr., did not leave Traveler's Rest to succeed his father-in-law until the fall of 1931, by which time he had sufficiently overcome his feeling of unpreparedness in assuming the post. It took several years, however, before he gained the full trust and support of Ebenezer's deacons—a years in which he provided remarkably effective leadership and restored the church to financial security. Beyond his grandfather's legacy, the forces shaping King, Jr.'s emerging personality were the stable influences of family, church, and community. King remembered his childhood as one of harmony. In an autobiographical statement written in early adulthood, King, Jr., depicted a happy childhood spent "in a very congenial home situation," with parents who "always lived together very intimately." He could "hardly remember a time that they ever argued (My father happens to be the kind who just [won't] argue), or had any great fall out."
Hidden from view were his parents' negotiations regarding their differing notions on discipline. His father believed strict discipline was sometimes necessary to prepare his offspring for the often cruel society they would enter. "To prepare a child for a world where death and violence are always near drains a lot of energy from the soul," King, Sr., later explained. "Inside you, there is always a fist balled up to protect them. And a constant sense of the hard line between maintaining self-respect and getting along with the enemy all around you." 

As a father, King, Sr., found it difficult to control his temper and to soften the sharper edges of personality that had enabled him to survive the hardships of his early life. "My impatience made it very hard for me to sit down with the boys and quietly explain to them the way I wanted things done." L. D. Reddick, an acquaintance of the King family, described the household as "father-centered," a place where King, Sr.'s word, "considerate and benevolent as he tried to make it, was final." The elder King's own recollections, however, suggest that his paternal desires were neither unbending nor always obeyed. Although he believed that the "switch was usually quicker and more persuasive" in disciplining his boys (Christine was "exceptionally well-behaved"), he increasingly deferred to his wife's less stern but effective approaches to child rearing, recognizing that her gentleness and empathy did not result in permissiveness--"they couldn't get up early enough in the morning to fool her." King, Sr., later acknowledged that his wife "insisted . . . as the children grew older, that any form of discipline used on them by either of us had to be agreed upon by both parents." His own difficult relationship with his embittered, violence-prone father prepared him to accept the possibility that only his wife could "investigate and soothe" his oldest son's "sensitivities." "We talked a lot about the future of the kids, and she was able to understand that even when I got very upset with them, it was only because I wanted them to be strong and able and happy." King, Jr., would later describe "Mother Dear" as being "behind the scene setting forth those motherly cares, the lack of which leaves a missing link in life." Protected and loved by concerned, confident, and accommodating parents, the King children also benefited from the presence in their household of Jennie Celeste Williams. As First Lady of Ebenezer, Williams was involved in most aspects of church governance, heading the Missionary Society for many years. She represented the church in local Baptist organizations and in the Woman's Convention, an auxiliary to the National Baptist Convention. Known as "Mama" to her grandchildren, she was especially protective of her first grandson and "could never bear to see him cry." Referring to her as "saintly," King, Jr., acknowledged her considerable impact on his childhood. "She was very dear to each of us, but especially to me," he later wrote. "I sometimes think that I was [her] favorite grandchild. I can remember very vividly how she spent many evenings telling us interesting stories." Beyond the family home, the King children spent most of their time at Ebenezer church. As King, Jr., later explained, "the church has always been a second home for me." Nearly all his initial friendships developed there. "My best friends were in Sunday School, and it was the Sunday School that helped me to build the capacity for getting along with people." Even King, Jr.'s earliest letters to his parents, written between the ages of eleven and fifteen, convey an intimate knowledge of Baptist church life, including such details as congregational governance, ward meetings, church finances, and social events. In addition to observing his father's leadership role, King, Jr.'s church activities also brought him into close association with his mother, who was Ebenezer's organist and choir director. As in other African American Baptist churches, the music and singing at Ebenezer played a major role in attracting and holding members. King, Sr. believed that "religious ideas and ideals have been shaped as much by gospel songs as by gospel sermons." Alberta King's musical talent caused her to be in demand at various Baptist gatherings in Georgia and even in meetings of the National Baptist Convention. In 1937, before graduating from Morris Brown College, Alberta Brown initiated a series of annual musicales featuring the church's choirs. Ebenezer's choirs also performed at the 1939 Atlanta premiere of Gone With The Wind. By the early 1940s the annual concerts were attracting overflowing crowds. From the age of four, King Jr., often performed with his mother at
Ebenezer and at other churches and religious gatherings, singing such songs as "I Want to be More and More Like Jesus" with his mother providing accompaniment. His father recalled his son's appreciation for church ceremonies and ritual, the passionate love of Baptist music.

The King children observed their father's increasingly evident achievements as a minister. Faced with mortgage foreclosure on Ebenezer in the years after A. D. Williams's death, King, Sr., reinvigorated the church through successful membership and fundraising drives and was able to pay off the note within four years. The family's living standard also improved. Indeed, King, Sr., later stated, "the deacons took great pride in knowing that young Reverend King was the best-paid Negro minister in the city." In 1934, his finances were such that he could attend the World Baptist Alliance in Berlin. Traveling by ocean liner to France, King and ten other ministers journeyed by train from Paris to Rome, then by boat to Tunisia, Libya, and Egypt. The tour was highlighted by visits to historic sites in Palestine and the Holy Land. "In Jerusalem, when I saw with my own eyes the places where Jesus had lived and taught, a life spent in the ministry seemed to me even more compelling," King recalled. Upon arrival in Berlin—where they noted many ominous signs of the rise of Adolf Hitler—the group joined thousands of Baptist clergymen from around the world. King's return to Atlanta in August 1934 was front-page news in the Atlanta Daily World. The increasing prominence and relative affluence of Ebenezer's pastor was also reflected by the now-final transformation of his name: from Michael King to Michael Luther King to Martin Luther King (although close friends and relatives continued to refer to him and his son as Mike or M. L.).

Despite the senior King's relative wealth, the family did not join the migration to the more prestigious neighborhoods that were being settled by middle-class blacks. King's anti-elitist attitudes were cultivated by his parents who discouraged him from developing feelings of class superiority. The King children often heard the story of A. D. Williams's stern rebuke of a parishioner who had corrected his grammar: "I done give a hundred dollars but the gentleman who corrected me has given nothing." King Jr., worked a variety of jobs—delivering the Atlanta Journal from age eight and holding manual labor positions as a teenager. He connected the "anti capitalistic feelings" he had developed by late adolescence with his childhood observations of "the numerous people standing in bread lines" during the Depression.

At about age six, King, Jr., had an experience that profoundly affected his attitudes toward white people. When a white playmate he had known for three years entered Atlanta's segregated school system, the friend's father told his son that he could no longer play with King. "I never will forget what a great shock this was to me," King, Jr., later recalled. He remembered discussing the matter with his parents over dinner and realizing for the first time "the existence of a race problem." King's parents told him of the "tragedies" of racism and recounted "some of the insults they themselves had confronted on account of it. I was greatly shocked, and from that moment on I was determined to hate every white person." Although his parents told him that he "should not hate the white man, but that it was my duty as a Christian to love him," he was not satisfied. "The question arose in my mind, how could I love a race of people who hated me and who had been responsible for breaking me up with one of my best childhood friends?"

King, Jr.'s schooling officially began at the end of January 1935. A year earlier he had tried to join his sister in the first grade of Yonge Street Elementary School; the attempt to enter school early was apparently foiled, however, when a teacher overheard him talking about his last birthday party. After a half-year as a first grader, though, he was promoted to the second grade anyway. In the fall of 1936, he entered the third grade at David T. Howard Elementary School, where he remained through the sixth grade. He then entered the Laboratory High School of Atlanta University, an experimental, progressive private school that appealed to black residents seeking alternatives to Atlanta's crowded public schools. He completed two years there—earning generally good grades except for a failing grade in social studies—before the school was closed. During King's childhood and teenage years, he became increasingly aware of his father's vocal opposition to segregation. The elder King not only engaged in individual acts of dissent, such as riding the "whites only" City
Hall elevator to reach the voter registrar’s office, and participating in protest movements for civil rights, but also was a leader of organizations such as the Atlanta Civic and Political League and the NAACP. In 1939, he proposed, to the opposition of more cautious clergy and lay leaders, a massive voter registration drive to be initiated by a march to City Hall. At an Ebenezer rally of more than a thousand activists, King referred to his own past and urged black people toward greater militancy. “I ain’t gonna plow no more mules,” he shouted. “I’ll never step off the road again to let white folks pass. I am going to move forward toward freedom, and I’m hoping everybody here today is going right along with me!”  

A year later King, Sr., braved racist threats when he became chair of the Committee on the Equalization of Teachers’ Salaries, organized to protest discriminatory policies that paid higher salaries to white teachers than to blacks with equivalent qualifications and experience. With NAACP legal help, the movement resulted in significant gains. Although too young to understand fully his father’s activism, King, Jr., later wrote that he and his siblings wondered how their father avoided being physically attacked during the “tension-packed atmosphere” of their childhood years. Dinner discussions in the King household often touched on political matters as King, Sr., expressed his views about “the ridiculous nature of segregation in the South.” Fearing that they might endure humiliating treatment, King forbade his children to attend segregated theaters. King, Jr., later remembered witnessing his father standing up to a policeman who stopped the elder King for a traffic violation and referred to him as a “boy.” According to King, Jr., his indignant father responded by pointing to his son and asserting, “This is a boy. I’m a man, and until you call me one, I will not listen to you.” The shocked policeman “wrote the ticket up nervously, and left the scene as quickly as possible.”

On another occasion during the time of the voting rights campaign, King, Jr., again witnessed his father’s determination not to accept racial discrimination. His father asked for a pair of shoes at a downtown store. When the white clerk told the two that they must go to the back of the store for service, King, Sr., refused and left the store. Years later, King, Jr., recalled the incident: “I still remember walking down the street beside him as he muttered, ‘I don’t care how long I have to live with this system, I will never accept it.’”

King, Sr.’s activism shaped his son’s understanding of the ministry and presaged King, Jr.’s own career. Along with other “progressive” black Baptist preachers, the elder King stressed the need for an educated, politically active ministry. In 1942 he spearheaded an effort in the National Baptist Convention to pressure President Franklin Roosevelt to eliminate racial discrimination on trains. In an earlier speech expressing his views on “the true mission of the Church” King, Sr., told his fellow clergymen that the church must touch every phase of the community life. Quite often we say the church has no place in politics, forgetting the words of the Lord, “The spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the Gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and the recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised.” . . . In this we find we are to do something about the broken-hearted, poor, unemployed, the captive, the blind, and the bruised. How can people be happy without jobs, food, shelter and clothes? . . .

God hasten the time when every minister will become a registered voter and a part of every movement for the betterment of our people. Again and again has it been said we cannot lead where we do not go, and we cannot teach what we do not know. As ministers a great responsibility rests upon us as leaders. We cannot expect our people to register and become citizens until we as leaders set the standard.

King, Jr.’s, recollections suggest that he entered his teenage years with enormous admiration for his father’s social commitment and with a sense of religion as a constant source of support. On the traumatic occasion of his grandmother’s death on 18 May 1941, he accepted his parents’ spiritual guidance. King learned about the fatal heart attack of Jennie Celeste Williams while attending a parade without his parents’ permission. Grieved by the death of his beloved “Mama” and remorseful about his transgression, King initially reacted by jumping
from a second-floor window of his home. While neither King nor his father later mentioned a suicide attempt in their autobiographical statements, the elder King's account confirms the distress and guilt his son felt: "He cried off and on for several days afterward, and was unable to sleep at night." King, Sr., explained that death "was a part of life that was difficult to get used to" and that God had "His own plan and His own way, and we cannot change or interfere with the time He chooses to call any of us back to Him." King, Jr., later described his grandmother’s death as a major formative experience of his youth: "It was after this incident for the first time that I talked at any length on the doctrine of immortality. My parents attempted to explain it to me and I was assured that somehow my grandmother still lived."

Despite his acceptance of many of his parents’ religious beliefs, King was uncomfortable with the fervent emotionalism he sometimes observed in church. In an autobiographical sketch King wrote while a graduate student at Crozer Theological Seminary, he remembered the lack of "dynamic conviction" that had accompanied his decision to join the church, made when a guest evangelist led a revival at Ebenezer. He admitted that he "had never given this matter a thought" and joined only when his sister took the step: "after seeing her join I decided that I would not let her get ahead of me, so I was the next." That King so vividly remembered this childhood event, which culminated in his baptism, may explain his later discomfort with emotional "conversion" experiences. "Conversion for me was never an abrupt something," he explained after recounting his baptism. "I have never experienced the so called 'crisis moment.' Religion has just been something that I grew up in. Conversion for me has been the gradual intaking of the noble ideals set forth in my family and my environment, and I must admit that this intaking has been largely unconscious."

King’s religious doubts occurred just as many aspects of his life were changing. Following the death of his grandmother, the family moved from the house on Auburn to a larger yellow brick house three blocks away at 193 Boulevard, thus fulfilling a childhood ambition of King, Sr., to own such a home. Enjoying the benefits of his family’s affluence, King, Jr., became active in the social life of middle-class Atlanta. He could not remain isolated, however, from southern racism. After delivering the Atlanta Journal for five years, he was denied the job of manager of a deposit station. As one account put it, "such a top post, even in Negro neighborhoods was reserved for white men. It involved handling money and coming into the downtown office where the cashiers and clerks were mostly young white women."

Another change in King’s life resulted from the closure of the Atlanta Laboratory School in 1942. Skipping the ninth grade, the thirteen-year-old started tenth grade at the public Booker T. Washington High. During his second year at the school he won a preliminary public speaking contest, which allowed him to participate in a state oratorical contest sponsored by the black Elks in Dublin, Georgia. On the way home from the competition, King and other black students were cursed by the bus driver when they refused to give up their seats to white passengers. They reluctantly complied with his directive only when their speech teacher warned them against becoming involved in a potentially dangerous incident. More than two decades later, King recalled his feelings as he stood during that ride to Atlanta: "It was the angriest I have ever been in my life."

King’s speech from the contest, "The Negro and the Constitution," was published in the 1944 high school annual. The text reflected King’s early political views. "We cannot have an enlightened democracy with one great group living in ignorance," he insisted. Neither could the nation be healthy with "one tenth of the people ill-nourished, sick, harboring germs of disease," or "orderly and sound with one group so ground down and thwarted that it is almost forced into unsocial attitudes and crime." King warned: "We cannot be truly Christian people so long as we flaunt the central teachings of Jesus: brotherly love and the Golden Rule. We cannot come to full prosperity with one great group so ill-delayed that it cannot buy goods. So as we gird ourselves to defend democracy from foreign attack, let us see to it that increasingly at home we give fair play and free opportunity for all people."

Following completion of the eleventh grade at Washington High, King had an opportunity to begin college education a year early. Because enrollment at Morehouse College, the alma mater of both King, Sr., and A. D.
Williams, had declined because of the wartime draft, president Benjamin E. Mays allowed promising high school juniors to fill out the entering class of 1944. Although King's grades at Washington were not strong, he demonstrated his capacity for college work in a special admissions test. Before beginning at Morehouse, however, King left for his first extended stay away from home, joining about one hundred other students working on a tobacco farm near Simsbury, Connecticut. Established during the World War I period by John Hope and supervised since the 1930s by Morehouse mathematics professor Claude B. Dansby, the summer work program allowed students to earn and save money to pay college expenses. The letters King wrote home from Connecticut reveal a fifteen-year-old who was both a child responding to his parent's wishes and a teenager relishing this departure from the world of his childhood. Most startling for King was his first exposure to racial attitudes outside the segregated South. Writing to his father, he commented on things he "never [anticipated] to see." Upon traveling north from Washington, D.C., he observed "no discrimination at all." Whites were "very nice. We go to any place we want to and sit any where we want to." A letter to his mother referred to his attendance at a church service in Simsbury: "Negroes and whites go [to] the same church." After a weekend trip into Hartford, he told his mother about the lack of discrimination in public places. Having eaten at one of Hartford's "finest" restaurants, he commented, "I never thought that a person of my race could eat anywhere." These experiences in the North increased King's already strong resentment of racial segregation.

While in Connecticut King participated in various religious activities, including singing in a boy's choir that appeared on a local radio program and leading student religious meetings on Sunday evenings. Despite the doubts of his high school years, King's religious commitment became stronger as he demonstrated his preaching abilities. He informed his mother: "As head of the religious Dept. I have to take charge of the Sunday service I have to speak from any text I want to." Four years later he referred to the summer of 1944 as a crucial period in his religious evolution, a time when he "felt an inescapable urge to serve society . . . a sense of responsibility which I could not escape."

In September 1944, King returned to Atlanta to begin his studies at Morehouse College. While the buildings that constituted the small campus had not changed much since the days when his father had been a student, the goals and standing of the college had. Since Mays had become president in 1940, Morehouse had begun to reverse the decline that began during John Hope's final years. Under this new leadership, the college regained its earlier vitality. Not only did Mays -- the first Morehouse president with an earned doctoral degree -- instill a belief in its students that "Morehouse men" were distinctive in their talent and commitment to racial uplift, but he also worked hard to improve the quality of the faculty, increasing salaries and encouraging professors to pursue doctorates.

Mays was also an innovative, politically-engaged scholar. His first book, *The Negro's God*, published in 1938, was a pioneering study of African-American Christianity, and reflected Mays's enthusiasm for prophetic, social-gospel religious teachings. A trip to India increased his appreciation of the philosophy of Mohandas K. Gandhi, who had given the Indian masses "a new conception of courage." Mays asserted that "when an oppressed race ceases to be afraid, it is free." He often criticized American Christian institutions for not challenging segregation. Believing that black colleges should be "experiment stations in democratic living," Mays also challenged Morehouse students to struggle against segregation rather than accommodate themselves to it. Noting the difficulty many students encountered in developing "a critical but secure religious position" to replace the orthodox religious views of their precollege years, he argued that black colleges should seek to inform students about the importance of the church in African-American life. Students needed "contact with people who demonstrate in their person the fact that religion counts," Mays argued, adding that "a religion which ignores social problems will in time be doomed." Religion must "give direction to
life--a direction that is neither communistic nor fascistic--not even the direction of a capitalistic individualism." Mays inspired a generation of Morehouse students who gathered for his Tuesday morning lectures, in which he stressed intellectual excellence, religious piety, and commitment to racial advancement. He later recalled King as an eager listener, often responding to his lectures by debating certain points. These contacts led to a "real friendship which was strengthened by visits to his home and by fairly frequent chats." King later described Mays as "one of the great influences in my life." King’s enthusiasm for Mays’s teaching developed only gradually. There is little evidence that King exhibited a serious interest in his studies during most of his stay at Morehouse. Younger than most of the other 204 students in his class and uncertain about his career plans, King initially paid more attention to his social life than to his classwork. Although he lived with his parents and did not join a fraternity, King was socially active. Not only was he president of the sociology club and a member of the debating team, student council, glee club, and minister’s union, but he also joined the Morehouse chapters of the NAACP and the YMCA, and played on the Butler Street Y basketball team.

Among King's first acquaintances at the college was another Morehouse freshman, Walter R. McCall, a pre-ministerial student five years older than King who would soon become King’s best friend. McCall recalled that King was an “ordinary student” during this period: “I don’t think [King] took his studies very seriously, but seriously enough to get by.” King “loved the lighter side of life,” even when it meant disobeying his father’s injunctions against sinful behavior. “Many times [his father] opposed our dancing and things like that,” McCall remembered, “but he would slip off anyway and go. Many times he and I as well as his sister and some more girls would congregate at his house while his Daddy was at church and we’d put on a party.”

Documentary evidence regarding King’s studies at Morehouse is scanty, making his intellectual development there difficult to trace. Later accounts suggest, however, that he benefited from Morehouse’s liberal arts curriculum and from the personal attention of the school’s faculty. During his first year, for example, he received the valuable help of Professor Gladstone Lewis Chandler in preparing for the John L. Webb oratorical competition, in which he won second prize in 1946 and 1948.

During King’s second year, he took his first course with sociologist Walter Richard Chivers, an outspoken critic of segregation, who became King’s advisor when he chose sociology as his major. Chivers wrote several articles during the 1940s about racial discrimination and the role of black leaders in the struggle against oppression. He praised social reformers, such as Harlem’s militant minister, Adam Clayton Powell, but offered caustic criticism of cautious “talented tenth Negro leaders.” Although his discussions of working-class issues were clearly influenced by Marx, Chivers did not openly advocate socialism, and he rejected communism as akin to totalitarian fascism. His emphasis on the economic roots of racism certainly contributed to King’s increasingly anticapitalist sentiments. As classmate Lerone Bennett, Jr., later recalled, King saw Chivers’s notion that “that money was the root not only of evil but also of race” confirmed when he took a summer job and observed that blacks were paid less than whites performing the same tasks.

King’s growing awareness of social and political issues is evident in the few writings that survive from his undergraduate years. In a letter to the editor of the Atlanta Constitution written the summer before his junior year, for example, he reacted to a series of racially motivated murders in Georgia. King summarized black goals: "We want and are entitled to the basic rights and opportunities of American citizens: The right to earn a living at work for which we are fitted by training and ability; equal opportunities in education, health, recreation, and similar public services; the right to vote; equality before the law; some of the same courtesy and good manners that we ourselves bring to all human relations." Invited during his junior year to write an article for the February 1947 Founders’ Day issue of the school paper, the Maroon Tiger, King used the opportunity to warn students about their "misconception of the purpose of education. Most of the ‘brethren'
think that education should equip them with the proper instruments of exploitation so that they can forever trample over the masses. Still others think that education should furnish them with noble ends rather than means to an end." To save men from "the morass of propaganda" was "one of the chief aims of education," according to King. "The function of education, therefore, is to teach one to think intensively and to think critically." Another essay, written at the end of his junior year, addressed the topic "Economic Basis for Cultural Conflict" and appeared in a departmental journal Chivers helped produce.

During his junior year, King's evolving sociopolitical views merged with the new understanding of Christian theology he gained from religion professor George D. Kelsey, a theologian widely known and respected for his annual Institute for the Training and Improvement of Baptist Ministers. While King, Sr., described Kelsey as a teacher who "saw the pulpit as a place both for drama, in the old-fashioned, country Baptist sense, and for the articulation of philosophies that address the problems of society," the younger King was attracted to his professor's tough-minded approach to theological issues. Kelsey (who gave King his only A at Morehouse) stressed the implications of the Christian gospel for social and racial reform while also insisting that the Kingdom of God could "never be realized fully within history" because the sinful nature of man "distorts and imposes confusion even on his highest ideas." Kelsey's writings of the 1940s evinced a personal struggle to reconcile the Protestant notion of individual salvation with the realization that religious individualism often encourages pessimism about progressive social reform. He also provided some of the intellectual resources King needed to resolve the conflict between the religious traditions of his youth and the secular ideas he had learned in college. As King later commented, that conflict continued until he took Kelsey's course and realized "that behind the legends and myths of the Book were many profound truths which one could not escape."

The influence of Chivers and Kelsey was evident in an essay entitled "Ritual" that King probably wrote during his senior year. Reflecting his self-conscious straddling of the line between his social science training and his religious vocation, King acknowledged that, although as a pretheological student he would be expected "to defend certain aspects of sacred ritual, therefore becoming unscientific," his aim was "to be as unbiased and scientific as possible."

While King's enthusiasm for Kelsey's critical approach to biblical studies set him apart from his father's scriptural literalism, it also enabled him to think more seriously about an idea he had previously rejected: entering the ministry. King, Sr., had always wanted both sons to become ministers and eventually, perhaps, to serve as pastors for Ebenezer, but he also recognized the wisdom of his wife's entreaties that their children be allowed to make their own career choices. He later expressed the hope that his sons could make use of his connections among Baptists--"family ties, school and fraternal relationships, the so-called hometown connections that kept phones ringing and letters moving in consideration of help requested and granted, favors offered and accepted. The world is too tough for anyone to think of challenging it alone." Yet A. D. and M. L. were unwilling to conform to paternal expectations: A. D. dropped out of Morehouse before deciding on a ministerial career, and King, Jr., spent his first three years at Morehouse planning to become a lawyer, or perhaps a physician, but certainly not a minister like his father. King, Jr.'s reluctance to become a minister stemmed largely from his rejection of religious practices that appealed to emotions rather than to the intellect. His persistent questioning of literal interpretations of biblical texts evolved during his Morehouse years into criticism of traditional Baptist teachings. He later wrote that his college days were "very exciting ones," especially the first two years when "the shackles of fundamentalism were removed from my body." Although his break with orthodoxy may have strengthened his determination not to become a minister, it also opened him to liberalism as a potentially acceptable religious orientation. King wrote later that the circumstances of his call to the ministry were unusual, for even though he had experienced a sense of calling, he continued to waver about his career choice during his first
three years at Morehouse. He recalled wondering "whether [the church] could serve as a vehicle to modern thinking. I wondered whether religion, with its emotionalism in Negro churches, could be intellectually respectable as well as emotionally satisfying.”

King was probably leaning toward the ministry by the end of his junior year, but making a final decision was nevertheless difficult. On the one hand, he could not ignore his father’s hopes and his friends’ expectations. His fellow students who heard him speak at campus events admired his oratorical skills; as one classmate recalled, "he knew almost intuitively how to move an audience.” On the other hand, he continued to deprecate the emotionalism associated with Baptist preaching. While remaining skeptical of his father’s doctrinal conservatism, King saw his father as a model. He would later explain that King, Sr.’s influence “had a great deal to do with my going in the ministry.” Perhaps even more influential than his father, Mays and Kelsey were also crucial role models. "Both were ministers, both deeply religious, and yet both were learned men, aware of all the trends of modern thinking," King Jr. later explained. "I could see in their lives the ideal of what I wanted a minister to be.”

His decision was, in short, a summation of King’s earlier experiences and influences. It came neither by some miraculous vision nor by some blinding light experience on the road of life. Moreover, it was a response to an inner urge that gradually came upon me. This urge expressed itself in a desire to serve God and humanity, and the feeling that my talent and my commitment could best be expressed through the ministry. . . . During my senior year in college I finally decided to accept the challenge to enter the ministry. I came to see that God had placed a responsibility upon my shoulders and the more I tried to escape it the more frustrated I would become."

King told close friends at Morehouse of his intention to become a minister, but he probably continued to debate the idea during the summer. Returning with other students to the Connecticut tobacco farm where he had worked in 1944, King once again led weekly religious gatherings. While there, he telephoned his mother to tell her of his decision. Upon his return to Atlanta at summer’s end, he discussed his plans with other family members before finally telling his father. "I finally decided to accept the challenge to enter the ministry," King recalled. "I came to see that God had placed a responsibility upon my shoulders and the more I tried to escape it the more frustrated I would become.” That autumn, King Jr., delivered a trial sermon at Ebenezer, attracting a large and appreciative audience. "M.L. has found himself," King, Sr., later recalled. "I could only thank God, pretty regularly, for letting me stay around long enough to be there.” Immediately after the sermon, the Ebenezer congregation liscensed him to preach, and he joined the church as associate pastor to his father. During his final year at Morehouse, he preached occasionally at Ebenezer before being ordained as a minister in February 1948.

After King decided to become a minister and to pursue graduate studies at a seminary, he became more serious and focused during his final year at Morehouse. In addition to Kelsey and Mays, Samuel W. Williams provided King with another example of an academically trained, socially committed minister. A leader of the People’s Progressive Party in Georgia, Williams supported the presidential campaign of Henry A. Wallace.

Wallace. King took an introductory philosophy course from Williams, who also preached at local churches. During his senior year, King’s commitment to social change was strengthened when he joined the Intercollegiate Council, an interracial student group that met monthly at Emory University to discuss various issues. Despite opposition from his father, King participated in these meetings. The encounters with white students helped King overcome the antiwhite feelings he had felt since childhood.

As he approached the end of his undergraduate years, King applied to several northern, theologically liberal seminaries, including Crozer Theological Seminary. His father, who already admired his son’s qualities as a preacher (“His voice, his delivery, the structure and design of his sermons all set him apart from anyone I’d ever heard in my life”), was disappointed that King, Jr., would not become co-pastor at Ebenezer, but reluctantly agreed to support his son’s education. King, Sr., feared his son might not return to the segregated South, but
he also recognized that King, Jr., would be able to "broaden his knowledge tremendously" at a northern
seminary. He secured letters from his father and several family friends, but the comments of those who
knew King well were restrained in their assessments of his intellectual ability, often focusing instead on King's
family background and social skills. Morehouse religion professor Lucius M. Tobin, who had not taught King,
could report only that he came from "a fine family" and was "a little above average in scholarship." Mays
similarly recommended King, along with another student, but conceded that King was "not brilliant," "only a
person capable of "B work" or, "with good competition," perhaps "even better." George D. Kelsey described
King's Morehouse record as "short of what may be called `good'" but contended that King was an
underachiever who had come "to realize the value of scholarship late in his college career." Brailsford R.
Brazeal similarly saw evidence of academic growth and sought to explain King's average grades by referring to
his "comparatively weak high school background." Even King, Sr.'s positive letter was vague, referring to the
fact that King was only fifteen when he entered college and was "above his age in thought."

When he began his seminary studies in the fall of 1948, nineteen-year-old King was younger than most of his
Crozer classmates. He probably realized that he would have to become more diligent in his studies if he were
to succeed at the small Baptist institution in Chester, Pennsylvania, a small town southwest of Philadelphia. As
one of eleven black students (six of them in King's class) in a student body numbering more than ninety, King
was self-consciously aware that he represented his race and determined to do well in his studies. King's only
extant letter from his Crozer years, written to his mother during his first term, mentions the social distractions
of a Temple student he had once dated when she was at Spelman and "a fine chick" in Philadelphia, but King
also insists that he never went "anywhere much but in these books" and did not think about girls because he
was "[too] busy studying." King, evidently wishing to break with the relaxed attitude he had had toward his
Morehouse studies, quickly immersed himself in Crozer's intellectual environment. He later recalled struggling
to avoid confirming racial stereotypes: "If I were a minute late to class, I was almost morbidly conscious of it
and sure that everyone noticed it. Rather than be thought of as always laughing, I'm afraid I was grimly serious
for a time. I had a tendency to overdress, to keep my room spotless, my shoes perfectly shined and my clothes
immaculately pressed."

The Crozer environment encouraged King's increasing intellectual seriousness. Nearly all students lived in
private dormitory rooms on campus, situated on a bucolic hillside. Students found that most of their daily
needs were satisfied by the seminary's facilities, which included a library, dining rooms, tennis courts, and other
amenities. The letter King received from Crozer's dean before the start of the term emphasized the school's
academic quality -- it was a fully accredited theological seminary with an "excellent faculty of consecrated
Christian teachers" -- and its informality, made possible by extensive personal contacts between students and
full-time faculty, all of whom lived on campus. His transition was eased when former Morehouse classmate
Walter McCall joined him at Crozer after the first term. In addition, King often had dinner at the nearby home
of the Reverend J. Pius Barbour, a King family acquaintance who had left Morehouse to become Crozer's first
black graduate and who was then pastor of Chester's Calvary Baptist Church. "He is full of fun, and he has one
of the best minds of anybody I have ever met," King informed his mother.

King immersed himself in his studies and in the European-American theological readings assigned by his Crozer
professors. King enrolled in six courses during his first term at Crozer, the most important of which was James
Bennett Pritchard's Introduction to the Old Testament--a demanding required course that constituted eight
of King's thirteen credit hours for the term. Pritchard was a noted biblical scholar who had been earned his
doctorate at the University of Pennsylvania and had taught at Crozer since 1942. King quickly demonstrated
his willingness to accept Pritchard's biblical interpretations based on historical and archeological research. In
one of his first papers for Pritchard, King eagerly expressed his independence from religious fundamentalism.
"No logical thinker can doubt the fact that . . . archaeological findings are now [indispensable] to all concrete
study of Hebrew-Christian religion," King commented in discussing the application of the "scientific method" to
The Martin Luther King, Jr. Papers Project

Old Testament study. Yet, King concluded, while such findings might reveal that biblical stories have mythological roots, they did not necessarily undermine the essential truths of the Old Testament, which remained "one of the most logical vehicles of mankind’s deepest devotional thoughts and aspirations, couched in language which still retains its original vigor and its moral intensity." King’s preference for politically engaged religion was also evident in another paper discussing scholarship on Jeremiah. King argued that despite his failure to affect the social order of his time, Jeremiah’s insistence on a personal relationship with God was ultimately a valuable contribution to Christianity. The prophet, King insisted, demonstrated that Christians should never “become sponsors and supporters of the status quo. How often has religion gone down, chained to a status quo it allied itself with.” In refuting the cynical notion that religion was "simply the reflection of the State’s opinion of itself foisted upon the divine," Jeremiah taught that religion could be a vehicle of social progress: "Religion, in a sense, through men like Jeremiah, provides for its own advancement, and carries within it the promise of progress and renewed power.”

King gained further exposure to historical biblical scholarship during his second term, in Morton Scott Enslin's History and Literature of the New Testament. A sometimes intimidating, Harvard-trained expert in the history of early Christianity, Enslin had taught at Crozer since 1924 and edited the Crozer Quarterly since 1941. Like Pritchard, Enslin was known to give few high grades, and he returned King’s papers with numerous critical comments and corrections written in almost illegible, miniature script. King's papers for Enslin, in which he acknowledged Christianity's indebtedness to earlier religious traditions, were, like those for Pritchard, competent, but unimaginative and derivative. In them he continued to affirm the value of biblical scholarship while also insisting that such scholarship did not undermine essential Christian values.

King began to forge his own theological perspective during the fall term of his second year, when he enrolled in George Washington Davis’s two term course, Christian Theology for Today. Davis, who attended Colgate-Rochester Divinity School and received a doctorate from Yale before joining Crozer's faculty in 1938, was a northern Baptist influenced by the social gospel of Walter Rauschenbusch. He emphasized the social implications of Christianity, reinforcing the social reform motivations that had led to King’s decision to become a minister. Although King had already been exposed to the social-gospel teachings of Mays and Kelsey, Davis expanded King’s understanding of the philosophical underpinnings of modern Christian liberalism, particularly the notion that God’s reality was revealed through the historical unfolding of his moral law. Davis’s impact on his twenty-year-old student was immediate. King’s essays for Davis displayed a greater degree of intellectual engagement than had the historical essays written for Pritchard and Enslin. So theologically compatible were King and Davis that King took a total of seven courses from him. Under Davis's tutelage, King began to see theology as a storehouse of ideas that could reinforce the religious beliefs derived from his formative experiences.

Although King's essays for Davis were more reflective than those he had written during his first year, they were still flawed by unacknowledged textual appropriations from theologians King consulted. His bibliography or notes nearly always identified his sources, but the lack of adequate citations and quotation marks obscured the extent to which King relied upon the work of others. The available documentary evidence does not provide a definite answer to the question whether King deliberately violated the standards that applied to him as a student, yet his academic papers do contain passages that meet a strict definition of plagiarism—that is, any unacknowledged appropriation of words or ideas. At the same time, his essays contained views consistent with those King expressed in other papers and exams written at the time; thus, even though King’s writings were derivative, they remain reliable expressions of his theological opinions.

King, in his papers for Davis, reaffirmed his acceptance of critical biblical scholarship while leaving room in his perspective for some traditional Christian beliefs that could not be reconciled with scholarly findings. He agreed with the liberal view of the Bible as "a portrayal of the experiences of men written in particular historical situations" and as a progressive revelation of the divine, rather than as the literal word of God. Although he saw Jesus as human, he affirmed "an element in his life which transcends the human," a divine quality that was "not something thrust upon Jesus from above, but . . . a definite achievement through the
process of moral struggle and self-abnegation.” He rejected literal interpretations of Christian beliefs that contradicted “the laws of modern science,” insisting instead that such beliefs— the divinity of Jesus, the virgin birth, the second coming, and the bodily resurrection— should be understood metaphorically. The true meaning of the kingdom of God, in short, involved the creation of “a society in which all men and women will be controlled by the eternal love of God.”

Christians who probed “into the deeper meaning of these doctrines” would find, he stated, “that they are based on a profound foundation.” Contrasting liberalism with fundamentalism, King portrayed fundamentalists as “willing to preserve certain ancient ideas even though they are contrary to science.”

In another paper, King declared that biblical scholars did not destroy religious belief; instead they served “to prepare the ground for constructive building.” The Bible is subject to historical analysis, King explained: “This advance has revealed to us that God reveals himself progressively through human history, and that the final significance of the Scripture lies in the outcome of the process.”

Several of King’s papers for Davis reflect his effort to refine his theological perspective by either identifying himself with or setting himself apart from particular theologians or theological schools. In an essay entitled “The Place of Reason and Experience in Finding God,” for example, King rejected both agnosticism, which eliminates “mystery from the universe,” and fundamentalism, which claims certainty about the nature of divinity; rather, he reiterated, “genuine Christian faith” accepts “that the search for God is a process not an achievement.” This stance led King to discard, as “one of the perils of our time,” the views of Karl Barth and other “crisis” or neo-orthodox theologians who argued that man, corrupted by original sin, could never come to know God through reason. Instead King identified himself with the views of Boston University personalist theologian, Edgar S. Brightman, who saw human awareness of God’s presence as the very essence of religious experience.

Brightman’s personalism appealed to King because it recognized the importance of nonintellectual sources of theological knowledge, including one’s own experiences. Echoing Brightman and other personalists, he confidently insisted that religious experience was important in finding God. “No theology is needed to tell us that love is the law of life and to disobey it means to suffer the consequences,” King wrote. “It is religious experience which shows us that much of the misery and weakness of men’s lives is due to [the] personal fault of the individual.” Moreover, King argued, all people, not just the intellectual elite, were capable of searching for God through experience.

While granting the utility of reason in the search for knowledge of the divine, King concluded by appropriating a Brightman formulation: “We must grant freely, however, that final intellectual certainty about God is impossible. . . . We can never gain complete knowledge or proof of the real. . . . But we cannot give up the search because of this limitation. Certainly if God is the real that we are seeking, we can always learn more about him. Thus, reason, when sincerely and honestly used, is one of [the] supreme roads that leads man into the presence of God.”

While King remained hostile to fundamentalist Christianity, he increasingly acknowledged the limitations of liberal theology and even of the theological enterprise itself. Still accepting a broad framework of theological understanding based on biblical criticism and the social gospel, he increasingly referred to his personal experiences to explain his gradual move toward greater orthodoxy. In an essay for Davis entitled “How Modern Christians Should Think of Man,” he argued that liberals too “easily cast aside the term sin, failing to realize that many of our present ills result from the sins of men.” King admitted that his conception of man was going through a state of transition. At one time I find myself leaning toward a mild neo-orthodox view of man, and at other times I find myself leaning toward a liberal view of man. The former leaning may root back to certain experiences that I had in the south with a vicious race problem. Some of the experiences that I encountered there
made it very difficult for me to believe in the essential goodness of man. On the other hand part of my liberal leaning has its source in another branch of the same root. [In] noticing the gradual improvements of this same race problem I came to see some noble possibilities in human nature. Also my liberal leaning may root back to the great imprint that many liberal theologians have left upon me and to my ever present desire to be optimistic about human nature.

He had, he acknowledged, become "a victim of eclecticism," seeking to "synthesize the best in liberal theology with the best in neo-orthodox theology." Discarding "one-sided generalizations about man," he concluded that "we shall be closest to the authentic Christian interpretation of man if we avoid both of these extremes." 165

As King became more critical of liberal theology, he also focused on the theological issue that he considered most crucial: the nature of divinity. Never having experienced God's presence directly through an abrupt experience of conversion, he sought ideas that would provide a conception of God consistent with his own experiences. Although King indicated in the middle of his second year "that the most valid conception of God is that of theism," which he defined as the notion that God was "a personal spirit immanent in nature and in the value structure of the universe," he would continue to struggle with this difficult issue long afterward. 166

King's acceptance of personalist theology resulted from his desire to view religious experience, rather than simply philosophical rigor, as a necessary foundation for religious rectitude. In another paper for Davis, King concluded that the "ultimate solution" to the vexing problem of the sources of evil in a God-created universe was "not intellectual but spiritual. After we have climbed to the top of the speculative ladder we must leap out into the darkness of faith." 167

King's increasing tendency to acknowledge the validity of some neo-orthodox criticisms of Christian liberalism may have been related to events in his personal life that contradicted Crozer's ethos of interracial harmony. Most accounts of King's experiences at Crozer suggest that he actively sought out social contacts with white students and faculty members. His immersion in the social and intellectual life of a predominantly white, northern seminary may have had psychological costs, however, for King learned that he could not insulate himself from the realities of antiblack prejudice. On one occasion a white southern student pulled a gun on King, in the mistaken belief that King had victimized him as a prank. 168

During the summer after his second year at Crozer, King was involved in another incident of harassment that reminded him of his vulnerability to racial discrimination when he ventured off campus. Not only were he and three friends refused service at a tavern, but the owner became abusive and picked up a gun, which he took outside and fired into the air. (He later claimed that, fearing a robbery, he wanted to alert his watchdog.) Almanina Barbour, daughter of J. Pius Barbour, urged the outraged King to sue the establishment. Although the Camden branch of the NAACP agreed to handle the case as a violation of New Jersey's 1945 legislation prohibiting racial discrimination in public facilities, the matter was dropped when several white witnesses refused to testify. 169

In addition to these reminders that he had not left racism behind in the South, King confronted the realization that he would have to tailor his academic training to fit his needs as a pastor of a black congregation. The unenthusiastic evaluation he received as a participant in Crozer's fieldwork program suggests King's difficulty in reconciling what he was learning at seminary with the ingrained religious beliefs he had brought from black Atlanta. Designed to aid students in their development as clergymen, fieldwork in King's case involved training at black churches in the area. Although King had refined his preaching while at Crozer, listeners' accounts suggest that his practice sermons were designed to engage the mind, not the emotions. 170

King was an experienced preacher, of course, having assisted his father at Ebenezer during the previous three summers; the final evaluation, written by the Reverend William E. Gardner suggests, however, that King may have become somewhat estranged from his Ebenezer roots. While Gardner saw King as superior in judgment,
decisiveness, neatness, poise, and self-confidence, he also noted an "attitude of aloofness, disdain & possible snobbishness which prevent his coming to close grips with the rank and file of ordinary people," as well as "a smugness that refuses to adapt itself to the demands of ministering effectively to the average Negro congregation." 171

Despite this evaluation, King’s buoyancy and self-assurance were evident in the most extended biographical statement he would write during his college career. While enrolled in Davis’s course The Religious Development of Personality in late 1950, King insisted in a paper, “An Autobiography of Religious Development,” that his basic religious and social views were decisively shaped, not by his academic training, but by his formative experiences. His father’s "noble" example, he said, and the influences of his childhood had led him to enter the ministry. Despite periods of doubt and a continuing antipathy toward religious emotionalism, King considered his early years and his intense, daily involvement in church life as the bedrock of his religious faith: "At present I still feel the affects of the noble moral and ethical ideas that I grew up under. They have been real and precious to me, and even in moments of theological doubt I could never turn away from them. Even though I have never had an abrupt conversion experience, religion has been real to me and closely knitted to life. In fact the two cannot be separated; religion for me is life.” 172

As King became absorbed in the concerns of philosophical or systematic theology, he did not abandon his interest in Christian ethics and the social role of the Christian church. During King’s last months at Crozer, he took two courses with Kenneth L. Smith, a strong advocate of social gospel thought. The courses, Christianity and Society and Christian Social Philosophy, served as a forum for discussion of modern social issues, including the problems associated with capitalism and the appropriateness of Marxian solutions to those problems. 173

Unsigned student papers from this class suggest that students examined a wide range of issues -- church-state relations, the American economy, and Cold War foreign policy, for example -- and challenged their own and one another’s political beliefs. One unsigned paper entitled "War and Pacifism," often attributed to King, probably accurately expressed King’s changing position on the issue during this period. "Though I cannot accept an absolute pacifist position," the author began, "I am as anxious as any to see wars end and have no desire to take part in one." Challenging the views of American pacifist leader A. J. Muste, who had spoken at Crozer during November of King’s second year, the paper argued that absolute pacifism would lead to anarchy. 174 Not only did such a position allow "no grounds for maintaining even a police force, since there is no real difference in kind between war and police action," but it also isolated "war from other ethical problems and [ignored] the fact that war is actually a symptom of deeper trouble." The conclusion was probably consistent with King’s beliefs at the time:

Since man is so often sinful there must be some coercion to keep one man from injuring his fellows. This is just as true between nations as it is between individuals. If one nation oppresses another a Christian nation must, in order to express love of neighbor, help protect the oppressed. This does not relieve us of our obligation to the enemy nation. We are obligated to treat them in such a way as to reclaim them to a useful place in the world community after they have been prevented from oppressing another. We must not seek revenge. 175

Although this paper reflects the neo-orthodox ideas of Reinhold Niebuhr, Smith recalled that King remained a fervent advocate of the social-gospel Christianity he had derived from both his childhood experiences and his study of Walter Rauschenbusch. 176 Smith later recounted his arguments with King “about the relative merits of the social ethics of Rauschenbusch and Reinhold Niebuhr,” with King arguing against Niebuhr. 177 King’s later account of his Crozer years, in Stride Toward Freedom, probably overstates the extent of his intellectual engagement with the ideas of Niebuhr, for this is not confirmed by the documentary record. While King, like many other liberal theological students of the early 1950s, was undoubtedly influenced by Niebuhr’s ideas, few
of his papers mention Niebuhr’s writings. Rather, King’s increasing awareness of the neo-orthodox critique of liberalism derived from a variety of sources in addition to Niebuhr. Aware of the intellectual deficiencies of social-gospel Christianity, King sought a theological framework that combined scholarly rigor with an emphasis on personal experience of God’s immanence. Such a theology would allow him to reconcile his emotional roots in the nurturing, sustaining environment of Ebenezer with the sense of intellectual rectitude he had sought in graduate study. King’s search led him to the personalism of Boston University’s Edgar S. Brightman. As early as his second year at Crozer, he had made favorable comments about Brightman’s writings, and during the second term of his last year he again encountered Brightman in Davis’s course on the philosophy of religion. Assessing Brightman’s book *A Philosophy of Religion*, he conceded that Brightman’s personalism left him “quite confused as to which definition [of God] was the most adequate.” In general, however, he was persuaded by Brightman’s inclusive notion of “essential” beliefs that underlay particular religious practices and concepts of God. Rejecting atheism as “philosophically unsound and practically disadvantageous,” King affirmed religion “that gives meaning to life” and provides “the greatest incentive for the good life.” He expressed his enthusiasm for a philosophical perspective that offers a rationale for the emotionally rich religious life he had known as a child: “How I long now for that religious experience which Dr. Brightman so cogently speaks of throughout his book,” King concluded. “It seems to be an experience, the lack of which life becomes dull and meaningless.” The third-year seminarian reflected on his struggle to achieve a sense of religious contentment: “I do remember moments that I have been awe awakened; there have been times that I have been carried out of myself by something greater than myself and to that something I gave myself. Has this great something been God? Maybe after all I have been religious for a number of years, and am now only becoming aware of it.”

By the time of his graduation, King’s intellectual confidence was reinforced by the experience of having successfully competed with white students during his Crozer years. He was elected student body president, became the class valedictorian, and was the recipient of the Pearl Plafker award for scholarship. He was also accepted for doctoral study at Boston University’s School of Theology, where he would be able to work directly with the personalist theologians he had come to admire. He had convinced his teachers that he was destined for further success as a minister and leader, perhaps even as a scholar. Davis’s confidential assessment of King’s abilities was that he would “make an excellent minister or teacher. He has the mind for the latter.” Enslin considered him a “very able man. All is grist that comes to his mill. Hard working, fertile minded, rarely misses anything which he can subsequently use.” He added a prediction: “He will probably become a big strong man among his people.” Crozer dean Charles Batten saw King as “undoubtedly one of the best men in our entire student body,” one of Crozer’s “most brilliant students,” a person with “a keen mind which is both analytical and constructively creative.”

Although King’s understanding of the modern literature of systematic theology was still in flux at the end of his stay at Crozer, he had refined his basic ideas about the nature of God. His essays reflected a gradual movement from an acceptance of liberal theological scholarship toward an increasing skepticism about rational inquiry as a means of achieving religious understanding. He had found new value in his early religious experiences. King’s seminary years had also been characterized by an ambiguous relationship to the values of the academy. Rather than developing proficiency as an original scholar, King had become skilled at appropriating ideas and texts that defined his evolving religious identity. As a student, he had been dutiful, inquisitive, well read, and able to win the approval of his professors, but his theological beliefs were subtly derivative, based on a priori assumptions about the nature of divinity and increasingly suited to his anticipated needs as a preacher rather than a scholar. King’s discovery of personalist theology had both strengthened his ties with African-American Baptist traditions and encouraged him to pursue further theological study at Boston University.

The religious ideas King brought to the seminary were modified but not drastically altered as his intellectual sophistication grew. Indeed, although he sought scholarly understanding of religion, his writings at Crozer consisted of an eclectic body of ideas that was rendered coherent not by his academic training but by his inherited values. He saw God as immanent in the world, accessible through reason and personal experience, yet
also transcendent, a being not limited by human conceptions of reality. Although King would further refine his beliefs about the nature of God, at Crozer he had reached theological conclusions that would remain central to his worldview.

Footnotes

1. G. S. Ellington, "A Short Sketch of the Life and Work of Rev. A. D. Williams, D.D.,” in Programme of the Thirtieth Anniversary of the Pastorate of Rev. A. D. Williams of Ebenezer Baptist Church, 16 March 1924, CKFC.

2. Records of Shiloh Baptist Church indicate that after several others joined the church on 1 November 1846, "Willis, servant boy of William N. Williams, came forward and was also received" by the pastor. One of the oldest Baptist congregations in the state, Shiloh was founded in 1795. Both enslaved and free African-Americans were admitted as full members, but only free black members were mentioned with last names in the church minutes. See Arthur F. Raper, Preface to Peasantry: A Tale of Two Black Belt Counties (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1936), p. 356; James Porter, "Shiloh Baptist Church minutes," 1 November 1846, SBCM-G-Ar: Drawer 34, box 36; Bruce A. Calhoun, "The Family Background of Martin Luther King, Jr.: 1810-1893," King Project seminar paper, 1987, Martin Luther King, Jr., Center For Nonviolent Social Change.


4. R. B. Edmonds, "Shiloh Baptist Church minutes," 15 October 1848, SBCM-G-Ar: Drawer 34, box 36. See also minutes for 16 July 1848 and 20 August 1848.


6. Adam Daniel's and his twin sister Eve's actual birthdate was probably earlier in the 1860s. The census of 1870 lists Adam Daniel Williams as nine years old, suggesting that he was born in 1861; his twin sister, Eve, is listed as seven. The census of 1880 lists both him and Eve as eighteen, implying a birthdate of 1862 (Census entry for Willis Williams, 22 June 1870, Greene Co., Ga.; census entry for A. D. Williams, 1880, Greene Co., Ga.). For A. D. Williams's claim of 2 January 1863 as his birthdate, see "Rev. A. D. Williams," Atlanta Independent, 4 April 1904; Ellington, "Short Sketch"; and "Adam Daniel Williams," in Caldwell, ed., History of the American Negro, p. 212.


9. Ellington, "Short Sketch." Ellington noted that A.D. Williams had only three weeks of schooling in his youth.

10. See Ellington, "Short Sketch"; Census entry for A. D. Williams, 15 June 1880, Greene County, Ga.; and Calhoun, "Family Background."


12. Powell Mills, a major employer, closed in 1884 and was destroyed in a devastating flood three years later. For more information on Greene County economic conditions, see E. Merton Coulter, "Scull Shoals: An Extinct Georgia Manufacturing and Farming Community," *Georgia Historical Quarterly* 48 (March 1964): 51-63; Raper, *Tenants of the Almighty*, pp. 111-112, 365; and Rice and Williams, *History of Greene County*, pp. 380-381.

13. "Adam Daniel Williams," in Caldwell, ed., *History of the American Negro*, p. 212 and Ellington, "Short Sketch." Although A. D. Williams's name does not appear on the extant rolls of ministers in the Jeruel Baptist Association minutes during these years, a transcriptionist's error may be at fault. The rolls list an "O. W. Williams" of Crawford, Georgia, in 1891, and an "E. D. Williams" in 1892. See *Minutes of Jeruel Baptist Association, Convened with Thankful Baptist Church, Days Station, Oglethorpe County, Georgia, September 24th, 25th, 26th, and 27th, 1891* (Augusta: Georgia Baptist Book Print, 1891); and *Minutes of Jeruel Baptist Association, Convened with Spring Creek Baptist Church, The Fork, Greene County, Georgia, September 21st, 22nd, 23rd, and 24th, 1892* (Augusta: Georgia Baptist Book Print, 1892).

14. [C. Shaw?], "Rev. John Parker," [1950?], EBCR; Christine King Farris, interview by Ralph E. Luker, 6 February 1989, MLKJrP-GAMK; and Ellington, "Short Sketch."

15. Ellington, "Short Sketch."


18. Ellington, "Short Sketch." Three biographical sketches of A. D. Williams published in his lifetime gave three different figures for Ebenezer's membership at the time Williams began his ministry; a newspaper's sketch reported seventeen members, Caldwell estimated seven members, and Ellington counted thirteen members in 1893; see "Rev. A. D. Williams," *Atlanta Independent*, 12 April 1904; "Adam Daniel Williams," in Caldwell, ed., *History of the American Negro*, p. 213


21. Ellington, "Short Sketch." In 1881 the Atlanta Baptist Female Seminary was founded in the basement of Friendship Baptist Church; subsequently it was renamed Spelman Seminary, in honor of the mother-in-law of John D. Rockefeller, a financial supporter.

22. Ellington, "Short Sketch"; Census entry for A. D. Williams and Jennie Celeste Parks Williams, 18 June 1900, Fulton County, Ga.; and Marriage license for A. D. Williams and Jennie Celeste Parks, 29 October 1899, Fulton County, Ga. See Loree Dionne Lynne Jones, "A Study of Spelman Seminary, Jennie Celeste Parks Williams, and
Alberta Christine Williams King,” King Project seminar paper, 1987, Martin Luther King, Jr., Center for Nonviolent Social Change.

23. Census entries for A. D. Williams and Jennie Celeste Parks Williams, 18 June 1900 and 28 April 1910, Fulton County, Ga.; and Atlanta City Directories, 1897-1905, 1907.

24. Ellington, "Short Sketch."

25. Indenture between Oscar Davis and the Trustees of Ebenezer Baptist Church, 26 May 1899, Fulton County, Ga., G-Ar; Indenture between Mrs. D. C. Shaw and the Trustees of Ebenezer Baptist Church, 20 June 1900, Fulton County, Ga., G-Ar; Indenture between the Fifth Baptist Church and the Trustees of Ebenezer Baptist Church, 12 December 1900, Fulton County, Ga., G-Ar; and "Rev. A. D. Williams," Atlanta Independent, 2 April 1904.

26. For more information on the origin of the National Baptist Convention and Williams's involvement in denominational activities, see James Melvin Washington, Frustrated Fellowship: The Black Baptist Quest for Social Power (Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 1986), pp. 159-185; Porter, "Black Atlanta," pp. 71, 209-212; Georgia Baptist, 2 June, 21 July, and 27 October 1898; and Atlanta Independent, 12 April and 17 June 1904. The Atlanta Baptist Ministers’ Union, in which A. D. Williams and Martin Luther King, Sr., were prominent for six decades, was an organization of black Baptist ministers in the city. The General State Baptist Convention was one of two black Baptist conventions in Georgia from 1893 to 1915. In 1893, a dispute over leadership of the Missionary Baptist Convention of Georgia led to the establishment of the General State Baptist Convention. In 1915, the two conventions were reunited as the General Missionary Baptist Convention of Georgia. See Wagner, Profiles of Black Georgia Baptists, pp. 79-81.


32. "Is It a Fraud?" Atlanta Independent, 25 September 1909.


36. A. D. Williams was moderator of the Atlanta Missionary Baptist Association from 1913 until 1920. Martin Luther King, Sr., was later moderator of the Association for more than twenty years. See Atlanta Missionary Baptist Association, "Minutes of the Fifty-second Annual Session of the Atlanta Missionary Baptist Association, Inc.," Atlanta, 13 October 1955.


38. For more details on Williams’s activities during the period, see *Atlanta Independent*, 25 August 1911, 10 September 1911, 31 May 1913, 15 November 1913, 21 February 1914, 22 May 1915, and 14 August 1915; Morehouse College, *Annual Catalogue, 1917-1918*, p. 95; Dittmer, *Black Georgia*, p. 179; and Jones, *A Candle in the Dark*, pp. 91-92.

39. At the end of 1916, following several unsuccessful efforts, Walter White began to organize a local branch of the NAACP. At an organizing conference held in February 1917, Harry H. Pace, an executive of Standard Life Insurance Company, was elected president and Walter White, Standard Life’s cashier, was elected secretary. NAACP national field secretary James Weldon Johnson addressed the conference in a crowded assembly room of Atlanta Life Insurance Company. Although police officers were stationed around the room, he noted, the crowd was not intimidated. “The organization conference which was held at Atlanta was unique," Johnson recalled years later; "it was the only one in which no woman was invited to take part. There were present fifty or so of the leading colored men of the city; lawyers, doctors, college professors, public school teachers, editors, bankers, insurance officials, and businessmen” (James Weldon Johnson, *Along This Way: The Autobiography of James Weldon Johnson* [New York: Viking Press, 1933], pp. 315-316). For further information on the creation of the Atlanta NAACP branch, see *Atlanta Independent*, 10 February 1917 and 24 February 1917; Minutes of the Board of Directors Meeting, 9 April 1917, NAACPP-DLC: Part I, Reel 1; Reports from the Annual Meetings of the NAACP, 7 January 1918, NAACPP-DLC, Part I, Reel 4; and White, *A Man Called White*, pp. 28-31.


45. The memorial pointed out the inadequate number and condition of black schools, pay inequity for black teachers, and limited library services, public services, and health and recreational facilities in the black community (*Atlanta Independent*, 8 March and 15 March 1919). Although black leaders claimed responsibility for defeating the measures, it was alleged in the white press (*Atlanta Georgian*, 24 April 1919) that the loss was due to manipulation of the black vote by the Georgia Railway & Power Company.


50. For more information on the 1921 bond campaign and the schools funded by the bonds, see *Atlanta Constitution*, 1, 6 and 9 March 1921; *Atlanta Independent*, 27 September 1923; Henry Reid Hunter, *The Development of the Public Secondary Schools of Atlanta, Georgia: 1845-1937* (Atlanta: Atlanta Public Schools, 1974), pp. 51-56; Garrett, *Atlanta and Its Environ*, 2:795-796; and Toppin, "Walter White and the Atlanta NAACP," p. 16.

51. *Atlanta Independent*, 28 September 1922.

52. The victor was Professor James M. Nabrit of Morehouse College. See ibid., 30 November 1922.

53. *Atlanta Independent*, 14 and 28 February 1924; *Programme of the Thirtieth Anniversary of the Pastorate of Rev. A. D. Williams of Ebenezer Baptist Church*, 16 March 1924, CKFC.


55. *Atlanta Independent*, 7 February 1924.

56. *Atlanta Independent*, 19 April, 29 November, 6 December, 13 December, 20 December 1923; 7 February, 6 March, 20 March 1924; 25 February, 25 March 1926; 11 August 1927; and 13 September 1928.

57. *Atlanta Independent*, 28 February 1924.

59. Born about 1842 in Virginia or Georgia, Long and his two brothers registered in 1867, despite intimidating activity by the Ku Klux Klan, which was organized in Henry County the previous year. See Henry County, Ga., Voter Qualification Form for James Long, 11 August 1867, G-Ar; and Ranier, *Henry County, Georgia*, pp. 283-284.

60. Census records for 1870 show that Jim Long settled after the war in Henry County, where he lived with his wife, Francis, and five children. In 1880, Jim and Francis Long lived with their ten children in Henry County’s Stockbridge district. The records suggest that Jim Long maintained another family, which included twenty-seven-year-old Jane Linsey and their five children. See Census entries for James Long and family, 1870 and 29 June 1880, Henry County, Ga.; Census entry for Jane Linsey and family, 28 June 1880, Henry County, Ga.; and Woodie King Brown, interview by Ralph E. Luker, 21 April 1989, MLKJrP-GAMK.

61. Information regarding James Albert King’s lineage is contradictory. The 1900 census reported that he was born in Ohio and that his father was born in Pennsylvania and his mother in Ohio. In 1910, though, the census listed his father’s place of birth as Ireland, while the 1920 census reported his place of birth as Georgia, an unlikely location given the absence of records placing King or his father in Georgia before the 1890s. See Census entry for James Albert King and family, 23 June 1900, Clayton County, Ga.; Census entries for James Albert King and family, 11 May 1910 and 14 January 1920, Henry County, Ga. Jim King’s death certificate, filed by Martin Luther King, stated that Jim King and his parents were born in Georgia; see Georgia Department of Public Health, Bureau of Vital Statistics, Certificate of death for James King, 17 November 1933, GAHR. 62. Marriage license for James Albert King and Delia Linsey, 20 August 1895, Henry County, Ga., HCPC; Tax Digest Records for James Albert King, 1897-1898, 1901-1907, 1910-1913, 1916-1918, Henry County, Ga., G-Ar; and Tax Digest Records for James Albert King, 1900, Clayton County, Ga., G-Ar. See also Alisa Duffey and Phyllis Heaton, "The King Family: 1880-1920," King Project seminar paper, 1987, Martin Luther King, Jr., Center for Nonviolent Social Change.

63. Although King would later date his birth in 1899, the census records for 1900 and 1910 support an earlier birthdate. See Census entry for James Albert King, 23 June 1900, Clayton County, Ga.; Census entry for James Albert King, 28 April 1910, Henry County, Ga. Although M. L. King was christened Michael L., he later changed it to Martin Luther; see note 98.

64. King, with Riley, *Daddy King*, pp. 25, 40-44.

65. Ibid., pp. 26-27.

66. Ibid., p. 37. See also *Henry County Weekly*, 14 July 1905; Henry County School Census, Stockbridge Colored School, 1903, 1908, and 1913, G-Ar.

67. King reported witnessing the lynching of a black man by white mill workers. Although lynchings were common enough in the rural Georgia of his youth, there was no report in the *Henry County Weekly* or the *Henry County News* of a lynching or a murder in the Stockbridge area that fits King’s description. See Duffey and Heaton, "King Family," pp. 4, 16-18; and King, with Riley, *Daddy King*, pp. 30-31.


69. King, Sr., with Riley, *Daddy King*, p. 27. King remembers his childhood minister explaining the meaning of hymns to the congregation and urging them “to sing with the spirit and understanding” (King, Sr., "What Part Should Singing Play in Our Church Worship?” *Georgia Baptist*, 1 March 1936).

70. Henry County School Census, 1913, G-Ar.

71. King, with Riley, *Daddy King*, pp. 27, 45.

72. King, with Riley, *Daddy King*, pp. 59-60; and *Atlanta City Directory*, 1919.


75. Delia King died in 1924, and her youngest daughter, Ruby, suffered a ruptured appendix shortly thereafter and died. Still reeling from these losses, Jim King was ordered to leave his sharehold. With his remaining children, he moved to College Park near Atlanta, where he earned a living as a porter and day laborer. He remained there until his death on 17 November 1933. See Georgia State Board of Health, Bureau of Vital Statistics, Certificate of Death for Delia Lindsay King, 27 May 1924, GAHR; King, Sr., with Riley, *Daddy King*, pp. 73-75, 88; Rainer, *Henry County, Georgia*, p. 331; *Atlanta City Directory*, 1928; Georgia Department of Public Health, Bureau of Vital Statistics, Certificate of Death for James Albert King, 17 November 1933, GAHR; and *Atlanta Daily World*, 19 November 1933.


78. Adam Daniel Williams and Jennie Celeste Parks Williams, Wedding Invitation for Marriage of Alberta Christine Williams and Michael Luther King, 25 November 1926, EBCR; and King, Sr., with Riley, *Daddy King*, pp. 80-82.

79. Martin Luther King, Sr., interview by E. A. Jones, [1972?], MLKJrP-GAMK. See also King, Sr., with Riley, *Daddy King*, p. 82.

80. King, Sr., with Riley, *Daddy King*, pp. 83, 87-88; Georgia Department of Public Health, Bureau of Vital Statistics, Certificate of Birth for Martin Luther King, Jr., 15 January 1929 [revised 12 April 1934 and 23 July 1957], GAHR.


82. King, with Riley, *Daddy King*, p. 90.

83. "Rev. Adam Daniel Williams" and "Noted Atlanta Divine Dies," *Georgia Baptist*, 10 April 1931. See also Lizzie Hunnicut, "In Memoriam," *Georgia Baptist*, 25 August 1931; and Ebenezer Baptist Church, Program for Rev. Adam Daniel Williams's Funeral Service, 24 March 1931, CKFC.

84. King, Sr., with Riley, *Daddy King*, pp. 91-95.


86. King, Sr., with Riley, *Daddy King*, p. 94.

87. King, Sr., with Riley, *Daddy King*, p. 130.
89. King, Sr., with Riley, _Daddy King_, pp. 130, 131.
93. King, Sr., "What Part Should Singing Play in Our Church Worship?"
94. Ebenezer Baptist Church Anniversary Program, 9-16 March 1936, EBCR; Wagner, _Profiles of Black Georgia Baptists_, p. 94; and Reddick, _Crusader Without Violence_, p. 56.
95. King, Sr., with Riley, _Daddy King_, p. 127.
96. King, Sr., with Riley, _Daddy King_, p. 94.
97. Ibid., p. 97; "Royally Welcomed on Return," _Atlanta Daily World_, 28 August 1934.
98. Documents from this period indicate that King, Sr.'s name change was achieved gradually rather than through a single legal process, which was not required under Georgia law. By the time he moved to Atlanta and enrolled in Morehouse College, he identified himself as M. L. King, or formally as Michael Luther King, which appeared on his wedding invitation in 1926. He stated in his autobiography that his mother and father had different preferences regarding his name: his mother preferring Michael, after the archangel, his father insisting that he have the names of Jim King's brothers, Martin and Luther. See King, Sr., with Riley, _Daddy King_, p. 26. The coincidence of the name change and King, Sr.'s visit to Germany may also suggest an attempt to identify with the founder of Protestantism. After returning from Europe in 1934, he rarely referred to himself as Michael Luther King and typically used either Martin Luther King or M. L. King. As for King, Jr., his birth certificate was filed on 12 April 1934, before the European tour, under the name Michael King, but was altered on 23 July 1957 to list King as Martin Luther, Jr. Atlanta public school transcripts for King, Jr., obtained by the King Papers Project, initially listed him as M. L. King, although this record was altered, probably during the 1930s, to identify him as Martin Luther King, the name that is also on his elementary school "Test Scores and Ratings" (Dulcie Shrider, Records Manager, Atlanta Public Schools to King Papers Project, 9 June 1987).
99. Reddick, _Crusader Without Violence_, p. 84. This story is told slightly differently by King, Sr.: "I have give a hundred dollars while the man with the good speech have give nothin'!" (King, Sr., with Riley, _Daddy King_, p. 90).
101. Ibid., pp. 362-363 in this volume. A different account, mentioning two white playmates, appears in _Stride Toward Freedom_ (pp. 18-19): "My mother took me on her lap and began by telling me about slavery and how it had ended with the Civil War. She tried to explain the divided system of the South—the segregated schools, restaurants, theaters, housing; the white and colored signs on drinking fountains, waiting rooms, lavatories—as a social condition rather than a natural order. Then she said the words that almost every Negro hears before he can yet understand the injustice that makes them necessary: 'You are as good as anyone.'" King's father also recounted this incident—mentioning "two young sons of a local grocery-store owner": Alberta "sat and talked with him for hours. He was a curious youngster who really did wonder constantly about this peculiar world he saw all around him. 'Don't you be impressed by any of this prejudice you see,' she told him. 'And never think, son, that there is anything that makes a person better than you are, especially the color of his skin'" (King, Sr., with Riley, _Daddy King_, p. 130). See also King, Jr., BBC interview by John Freeman on "Face to Face," 29 October 1961, MLKJrP-GAMK.
102. His sister later recalled that he was "not too studious" during his elementary school days, although she remembered that he enjoyed competing in spelling bees. King's elementary school grades were generally satisfactory; a fifth grade intelligence test rated him slightly below the mean for youngsters his age. See Reddick, _Crusader Without Violence_, p. 54; Jerry Tallmer, "Martin Luther King, Jr., His Life and Times," _New York Post_, 8 April 1968; "Christine King Farris," _USA Weekend_, 17-19 January 1986; Christine King Farris, "The Young Martin," _Ebony_ 41 (January 1986): 56-58; "Martin Luther King, Jr.'s Grade School Records, 1934-1940," APS.
Thomas, Report Card in P.E. for King, 23 January 1942; Roland G. Anderson, Report Card in 8th Grade Math for King, 26 January 1942; Mary J. Dean, Report Card in 8th Grade Art for King, 26 January 1942; and Report Card in 8th or 9th Grade English for King, September 1941-June 1942; all in CKFC.

104. King, Sr., with Riley, Daddy King, p. 100, 104-107, 124-125. King incorrectly dated this event to 1935 rather than 1939; see Atlanta Daily World, 8 November 1939.


106. King, Jr., Stride Toward Freedom, p. 19. See also the description of this incident in King, Sr., Daddy King, pp. 108-109.

107. King, Sr., Moderator’s Annual Address, Atlanta Missionary Baptist Association, 17 October 1940, CKFC.


110. Ibid; pp. 361 in this volume.

111. Reddick, Crusader Without Violence, p. 56.

112. King, Jr., “Interview,” Playboy, January 1965, p. 66. On the oratorical contest, which was part of a national competition, see Atlanta Daily World, 16 and 22 April 1944.


114. King, Jr., to King, Sr., 15 June 1944; King, Jr., to Alberta Williams King, 11 June 1944; and King, Jr., to Alberta Williams King, 18 June 1944; pp. 111-116 in this volume.

115. King, Jr., later remembered his first time sitting behind a curtain in a dining car: “I never will forget the deep sense of resentment... Although I was only thirteen years old, this experience disturbed me greatly” (draft of Stride Toward Freedom, MLKP-MBU; Box 94A, folder 17B.)

116. King, Jr., to Alberta Williams King, 18 June 1944, p. 116 in this volume.

117. King, Application for Admission to Crozer Theological Seminary, pp. 144 in this volume.

118. Mays, Born to Rebel, pp. 170-178; and Jones, A Candle in the Dark, p. 152.


123. Mays, Born to Rebel, p. 265.


125. King, Application for Admission to Crozer Theological Seminary, p. 144 in this volume; YMCA, Certificate of Participation in Annual Basketball League, 1947-1948, ATL-AAHM.

126. Walter R. McCall, interview by Herbert Holmes, 31 March 1970, MLK/OH-GAMK.

127. “King later described [Chandler] as ‘one of the most articulate, knowledgeable and brilliant professors’ at Morehouse, ‘one of those rare unique individuals who was so dedicated to his work that he forgot himself into immortality’” (King to Mrs. G. Lewis Chandler, 28 September 1965, quoted in Oates, Let the Trumpet Sound, [New York: Harper & Row, 1982] p. 17).


129. Bennett, *What Manner of Man*, p. 28. King drew a somewhat different conclusion when he described his summer work experiences, years later in *Stride Toward Freedom*: "During my late teens I worked two summers, against my father's wishes - he never wanted my brother and me to work around white people because of the oppressive conditions - in a plant that hired both Negroes and whites. Here I saw economic injustice firsthand, and realized that the poor white was exploited just as much as the Negro" (King, *Stride Toward Freedom*, p. 90).


131. King, Jr., "The Purpose of Education," pp. 123-124 in this volume. See also the recollections of Charles V. Willie, in Renee D. Turner, "Remembering the Young King," *Ebony* 43 (January 1988): 46. King's essay was undoubtedly influenced by Mays's ideas. Mays had presented an argument similar to King's in a 1942 article: "One of the fundamental defects in the world today is the fact that man's intellect has been developed to a point beyond his integrity and beyond his ability to be good. . . . The trouble with the world lies primarily in the area of ethics and morals. It will not be sufficient for the Negro liberal arts colleges, nor any colleges, to produce clever graduates, men fluent in speech and able to argue their way through; but rather honest men who can be trusted both in public and private life—men who are sensitive to the wrongs, sufferings, and injustices of society and who are willing to accept responsibility for correcting the ills" (Mays, "The Role of the Negro Liberal Arts College in Postwar Reconstruction," pp. 407-408).

132. This article, which has not been located by the King Papers Project, is mentioned in "M'house Students Publish Annual Sociology Digest," *Maroon Tiger*, May-June 1948.


135. King, Jr., "Autobiography of Religious Development," p. 362 in this volume. Kelsey (who remembered the class as occurring during King's sophomore year) recalled that King "stood out in class not simply academically, but in the sense that he absorbed Jesus' teachings with his whole being. I made it my business to present lectures on the most strenuous teachings of Jesus. It was precisely at this time that Martin's eyes lit up most and his face was graced with a smile" (quoted in Turner, "Remembering the Young King," p. 44). For Kelsey's restrained letter supporting King's seminary application, see Kelsey to Charles E. Batten, 12 March 1948, p. 155 in this volume.


137. King, Sr., with Riley, *Daddy King*, p. 128.

138. King, Jr., "Autobiography of Religious Development," p. 363 in this volume. Despite King, Jr.'s definition of his father's theology as "fundamentalist," the term is a misleading description of King, Sr.'s conservatism on matters of biblical interpretation. In a 1956 interview, King, Jr., noted that he was disturbed that "most Negro ministers were unlettered, not trained in seminaries, and that gave me pause. I revolted, too, against the emotionalism of much Negro religion, the shouting and stamping. I didn't understand it, and it embarrassed me" (William Peters, "'Our Weapon Is Love'", *Redbook* 107 [August 1956]: 42).

139. King quoted in "Attack on the Conscience," *Time*, 18 February 1957, p. 18. A Morehouse classmate, William G. Pickens, recalled that King's image of the black Baptist preacher was negative: "He saw them as anti-intellectual and prone to establish or maintain emotionalism as the chief sign of salvation" (quoted in Turner, "Remembering the Young King," p. 46).

140. Samuel DuBois Cook, quoted in Turner, "Remembering the Young King," p. 42.


143. King's 7 August 1959 statement written in response to a request by Joan Thatcher, Publicity Director of the Board of Educationn and Publication of the American Baptist Convention, Division of Christian Higher

144. Ibid.
145. King, Sr., with Riley, Daddy King, p. 141.
146. In a mock presidential election during the spring of 1948, a Wallace for President committee (led by Morehouse student Floyd B. McKissick) succeeded in winning the support of a majority of Morehouse students. Williams's hopes for the radical political party were dashed in the November general election, however, when less than 1 percent of Georgia's voters favored Wallace. Nine months later, Williams resigned from the leadership of the Progressive Party over differences in "basic philosophy." Soon thereafter he published two articles, one outlining his understanding of the party's failure to appeal to large numbers of Georgia voters, black or white, the other presenting a Christian critique of Communism: "The People's Progressive Party of Georgia," *Phylon* 10 (September 1947): 226-230; and "Communism: A Christian Critique," *Journal of Religious Thought* 6 (Autumn/Winter 1949): 120-135. See also "Wallace Committee," *Maroon Tiger*, March-April 1948; "Student Poll Favors Wallace; Supports A. Philip Randolph," *Maroon Tiger*, May-June 1948; *Congressional Quarterly's Guide to U.S. Elections* (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly, Inc., 1985), p. 357; and Progressive Party Correspondence, 1949, SWWC-GAU.

147. King, Jr., "Autobiography of Religious Development," pp. 362-363 in this volume. King was later quoted as saying, "I was ready to resent all the white race. As I got to see more of white people, my resentment was softened, and a spirit of cooperation took its place. But I never felt like a spectator in the racial problem. I wanted to be involved in the very heart of it" ("Attack on the Conscience," *Time*, 18 February 1957, p. 18). See also Brailsford Brazeal, interview by Judy Barton, 16 February 1972, MLK/OH-GAMK; and King, Sr., with Riley, *Daddy King*, pp. 141-142.

149. Lucius M. Tobin to Charles E. Batten, 25 February 1948; Benjamin Elijah Mays to Batten, 28 February 1948; George D. Kelsey to Batten, 12 March 1948; King, Sr., to Batten, 5 March 1948; also Phoebe Burney to Batten, 9 March 1948; pp. 151-155 in this volume.
150. King, Jr., to Alberta Williams King, October 1948, p. 161 in this volume.
152. Charles E. Batten to King, Jr., 29 October 1947, p. 126 in this volume.
153. King, Jr., to Albert Williams King, October 1948, p. 161 in this volume.
156. For a fuller discussion of the issue, see the Martin Luther King, Jr., Papers Project, "The Student Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.: A Summary Statement on Research," *Journal of American History* 78 (June 1991): 23-31; and Clayborne Carson et al., "Martin Luther King, Jr., as Scholar: A Reexamination of His Theological Writings," ibid., pp. 93-105.
157. King, Jr., "How to Use the Bible in Modern Theological Construction," pp. 000-000 in this volume.

157. King, Jr., "How to Use the Bible in Modern Theological Construction," pp. 000-000 in this volume.
168. Reddick, *Crusader Without Violence*, p. 82.


171. Gardner was the black pastor of First Baptist Church in Corona, New York. See William E. Gardner, *Crozer Theological Seminary Field Work Department: Rating Sheet for Martin Luther King, Jr.*, pp. 380-381 in this volume.

172. King, Jr., "Autobiography of Religious Development," p. 363 in this volume. The dependability of the paper is limited by the fact that King self-consciously fits his life experiences into the framework of then popular theories of personality and attitudinal development during childhood. In his notes for the course, for example, King defines an attitude as a "habitual manner of reaction with strong emotional components." King was encouraged to see his childhood experiences as of primary importance to his religious development: "The social reaction in the home is of primary importance in a child’s religious dev. This is because out of experience grows concepts and only through finding mutual love between parents can the child conceive of a God of love . . . Rel. finds the beginning of its ethical quality in the early soc. situation which involves distinctions of right and wrong" (King, "Class Notes, Religious Development of Personality," 12 September 1950-22 November 1950, MLKP-MBU: Box 106, folder 22).

173. According to his account in *Stride Toward Freedom*, King had read Marx during his spare time in 1949. He concluded that Marx had "pointed to weaknesses of traditional capitalism, contributed to the growth of a definite self-consciousness in the masses, and challenged the social conscience of the Christian Churches" (*Stride Toward Freedom*, p. 95.)

174. King reported in his autobiography that after hearing Muste speak, he felt that "while war could never be a positive or absolute good, it could serve as a negative good in the sense of preventing the spread and growth of an evil force" (*Stride Toward Freedom*, p. 95). According to another report of Muste's talk, he received "a fairly good reception, marred by the chilly attitude of the acting president, and the worst outburst of invective...from a vet who apparently had a tough time during the war and is having a difficult time living with himself." (Charles Walker to Bayard Rustin, 14 November 1949, FORP-PSC-P).

175. King, Jr., "War and Pacifism," p. 435 in this volume. Although the evidence for King's authorship of this document is inconclusive, there is no convincing information identifying one of the other unsigned papers as the one submitted by King. One of the three papers that may have been authored by King linked democracy to the rise of Protestant Christianity. The Reformation, the author maintained, "was not primarily theological but social." It was part of a social movement, in which "the sacredness of man and his rights were the cardinal doctrines," attempting to overcome the "weight of centuries of oppression." In the New World, the ideals of religious dissenters "were imposed on their political action and we have the foundation of an essentially Christian nation." Having been linked in their origins, democracy and Protestant Christianity were interdependent. "So long as the Christian ideals hold true for individual men, so long will democracy grow and flourish. When Christianity dies, democracy too will fade away and die For it will have lost the Wellspring of its life" ("Christianity and Democracy," 20 February 1951-4 May 1951, MLKP-MBU: Box 112, folder 17).

176. King asserted that his initial reading of Rauschenbusch’s *Christianity and the Social Crisis* "left an indelible imprint on my thinking by giving me a theological basis for the social concern which had already grown up in me as a result of my early experiences" (King, Jr., *Stride Toward Freedom*, p. 91). See also Kenneth L. Smith, "Reflections of a Former Teacher," *Bulletin of Crozer Theological Seminary* April 1965, p. 3.

177. Smith, "Reflections of a Former Teacher," p. 3. Smith also speculated that King’s direct-action approach to civil rights indicated an eventual acceptance of Niebuhr’s brand of realism.


179. Crozer Theological Seminary Placement Committee: Confidential Evaluations of Martin Luther King, Jr., by George W. Davis, Morton Scott Enslin, and Charles E. Batten, 15 November 1950, 21 November 1950, and 23
February 1951, respectively, pp. 334, 354, and 406-407 in this volume; and Charles E. Batten, "Martin L. King," 1951, pp. 390-391 in this volume.