

THE BURNING TRUTH IN THE SOUTH

by **Martin Luther King**



The civil rights crisis rocking the South today poses to American democracy the severest challenge of the century. The myth of the indifferent Negro has been exploded, along with the illusion of a "peace" founded on injustice. Heroic Southern Negro students have raised the demand for dignity and equality in a manner that bars equivocation in advance. They have made it clear that if there are to be any lunch counters in the South, they must be integrated. Tomorrow, libraries, parks, theaters—and even schools—will face the same choice: integration or disintegration.

The spiritual leader of this historic movement for freedom in the South is the author of this article—Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Leader of the successful Montgomery Bus Protest, his philosophy of non-violent mass action both inspired the student movement and provided it with a weapon of incontrovertible efficacy.

On the last page of this brochure you will find an appeal for funds. This appeal, as you will note, grew out of the State of Alabama's indictment of Dr. King on charges of perjury—charges we categorically state to be false. The need to defend Dr. King and the movement he leads prompted the formation of the Committee to Defend Martin Luther King and the Struggle for Freedom in the South. We urge you to give very careful consideration to this request for funds. For we are convinced that much hangs in the balance—nothing less than the quality of human life in the United States. Not merely Dr. King, but American democracy is on trial.

A. PHILIP RANDOLPH
DR. GARDNER TAYLOR
Chairmen

**Committee to Defend Martin Luther King and the Struggle
for Freedom in the South**

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The Burning Truth in the South

by MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.

AN ELECTRIFYING movement of Negro students has shattered the placid surface of campuses and communities across the South. Though confronted in many places by hoodlums, police guns, tear gas, arrests, and jail sentences, the students tenaciously continue to sit down and demand equal service at variety store lunch counters, and extend their protest from city to city. In communities like Montgomery, Alabama, the whole student body rallied behind expelled students and staged a walkout while state government intimidation was unleashed with a display of military force appropriate to a wartime invasion. Nevertheless, the spirit of self-sacrifice and commitment remains firm, and the state governments find themselves dealing with students who have lost the fear of jail and physical injury.

It is no overstatement to characterize these events as historic. Never before in the United States has so large a body of students spread a struggle over so great an area in pursuit of a goal of human dignity and freedom.

The suddenness with which this development burst upon the nation has given rise to the description "spontaneous." Yet it is not without clearly perceivable causes and precedents. First, we should go back to the ending of World War II. Then, the new will and determination of the Negro were irrevocably generated. Hundreds of thousands of young Negro men were mustered out of the

armed forces, and with their honorable discharge papers and G.I. Bill of Rights grants, they received a promise from a grateful nation that the broader democracy for which they had fought would begin to assume reality. They believed in this promise and acted in the conviction that changes were guaranteed. Some changes did appear—but commensurate neither with the promise nor the need.

Struggles of a local character began to emerge, but the scope and results were limited. Few Americans outside the immediately affected areas even realized a struggle was taking place. One perceptible aspect was the steady, significant increase in voting registration which took place, symbolizing the determination of the Negro, particularly the veteran, to make his rights a reality. The number of registered voters reached a point higher than exists today.

The United States Supreme Court decision of 1954 was viewed by Negroes as the delivery of part of the promise of change. In unequivocal language the Court affirmed that "separate but equal" facilities are inherently unequal, and that to segregate a child on the basis of his race is to deny that child equal protection of the law. This decision brought hope to millions of disinherited Negroes who had formerly dared only to dream of freedom. But the implementation of the decision was not to be realized without a sharp and difficult struggle. Through five years of

turmoil some advances were achieved. The victory is far from complete, but the determination by Negroes that it will be won is universal.

What relation have these events to the student sit-downs? It was the young veteran who gave the first surge of power to the postwar civil rights movements. It was the high school, college, and elementary school young people who were in the front line of the school desegregation struggle. Lest it be forgotten, the opening of hundreds of schools to Negroes for the first time in history required that there be young Negroes with the moral and physical courage to face the challenges and, all too frequently, the mortal danger presented by mob resistance.



There were such young Negroes in the tens of thousands, and no program for integration failed for want of students. The simple courage of students and their parents should never be forgotten. In the years 1958 and 1959 two massive Youth Marches to Washington for Integrated Schools who brought with them nearly 500,000 signatures on petitions gathered largely from campuses and youth centers. This mass action infused a new spirit of direct action challenging government to act forthrightly.

Hence for a decade young Negroes

have been steeled by both deeds and inspiration to step into responsible action. These are the precedents for the student struggle of today.

Many related, interacting social forces must be understood if we are to understand history as it is being made. The arresting upsurge of Africa and Asia is remote neither in time nor in space to the Negro of the South. Indeed, the determination of Negro Americans to win freedom from all forms of oppression springs from the same deep longing that motivates oppressed peoples all over the world.

However inadequate forms of education and communication may be, the ordinary Negro Jim Smith knows that in primitive jungle villages in India still illiterate peasants are casting a free ballot for their state and federal legislators. In one after another of the new African states black men form the government, write the laws, and administer the affairs of state. But in state after state in the United States the Negro is ruled and governed without a fragment of participation in civic life. The contrast is a burning truth which has molded a deep determination to end this intolerable condition.



Negroes have also experienced sharp frustrations as they struggle for the realization of promises expressed in hollow legislative enactments or empty electoral campaign oratory. Conferences from the lowest levels of officialdom up to the Chief Executive in the White House result in the clarification of problems—but not their solution. Studies by many commissions, unhappily devoid of power, continue to pose problems without any concrete results that could be translated into jobs, education, equality of opportunity, and access to the fruits of an historic period of prosperity. In "the affluent society," the Negro has remained the poor, the underprivileged, and the lowest class. Court actions are often surrounded by a special type of red tape that has made for long drawn-out processes of litigation and evasive schemes. The Negro has also become aware that token integration was not a start in good faith but a new form of discrimination covered up with certain niceties.

It was inevitable, therefore, that a more direct approach would be sought—one which would contain the promise of some immediate degree of success based upon the concrete act of the Negro. Hence, a period began in which the emphasis shifted from the slow court process to direct action in the form of bus protests, economic boycotts, mass marches to and demonstrations in the nation's capital and state capitals.

One may wonder why the present movement started with the lunch counters. The answer lies in the fact that here the Negro has suffered indignities and injustices that cannot be justified or explained. Almost every Negro has experienced the tragic inconveniences of lunch counter segregation. He cannot understand why he is welcomed with open arms at most counters in the store, but is denied service at a certain counter because it happens to be selling food and drink. In a real sense the "sit-ins" represent more than a demand for service; they represent a demand for respect.

It is absurd to think of this movement as being initiated by Communists or some other outside group. This movement is an expression of the longing of a new Negro for freedom and human dignity. These students were anchored to lunch counter seats by the accumulated indignities of days gone by and the boundless aspirations of generations yet unborn.

In this new method of protest a new philosophy provided a special undergirding—the philosophy of non-violence. It was first modestly and quietly projected in one community, Montgomery, when the threat of violence became real in the bus protest. But it burst from this limited arena, and was embraced by masses of people across the nation with fervor and consistency.

The appeal of non-violence has many facets:

First—It proclaims the sincere and earnest wish of the Negro that though changes must be accomplished, there is no desire to use or tolerate force. Thus, it is consistent with the deeply religious traditions of Negroes.

Second—It denies that vengeance for past oppression motivates the new spirit of determined struggle.

Third—It brings to the point of action a great multitude who need the assurance that a technique exists which is suitable and practical for a minority confronting a majority often vicious and possessed of effective weapons of combat.

Fourth—Many Negroes recognize the necessity of creating discord to alter established community patterns, but they strongly desire that controls be built in, so that neither they nor their adversaries would find themselves engaged in mutual destruction.

Fifth—Having faith that the white majority is not an undifferentiated whole, Negro leaders have welcomed a moral appeal which can reach the emotions and intellect of significant white groups.



The appeal of the philosophy of non-violence encompasses these many requirements. The key significance of the student movement lies in the fact that from its inception, everywhere, it has combined direct action and non-violence.

This quality has given it the extraordinary power and discipline which every thinking person observes. It has discredited the adversary, who knows how to deal with force but is bewildered and panicky in the face of the new techniques. Time will reveal that the students are learning lessons not contained in their textbooks. Hundreds have already been expelled, fined, imprisoned, and brutalized, and the numbers continue to grow. But with the punishments, something more is growing. A generation of young people has come out of decades of shadows to face naked state power; it has lost its fears, and experienced the majestic dignity of a direct struggle for its own liberation. These young people have connected up with their own history—the slave revolts, the incomplete revolution of the Civil War, the brotherhood of colonial colored men in Africa and Asia. They are an integral part of the history which is reshaping the world, replacing a dying order with modern democracy. They are doing this in a nation whose own birth spread new principles and shattered a medieval



social society then dominating most of the globe.

It is extremely significant that in many places the Negro students have found white allies to join in their actions. It is equally significant that on a mass scale students and adults in the North and elsewhere have organized supporting actions, many of which are still only in their early stages.

The segregationists now face some hard alternatives: They can continue to seek to maintain segregated facilities. In this event they must live with discord or themselves initiate, and be responsible for, violence with all its evil consequences. They may close the facilities as they have done in many places. But this will not end the movement; rather, it will spread to libraries, public parks, schools, and the like, and these too will have to be closed, thus depriving both white and Negro of necessary cultural and recreational institutions. This would be a step backward for the whole of society. Or finally, they can accept the principle of equality. In this case they still have two alternative approaches. They may make the facilities equally bad for both white and Negro or equally good. Thus finally simple logic and justice in their own interests should direct them to the only acceptable solution—to accept equality and maintain it on the best level for both races.

The outcome of the present struggle will be some time in unfolding, but the line of its direction is clear. It is a final refutation of the time-honored theory that the Negro prefers segregation. It would be futile to deplore, as many do, the tensions accompanying the social changes. Tension and conflict are not alien nor abnormal to growth but are the natural results of the process of changes. A revolution is occurring in both the social order and the human mind. One hundred eighty-four years ago a bold group of men signed the Declaration of Independence. If their struggle had been lost they had signed their own death warrant. Nevertheless, though explicitly regretting that King George had forced them to this extreme by a long "train of abuses," they resolutely acted and a great new society was born. The Negro students, their parents, and their allies are acting today in that imperishable tradition.

APPEAL FROM THE SOUTH

for the

- Student Defense Fund of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference
- Committee to Defend Martin Luther King, Jr.
- Registration and Voting Crusade in the South

Dear Friend,

In recent weeks three developments have combined to create a civil rights crisis of historic depth and magnitude:

First, Southern Negro students have launched a mass offensive that is cracking the walls of segregation. Their courageous and non-violent spirit has awed millions and given a new dignity to the cause of freedom. In retaliation, the Southern racists have expelled them from schools, arrested and jailed them, denied them bail, and visited violence upon them.

Second, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference has launched a crusade to bring over a million new Negro voters into the 1960 Presidential elections, threatening the political power of the Dixiecrats.

Third, as the student sit-ins and voting crusade struggled on with grim determination, the State of Alabama, with calculation and on obviously false charges, indicted Martin Luther King, Jr., leader of the historic Montgomery Bus Protest, for perjury.

What is the purpose of this sinister indictment? It seeks to destroy leaders indigenous to the South to whom the students are looking for support and guidance, and to cripple the voting crusade now under way. Because of Dr. King's importance to these struggles the Dixiecrats are determined to jail him.

To defend themselves and to continue their assault on Jim Crow, Southern Negroes—especially the students—cry out for moral and material support. They face a fanatical and unscrupulous enemy. Their only real allies are those whose dedication to democracy is uncompromising. Your help is urgently needed **now!**

Please send your contribution today.

Sincerely,

BERNARD LEE, President
Montgomery Student
Protest Movement

REV. FRED L. SHUTTLESWORTH, Secretary
Southern Christian Leadership Conference

REV. RALPH ABERNATHY, Treasurer
Voting and Registration Crusade

A. PHILIP RANDOLPH, Chairman
Committee to Defend Martin
Luther King

HARRY BELAFONTE
LANGSTON HUGHES

DAISY BATES
BAYARD RUSTIN

NORMAN THOMAS
SIDNEY POITIER

Please make checks payable to Nat King Cole, Treasurer

Committee to Defend
Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.
312 West 125th Street
New York 27, New York

Enclosed please find my contribution of \$..... for the Combined Emergency Appeal.

Enclosed please find \$..... which I am lending to the Revolving Bail Fund of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, to be used for students and others arrested in the struggle. It is my understanding that this money is 100% returnable at any time upon request.