AN AGENT FOR CHANGE: THE STORY OF REVEREND H. K. MATTHEWS

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

**ACKNOWLEDGMENTS** ........................................................................................................ iii

**ABSTRACT** ....................................................................................................................... vi

**CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTION** ................................................................................... 1  
A. What was Going on in the World? ................................................................. 6  
B. Leaders and Social Change ................................................................. 10  
C. Statement of Purpose ..................................................................... 12  

**CHAPTER II. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE** .................................................... 16  
A. New Era – Different Tactics .............................................................. 19  
B. The Black Civil Rights Movement ..................................................... 24  
C. Exemplary Practices of the Black Civil Rights Movement ............. 32  
D. Leadership in the Black Civil Rights Movement .............................. 38  

**CHAPTER III. METHOD** ........................................................................................... 50  
A. Methods of Generating Data ............................................................. 54  
B. Data Analysis and Theoretical Perspectives ....................................... 61  

**CHAPTER IV. THROUGH THE EYES OF OTHERS** .............................................. 71  
A. Three Recurrent Topics ................................................................. 72  
B. The Ethic of Care in the African American Community ................. 83  
C. Double Consciousness and African Americans in Pensacola ........ 87  
D. Charisma, Churches, and Civil Rights .............................................. 91  
E. Confrontation not Communication .................................................. 96  

**CHAPTER V. IN HIS OWN WORDS** ....................................................................... 101  
A. The Early Years ........................................................................... 104  
B. Leaving Home ............................................................................. 109  
C. Lifting the Veil .......................................................................... 115  
D. Reverend H. K. Matthews, Civil Rights Leader ............................. 122  

**CHAPTER VI. REVEREND MATTHEWS AT THE HELM** .................................. 127  
A. Integrating Pensacola’s Schools ..................................................... 129  
B. Official Violence .......................................................................... 140
ABSTRACT

AN AGENT FOR CHANGE: THE STORY OF REVEREND H. K. MATTHEWS

Lusharon Wiley

This case study examines the Civil Rights Movement in northwest Florida through the lived experiences of a Black Civil Rights activist. I attempted to situate the participant in the political as well as cultural and historical context of the time. By conducting interviews foremostly with the subject of this study as well as others and examining archival data, I developed a clear picture of the racism embedded in the day-to-day life of Blacks and Whites from the 1950’s to the present. Within this framework, I explore the lived experiences of one ordinary man who had the courage to become an agent for change, who by his actions changed history. His story suggests that activists must possess vision and passion and be willing to risk loneliness and rejection if they are to be successful agents for change.
CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

As a child growing up in South Georgia in the 1950s and 60s, life appeared to have been idyllic, at least on the surface. There were 11 of us all told, two adults and nine children. If my stepsister were to be included, there were really 10 of us children – five girls and five boys. Ours was a simple life but not an easy one. My environment was an all Black existence. Let me share with you some of my lived experiences.

My mother was widowed at 27 years old. My father was killed by his cousin’s husband. Things were very hard for my mother as a young woman with only a high school education and four little ones to feed. She worked in the cotton and tobacco fields and cleaned White folks’ homes to make ends meet. We lived in the country in a “shot gun” house. You know the type. You shoot a shotgun in the front door, and the bullet will go out the back door. Times were really tough, but some of the older ladies in the neighborhood helped out as best they could. Child rearing back then was truly a community effort.

As the youngest of the four children, I stayed at home during the day with two of my great aunts – Aunt Sara and Aunt Rachel. I remember many a day that I would go to sleep while Aunt Sara was combing my hair and wake up hours later (or so it seemed) with her still combing my hair. I dared not fuss or I’d get popped on the forehead with the comb. Aunt Sara was gentle, and I knew how much she loved me.
Aunt Rachel, on the other hand, seemed sterner. However, as I look back, I realize she was equally as caring but gruffer in tone and manner.

One of the things I remember about Aunt Rachel was the stories she used to tell me. She seemed to talk a lot, and I listened a lot. As a little girl, I remember Aunt Rachel cooking mullet (with their heads still on their bodies) in onions and water in an iron skillet. She would make hoecakes and serve the fish and hoecakes with “clabber” milk. That was good eating. Aunt Rachel would often reminisce about her childhood. When old folks told stories, you didn’t interrupt, you just listened. Aunt Rachel recounted a story of her father being placed in a burlap sheet. The sheet was tied by a rope and hung from the tree. Her father was beaten with sticks by two White men while he swung in the burlap sheet. Seems he had done something the Master didn’t like.

When I heard the story of Aunt Rachel’s father being beaten while swinging from the tree, I did not comprehend the full meaning of the story. I did not know what the story meant. After all, I was so young.

Aunt Rachel was an old woman when I first knew her. She died in the early sixties at 80 something years of age. We didn’t know her correct age because there were no accurate records of Blacks’ vital statistics at the time of her birth. Aunt Rachel’s parents were slaves. I didn’t know what that meant. I knew only that she had a rough time growing up. Aunt Rachel had other stories to tell and healing remedies to share.

I remember when my older sister burned her arm on the stove. It was a pretty severe burn. Aunt Rachel went into the woods and got some weeds. She extracted their oil, smoothed it on my sister’s arm, and chanted in a language we did not understand. She called it “fire-talking.” Before I knew it, my sister’s arm had stopped aching, and
over the next few days, Aunt Rachel continued to apply the oil to the burn. The arm healed with no trace of having been burned!

Those were happy days. We lived in a run-down shack with no running water, no indoor plumbing, and used a wood burning stove with which to cook and heat. But we were happy. We were most happy on the days the “rolling-store” came by. The White man would come to our aunts’ home to sell his wares – candy, blankets, hair grease. Among the items Aunt Rachel would buy was candy. She would sell the candy to children in the neighborhood. It was a source of income for her. Because I was at home with her during the day, I would often be given a piece of candy when no one else was around. I was admonished not to tell the others, but of course, I always did.

Back there, in the country, where the tall Georgia pines grow, I felt safe. I would walk in the ditches to and from my aunts’ home back to my home and then back again. Sometimes I even walked to Aunt Lump’s house. Aunt Lump was another great aunt who lived about a mile or so up the road. I could only walk to Aunt Lump’s house when my older sister and brothers were with me. Aunt Lump was quite gnome-like. She was round and jolly with chubby cheeks and a ready grin. She always called me “the Woods baby” and made sure that I was always given just a little bit bigger treat than everyone else. I was called “the Woods baby” by a lot of people who lived in the country. That was because I was the baby of the Woods family when my father was killed. Aunt Lump still lives in that same old house where she lived when I was a little girl. She is 94 years old and still as feisty as ever.

We rarely saw White people. I do not remember ever going to town when we lived in the country. At least, when we went to town we did not go to the stores to shop
because there was always the risk that we would be accused of stealing. We would sometimes visit my Aunt Cora Mae and her husband, Uncle Short, who lived in town, but we didn’t really go to any stores – at least not that I can recall.

My mother eventually began to date. She eventually remarried, and, after continuing to live in the country for a few more years, we moved to town. My life changed. We moved to the south side of town into an all Black area called “Little Miami.” I think the name Little Miami comes from the amount of illegal number running that went on in the neighborhood. The numbers running game was brought to my hometown by people from Cuba by way of Miami (or so the story goes). When I was coming up, this illegal gambling was called “cubie.” Everybody bought numbers and hoped their numbers would be the one thrown. If your number was the one thrown, it meant you would win money. The pot was usually not a large amount of cash, but every little bit helped. This was another way to make ends meet.

I attended an all-Black elementary school. The first grade I entered was called primer, today known as kindergarten. I learned easily and enjoyed playing with the other children. Having three older siblings to tutor me and a mother who often read to us, I already knew how to read, do basic arithmetic, and was excellent at spelling. My mother would often read the Bible to us, but the stories we enjoyed most were the fables about Epaminious. My mother would do dramatic interpretations of poems by Paul Laurence Dunbar and James Weldon Johnson. We would all sit at her feet and listen, fascinated both by the words and her actions.

I enjoyed being in school and being surrounded by people who wanted me to succeed. I felt safe and loved. However, I soon began to notice the subtle differences
between my old neighborhood and my new neighborhood. This new community did not have a rolling store. Instead, street vendors came to our house. When the White man would come to the door to see if my mom was at home, he would ask “Is Auntie home?” More often than not, the man would be much older than my mother. I would wonder why he called my mother Auntie. I wondered if this White man could have a Black aunt. I knew I didn’t like his calling my mother auntie, but I didn’t know why I didn’t like it.

Another kind of White man also came to the door. This was the insurance man who would always ask, “Is Nancy home?” My mother was never addressed as Mrs. or Ms. even though the insurance man was much younger than my mother. I didn’t like that either, and I always thought the insurance man was too familiar and sort of sneaky. (Later, we would find that the insurance policies my mother had paid on for over 40 years would end up being worthless). It seems there was often a discrepancy over the amount my mother thought she owed and the amount the insurance man would have recorded on the ledger. This went on for years until my mother started making her payments directly to the insurance company.

After moving to town, we would occasionally be allowed to go “uptown.” As we ventured to town, we were always given a stern warning not to “touch anything” in the store. We were warned about which stores to avoid. We knew if we touched something in the store, we could go to jail. Whenever we were walking on the sidewalk in downtown and Whites were coming toward us in the opposite direction, we would have to step off the sidewalk to let them pass. When we went to the courthouse to get
water, we used the “colored” water fountain and the “colored” bathrooms. At the time, I
did not realize that this was segregation. It was just a way of life.

This life was one where the Black neighborhoods had no sidewalks. Shucks, the
streets were not even paved. For all of my growing up years, we heated our home with
bottled gas. Only after I had gone off to college did my mother start a neighborhood
petition to have the gas lines extended to our community. There were a few skeptics,
but my mother prevailed. We were all so excited to have the entire house heated instead
of having to stand in front of the gas heater to get warm. When one of us stood in front
of the heater for more than a few seconds, everyone else would start complaining that
the person was “blocking the heat.” The days of cold, drafty rooms had come to an end.
My world and the world around me would soon change. History books are filled with
the lessons learned during those turbulent years in America’s Black Civil Rights
Movement and social protests.

What was Going on in the World?

During the very early years of my life, the entire family watched Walter
Cronkite on the CBS evening news everyday. We knew that Mr. Cronkite would end
the evening broadcast with, “And that’s the way it is.” As the result of watching the
evening news, I became aware at a young age of what was going on in the world. I
vaguely recall the “Watts Riots.” As I entered my teenage years, I was aware that
Blacks in America wanted the same Rights as White Americans. While I didn’t fully
understand the Black Civil Rights Movement, I sang along with James Brown that I was
“Black and proud.” I remember Marvin Gaye’s song “What’s Going On?”, and I saw
the racial protests, sit-ins, and peaceful demonstrations on television. I saw the Freedom Riders in North Carolina and the beating of Blacks by policemen in Birmingham and Montgomery. I saw Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and heard his powerful speeches. I saw John Fitzgerald Kennedy and Bobby Kennedy. I saw the riots in Detroit, Watts, and places all over the south. My world was changing, and I was scared.

Then the unthinkable happened. President Kennedy was shot and killed. The fear increased. The outspoken and controversial Malcolm X was shot and killed in 1965. Many speculated that the CIA had ordered the assassination. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was killed three years later, and the fear escalated. Robert Kennedy’s assassination soon followed. What was happening to my world, to America? What was happening to me? How had my world turned upside down? These demonstrations, killings, protests, and sit-ins occurred during my middle and high school years.

The social changes caused me to reminisce about life in this small town in South Georgia. I began to recall all the times I had gone to F. W. Woolworth or Kress and had to go to the back door to purchase food. I remembered having to purchase bus tickets at the back door of the bus station and having to sit in the back of the bus. I remembered the segregated schools, with the lack of adequate books and supplies. I remembered having to sit in the balcony at the movie theater. I remembered young White men and women calling my stepfather “boy.” I remembered never having seen a Black letter carrier or bank teller or even cashier in the local stores. For the very first time in my life, I began to question this unequal treatment and unequal access. I was fed up and frustrated. In this state of mind, I entered Tuskegee Institute ready to take on the world, ready to fight back. And I was less afraid.
Tuskegee Institute was a predominantly Black college in Alabama. (There were White students in the veterinary science program, but they kept to themselves). This was the first time I had ever interacted with people from such diverse backgrounds. I met Black people from Africa and East Indians from India. I even met people from Chicago, New York, and California. Even though most of the students were African Americans, their ideas and speech were diverse. I was about to begin a journey of enlightenment that I could never have expected. I was excited about new opportunities to learn.

When H. Rap Brown came to campus, I listened. When Nikki Giovanni with her rhyme and rhythm spoke, I listened. When Angela Davis and the Black Panthers spoke, I listened. When Dick Gregory spoke, I listened. When Julian Bond came to campus and spoke about a united America, one where I could take part in democracy as a full citizen, I listened. I wondered at the courage of the various people I saw. I was awed by their willingness to speak up and speak out. I wondered where the courage came from that inspired little ol’ Black men and women to go to the polls to vote even though they faced the threat of physical harm or incarceration. While I was inspired by the actions of those around me, I was still afraid, afraid of the police dogs, afraid of the guns, afraid of the people who should have been my protectors but whom I had come to view as my enemy. But still I listened.

Clayton Powell of New York, heard Carl Stokes speak in Ohio, saw John Lewis of Mississippi on television, and watched Julian Bond in Georgia. I heard about the National Urban League and a young leader named Whitney Young, Jr. whose agenda was to end employment discrimination in America. And I watched. I watched Harry Belafonte and Dick Gregory and Richard Pryor. I watched in horror at the deaths of students at Kent State University and Jackson State University. I asked myself, “Is this America, the land of the free and the home of the brave?” I wondered how college students, mothers and fathers, and teenagers, fathers, Whites and Blacks, and Northerners had the courage to act. What was it that compelled them to act?

Was Fannie Lou Hamer’s simple refrain – “I’m sick and tired of being sick and tired” – really the crux of the matter? Had people gotten so tired of racism, exclusion, and social injustice that they were forced to act? Was there a single instant of racial or social injustice that caused each of them to act? Was it the dynamics of group interaction? While pondering the changes in American society, I happened to hear a speech that H. Rap Brown gave at Tuskegee. He, along with social activist Eldridge Cleaver, had come to encourage college students to help with voter registration in Macon County, Alabama. Even though Tuskegee, the county seat of Macon County, was essentially all Black, there had never been a Black mayor. Black residents were afraid to try to register to vote because of the continued threats of physical harm and the loss of employment. The plea of the political activists for us to get involved struck a chord with me. Egged on by my fellow students, I decided to take my first step toward active participation in social unrest. I went to a rally for voter registration of Black citizens of Macon County. As a direct result of the participation of college students in
getting citizens of Macon County registered to vote, Johnny Ford was elected in 1972 as the first Black mayor of Tuskegee. He served in that capacity for 24 years.

My political activism was short-lived. I settled back into a routine of work and school, while often expounding on social injustice and parroting anti-Vietnam rhetoric. I soon graduated from Tuskegee, got married, and moved to Chicago. Though my major had been political science, I took the first job I could find and settled into a non-descript uneventful routine. Though I would remain attuned to social changes and pay close attention to what was happening in the world, it would be years before my interest would be piqued again to the point of political involvement.

Leaders and Social Change

I have always been intrigued by the personal stories of individuals who have changed the course of history, ordinary people who undertake extraordinary challenges. History has recorded the stories of a few extraordinary people whose leadership and determination have made an indelible mark on the course of American history. Marable (1998, p. xvi) states that “leaders are essentially individuals who have the ability to understand their own times, who express or articulate programs or policies that reflect the perceived interests and desires of particular groups, and who devise instruments or political vehicles that enhance the capacity to achieve effective change.”

One such leader is Civil Rights activist Representative John Lewis (D, GA) who marched with Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. during the sixties. Rep. Lewis was co-founder of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and continues his fight today on the floor of Congress to promote equal access and equal opportunity for
all Americans. In *Walking with the Wind*, Lewis (1998) writes of having grown up in Alabama during a time of racial hatred and segregation. He recalls two incidents that profoundly affected his life. First, in 1955 a Supreme Court ruling that struck down the racially unjust “separate but equal” educational policy by ruling in favor of Brown in the now famous Brown vs. the Board of Education [Topeka, KS] decision. Specifically, the Supreme Court ruled that separate but unequal schools adversely affect Black children and are discriminatory.

The second incident that rocked young Lewis’ world was the killing of Emmett Till, a 14 year-old Black boy from Chicago who had been visiting relatives in Mississippi. Lewis (1998) states that he was

shaken to the core by the killing of Emmett Till. I was 15, Black, at the edge of my own manhood, just like him. He could have been me. That could have been me, beaten, tortured, and dead at the bottom of a river. It had only been a year since I was so elated at the Brown decision. Now I felt like a fool. It didn’t seem that the Supreme Court mattered. It didn’t seem that the American principles of justice and equality I read about in my beat-up civics book at school mattered . . . . . declarations of absolute equality in God’s eyes, didn’t seem to matter either. They didn’t matter to the men who killed Emmett Till. They didn’t matter to the jury that deliberated for a mere hour before delivering its verdict of not guilty. Nor did they matter to the county that continued to send me to a school separate from White children and forbade me to eat at the same drugstore lunch counter or even use the same public rest room as they. I couldn’t accept the way things were, I just couldn’t. (p. 47)
It seems that Morris Dees, another of my heroes, also could not accept how things were. Dees, cofounder of the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) in Montgomery, Alabama, along with John Levin of Pensacola, Florida, wanted to establish a legal mechanism to fight racial and social intolerance. Although Dees (2001) was a successful lawyer in his own right, he put everything on the line, including the safety and welfare of his family, to fight for social justice and social change. Through the efforts of the SPLC, many perpetrators of hate crimes have been successfully prosecuted. Today, SPLC is internationally known for its tolerance education programs, its legal victories against White supremacist groups, its tracking of hate groups, and its sponsorship of the Civil Rights Memorial. Many of our nation’s schools participate in the tolerance programs it funds.

Fannie Lou Hamer, Civil Rights activist from Mississippi, has also played a role in forming my views about social and political leadership. Imagine being dragged from your car, arrested and beaten, just because you desire the right to vote. But intimidation did not cause Hamer to buckle. Instead, she doubled her efforts to register to vote and went on to challenge the process of electing representatives to the Democratic National Convention. I examine these Black Civil Rights activists and their impact in detail later in my literature review. I have often wondered what they have in common. What factors led them to resist the dominant/subordinate paradigm? Is it a specific event or experience? Is it a matter of morality? Where could I turn for answers?

Statement of Purpose

As if in response to my internal struggles, I had the good fortune to help with planning the Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. celebration at The University of West Florida
in 1999. The scheduled guest cancelled at the last moment. Another speaker had to be located. I had heard of a local Civil Rights activist named Rev. H. K. Matthews. I was unsure exactly what he had done, but everyone seemed to think highly of him. I suggested that we contact Reverend Matthews since he was in the local area and had a good reputation. He agreed to speak.

His speech held me riveted to my seat. Here was a local Civil Rights activist who had risked his livelihood and his life to fight social injustice. He was the first person I had ever heard of who had been banned from working in the state of Florida! That explained why he still resided in Alabama. Although he frequents Pensacola, Reverend Matthews has not returned to the city to live or work since his exile of the sixties. Here was another of those ordinary people who do extraordinary things.

I wanted to know more. I immediately cornered Reverend Matthews after the program. I stood there awestruck with many questions running through my head. I wanted to tell his story. I wanted to shout out in frustration on his behalf. How could he be so calm? What had made him risk everything? Why did he not consent to live within the White, hierarchical social structure like the others? I asked if I could sit at his knee and learn from him. He agreed but seemed surprised that I should be so interested. Now, five years later, I have come full circle.

As I sat in TGI Friday’s eating dinner with Reverend H. K. Matthews on Monday, April 12, 2004, I was filled with joy in the presence of such an extraordinary man. Yet, he seems so ordinary, so unassuming. I have assured Reverend Matthews that this evening’s meeting is simply a “get-to-meet-you” opportunity, not an interview. Yet, I find it hard to keep my promise. “Where did you grow up?” I blurt out. What does H.
K. stand for? Were you ever afraid? How many sisters and brothers do you have? Are you retired? How did today’s rally go? Reverend Matthews calmly answered all of my questions with a slight smile that seems to say, “I thought there weren’t going to be any questions tonight.” So it goes in the life of a public figure.

My interest in conducting a case study of Reverend Matthews’ life is two-fold. First, I want to know under what social conditions he became a social change agent. It is important to situate the study of Reverend Matthews not only in its political context but also in its cultural and historical context. The culture of the South, the relationship between Black and White Americans and the racism embedded in the day-to-day life of these actors must be taken into account. What made him risk everything? Was he perhaps like John Lewis who saw the social injustices as a young man and knew even then that racial hatred and discrimination were wrong and determined early on that he would help change society or die trying? Was he perhaps like Morris Dees who was already established in his own career but wanted to change society so that those marginalized by institutional racism would be given a legal voice? Or was he perhaps like Fannie Lou Hamer, sick and tired of being sick and tired? Why, at the age of 35, did he decide to take a stand?

Second, I want to know what leadership strategies Rev. Matthews employed. By examining his answers, as well as reviewing the patterns among other leaders, it might be possible to discern common leadership practices. These common leadership practices in turn imply what others can learn from these leaders. Thomas A. Schwandt (2001, p. 275) cautions that “to find meaning in an action, or to say one understands what a particular action means, requires that one interpret in a particular way what the actors
are doing.” Schwandt (p. 275) further states that *Verstehen* “entails a kind of empathic identification with the actor. It is an act of psychological reenactment – getting inside the head of an actor to understand what he or she is up to in terms of motives, beliefs, desires, thoughts and so on.” It is at this level of that I wish to explore the actions and experiences of Reverend H. K. Matthews.

Reverend Matthews is one of those leaders who understood the interests and desires of his group. Like other Americans, both Black and White, he cared enough and dared enough to face the dangers of social activism head on. This research is an opportunity to examine the lived experiences of one ordinary man who had the courage to say no to social injustice and yes to social change and willingly became a change agent who changed the course of history. His is a compelling story. It is time that his voice was heard.
CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

They call it the Diaspora, the movement of Blacks from Africa to foreign shores. Families divided, humans chained together as tightly as sardines in a can, held in the depth of the ship, the stench of the air so acrid it stings the nose. Some of them seek refuge in the sea rather than to be held in captivity. Originally brought to America as indentured servants, they were soon forced to serve others. They were denied their language, their families, and their dignity. This was the plight of Africans in America.

Riches (1997, p. 1) recounts the description given by John Rolfe, one of the first settlers in Virginia, in describing the arrival of the first Africans in the United States: “They came by accident. A Dutch ship seeking supplies visited the new English colony and exchanged 19 and odd Negroes for food.” Historians tend to agree that these first Africans were treated as indentured servants. Their treatment was essentially the same as White indentured servants. Klinkner and Smith (1999, p. 11) write, “slavery did not spring fully grown onto American soil when the first Africans were brought to the Jamestown colony in 1619. It appears that these Africans came not as slaves but as indentured servants who were held to labor for only a finite period of time.” Black indentured servants as well as White indentured servants were given land and, in some instances, “some political Rights, which in a few areas included the right to vote in local elections and the right to testify in court against Whites.”
However, the tide soon began to change. As the need for field labor became more and more pressing, the Southern states began to force Black servants into a lifetime of labor which was passed on to their children (Klinkner and Smith, 1999). Slavery was both cruel and repressive. The privileges Blacks had held as indentured servants were gradually taken away. By 1640, slavery was a part and parcel of the way of life in the American south. In fact, the American Constitution stated that “taxes in each state were determined by adding to the whole number of free persons, including those bound to service for a term of years and excluding Indians not taxed, 3-fifths of all other persons” (Riches, 1997, p.1). The language of the Constitution was a deal worked out between the North and the South in an attempt to ensure that southern states votes included the large number of ‘other persons’ living in their states. This compromise would prove to be costly to all Americans. How would landowners keep their property in hand? How would an overseer rule a slave community where the slaves outnumbered the slave owners? It would call for drastic measures.

“A wise master did not take seriously the belief that Negroes were natural-born slaves. He knew better. He knew that Negroes freshly imported from Africa had to be broken into bondage; that each succeeding generation had to be carefully trained” (Stampp, 1956, p. 27). The tools for training slaves were varied. There were discourses written on the management of slaves. According to Drewry and Drewry (1971, p. 27), one slave master stated that slave owners should utilize military tactics to ensure that slaves performed in the manner that they were trained to do: “They must obey at all times, and under all circumstances, cheerfully and with alacrity.” The book goes on to
say that slaves had to “know and keep their places,” to feel the difference between
master and slave and to understand that bondage was their natural status” (p. 27).

Many other tactics were used to bring slaves into submission. Perhaps one of
the cruelest of the tactics used was that of creating dependence of the Negro on his
master - to “impress Negroes with their helplessness, to create in them a habit of perfect
dependence upon their masters” (Drewry & Drewry, 1971, p. 29). The last thing the
slave owners wanted was for the Negro to develop a sense of self-determination. “The
way to produce the perfect slave: accustom him to rigid discipline, demand from him
unconditional submission, impress upon him his innate inferiority, develop in him a
paralyzing fear of White men, train him to adopt the master’s code of good behavior,
and instill in him a sense of complete dependence” (p. 29).

And so it was that the Africans were brought into complete submission in this
new placed called America. Thus began this ‘peculiar institution’ of American slavery.
The domination was almost entirely complete. Slaves were subjected to intense brutality
including flogging. After being whipped, some slave masters would subject slaves to
“salting,” washing the open wounds of the slaves with brine. The historical picture of
the plantation slave as painted by Southern folk lore depicts slaves as Sambo-like in
their behavior – “docile but irresponsible, loyal but lazy, humble but chronically given
to lying and stealing; his behavior was full of infantile silliness and his talk inflated with
childish exaggeration” (Drewry & Drewry, 1971, p. 37). The slaves were neither docile
nor silly.

History has recorded instances of slave revolts including Denmark Vessey’s
plot of 1822 in Charleston, South Carolina and the slave rebellion led by Nat Turner in
1831 in Virginia. In spite of the repressive and cruel treatment of slaves, some slaves, with the help of abolitionists and an underground system of freedom stops and safe places, escaped to freedom. Eventually, the institution of slavery would be dismantled. It would take a Civil War and the passage of the Emancipation Proclamation to topple this “peculiar institution.” Just as the Emancipation Proclamation did not ensure that the newly emancipated slaves would be treated as equal citizens under the law neither would the Brown decision of 1954 ensure that Black Americans would receive equal treatment under the law. It would take a massive social movement to help make this dream become a reality.

New Era – Different Tactics

The Jim Crow era is described by Chafe, Gavins, and Korstad (2001, p. xxvi) as “a combination of the de facto second-class citizenship and racial separation that emerged in 1877 at the end of Reconstruction, and the de jure arsenal of laws and official regulations that came to fruition in the 1890’s.” Chafe et al. (p. xxx) speak of the need to understand the “dailiness of the terror Blacks experienced at the hands of capricious Whites.” The historical context within which the Civil Rights Movement emerged has to be examined in order to understand why people came to act. With the passage of new laws, especially the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments, and the new playing field created during the Reconstruction era, the previous relationship between African Americans and Whites was redefined. Cashman (1991, p. 6) points out that “the regular intimacy of contact under slavery was being superseded by a caste system which resulted in an inexorable gulf between African-Americans and Whites.” African-
Americans were segregated in “schooling, housing, and places of public accommodation, such as parks, theaters, hospitals, schools, libraries, courts, and even cemeteries” (p. 6).

Racial segregation did not occur by chance. Rigorous laws as well as violent acts of aggression by Whites toward African Americans served to reiterate Black inferiority and ensure that Blacks stayed in their place. The tools of oppression used by the White Southerners to guarantee the African Americans’ adherence to social norms of White domination were widespread. Blacks knew the roles they were expected to perform in the Jim Crow era. Firsthand accounts of their early 20th century experiences tell “of rapes and beatings, of houses burned to the ground and land stolen, of harrowing escapes in the middle of the night to escape lynch mobs or to avoid the slower grinding death of perpetual poverty and indebtedness on southern tenant farms” (Chafe et al., 2001, p. 1). For example, Ralph Thompson, who grew up in Memphis, is quoted in “Remembering Jim Crow” (Chafe et al., 2001):

If we went downtown and they had the colored drinking fountain and White drinking fountain – in looking back, my sister [and I], talk about it now – my mother would always tell us to drink water before we left home. So we didn’t get caught into drinking water out. Little things like that. Things like going in the store and you can’t try the clothes on….you go to a store, and you’re standing there and a White person walks up, and they’ll wait on that White person and just make you stand. (p. 5)

William Bradford Huie (Hampton & Fayer, 1990) spoke of the death of 14 year-old Emmett Till who was killed by two White men in Mississippi for whistling at a
White woman. Huie gives this account of his conversation with John Whitten, the lawyer who defended the two men. Whitten stated, “They did not intend to kill him when they went and got him. They killed him because he boasted of having a White girl and showed them the pictures of a White girl in Chicago” (p. 13). According to Whitten,

J. W. Milan looked up at me and said, “Well, when he told me about this White girl he had,” he says, “my friend, that’s what this war’s about down here now. That’s what we got to fight to protect.” And he says, “I just looked at him and I said, ‘Boy, you ain’t never going to see the sun come up again.’” (p. 13)

Ann Pointer of Macon County, Alabama shared this story about education and work (Hampton & Fayer, 1990):

I’m telling you the truth. It was real funny, but you know, one thing: if you got a child and the man want him to work, he go and tell the teacher that “this boy can’t come to school right now because he’s working for me” he’d go there and get him out of school and make him go the field. It sound[s] funny to you because you never have been subject to nothing like this, but that’s what I want to tell you: how horrible it is when, everything you do, the man’s go to approve it. Either you are [are] his concubine or – many women, you know, fell prey to their [White men’s] sexual desires and all that kind of stuff. So, that’s the plight of the Jim Crow days. It was something. (p. 55)

The disenfranchisement of the African American in the South was pervasive. One of the most notorious means of suppressing Black achievement was through manipulation of the right to vote. The Mississippi Constitutional Convention of 1890
devised a literacy test and implemented a clause when “no person was permitted to vote who was unable to read any section of the national constitution when submitted to him, or to interpret its meaning when read to him” (Drewry & Drewry, 1971, p. 131). North Carolina adopted a “grandfather clause” whereby any person was “exempt from the literacy test who had voted before January 1, 1867 or who was the son or grandson of a person who had enjoyed that right” (Drewry & Drewry, p.121). Variations of these two tactics were soon adopted by all southern states.

The use of legal machinations to bar Blacks form political participation through establishing a set of laws and social customs came to be known as Jim Crow. According to Winters (2000, p. 14), “the term Jim Crow is taken from a minstrel show song of the 1830’s. It is usually associated with codes of conduct that defined segregation throughout the South.” Under the Jim Crow system, Blacks were not allowed to reside in hotels as they traveled. They were relegated to separate railroad cars and other public facilities including bathrooms and water fountains. In addition, Blacks were expected to act in a manner that reinforced the superiority of the White race. “They might be required to step aside as Whites passed on a public sidewalk, to enter a back door instead of a front entrance, or to remove their hats when speaking to a White person. Failure [by Blacks] to observe the code might prompt insults, beatings, and even lynchings” (Winters, p. 15).

Laws that prohibited Blacks from registering to vote, poll taxes, inadequate education, lack of land ownership, share cropping, violence, intimidation, and segregation laws all worked together to ensure that racial separation was enforced and that racial discrimination and domination was perpetuated. Economic opportunities for
southern Blacks were extremely limited. Add to this dismal picture, the Supreme Court ruling of 1896 in the Plessey v. Ferguson decision (Winters, 2000). That ruling essentially upheld Ferguson’s contention that states were not required to integrate Whites and Blacks but rather that Louisiana had the right to regulate the railroads within its borders. It paved the way for the separate but equal doctrine that became the cornerstone of racial inequality in the South. This ruling relegated Blacks to a second-class status. It became apparent that the federal court would no longer intervene in the business of the state. The state had the right to self-governance and self-direction. African Americans in the South would have to find other means of addressing social segregation and racial inequality. They would have to take social and political action; they would have to launch a social movement.

Cashman (1991) describes the period leading up to the Civil Rights Movement as “a giant suspension bridge across a turbulent river, the dark waters of racism.” The buttresses of the bridge were the Civil Rights groups formed between the years of 1900 and 1945: “the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (1910); in 1911 the Urban League; in 1931 the Nation of Islam, and in 1943 the Committee, later the Congress, for Racial Equality” (p.11). During the pre-Civil Rights mass movement four Blacks rose to the positions of national leadership including Booker T. Washington, W.E.B. DuBois, A. Phillip Randolph, and Marcus Garvey.

Booker T. Washington (Cashman, 1991) espoused the philosophy of economic independence and the acquisition of property. Seen as an accommodationist by many, Washington’s philosophy and leadership were attacked publicly by DuBois who “insisted on an end to accommodation; by every Civilized and peaceful method we
must strive for the Rights which the world accords to men” (Cashman, p.18). Cashman goes on to point out that Marcus Garvey’s pan-Africanism went even further than DuBois’ argument. Garvey wanted a separate land for African Americans. He was considered to be a man of the people: “he proved able and willing to speak directly to the great mass of African Americans as none of the established Black leadership groups really tried to do… Hence they were willing to embrace the boundary-crossing Black racial nationalism Garvey espoused in place of the visions of racial integration within American mainstream. A. Phillip Randolph was a political activist whose leadership spanned fifty years. Cashman (1991, p. 73) describes Randolph as “perhaps the least known of all major Civil Rights leaders . . . [who] may have exerted the greatest influence on the whole of the Civil Rights Movement.” In addition to the increasing prominence of nationally recognized Black leaders and their push for equality was the emergence of the Second World War. With the advent of the war, many in the African American community eagerly went into service for their country only to return to a land in which they were still not treated equally. The time was ripe for a national revolution – a change in the status of Black folks.

The Black Civil Rights Movement

It is important to understand the Black Civil Rights Movement both historically and politically. The everyday lived experiences of Blacks in America, as described in the preceding sections, relegated them to a second-class existence. The signs that read “colored” or “white,” the dated school books used in African American schools, the lack of titles employed when Whites addressed Blacks, especially in the South, was a
language filled with limitations and representations meant to reinforce the position of
Blacks as inferior American citizens, if indeed they could be considered citizens at all.
The tools of oppression were varied and diverse and ranged from examinations being
required in order for Blacks to register to vote to the insult of not allowing Blacks into
certain hospitals to the refusal to admit African Americans into historically White
institutions of higher learning. Institutionalized racism was a taken-for-granted part of
life in America.

Within this historical and political context of discrimination and racial
desegregation, the Black Civil Rights Movement emerged. Cashman (1991) asks,
“What is meant by Civil Rights?” and answers

For generations who witnessed the apogee of the drama in the Second
Reconstruction of the 1950’s and 1960’s, Civil Rights had a very precise
meaning: they were the political, social, and economic Rights of African
American citizens to vote and to enjoy equality of opportunity in education,
employment, and housing. This also entailed free access to places of public
accommodation such as parks, bars, cafes and restaurants, and public transport.

(p. 4)

How would African Americans be assured that these Rights would be granted them? It
had been years since the Brown decision and progress toward equal access and equal
Rights had been slow. Many in the African American community had grown
increasingly frustrated with the widespread practice of the separate but equal approach
to education, transportation, and other aspects of their daily lives. The events that would
follow would “disrupt” the daily lives of Americans and forever change the landscape of social and political interaction in America.

According to Santoro, three kinds of dramatic events, commonly referred to as social movement theory are linked to the Black Civil Rights Movement: (a) Black protests, (b) Black riots and (c) segregationist violence. Social movement as theory is further discussed in chapter III. Black protests according to Santoro (2002, p. 3) are described as “collective attempts at social change that use non-institutional forms of political influence, such as boycotts, sit-ins, pickets and marches.” He goes on to say that “the first massive wave of Black protests across U.S. cities took place with the 1960 sit-in movement.”

These movements were community-wide and were sustained over a period of time. Meyer (2004) conceptualizes these protest movements in the context of political opportunity structure and states that “exogenous factors enhance or inhibit prospects for mobilization, for particular sorts of claims to be advanced rather than others . . . and for movements to affect mainstream institutional politics and policy” (p. 1457). One of the changes in America’s institutional policy was the Brown decision of 1954. This hard won victory seemed hollow to many Blacks.

Five cases from various states challenging the separate but equal doctrine reached the Supreme Court in 1952. These cases plus Brown versus Board of Education in 1954 “presented a range of situations by which the Supreme Court could comprehensively view the segregation issue” (Alexander & Alexander, 1998, p. 452). The Brown decision on school segregation, according to Alexander & Alexander, was described by Pollack as “probably the most important American governmental Act of
any kind since the Emancipation Proclamation” (p. 454). It states, “We conclude that in the field of public education the doctrine of ‘separate but equal’ has no place. Separate educational facilities are inherently unequal. “Therefore, we hold that the plaintiffs and others similarly situated for whom the actions have been brought are, by reason of segregation, deprived of the equal protection of the laws guaranteed by the Fourteenth Amendment” (Alexander & Alexander, p. 453).

The intent of this decision as well as other Civil Rights legislation during the 1960s and beyond was to level the playing field – to make America a place where equal Rights and equal access are routinely available to everyone. However, these advances in Civil Rights did not occur overnight. Political activism and the Civil Rights Movement were essential to the legislation and court rulings of the Civil Rights era. Wayne Santoro (2002, p. 3) writes that “the dominant approach to explain Civil Rights legislation argues that such acts came about from the generation of dramatic events by the Civil Rights Movement and segregationists.”

The “dramatic events” referred to by Santoro captured the attention of the public and policy makers. Public demonstrations that challenged government sanctioned discrimination tested the very fabric of the American way of life both in the courts and in the streets of America’s cities. The events that occurred during the Black protests pushed Civil Rights legislation to the top of the policy agenda. President Kennedy (Santoro, 2002, p.5) commented that, “The events in Birmingham and elsewhere have so increased the cries for equality that no city or state or legislative body can prudently choose to ignore them.” How did the Civil Rights Movement become an event that could not be ignored? What were the factors that propelled the movement to the
forefront? How did citizens band together in collective action against the powers that existed? In order to answer these questions, we must first understand the nature of social movements and how people come to act.

To understand the way a social movement works, the movement has to be understood in the context of a particular time in history. According to Eyerman and Jamison (1991, p.5), “cognitive praxis does not come ready-made to a social movement. It is precisely in the creation, articulation, formulation of new thoughts and ideas that a social movement defines itself in society.” They go on to say that the “social location of the members of a particular group and their relative degrees of poverty or wealth will have profound effects on the shape movements take and who will take an interest in such movements.” The theory of social movements is explored further in chapter III.

The Black Civil Rights Movement was both social as well as political and must be understood as a collection of separate actions in a number of different cities and states. The states where most of the struggle took place were located in the south. Mississippi and Alabama are perhaps the two states with the most recorded history during the Civil Rights struggle. The pictures of the Civil Rights struggle are vivid ones – water hoses being unleashed on protesters, dogs attacking marchers, and a governor barring the entrance to a state university are reminders of the massive resistance to integration and equal opportunity. The protesters included a number of youth as well as White men and women. The activities included sit-ins, marches, voter registration drives, and organized non-violent resistance. The media helped propel the problems of Blacks in the south to the national and international forefront.
With the world looking on, the picture of inequality for African Americans took center stage. What America demanded of other countries, it would not do for itself—that is, to provide equal access and equal Rights to all its citizens. With the attention of the media focused on America’s “Negro problem,” the time was right for action. McAdam, McCarthy, and Zald (1996, p. 8) state that “most political movements and revolutions are set in motion by social changes that render the established political order more vulnerable or receptive to challenge.” This was an opportune time to take action. With the political order being vulnerable to change, the Civil Rights Movement moved forward. The timing of the Civil Rights Movement, what political scientists refer as “political opportunity” was right. Gamson and Meyer (1996, p. 275) make clear that while “opportunities open the way for political action, movements also make opportunities.” The political environment in which a movement occurs will either constrain the movement or provide opportunities for its growth and expansion. Perhaps no other single factor plays as important a role in understanding social movements as the concept of political opportunity.

Campbell (2005, p. 54) defines the political opportunity structure as “a set of formal and informal political conditions that encourage, discourage, channel and otherwise affect movement activity.” Tarrow’s (1996, p. 61) definition captures the impermanency of political opportunity structures. He sees such structures as “consistent— but not necessarily formal, permanent or national— signals to social or political actors which either encourage or discourage them to use their internal resources to form social movements.” In either case, political opportunity structure perceives vulnerability in the system and capitalizes on that vulnerability. Tarrow (p. 61) states that “movements arise
as the result of new or expanded opportunities; they signal the vulnerability of the state to collective action, thereby opening opportunities for others to act; the process leads to state responses which, in one or another, produce a new opportunity structure.”

Taking action also requires taking risks. Movement structure serves not only to mobilize participants but also to help disseminate information among group members and potential members. McCarthy (1996, p. 149) defines mobilizing structures as “agreed upon ways of engaging in collective action.” He includes in this definition the social locations where mobilization may be generated such as “family, friendship networks, voluntary associations, work units, and elements of the state structure itself” (McCarthy, p. 143). There would be no way to guarantee how successful this massive social action movement would be. However, social movement theorists suggest that there are specific tactics that must be used in staging political and social movements.

Davis, McAdam, Scott, & Zald (2005, p. 48) state that in order for a movement to be successful “activists must frame issues in ways that resonate with the ideologies, identities, and cultural understandings of supporters and others who might be drawn to their cause.” As was the case with the Black Civil Rights Movement, the conditions external to the movement facilitated the overall structure of the movement. The Civil Rights Movement existed in an antagonistic relationship to local and national authorities as well as to other groups within the community. Participants in the Civil Rights Movement shared a set of beliefs that brought them together as a group working toward a common goal.

This shared “sense of group” thus creates a sense of oneness in around a shared value known as the “conscience collective” (R. Collins, 2001). The conscience
collective has what Collins calls “high ritual density” which has three ingredients (a) the physical assembly of people; (b) a shared focus of attention; and (c) the focus of attention becomes a mutual focus of attention. As a result of these ingredients, the group begins to develop a sense of group solidarity. Emotional energy begins to rise as participants gain confidence and become more enthusiastic (about the shared goal or vision). Group symbols are developed and a sense of morality evolves. This process is known as ritualualism and operates by transforming emotions into action. The interplay of framing and the social structure work together as movements attempt to recruit members and build an organizational base to either maintain a structural system or change a political outcome.

According to Snow, Zurcher, and Ekland-Olson (1980, p. 798), the probability of being recruited into a particular movement is largely a function of two conditions: “(a) links to one or more movement members through a preexisting or emergent interpersonal tie; and (b) the absence of countervailing networks.” The injustice component facilitates the adoption of a sense of collective agency. “Participants in collective action assign meaning to interpret relevant events and conditions in ways that are intended to mobilize potential adherents and constituents, to garner bystander support, and to demobilize antagonists” (Snow & Benford, 2004, p. 338). Structural conditions are associated with discontent and collective action framing. The leaders of the Black Civil Rights Movement were able to successfully parlay the injustice frame into a national movement with international implications. Many of the practices of the Civil Rights Movement have been utilized by other groups in their efforts to bring about political change through social action.
Exemplary Practices of the Black Civil Rights Movement

McAdam, et al. (1996, p. 339) state that political movements face at least six strategic hurdles that typically must be surmounted if they are to become a force for social change. Movement groups must be able to

1. Attract new recruits
2. Sustain the morale and commitment of current adherents
3. Generate media coverage, preferably, but not necessarily, of a favorable sort
4. Mobilize the support of various bystander publics
5. Constrain the social control options of its opponents

The Civil Rights Movement met and overcame each of the conditions listed above. Each of these points will be addressed in the narrative that follows.

Interorganizational collaboration led to capacity building and strengthened the groups’ ability to mobilize, solve problems and expand their resource base. The movement is filled with examples of collaboration and mobilization. Primary among the organizations active in the Civil Rights Movement were the Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), Black churches, and numerous local, state, and regional organizations. According to Chafe et al. (2001) such organizational development can serve to “produce needed goods and services, provide access to resources and opportunities, foster development of human
capital, create or reinforce community identity and development, and support community advocacy and exertion of power” (p. 21).

In addition to coalition building, the Black Civil Rights Movement used the approach of appealing to decency and fairness as a strategy to engage others. Johnson (2001, p. 77) explains that “the first strategy is to appeal to privileged people’s sense of decency and fairness, their good will toward those less fortunate than themselves. This strategy is known as the tin cup approach.” The tin cup strategy depends on the generosity of others and may not work for the long haul. It is often a short-term emotional response.

Another tactic used by the Black Civil Rights activists was grassroots recruitment. McCarthy (1996, p. 143) states that “the role of informal structures of everyday life has been widely linked with movement mobilization.” These informal structures include family, friends, neighborhood, voluntary associations, work networks, churches, unions, students, and professional associations as well as elements of the state itself. According to Snow et al. (1980), kinship and friendship networks have been shown to be central to understanding movement recruitment. Alinsky (1971, p. 138) refers to the mobilization of people as a resource of “have-nots – no money but lots of people.”

One of the best-known tactics used by the Black Civil Rights Movement is that of creating rituals. Berezin (2001, p. 93) refer to rituals as “repeated actions in public spaces that are representational and performative; categorical and experiential, or epistemological and ontological.” The experience of repeating a ritual, whether it is a poem or a dance or a song, brings about familiarity and produces a feeling of oneness.
Those participating in the ritual will remember what they experience and the ritual eventually becomes tied to the event. The ritual creates a sense of community. The Black Civil Rights Movement is well known for the song “We Shall Overcome.” The phrase became so tied to the event that President Johnson even used the term in his speech denouncing the separate and unequal treatment of Blacks in America. John Lewis (1998, p. 116) refers to the slogan that came to symbolize the sit-ins of the 1960s – “we sat in for you now stand up for us.” The slogan was used to encourage Black citizens to register to vote. Another symbol that grew out of the freedom rides was the photo of the burning bus with the torch of Statue of Liberty superimposed on it. This symbol was created when James Farmer, a Civil Rights activist, saw the photo of the burning bus. He was to have been on the bus but had left the freedom ride to attend his father’s funeral in Washington.

The effective use of the media to help spread the word about the plight of Blacks in America helped propel the civil rights issue to the international arena. The media helped transcend borders to reveal the inequalities and suffering rooted in the institutional structure of American society. Zald (1996, p. 270) states that “frames are transmitted and reframed in the mass media.” The media is essential to transmitting images of social and political movements. Zald (p. 270) goes on to state that “framing contests occur in face-to-face interaction and through a variety of media – newspapers, books, pamphlets, radio, television . . . media are not neutral to this process, since they lend themselves to different rhetorics and images, to rendering the salience and intensity of issues.” Positive framing of a movement through the media can be a determining factor in whether or not the movement is effective.
If the media lend their support to the movement, the public is influenced by the images, slogans, and symbols captured in pictures, words, and actions. The symbols evoke an emotional response and dramatize the event. Mobilization and political opportunities are often created through the impact of the media. According to Zald (1996, p. 271), “the modern civil rights movement grew out of the attempt to dismantle segregation in public institutions and in the law . . . although no single event or person forced the contradiction of racism and democracy unto the public agenda, events following World War II facilitated that process . . . the contradiction between democracy and racism at home restricted the claims of the American model.” The media was doing its job. The United States had to resolve the contradiction.

Another highly effective strategy used by Black Civil Rights activists was that of targeting a particular activity and following through regardless of the setbacks they might encounter. The Montgomery bus boycott is one of the most skillfully crafted and organized political action movements of the Civil Rights era. The boycott lasted more than 365 days. Through collective action and planning, the boycott was successful in reversing the discriminatory practice of forcing Blacks to sit in the back or to give up their seats when a White person did not have a place to sit. Alinsky (1971, p. 158) points out that “timing is the difference between success and failure.” He suggests using various tactics at the right time to bring about desired results. Dees (2001, p. 158) states “to everything there is a season . . . everything in my life that had brought me to this point, all the pulls and tugs of my conscience, found a singular peace . . . for me it was going to be a season for justice.”
John Lewis (1998) refers to a full-scale nonviolent assault that would target movie theatres. The place was Nashville, Tennessee. The students decided to “stand-in” outside the movie theatre using “revolving” lines of picketers in front of each theater. Other targeted tactics included the Freedom Rides, sit-ins, school desegregation, voter registration, and freedom marches. What all these tactics had in common was that the Civil Rights leaders practiced nonviolent protest. The practice of nonviolent protest was protest by design. Kozol (2005, p. 310) provides further insight into the activism of Lewis, “He was arrested more than 40 times and was repeatedly attacked by mobs and beaten badly.”

Many of the leaders of the Black Civil Rights Movement were committed to nonviolent social action and the teachings of Gandhi. John Lewis (1998) states one of the most fundamental principles of the Gandhian notion of satyagraha – nonviolent action – is that it is not merely a technique of achieving specific goals. It is not simply a means to attaining political independence or racial desegregation. It is not just a tool to achieve unity and freedom in the world around us. True satyagraha is about a fundamental shift inside our own souls. (p. 126)

The concept of satyagraha relates to inner unity and freedom from things outside oneself. Once inner peace has been found, the person cannot be affected by details of the world. Inner peace and unity is unchanging regardless of the circumstances surrounding the individual. Lewis internalized the concept of satyagraha and followed its dictates even under the most adverse conditions. Kozol (2005) writes, “Lewis became the chairman of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, which led the
student mobilizations in the South during the most intense years of the Civil Rights campaign.” The intensity of the Civil Rights Movement often led to violence against the participants. The Highlander School was pivotal to providing instruction to many Civil Rights activists on how to protect themselves during these periods of violence and Civil unrest.

The Highlander School was started in 1932 by Myles Horton and Don West with the goal of providing educational programs to assist union leaders to bring about social and economic reform. Over time the ideals and goals of the Highlander School changed. By the time of the Civil Rights Movement, the Highlander School was positioned to play a major role in training participants in the movement. According to Glen (1996), Highlander’s programs during the 1950s reflected the growing struggle for legal, political, and social equality by Black Americans.

In fact, after the Brown decision in 1954, the Black Civil Rights Movement became the focus of the Highlander School. Programs were planned that would train Blacks and liberal Whites in the best practices to use when participating in peaceful protests. The training sought to reduce serious injury and to minimize violence. Many of the most prominent Black Civil Rights leaders were trained at the Highlander School. The list includes Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Septima Clark, Rosa Parks, John Lewis, and E. D. Nixon. John Lewis (1998, p. 80) writes: “I knew about Highlander. We all did. It was created back in the early 1930s by a man named Myles Horton, a liberal White activist who’d spent his entire life working for social justice in every arena from labor unions to racial equality.”
The Black Civil Rights Movement serves as a road map for effective strategies for social change. The organizational skills, strategic targeting of activities and places, effective use of media attention, nonviolent social resistance, mobilization of diverse groups at the grassroots level, and the willingness to work collectively toward a shared goal required effective leadership strategies and the ability to disrupt a politically vulnerable social structure. The Civil Rights Movement forced those inside the walls of power listen. The appeal to common decency and human rights guaranteed by the Constitution were Rights that could not be ignored. In 1961, John Lewis (1998) wrote, At this time, human dignity is the most important thing in my life. This is the most important decision in my life, to decide to give up all if necessary for the Freedom Ride, that Justice and Freedom might come to the Deep South. (p. 129)

This seems to have been the sentiment of every participant in the Black Civil Rights Movement. But who were the leaders? How did certain activists rise to the top? What were their shared traits?

Leadership in the Black Civil Rights Movement

They came from all walks of life. They were a diverse group. They were young, old, men, women, White, Black, northerners, and southerners. They shared a common vision – a vision of freedom and equality for all Americans. They were the orators, the organizers, the risk takers. They were the political activists, the writers, the singers, the performers. They were the very essence of the movement. Their voices called out and were heard above the others. Their faces were the faces of hope. Call it circumstance, luck, or nobility. Call it whatever you like. They became the leaders, the people others
followed. How is the essence of leadership captured? What makes one person a leader and another a follower? What is it in the human makeup that brings leadership to life?

What are the qualities of a leader?

Manning Marable (1999) writes that leaders are essentially individuals who have the ability to understand their own times who express or articulate programs or policies that reflect the perceived interest and desires of particular groups, and who devise instruments or political vehicles that enhance the capacity to achieve effective change. (p. xvi)

Experts in the field of leadership suggest a number of different leadership styles but generally express similar opinions on the basic characteristics that a leader should possess. Warren Bennis (2003, p. 31) states that, “the first basic ingredient of leadership is a guiding vision.” The leader must have a clear idea of what it is that needs to be done. Kouzes and Posner (2002) share this same ingredient. They state that a leader must be able to “inspire a shared vision” (p. 15). The vision must be credible. What the leader is selling to constituents is change, the ability to envision the future differently.

Passion is the second basic ingredient Bennis (2003) states a leader should possess. The leader must love what he or she is doing and must be able to communicate that passion to followers. Ghandi, for example, was able to convince his followers to sacrifice their own safety and security for the greater good of an independent India. The passionate entreaties of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. were able to move a nation to act.

Integrity is the next basic ingredient Bennis lists. He includes in integrity three basic parts: self-knowledge, maturity, and candor. Kouzes and Posner (2002) in their extensive research over the past twenty years have found that honesty has consistently
been the number one characteristic respondents have said a leader must possess.

Honesty and integrity exist on a continuum.

While Bennis (2003) speaks of daring and curiosity as the next basic ingredients a leader must possess, Kouzes and Posner (2002) suggest that a leader must “challenge the process.” Disruptive change demands significant commitment and sacrifice, but the positive feelings associated with forward progress generate momentum that enables us to ride out the storm. Kouzes and Posner state that leaders should search for opportunities to get thing done. Leaders should make use of four essentials of leadership. They should (a) seize the initiative (b) make challenge meaningful (c) innovate and create; and (d) look outward for fresh ideas.

Jim Collins (2001) credits his undaunted curiosity with motivating him to undertake huge research projects that challenge the status quo. He refers to the highest level of leadership as Level 5. Leaders at this level “channel their ego needs away from themselves and into the larger goal of building a great company . . . . Their ambition is first and foremost for the institution, not themselves” (p. 21). But whatever the motivating factor, the leader must take charge of change and encourage initiative taking in others. Ideas for challenging the process can come from other people or can be self-generated. Spencer Johnson (1998), author of *Who Moved my Cheese*, states that “when you move beyond your fear, you feel free; when you see that you can find and enjoy new cheese, you change course” (p. 63). The key to challenging the process is to question the status quo and to anticipate and expect change to happen. Several leaders during the Civil Rights Movements challenged the process – and things did happen.
The Black Civil Rights Movement generally refers to the period in American history from 1954 to 1968. The Brown decision of 1954 was heralded as the beginning of a new era in America for African Americans. What followed were some of the most turbulent years in American history. The struggle for freedom – the revolution – would try the souls of Black folks, leave children dead, protestors beaten, and would test the very fabric of American life. Heroes and heroines would be born. Villains would be made of ordinary people. Leadership would take on a different look – or would it? Perhaps the thing that would be different was not the roles but rather the actors. Had not Booker T. Washington (1933) written more than sixty years earlier “I do not believe that any state should make a law that permits an ignorant and poverty stricken White man to vote, and prevents a Black man in the same condition for voting. Such a law is not only unjust, but it will react, as all unjust laws do, in time” (p. 171). The time had come and the actors took center stage.

The Civil Rights Movement brought to the forefront many actors who would go on to become national and state leaders while others would achieve fame and notoriety in their hometowns or local communities. Fannie Lou Hamer, mentioned in another part of the text, has been largely overlooked by many historians. Other leaders such as Jemison in Baton Rouge and E. D. Nixon of Montgomery are not household names. Yet, these brave leaders prepared the way and worked alongside those who would go on to greater fame. These new leaders did not follow the textbook pattern outlined by status quo leaders. While they did inspire a shared vision, challenge the process, and model the way, the arena was much more dangerous than being in a boardroom. It was
understood that the price of leadership could be death. What were the characteristics of these new leaders?

One of the most significant ways that the emergence of Black Civil Rights leaders differed from status quo leadership has to do with how Civil Rights leaders came to hold positions of power. They did not begin in the boardrooms of big businesses nor was it the political arena or the legacy of having come from a wealthy family. Most Black leadership during the 1960s began in churches, in the local community, and on college campuses. The Civil Rights Movement did not just happen. A number of local organizations had already been formed in southern states to combat unequal and unfair practices. Out of these already existent organizations came the support and infrastructure needed to organize and carry out the functions of the emerging Civil Rights revolution.

African Americans throughout the South were tired of giving in (Riches, 1997). Rosa Parks’ refusal to get up and give her seat to a White man exemplifies in ways that words never can, the tiredness of the soul of Black folks. Like the refrain for which Fannie Lou Hamer is best known, Black people were “sick and tired of being sick and tired.” The emergence of the mass movement of African Americans grew out of the frustration of years of segregation, mistreatment, and denial of the right to vote, substandard housing, Jim Crow laws, unfair employment practices, and lynchings. It is no wonder that mass resistance would begin in the south where Jim Crow laws were most oppressive.

Contrary to popular belief, other parts of America also struggled with insuring African Americans equal right and equal protection under the law. The Brown decision
was propelled to the national forefront as a result of a Civil Rights case, as well as other cases, logged in the state of Kansas. In his book on America’s reverse Underground Railroad, Musgrave (2004) writes of the heinous crime some Illinoisans engaged in – that of selling freed men, women and children back into slavery. Here’s one account as described by Musgrave:

The home of the children was entered at night and they were seized and carried away. The plan of the kidnappers had been so carefully carried out that they made their escape with the children without leaving a trace as to their identity, or whither they went. Indeed, the doers of these bold crimes were never detected. Knowledge of this crime created great excitement throughout the county . . . A number of prominent citizens came together to devise means for recovering the children and the discovery of the offenders. It turns out that the children had been taken to St. Louis and sold in the open slave market. (p. 273)

The picture of slave markets in the mid-western states is rarely shared in the historical accounts of slave trading. It is safe to say, however, that most accounts of slavery, Jim Crow tactics, and lynchings are aptly attributed to the southern states.

While the actions of Rosa Parks and the resultant Montgomery bus boycott brought the plight of African Americans worldwide attention, Black Americans had long been active in local and state organizations. Riches (1997) writes,

By segregating their fellow Black citizens, White southerners forced Black southerners to teach in their own schools and study in their separate colleges, to worship in their own churches. Out of these institutions African Americans forged an army and weapons to war against their daily humiliations. (p. 40)
African-Americans worshipped in their own churches. The worship hour is often referred to as the most segregated time in America.

The grassroots efforts took hold among churchgoers, educators, college students, and youth. As a result of the Brown decision of 1954, many southern states either cracked down on the NAACP or outlawed it entirely. According to Riches (1997) African Americans responded by turning to their community leaders, especially in the churches and educational institutions, and they formed groups which operated at city, state and regional level such as the Montgomery Improvement Association (MIA), the Alabama Christian Movement for Human Rights (ACMHR), the United Christian Movement Inc. (UMI) of Louisiana, the SCLC and the SNCC. (p. 40)

Black Americans were prepared to act. Their massive resistance took America by surprise. White resistance was both swift and severe. In Montgomery, the city commissioners refused to compromise once the bus boycott was underway, the city police commissioner as well as the mayor of Montgomery joined the White Citizens Council. White harassment of the Black community escalated and led to the first arrest of King. Riches (1997) states that King recalled the vehemence with which southern Whites sought to defend segregation and how he was so fearful of the hatred that surrounded him that he almost quit leadership of the boycott. He had not done so because he had prayed . . . . And it seemed at that moment that I could hear an inner voice saying to me, “Martin Luther, stand up for righteousness. Stand up for justice. Stand up for the
While the African American community relied heavily on its Christian beliefs and local churches for support and leadership, most of the ministers of White churches in the south vehemently opposed integration and equal Rights for Blacks. When the Council of Federated Organizations, comprised primarily of northern White ministers, sought to “talk about the changes Whites had to face, they had hoped to create an atmosphere in which Christian reconciliation might develop. These efforts met with little success and most often with vehement rebuffs” (Winters 2000, p. 31). The response of the White Mississippi church people “intensified the northern ministers’ respect for the Black people they had come to support” (Winters, p. 31).

The Civil Rights Movement continued to grow and move forward. The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) formed the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party in April of 1964 (Winters, 2000) which insisted that Blacks be seated at the Democratic National Convention in Atlantic City. Other groups were formed throughout the south with the goal of ending segregation and discrimination and gaining the right to vote for all citizens. College students and women as well as a number of Whites were involved at every stage in the process. The work of women in the Civil Rights Movement has been relegated to the background by many authors who have written on the Civil Rights Movement.

Pauli Murray (1996), a longtime activist in both the Civil Rights and women’s Rights movements wrote that “The Negro woman can no longer postpone or subordinate the fight against discrimination because of sex to the Civil Rights struggle.
but must carry on both fights simultaneously (p.169).” Indeed, the African American woman has not been given the prominence in the movement to which they were entitled. “Negro women, historically, have carried the dual burden of Jim Crow and Jane Crow” (Murray, p. 164). The fight has been one against female dominance and the delicate balance of assertiveness and protecting the Black males’ view of self. Again, according to Murray, “part of this upsurge reflects the Negro males’ normal desire to achieve a sense of person worth and recognition of his manhood by a society which has so long denied it” (p. 165).

Robnett (1996, p. 1669) writes, “That women were excluded from formal leadership positions during the time of the Civil Rights Movement should come as no surprise. It is clear that expectations were for men to occupy the formal leadership positions.” The structure of the Civil Rights Movement mirrored that of the church. Jonnie Carr, a member of MIA, when speaking about a woman chairing a committee stated in an interview with Robnett,

Well, it was not a stated thing but just an understood thing . . . . Now of course when you spoke out against things like that, a lot of times you were even criticized by other women that felt like . . . . This is not what we ought to be doing. (p. 1669)

There was a systematic pattern of gender exclusion from formal leadership positions. Such exclusion held true for all organizations.

“The fact that women’s participation options as titled staff members were limited does not reduce the importance of their activities. Likewise the women interviewed did not perceive themselves as limited” (Robnett, 1996, p. 1676). Barnett
(1993, p. 168) writes of an interesting initiative led by women during the Montgomery bus boycott. The story goes that a woman, Georgia Gilmore, a cook and domestic worker “single-handedly organized the Club From Nowhere.” Here is the story that was told to Barnett by one of the women she interviewed:

She headed this club and even lost her job working in a café when she started it. The club went door to door asking for donations and selling dinner plates and baked goods . . . . [They] made weekly reports on all the money collected from all kinds of people, Blacks and Whites. Some of these people didn’t want it known that they had given money to the movement, so they wouldn’t give Mrs. Gilmore and the other ladies checks that could be traced, only cash. And Mrs. Gilmore made sure they didn’t tell anybody who made the donations. That’s why it was called the Club From Nowhere, so that none of the people giving the money could be in the least bit accused of supporting the movement. (p. 168)

This and other extraordinary stories of women’s leadership and activism are too numerous to recount. The organizational skills of Ella Baker are well documented. The oratory and organizational skills of Fannie Lou Hamer are without parallel (Robnett, 1996). The leadership of women like Septima Clark, Coretta Scott King, and Bernice Robinson helped shape the Civil Rights Movement. While these and other women may not have held positions as chairs of organizations in the Civil Rights Movement, they were without question an integral part of the Civil Rights Movement and a prominent force. Perhaps no other movement in America’s history has brought together such a diverse group of people, northerners, Whites, Blacks, ministers, youth, women, poor,
middle class, educated, uneducated – with a common goal of advancing the promise of equal Rights and equal opportunity for all Americans.

While the overwhelming majority of the participants in the Civil Rights Movement were African American, it should be pointed out that, like the abolitionists before them, many Whites also participated in the struggle for equality. It is important to note that the all-White National Council of Churches (NCC), which had been established in 1950, became increasingly concerned about the Civil Rights struggle. However, their concern did not translate into immediate action. It would take a direct appeal from “Black intellectual and cultural leaders in New York” as well as a “not so subtle rebuke by King on the continuing inactivism of most White religious leaders” (Findlay, 1990, p. 70) to stir these leaders into action. The NCC formed its own Commission on Religion and Race which went on to play a pivotal role in ensuring that the Civil Rights bill (which would become the Civil Rights Act of 1964) was enacted (Findlay). James Hamilton, who became the associate director of the NCC’s Washington office, sums it up this way “[This] wasn’t the church operating as a church, it was the church operating in lay field, involving the business community, reaching into the power structure” (Findlay, p. 71).

Robert S. Graetz, interviewed by Hare (2005) in his book, They Walked to Freedom, is a White minister who served as pastor of an all-Black Lutheran church in Montgomery, Alabama. He accepted the post in 1955 and was the only White person to become a member of the board of the Montgomery Improvement Association (MIA). The MIA was the group that sponsored the Montgomery Bus Boycott. Graetz, who still lives in Montgomery, stated during his interview with Hare, “we got an amazing
amount of support from White pastors. The ones who spoke out openly didn’t last long” (p. 113). In addition to the work of the clergy, many White college students from the north came south as participants in the Freedom Rides, sit-ins, and demonstrations that took place throughout the south.

While it is impossible to recognize all the leaders, followers, organizations, clergy, educators, lawyers, and behind the scenes folks who participated in and contributed to the Civil Rights struggle, I would be remiss if I did not mention Attorney Fred Gray, “a 25 year old attorney fresh out of law school when the Montgomery Bus Boycott began” (Hare, p. 96). He not only represented Rosa Parks in her criminal trial but was also the “lead attorney on the case that provided the vehicle for the U.S. Supreme Court to declare segregated public transportation unconstitutional” (Hare, p. 96). The Civil Rights Movement made heroes and heroines out of ordinary people who went on to accomplish extraordinary feats. The work of these Americans forever changed the fabric of American society and forged a new landscape.
Qualitative researchers are well aware of the intimate relationship that can develop between the researcher and the co-participants in their studies. Their naturalistic approach to inquiry puts qualitative researchers in danger of over-identifying with their participants. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2003a), the researcher as storyteller understands that research is shaped by the researcher’s personal history, gender, race, and class as well as by the participants whose voices are being heard. In order to help minimize these influences, I acknowledge that my own experiences affect the flavor and texture of these writings. Further, I use reflections and journaling to curtail the weight of my own perspective on things. Both promote reflexivity that in turn controls personal bias. By reflexivity qualitative researchers mean “the process of critical self-reflection on one’s biases, theoretical predispositions, preferences, and so forth” (Schwandt, 2001, p. 224).

Denzin and Lincoln (2003b) also offer strategies for promoting reflexivity and lessening bias. They emphasize that the researcher has an ethical responsibility to ensure that the voices of participants are accurately captured. They suggest that the researcher reflect upon a series of questions in order to stay focused. Some of their questions invite reflection that will minimize bias in my reporting. The first asks, “Have I connected the “voices” and “stories” of individuals back to the set of historic,
structural and economic relations in which they were situated” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003b, p. 199)? Thereby they remind me to contextualize my data as richly as possible. By anchoring the data in historical, cultural, and political contexts, I lessen the likelihood of unduly anchoring them in my own worldview.

The second question Denzin and Lincoln (2003b, p. 200) ask is, “Have I deployed multiple methods so that very different kinds of analyses can be constructed?” The application of different theoretical perspectives and methods “provides richer versions of an event or of experiences” (Flick, 1998, p. 230). Through this process known as triangulation, my inferences will be richer. Schwandt (2001, p. 257), says that “the strategy of triangulation is often wedded to the assumption that data from different sources or methods must necessarily converge on or be aggregated to reveal the truth.”

Flick (1998) describes four types of triangulation. Methodological triangulation involves multiple methods of generating the data; data triangulation refers to using different data sources with the researcher typically purposely and systematically involving diverse participants in the study; theory triangulation entails is approaching data from multiple perspectives; and investigator triangulation involves using different observers or interviewers so as to detect and minimize the biases resulting from a sole researcher generating the data. As we will see, I make use of data triangulation and theory triangulation as well as methods triangulation. Denzin and Lincoln (2003b) emphasize that such triangulation reflects an attempt to secure an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon in question . . . . The combination of multiple methods, empirical
material, perspective, and observers in a single study is best understood, then, as
a strategy that adds rigor, breadth, and depth to any investigation. (p. 188)

The third question Denzin and Lincoln (2003b, p. 200) ask is, “Have I described
the mundane?” They caution against the temptation to explore only the exciting aspects
of the topic while ignoring ordinary realities. Denzin and Lincoln (p. 200) imply that
obvious matters could be “hidden because of their simplicity and familiarity.” I would
likely not have paid particular attention to this area but reflecting on the obvious might
alert me to some gem that results in a richer description.

The next question asks, “Have some informants/constituents/participants
reviewed the material with me and interpreted, dissented, challenged my
interpretations?” This may be the most critical of all their questions. What safeguards
have been put in place to ensure that interpretations and inferences are meaningful and
trustworthy? What qualitative researchers call *member checks* safeguard against
misinterpretations. My strategy will be to share excerpts of my report with Reverend
Matthews. According to Schwandt (2001, p. 155), “respondent validation is a
sociological term for soliciting feedback from respondents on the inquirer’s findings.”
Some researchers view the member check as problematic, particularly when a
respondent disagrees with a finding or conclusion. The inquirer is then forced to
consider changing part of the report or doing additional research. On the other hand,
some researchers see member check as “an act of validation by respondents which
provides one more opportunity to gather data about the integrity of the inquirer’s
findings.” Schwandt (p. 155) points out that in any case member checks may be “simply
the Civil thing to do for those who have given their time and access to their lives.”
Another strategy I use to help ensure trustworthiness and credibility is grounded theory. Grounded theory helps the researcher to identify concepts that emerge from data generated through interviews or other methods. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2003a, p. 279), “grounded theory is an iterative process by which the analyst becomes more and more “grounded” in the data and develops increasingly richer concepts and models of how the phenomenon being studied really works.” This process is both meticulous and tedious. Atkinson, Coffey, and Delamont (2003, p. 151) characterize grounded theory as “a description of how productive research is conducted, and how productive ideas may be generated. It is certainly as much about the strategic design and conduct of empirical research as it is about techniques for data analysis.” Through this process of examining and analyzing data from interviews and documents, the researcher looks for emergent theories and possible relationships among sets of concepts. According to Flick (1998, p. 57), this approach “strongly focuses on the interpretation of data no matter how they were collected.”

Overall, my study reflects the characteristic features of a case study. According to Schwandt (2003, p. 23) “in the case study, the case is at center stage, not variables. The case study (Trochim, 2001, p. 161) “is an intensive study of a specific individual or specific context.” Flick (1998, p. 58) states that it entails “a strong emphasis on exploring the nature of a particular social phenomenon; a tendency to work with ‘unstructured’ data; investigation of a small number of cases, perhaps just one case, in detail; and analysis of data that involves explicit interpretation of the meanings and functions of human actions.”
Methods of Generating Data

This study is a collaborative process between the participants and me. I seek to honor the participants’ commitment of time and their willingness to share their stories by providing a letter of introduction, asking them to sign a consent form, respecting their time constraints, and backing off when they would rather not discuss a given topic. I have done my utmost to establish relationships based on trust and mutual respect. During the initial meeting, I made clear the focus of the research while explaining that this research involves participants as co-contributors rather than as “subjects.”

In this study, the interview process rests on the idea of reciprocity. Reciprocity “is part of the larger ethical-political process of building trust, cultivating relationships, and demonstrating genuine interest in those whom one studies” (Schwandt 2001, p. 223). Fontana and Frey (2003, p. 75) speak of “the establishment of a human-to-human relation with the respondent and the desire to understand rather than to explain.” Giroux (1992) points out that educators must develop a public language that refuses to reconcile higher education with inequality, that actively abandons those forms of pedagogical practice that prevent our students from becoming aware of and offended by the structures of oppression at work in both institutional and everyday life. (p. 107)

While Giroux’s writing refers to the need to give voice to students, I adopted the same position when exploring the lived experiences of the co-participants in this research. bell hooks (1994) points out that coming to voice means moving from silence into speech. As participants moved from silence to speech, I was alert as to how they “reclaimed their own histories, voices, and visions” (Giroux, p. 33).
As I built relationships with co-participants in the process of reclamation, I was aware that problems could surface. The relationship that developed between respondents and me is complex. Any concerns or problems that emerged during interviews were discussed as a part of the process of relationship building. Given my prior experiences in the social services arena and as a group facilitator, the process progressed without any major roadblocks.

For this case study, data collection foremostly involved interviews with Reverend Matthews as well as individuals who knew him. Archival data served as the primary source for selecting participants. I interviewed other ministers active during the movement in Escambia County and educators who knew Reverend Matthews, plus other individuals whose names emerged. I interviewed four co-participants. I conducted semi-structured interviews with each participant. My interview questions dealt with the historical climate of the time, the social and political context of the Civil Rights Movement and the respondents’ perceptions of Reverend Matthews. Each interview began with gathering demographic information on the respondent.

Those who were supporters of Reverend Matthews as well as those who resisted his efforts were sought so as to hear diverse voices. Further, multiple voices were essential to ensuring the authenticity of the data while also ensuring an accurate picture of the man and his times. What I had thought would be a relatively easy process turned out to be much harder than I had anticipated. First, many of the people I had assumed would be willing participants in the interview process did not return phone calls or said no to being interviewed. One of the participants whose voice I had thought would be critical to fully understanding Reverend Matthews and his leadership style is local
political activist, Leroy Boyd. I called both Mr. Boyd’s home and the local office, Movement for Change. After trying several times and speaking with his wife at least four times, I decided to look for different ways to obtain the information.

Another voice I had hoped to include in my research was that of Reverend Otha Leverette. I contacted him at his home. He told me that he is sick and would not agree to an interview. I tried on one other occasion and decided to honor his request. I did not contact him again. Another voice I would have liked to include is that of the widow of Reverend Brooks. While Mrs. Brooks was quite pleasant, she made it clear that she had very limited time and would not be available for an interview. These persons are ones that were mentioned time and again during the data generation process. I had also hoped to speak with persons whose stances diverged from Reverend Matthews’ stance. One of the persons whose name came up often is a retired university professor. When I contacted him, he was quick to say no without explanation. Attempts to interview local politicians netted the same results. Because of the passing of time and the age of a number of potential participants, they either are no longer with us or are of an age where they do not care to discuss the past. I had to look for other ways of gathering information. Many of the voices do show up in archival data that I analyzed.

Fate and luck conspired to place others in my path whose voices served to enrich and broaden the scope of my research. The rich data generated through these interviews made selection of themes to focus on very difficult. The task of selecting which themes were most important was not an easy one. Ultimately, however, Reverend Matthews’ voice will connect the pieces and run throughout the narrative as its primary and most important source.
Each participant was contacted initially by phone. I then met with each participant at a previously agreed upon time. My interview questions, except for those used for gathering demographic information, were open-ended. Each interview, with the permission of the respondent, was recorded and later transcribed as soon as possible after the interview. Use of the audio tapes allowed for the free flow of conversation between me and co-participants without the distraction of note taking during the interviews. Before beginning each interview, I explained the purpose of the research and encouraged respondents to ask questions if clarification on any point was needed. I informed respondents that they are co-contributors to the research process. As part of my commitment to them, I followed the tenets of the Belmont Report. “These principles make up the moral standards for research involving human subjects: respect for persons, beneficence, and justice” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003b, p. 219). I ensured that each participant signed a consent form (Appendix B) that explained the purpose of the research, what the study involves, and the amount of time needed from each participant.

The interviews involved respondents talking about how they came to know Reverend Matthews and their relationship with him. All of the interviews were held in Pensacola, Florida; two interviews were held in participants’ homes; one interview was held at the participant’s business office; and another interview was held in a local church. Each participant talked about their own participation, if any, in the Civil Rights Movement and whether they saw any of Reverend Matthews’ activities. I asked them about how Reverend Matthews’ activism impacted their lives. Teasing out the relationships between Reverend Matthews and the respondents helped illuminate the man and the role he played during the 1960s.
The participants range in age from 61 to 75. Two of the participants were born and reared in Pensacola. One moved here at the age of eight while the other moved to Pensacola after finishing college. All of the participants interviewed are African Americans. Two of the participants were active members of the NAACP Youth Council under the leadership first, of Reverend Dobbins and second, Reverend Matthews. One of the participants was active in the Civil Rights Movement while attending college in Nashville, Tennessee and participated in sit-ins under the leadership of John Lewis who was national leader of the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). Three of the participants began their careers as educators in the Escambia County Public School System. One of the participants eventually resigned due to his political activism. Two of the participants are currently small business owners. One is a minister. Each of the participants has personal stories to share about life in Pensacola during the sixties and their experiences as co-participants in the Civil Rights struggle.

Such semi-structured interviews, according to Flick (1998), reconstruct the interviewee’s subjective reactions to the matter under study. Flick (p. 82) states that “the term ‘subjective theory’ refers to the fact that the interviewee has a complex stock of knowledge about the topic under study.” Different types of questions guided interviewees through the interview process so as to elicit their knowledge as fully as possible. According to Schwandt (2001, p. 135) “qualitative studies make greatest use of unstructured, open-ended, informal interviews because these allow the most flexibility and responsiveness to emerging issues for both respondents and interviewees.” Semi-structured interviews allow for constructing meaning in a context that is mutually reinforcing and lead to rich accounts.
I interviewed Reverend Matthews four times. The first two interviews were held in Brewton, Alabama. The third interview was held in Pensacola at a local church. The fourth interview was by phone. The number of interviews held was determined by the information I obtained from Reverend Matthews as well as the other interviewees. A keen ear was kept for new information that was introduced either by Reverend Matthews or by other interviewees. Following are some questions I explored with Reverend Matthews:

1. Which Civil Rights activists had the greatest influence on you?
2. What was the single most important factor that led you to become an activist?
3. Were you ever afraid?
4. Were there times when you felt like giving up?
5. What role did your faith (belief in God) play in your activism?
6. What message of hope can you give to this generation?
7. Do you feel that the Civil Rights struggle achieved the goals you had hoped for?
8. What still needs to be done?

In order to hear each respondent’s story in their own words, I used open-ended questions such as these. In order to ensure the privacy of participants, fictional names have been assigned to each of them with the exception of Reverend Matthews.

Besides interviewing, I examined artifacts from the Civil Rights era, particularly ones relating to northwest Florida and south Alabama. New meanings surfaced and deeper insights were gained from such critical examination. These artifacts included
newspaper articles, books, articles, and pictures. I sought to understand the implicit as well as explicit meanings of the written text. According to Hodder (2003, p. 157), “text can “say” many different things in different contexts.” They can “give alternative insight into the ways in which people perceived and fashioned their lives” (Hodder, p. 158). Examining such artifacts allowed me to “listen” to different and sometimes conflicting voices. “An adequate study of social interaction thus depends on the incorporation of mute material evidence” (Hodder, p. 159) such as relatively obscure or unexamined texts.

Unfortunately, written text recording the life and times of African Americans is not threaded through this document as much as I had hoped. I searched for archival data from newspapers during the time of the Civil Rights Movement. The historically White university in the city had only two copies of a now defunct newspaper. There were no copies of the Black newspaper, the Pensacola Voice, from that time. Its collection of print articles of the Pensacola Voice did not begin until the late 1980s. Undeterred, I checked with the local junior college. Once again, I found neither archival data nor any recent copies of the Pensacola Voice. I then checked the local public library certain that I would find what I was looking for. Not only were there no newspapers from the period in question, their current holdings only include papers from the last six months. The librarian explained that they did not have room to house more than that.

I then contacted the current co-owner of the Pensacola Voice, LaDonna Spivey. I explained what I am doing and asked permission to review archived issues of the newspaper. Much to my surprise, I was told that there are no back issues on hand, “My grandfather kept the issues stacked in the garage. Before his death, we decided not to
hold on to the papers any more and cleaned them all out.” When asked whether current
issues are being archived the response was again no. LaDonna explained, “We have
trouble just meeting the cost of going to press each week. We can’t afford to archive the
copies.” The data on hand thus contains several articles from the Pensacola News
Journal and limited articles from the Pensacola Voice, the Call & Post, the pre-cursor to
the Pensacola Voice, and the Colored Press.

In order to “make sense” of the data, I sorted and organized the data into
different categories. I looked for emergent themes, after coding the data. I sought to
answer questions like the following: Why do the data from this source differ so greatly
from data from like sources? What is missing from the data? Whose voice is missing?
Does the language used during that historical time have a different meaning in today’s
culture? Is further clarification needed? Have I followed the procedures for qualitative
content analysis? Have I selected the parts of the interview that answer the research
questions?

Data Analysis and Theoretical Perspectives

To generate and analyze data for this case study, I relied primarily on theoretical
resources cutting across two domains – social movement theory and leadership theory.
Each perspective provides a partial framework for understanding the historical period
when the Civil Rights Movement took place. These intersecting theoretical frameworks
complement each other. While other theoretical perspectives could be useful, these two
perspectives are essential to understanding the life and the times of Reverend H. K.
Matthews.
R. Collins (2001, p. 27) argues that successful social movements are crescive, emergent phenomena.” The Civil Rights Movement was an “emergent phenomenon” that exhibited what Zald, Morrill, & Rao (2005) describe as the classic ways movements manifest themselves and influence systems:

First, movements bring to public attention grievances and problems in the larger society. Second, movement activists and adherents, (i.e. those who identify with movement goals and orientations even though they are not involved in particular social movement organization or networks of activism) individually or collectively attempt to convince organizational authorities to change policies and practices. Third, movements participate in politics and attempt to change laws and establish government agencies to encourage or facilitate organizational change. (p. 257)

No one should presuppose that such developments emerge early. As we saw in the last chapter, the historical data provide evidence of all three of these developments. According to Tarrow (1996), four signals point to vulnerability in the state that makes it susceptible to change: the opening up of access to power, shifting alignments, the availability of influential allies, and the cleavages within and among elites. The Civil Rights Movement ruptured the existing state-sanctioned patterns of racial subordination and domination in American society. African Americans saw that their engagement in collective activities that challenged the social norms moved them closer to equal status with Whites.

Participants in social movements seek to gain power while one or more opposing groups seek either to retain power or to resist granting it. Social structure and
ideological framing interplay in these dynamics. For example, McVeigh, Myers, and Sikkink (2004, p. 2) write that “people band together to bring about social change by exploiting new political opportunities. Structural changes can generate incentives to engage in collective action.” Their research on the Ku Klux Klan shows that “structural conditions are associated not only with varying levels of discontent in society, but also work together with collective action framing processes to shape both the trajectory and outcomes of social movements” (McVeigh et al., p. 2). In addition, as Gamson (2003) points out, people involved in collective action often adapt their strategies to influence not only the framing of the discourse about issues but their policy outcomes as well.

Opposing groups use the collective action frames to work toward different ends. McVeigh et al. (2004) characterize collective action frames as adding legitimacy to social movement campaigns and inspiring participants to engage in social or political action. They point out that how a group interprets and represents existing social conditions can influence potential participants and convince them to consider participating in a given activity – even one they might not have considered. Social movements thus bring people together around shared values. Gamson (2003, p. 3) states that commonly an “injustice component facilitates the adoption of a sense of collective agency” and shared values.

The Civil Rights Movement brought people together around the values of equality and access, including housing and education, along with social and racial justice. The movement challenged familiar, taken-for-granted practices and structures. Johnson (2001, p. 90) explains that “patterns of oppression and privilege are rooted in systems that we all participate in and make happen. Those patterns are built into paths
of least resistance that people feel drawn to follow every day, regardless of whether they think about where they lead or the consequences they produce.” The injustice frame figures prominently in any attempt to challenge such patterns. This frame expresses the lived experience of oppressed actors.

The physical segregation of groups often intensifies their sense of oppression and stimulates their oppositional consciousness. Such separation readily lends itself to collective action. “Groups oppressed on the basis of race, ethnicity, or class are likely to live in geographically segregated communities where oppositional culture becomes a part of the bonds of family and neighborhoods” (McVeigh et al., 2004, p 4). These places to talk without fear of interference promote consciousness-raising and enhance the capacity to mobilize. This is not to imply that such eventualities are automatic. However, “highly segregated groups are more likely than other marginalized groups to develop an oppositional culture and oppositional consciousness capable of facilitating and sustaining full-fledged liberation movement” (McVeigh, p 4).

Dr. King’s teachings illustrate the injustice frame. His teachings were substantially rooted in the Social Gospel Movement. According to Findlay (1990), activism through the Social Gospel has long been a part of American history. However, the 1950s return to the Social Gospel required churches to demonstrate faith through active participation with and concern for the poor. In Smith and Zepp (1974), King wrote,

The gospel at its best deals with the whole man, not only his soul but also his body, not only his spiritual well-being but also his material well-being. A religion that professes a concern for the souls of men and is not equally
concerned about the slums that damn them, the economic conditions that strangle them, and the social conditions that cripple them, is a spiritually moribund religion. (p. 30)

The same can be said of a society.

This was the society of the 1960s where economic and social conditions condemned African Americans to a substandard existence. As we have seen, social movement theory treats such ruptures in society as opportunities to change existing political and social structures. Snow, Soule, and Kriesi (2004, p. 3) argue that social movements “are one of the principal social forms through which collectivities give voice to their grievances and concerns about the right, welfare, and well-being of themselves and others by engaging in various types of collective action.” The Civil Rights Movement contained the necessary ingredients for social action: there was Civil discontent; people were united in a common cause; the state was vulnerable to change. The Civil Rights Movement became the most powerful social movement in American history. Its activities and achievements presuppose the strong, valiant leadership of individuals such as Reverend Matthews.

Morris and Staggenborg (2004, p. 171) define movement leaders as “strategic decision-makers who inspire and organize others to participate in social movements.” Marable (1998) states that

leaders are essentially individuals who have the ability to understand their own times, who express or articulate programs or policies that reflect the perceived interest and desires of particular groups, and who devise instruments or political vehicles that enhance the capacity to achieve effective change. (p. xvi)
Most theories address leadership primarily in traditional settings such as boardrooms and institutions. These theories cannot adequately account for nontraditional leadership, yet they can be helpful. For instance, Bennis (2003) cites five basic ingredients of leadership: *guiding vision* – the leader has a clear idea of what he or she wants to do; *passion* – the leader loves what she or he is doing and inspires hope in others; *integrity* – the leader has self-knowledge, candor, and maturity; *curiosity* – leaders want to learn as much as they can; and *daring* – leaders are willing to take risks.

Similarly, McCauley and Van Velsor (2004, p. 7) outline how people can develop the skills and perspectives necessary to become effective leaders. They state that leaders must be clear about changes that are needed; they must have experiences that challenge them and force them out of their comfort zone; they must learn to “deal with losses, failures, and disappointments.” Purkey and Siegel (2003, p. 1) offer a leadership model that focuses on “connectedness, cooperation, and communication.” Their model, known as invitational leadership, rests on the four principles of respect, trust, optimism, and intentionality. Invitational leadership aims at living more joyful and meaningful lives both professionally as well as personally. Another traditional approach is the transformational leadership model that develops around three themes: (a) recognizing the need for revitalization (b) creating a new vision and (c) institutionalizing change (Tichy & Devanna, 1986).

Writing from the standpoint of transformative knowledge, Banks (1996) states that positionality and knowledge construction help transform society. He goes on to note that intellectual leadership requires that scholars
recognize the social, political, and economic context of ideas . . . . A true intellectual cannot be morally detached . . . . As scholars who are involved in the creation of knowledge, intellectual leaders help direct paradigmatic transitions in the creation of new paradigms which can provide an intellectual foundation for social change. (p. 47)

Leadership theory seems to suggest that leaders should possess vision but there must be a willingness to serve as well. Intellect and service seem to go hand in hand.

Well thought out leadership strategies and critical analysis of the social and political climate as well as a willingness to serve helps translate thought into action. In 1933, Carter G. Woodson wrote,

if the Negro could abandon the idea of leadership and instead stimulate a larger number of the race to take up definite tasks and sacrifice their time and energy in doing these things efficient the race might accomplish something. The race needs workers, not leaders . . . . If we can finally succeed in translating the idea of leadership into that of service, we may soon find it possible to lift the Negro to a higher level. (p. 118)

While Woodson did not coin the phrase servant leadership, his writings imply support for the idea. Finzel (1994) defines such in terms of: (a) not abusing authority (b) giving people the room and freedom to be themselves (c) listening to others and focusing on the needs of others (d) creating partners in the process; and (e) empowering others. But do social movement theories of leadership differ from other theories of leadership?

What might be distinctive features of African American social movement leadership? Morris and Staggenborg’s (2004, p. 172) work is illustrative. They
emphasize “the conflicting requirements for a leader to function both within the
movement as a “mobilizer,” inspiring participants, and outside the movement as an
“articulator,” linking the movement to the larger society.” Building on Max Weber’s
approach, they describe three types of leaders in social movements – charismatic,
ideological, and pragmatic types. In a related vein, Snow, Soule, and Kriesi (2004, p. 8)
state that, “different types of leaders come out of different types of preexisting
organizational structures.” Kershaw (2001), contends that those social movements most
successful for African Americans have been those where charismatic leadership,
explosive social conditions, and the political and social climate have come together to
create an opportune period for protest. Most Civil Rights leaders, often deemed
charismatic, arise from the ranks of the masses. Yet, they must have the support of
strong organizations. Kershaw emphasizes that social conditions have to be such that
social protest would be both successful and tolerated. The social protest must, as
pointed out elsewhere in the research, resonate with constituents willing to rally around
the cause. Kershaw describes two dominant leadership traditions in the African
American community.

One is in the tradition of Booker T. Washington and Martin Luther King, Jr.
(Kershaw, 2001). This is the integrationist approach to leadership. The integrationist
approach emphasizes racial identity and shared cultural heritage as the building blocks
for social change. The result would be an integrated society with equal social and
economic Rights for everyone while maintaining racial consciousness of culture and
heritage. The other leadership tradition is the nationalist leadership approach espoused
by Garvey and Malcolm. It aims for Black separatism with autonomous institutions.
The two leadership theories complement each other in racial struggle against inequality and their mutual heritage of music – both gospel and secular. Both involve the church, local and national organizations, and folk stories.

Regardless of racial composition, a key theoretical issue is the question of how much the action of leaders and their leadership styles matter to their followers and to the public. Morris and Staggenborg (2004, p.171) summarize the scholarly response to this question: “Leaders operate within structures, and they both influence and are influenced by movement organization and environment. Further, different types of leaders may dominate at different stages of movement development and sometimes come into conflict with one another. Social movement leaders also share the following characteristics: “most social movement leaders tend to come from the educated middle and upper class, are disproportionately male, and usually share the race or ethnicity of their supporters.”

Both social movement theory and leadership theory guide my data analysis. Schwandt (2001, p. 5) quotes Geertz as saying “using them, I seek to “make small facts speak to large issues.” As Schwandt (2001, p. 64) points out, “it may be more appropriate to talk of emergent analysis in qualitative studies.” I agree. My analysis of the data will entail discovery. The questions I have raised will guide the research. What emerges may be different from or an expanded version of an existing perspective. Trochim (2001) points out that as data are coded and tentative linkages are fleshed out, the resultant theory will be a conceptually dense and contextually rich discourse. This process of coding, analyzing, and comparing concepts will ensure that the theories that arise will be grounded in the data generated through interviews and archival data.
As I examine texts and transcripts, as themes emerge, I will keep in mind the questions of how all these came to be and what we can learn from this man who helped shape the social and political culture of Northwest Florida and South Alabama.
CHAPTER IV

THROUGH THE EYES OF OTHERS

We were there together
There has always been
Ever since I can remember
Two separate worlds
You knew them
You knew white people
And white people knew Black people
So when the explosion came
It was just a matter of time
The militant movement
Was always in confrontation
With the white power structure
Behind the scenes
Very hateful words
That will always be with me
I still am baffled about the hate
We never really espoused hating people
Chose to remain silent either out of fear or . . .
When the explosion came
You knew white people
I still am baffled
By the hate

While a case study typically would not involve interview data from other
participants before looking at data from its subject, I think it is important here to
establish the social and political context wherein Reverend Matthews emerged as a
successful leader of the Civil Rights Movement in Northwest Florida. By focusing
initially on the lived experiences of these interviewees and some archival data drawn
primarily from local newspapers, the day-to-day patterns of segregation, intimidation,
and subordination then and there become clearer. These participants paint a vivid picture of African Americans’ experiences during the 1960s in this part of the country.

Their experiences continued to reflect a second-class existence. As we saw in the literature review, laws that prohibited Blacks from registering to vote, poll taxes, inadequate education, lack of land ownership, sharecropping, violence, intimidation, and segregation all worked together to ensure racial separation as well as racial discrimination and domination. These participants’ stories depict the situation in Pensacola as one mirroring American society during that time. While overt instances of racism may have become less prevalent, inequality and social injustice persisted.

Three Recurrent Topics

As these participants shared their experiences, three topics emerged that threaded through their stories. These topics help set the stage for understanding the environment that led to the emergence of the Civil Rights Movement in this part of the South. Exploring these topics, even in a limited way, provides further insights into that movement here. These intertwined topics include racism, integration, and behind-the-scenes support of the movement.

The first topic threaded throughout the interviews is racism as a way of life for African Americans. This racism undergirded segregation. One participant shared this view:

I don’t think Pensacola has ever acknowledged that there is a bad, racist problem here. And the reason for that is that there has always been ever since I can remember Whites and Blacks always were there together. They were there
together. That *there together* meant that we were very much segregated . . . . So, see you knew them, you knew White people and White people knew Black people, so it had been kind of a thing to say that everything was okay . . . .

Living in two such separate worlds often entailed racialized encounters. The painful memories of such encounters often last a lifetime. Here is an example that Jessica shared:

My grandmother was dying . . . . I was raised by my grandmother. My grandmother was my mother. Sacred Heart at that time was right on the corner of Gonzalez and 12th. That big, old building, that was Sacred Heart. I wasn’t 15 yet. The family, we knew it was just a matter of time. So we were just sitting there, you know. So there was a drug store on the corner downtown on Gonzalez right on the corner across the street. So we went down to get something to eat. You could get food there. To this day at 65, I still am baffled about the hate that I didn’t understand at 15, and I still don’t understand to this day. It was about 11 o’clock at night. There was nobody in the store but us, me and my cousin. We were standing at the counter. I found out about the hate. We were standing at the counter, and I sat down at the stool. I don’t think that I have ever faced that kind of hatred since being told that I couldn’t sit there. I’m standing there ordering food. Nobody was in the store at all. I was mentally abused [by] very hateful words that will always be with me.

While the event Jessica relates occurred in 1956, a *Pensacola News Journal* article (“Baptist Hospital Protest,” 1969) dated almost 15 years later describes continuing racism at Baptist Hospital. Marchers were protesting in an effort to get
Blacks hired there in positions other than housekeepers and dietary personnel. While Black employees could clean the building, they were not allowed to go into certain areas nor were they allowed to eat at the counter in the hospitality shop. Here is what the article (“Baptist Hospital Protest,” 1969) reads in part:

Reverend H. K. Matthews, manager of Escambia Arms Apartments and local Civil Rights leader and five other persons, were arrested December 10, 1969 while attempting to enter the Baptist Hospital. They were subsequently charged with disturbing the peace . . . . They were attempting to go downstairs to the hospitality shop. Meanwhile, the number of protesters has tripled with Blacks and Whites in their ranks. (pp. A1-A2)

Racial separation was so ingrained in both southern Blacks and Whites that anything different would have seemed outside the norm. Even public libraries remained segregated. Consider this bit of local history from the now defunct weekly newspaper, The Colored Citizen (“Branch library,” 1952) which speaks of the Alice S. Williams branch library as a separate facility for Blacks. Equally interesting is an article from the Pensacola News Journal written more than a decade later (“School group objects,” 1963) about racial inequities among educators in the local school district.

One of the participants, a retired educator, told me about his firsthand experiences with the inequities addressed in this newspaper article. Specifically, Jeremy recalls what happened in Escambia County as Black teachers’ pay was brought to parity with White teachers’ pay,

White teachers were making one amount. Black teachers were making a different amount. I can’t say exactly what it was. Social Security and insurance
was being paid for the White instructors. Most Black teachers did not pay into Social Security . . . 13 years of my time I did not pay Social Security. They [Escambia County School District] began giving Blacks the extra money to pay the salary equal to the White salary, but they were not paying Black teachers’ Social Security. They were paying the White teachers’ Social Security . . . . When I got ready to retire, I and a whole lot of teachers, didn’t get Social Security because they didn’t have the amount of time in. You had about eight or nine Blacks, they were paying their [Social Security] separately, so when they retired, when they got 65, they got the maximum retirement like the White teachers.

The unequal pay and benefits were sanctioned by many at the state level as well as the local level. The *Pensacola News Journal* in 1963 (“School group objects”) quotes a state senator at that time

Escambia County’s Negro teachers today told state Senator L. K. Edwards they don’t like to be called “darkies.” Members of the Escambia County Department of Classroom Teachers also said they feel they’re as qualified to teach as anyone. Edwards told a Senate committee hearing Wednesday that he was against equal pay for White and Negro teachers. “Darkies can get any kind of a degree they want.” (pp. A1-A2)

In response to Senator Edwards’ comments, Ruby Gainer of the Escambia Negro Teachers Association (“School group objects,” 1963) voiced “open and public resentment” to use of the term darkies and expressed indignation to the implication that Negro teachers are not qualified to teach.
group had wired Edwards that doctor of philosophy degrees cannot be earned from Bethune Cookman College or any other Negro institution. Therefore, Negroes receive their PhD’s from the same institutions as Whites. “It would appear that an informed legislator would know that the law requires equal pay for equal rank and experience. (pp. A1-A2)

Edwards was scarcely the exception. Elected public officials often expressed racist views and supported separate-and-unequal policies. In order to ensure that the Black citizens’ voices were heard, African Americans worked to get out the vote and get Blacks elected to strategic positions. One participant shared his experience of trying to get his father elected to the local school board, the first Black citizen to seek that position. He tells how they kept voters from finding out that his father was Black.

The strategy we used was that every time he had an interview, we refused to have an interview face to face so no one knew what color he was. And this was one of the strategies we used in the sixties, and . . . he missed by only two or three votes.

Besides racism, another topic that came up in every interview is integration. While it is often the perception that African Americans rallied for integration, the sense that I got from these participants was that they were more interested in equal access than they were in integration. Here is what Jeremy had to say:

Personally, if you’re talking about teachers, we did not want integration because we knew we were going to lose a lot. All was going to be lost. Personally, I wish it had stayed the way it was at that particular time. With all the changes, it [the school system] was in turmoil. All of the Black teachers, high school teachers
were disgraced. We had to move [from Black schools to White schools]. That was hard. I did not want to do it. Yes, I was against it. I figured if we could have our own, we would be more comfortable, but we didn’t have what we needed. As far as integration was concerned, everybody within the school system was against it - *period*.

Omar expressed similar concerns about desegregation, the term he prefers over “integration”:

Desegregation simply meant that a lot of the positions that were held by administrative officials from the Black community for some reason or another had been somewhat diluted. Many of those people, who were principals and deans, were demoted . . . . Principals became deans, deans became schoolteachers, and that was the beginning of integration . . . . What I like to coin as desegregation. There was a segregation kind of tactic used whereby out of a 100%, 90% of the educators were hit, and then they left about 10% somewhat in place to give the impression that everything was fine and that 10% was to more or less serve as front people to make things appear as if everything was going to be all right, and yet we knew in the Black community that we had been hit with a devastating blow to education and the positions we held prior to integration.

Jeremy’s recollections echo Omar’s. He, too, saw the setbacks associated with was often touted as racial progress. Jeremy observes,

Some teachers were displaced. They were set and put in other schools and made to teach subjects that they didn’t know anything about. If you were a science
teacher, what do you look like teaching Spanish? They put you in places where you would fail. If you have been teaching in high school for 20 years and you got to go back to first grade, you see what a change that would be? These were the things they were doing. A lot of teachers resigned or just quit because they couldn’t do it any longer. They did that to us. If you went down there [School Board] to try to talk to the White folks, they wouldn’t do anything for you. Whatever you did, you were criticized for it. They wanted to keep us in our place.

Omar shares an example at a previously all-Black middle school:

Toward the middle of the school year when integration began to take hold, one of the things that really got the Black folks upset was that our principal, once integration took place, all of a sudden was no longer qualified to be a principal, though she had been principal probably 15, 20 years. They brought in a White guy . . . who didn’t know his head from his toe. He was considered a walking joke. He in no way possessed the administrative ability to run anything, much less to be principal of a school. But that’s how much they were out to dismantle the school system from a Black perspective.

Jessica also recalls the sense of loss and displacement felt in the African American community as a result of integration. She sums it up this way:

The whole system of segregation and the Black, the positive part that existed before integration where the children were taken care of, we lost it. These kids were basically alone. They saw the racism. They experienced the racism. They understood what was going on and they knew the difference.
Jeremy told me about what happened among the students when integration first occurred. He remembers that

There were a lot of fights – fights between Blacks and Whites. Not Black on Black. Not White on White but fighting between the Blacks and the Whites. There was lots of name-calling. You call a Black person a nigger and you had problems at that time. You say “you nigger,” which all of them were prone to do that at the time, and you were bound to get into a fight. There were a lot of fights, misunderstandings, and walkouts. Kids would walk out of school. Everything was in turmoil.

Jessica, too, recalls after integration

There was a lot of tension because the teachers, the Black teachers had control of the Black children, but the White teachers were not used to Black children. When they [White teachers] complained to the principal, the principal could paddle them. When the time came up and Blacks had the authority to paddle White children, Whites didn’t want Blacks spanking their kids, paddling their kids so the tension was high, very high.

Jeremy shared a story with me about the everyday interactions between Blacks and Whites in the sixties. The story illustrates how some Whites dismissed the feelings and perceptions of Black people.

Right after integration, I had the experience of being one of the first Blacks to work with the Whites and go into Baker, Allentown, Century, and Gulf Breeze to officiate games. I was a football official, baseball official, and basketball official. I was also coaching at the time. We had a Black organization. We had a
White organization. We merged. I was the only Black chosen [to officiate the games] so I have some experience with being called names sometimes. I remember calling a basketball game in Baker. I tossed the ball. A boy used his elbow and hit another boy in the eye. I called a foul on him. And the stand got just as quiet, “That nigger sho’ know what he calling” someone in the stand yelled out. That was meant as a compliment.

With the walkouts, tension, turmoil, name-calling and escalating dissatisfaction on both sides, parents began looking for different ways to ensure that their children received a quality education. Blacks started “freedom schools,” which are discussed in greater detail in chapter V. Jessica recalls the emergence of a local, White private school during this period:

Pensacola Christian was a school that was created so Whites would not have to go to school with Blacks. That’s how Pensacola Christian came about. It was a private school for the Whites to go to and not be with Blacks. That was a school [for] the Whites who could afford to take their children out of the public school system.

Like other communities throughout the South, Pensacola’s Black and White residents found integration extremely, achingly difficult.

The third topic threaded through the interviews revolves around how some chose to work behind-the-scenes of the local movement. Some feared losing their jobs. Others felt they could be more effective by letting a few leaders gain prominence with the support of a lot more folks in the background. Thus, many people who supported the
cause may never be recognized as having done so. Dan, a retired educator and minister, illustrates:

I had my hands tied due to the fact that I was working for the system. See ‘cause in the sixties, in the school system, they had a rule, a policy – any administrator that was caught marching would be terminated immediately. Now, I planned a lot of the strategies but everything else I have done was behind closed doors. I think a lot of people fall in the same category as myself. They had professional jobs and could not really get involved openly because of these rules that if you wanted to work, if you wanted to continue to feed your family, you would not participate in these activities.

Another participant observes while some people remained behind the scenes for fear of losing their jobs, others who chose to remain behind the scenes for different reasons,

some really kind of wanted to remain behind the scene even as young as we were . . . so for that reason their names were not called, but they were always there for support without putting their names out front. They didn’t know we were actually talking about the people who were a lot of times behind the scenes who were actually running things who were actually a part of the major decision-making process and that was the power structure, and they used a lot of other individuals to carry those mandates out.

One example of these others is the group of local ministers who formed an alliance to funnel monetary support and participants to the leaders of the Civil Rights Movement. They kept their involvement out of public view. These ministers,
primarily members of a group called the Ministerial Alliance, supported the cause but saw themselves as being more effective behind the scenes rather than out-front like Reverend Matthews and Reverend Leverette, but they were very much supporters of the cause and Reverend Matthews could count on them. They just weren’t as vocal but they were certainly with him and they preferred to stay in the background.

A number of Black businessmen also provided monetary and emotional support for the Civil Rights Movement and in particular for Reverend Matthews. Omar shares this information but seems to do so reluctantly, as if wanting to shield them from exposure even today:

There were Black businessmen who totally supported Reverend Matthews: J. P. Newton, Dr. Donald Spence, Morris Lucky, Ben O. English, and Joe Morris, Sr. These were people that Reverend Matthews could count on that I knew of. I am sure there were others. There was also a gentleman, John Reed, who was also very prominent at Benboe Funeral Home during that time. There was another gentleman, and that is Daddy Blue. He operated Blue Dot Barbeque. These were people I know put their money where their mouth was and decided that they would be more effective . . . behind the scenes.

Some educators were also involved behind the scenes, as we have seen. Perhaps no other group occupied such a precarious position by supporting the Movement while maintaining employment within the very system they were fighting to change. Omar adds:
There were a number of people who really wanted to remain behind the scene. There were a number of guys who were educators who backed me, because I guess I gave the more or less independent view. If I had to give up teaching school, then it was no big deal because I was blessed, in my way of thinking, to have other avenues to legitimately make a living. These educators were not in a position to quit. They had families to take care of so they supported me and the other activists from behind the scenes.

Besides these three topics, I found common themes among these participants. The three most important are the ethic of care in the Black community, double consciousness, and charisma as a political tool. These themes align closely with my research questions about the Civil Rights Movement in northwest Florida and the leadership practices of local leaders in general and Reverend H. K. Matthews in particular.

The Ethic of Care in the African American Community

While Hilary Clinton may have popularized the African proverb “It takes a village to raise a child,” African Americans have long put these words into practice in their communities, especially before the time of integration. African Americans relied on the eyes and ears of everyone in the community to keep their children safe. They knew that to stray too far from home could result in harm or death. While children may have complained of being “told on” by other adults in the community, they also felt cared for by the entire community. Jessica puts it this way
At that time the church, the community, which is the family and the neighborhood, and the school all worked together as one unit so there was basically not a separation. You knew the whole neighborhood. You knew everybody’s teachers; the whole neighborhood knew each other. Everybody took care of each other. And so, it was a very safe time; it was a very safe time for African Americans at that time.

During this time in Pensacola, low-and middle-income African Americans lived in the same community. It didn’t matter what your profession was, everyone lived in the same community. Those who lived in “projects” were not seen as different from those who could afford to live elsewhere. Their shared experiences of living in communities separated by race seem to have strengthened community bonds. Jessica recalls the period this way:

I hear them use the word project. That really wasn’t...we didn’t know anything about those words. If we were poor, we didn’t know about it. I mean it was like you had the doctors and the lawyers and the teachers and all lived in these apartment complexes. So, you know, they weren’t looked upon as projects.

At that time there was widespread community support for and encouragement of academic achievement. The young people in the community were encouraged by the entire community. Indeed the village took care of its children. Jessica continues,

If by chance, out of our community, there was a young man or woman that was blessed to go on off to college; I mean it was the whole community’s child. It wasn’t like it was your child or somebody else’s child; it was the whole community’s child. In those days people would send cookies, if you would come
home on Sundays, they would give you, you know, fifty cents or whatever they had because they were just so proud that you went on to higher learning.

Roy echoes these same thoughts. He observes that

Many of the students were coming from families that were broken up. Many homes had no father and many of the homes had no mother; there were grandmothers and grandfathers raising kids. There were single mothers raising kids. In a lot of instances, there was no one home to provide that kind of guidance that was needed so we all had to pitch in and we saw ourselves more as this big family. And so the understanding prior to the integration was that we had to serve more or less as surrogate parents . . . . That kind of caring that we were able to give to them which really doesn’t make up for your A-B-C’s, you know, or learning your lessons, but it created the kind of atmosphere where the student was able to learn a lot better than when you put kids in a classroom and, those that can, can, and those that can’t seem to suffer the blow, whereas, during this caring period that I speak about, we took the time.

These individuals knew segregation and marginalization in Pensacola society. Looking back, they give voice to their experiences of being ‘the other.” Although their views differ by degrees, their experiences involve similarities woven into their shared history.

About the education of African American students in all-Black schools, for example, each participant tends to agree that the attitude of care was very much the norm. Octavia says, “I can remember back when the schools were not integrated. Okay, it seems like we had more dedicated Black teachers, I mean very sincere. You didn’t
hear of kids flunking exams; Black teachers were concerned about Black students.”

About the same period, Jessica reports

I went to school in a segregated era but our teachers were very concerned and they made sure that we knew why we were at school and we got a very good education in that time. I started out at Spencer Bibbs School and the principal was Ms. Pickens, Ms. Sadie Pickens. You know our teachers; you know some of them I can remember that they were absolutely beautiful. They knew without a doubt that we did not have learning disabilities; that African Americans did not have any learning disabilities and so those that might have been say slow or whatever, you know, they was in the same class with us so something had to rub off on them because they wasn’t treated different, they wasn’t put off into a room by themselves. They were just allowed to be with the rest of the class. When they could go no further, then they stopped school. They were never put out of school and they was never put into a room just all by themselves . . . . Teachers of that day made you feel that you were all deep; that you could do it.

In these stories, the topics of education and care cannot easily be teased apart. Frank (1995, p. 17) states, “In the reciprocity that is storytelling, the teller offers herself as guide to the other’s self-formation. The other’s receipt of that guidance not only recognizes but values the teller.” In the stories of these participants, a somewhat circuitous path begins to take shape as we walk through Pensacola’s history.
What has become clear is that caring for children and keeping them safe was a central value in the African American community. Equally important was understanding how to navigate through White society without causing harm to self or the community. W. E. B. DuBois (1903) coined the phrase *double consciousness* that describes the standpoint of people existing in two separate worlds, as Americans and as African Americans. This dual existence forces persons to learn how to move effectively between the two worlds. According to DuBois (1903, p. 6), his childhood experience of having his gift rejected by a classmate made him realize that he was different. He describes it this way: “The exchange was merry, till one girl, refused my card . . . . Then it dawned upon me with a suddenness that I was different from the others; or like mayhap, in heart and life and longing, but shut out from their world by a vast veil.”

DuBois would live with the sting of rejection and a fierce desire to beat his classmates on tests, at sports, and in every other aspect of his life. He asked himself why God had made him different. Over time, DuBois’ reflections gave him insight into the souls of Black folks. He wrote (1903, p. 7) that “the Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world – a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world.” DuBois (p. 7) states that this sensation is a peculiar feeling – *double consciousness* – “of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity.” Viewing oneself through the eyes of others, African Americans live in a state of limbo wearing a veil that can be donned at a moment’s notice when moving from one
world to the other. The veil covers both an American soul and a Negro soul. Again, quoting DuBois (p. 7), “One ever feels his twoness, – an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder.”

During the 1960s, the hegemonic perspective demanded that African Americans ‘stay in their place.’ That place included jobs at the low end of the scale, going to the back door of establishments to buy sandwiches, and learning to live as adults with the insults of being called boy, auntie, uncle or girl. Here is how one participant describes the situation:

   Back there, my parents and the parents of that generation, they were concerned that you be safe, that you be safe. You were taught how to live in two worlds. You were taught very good how to live in two worlds. And we had to know our life depended on how we acted. Yeah, we were consistent on how to deal when we went outside of our world. I think from the beginning of time, I think there was always hate . . .

Ironically, the same participant shares another story that might appear to flaunt societal norms but in actuality illustrates the strict lines that divided the Black and White worlds. Each side knew how far to go in race relations. The story gives a glimpse of tentative steps made toward crossing the line, which in the end falls miserably short:

   There was a man named Mr. Dobbs that lived across the street from me where I lived at. Mr. Dobbs was a colorblind where the children could play. I don’t know Mr. Dobbs’ wife’s name, don’t know the daughter’s name. Nothing. I can remember that we could all play safe in his yard – Black and White. We could
all play safe in his yard. He had all kinds of scuppernongs, fresh fruit and all. It was just odd how we went into his yard, the different races of us, we just became children. And, then when we went outside of his yard, we became Black and White again. The same ones of us that went into his yard and played together never played outside of his yard; never talked to each other outside of his yard.

It seems that everyone knew the racialized roles to be played, both Black and White. According to one participant, “If a White chose to be my friend and I’m African American, they basically had taken their lives in they hand and they knew that.” There was not only the fear of physical harm but also the threat of economic harm. According to Roy, “Those he (Reverend Matthews) attempted to represent were the very ones who became silent and mute about their demotions and about the things they were experiencing simply because of fear that they might lose their jobs.” Still another educator observes that “a lot of people fall in the category as myself, that had professional jobs and could not really get involved openly because of these rules these offices had if you want to work, if you wanted to work to continue on and feed your family.” Perhaps most telling is this account from a retired educator who grew up in Pensacola:

You know, like I say, you couldn’t hardly walk the street. Back there during that time, they were still doing what they used to try to do when I was a boy. If you go downtown, you almost had to walk on one side of the street. You had the Black and White water fountains and the bus station segregated. Black boys had to walk from the east side to the west side to school everyday. White kids were
riding. Lot of ‘em had cars. If you played football and basketball you walked
back home in a group together. The White boys with cars would come along
throwing bricks and all. We got where we would pick up bricks and throw them
back at them, you know. We broke a lot of windshields and things you know.
Then they stopped that. It was bad. It was real bad back there.

In every aspect of their lives, African Americans were conscious of the roles
they were expected to play. Brink and Harris (1963, p. 21) ask, “How do you explain to
a child that he can’t take a 25-cent pony ride because of the pigment of his skin, or that
he can’t sit in front and watch the bus driver?” They assert African American parents
need to address the idea of double consciousness when explaining the world to their
children: “Theirs is the immensely difficult task of explaining discrimination to children
born without prejudice or knowledge that their Black skins make a difference” (p. 21).
Back then the color of your skin made a difference in whether you could go to the front
door or whether you would be required to go the back door even when your purpose
was to render a service to the occupants of the house. Here’s what one interviewee
experienced as a high school student:

As a high school student, I worked at a drug store. I delivered grocery. I had to
go to the back door to deliver grocery. They got dogs back there, I got to deliver
grocery. I’d take it back to the store. They’d tell me to take it back. I’d say no,
I’m not going back out there. Give it to someone else. I lost several jobs behind
that. You didn’t go to no White person’s front door. You had to go to the back
do’. I’ve had people come in and say what’s this nigger doing in here? What’s
he doing? You know. You get used to it.
To some extent, people get used to playing this double role that makes for being a second-class citizen. They get used to “seeking to satisfy two unreconciled ideals” (DuBois, 1903, p. 9) and even get used to unprovoked violence. Some violence was instigated by people paid to serve and protect. Seeing power and authority misused was standard fare for African Americans in Pensacola and elsewhere. Here’s what one participant shared about unprovoked violence: “My cousin and I were together one day. We were walking the street. The police came up [and said] “Nigger, what’s your name?” He (my cousin) didn’t say nothing. He slapped him – pow! I’ve hated police officers ever since for doing that. We were just walking the street. They could do that back then during that time.”

As a matter of practical necessity, of survival, most African Americans accepted things as they were and stayed in their place, at least on the surface. In rare circumstances, an individual might have an independent source of income that would allow him or her to fight back, to speak out against the system. For those without independent sources of income, however, it was easier to seethe inside and vent at home. DuBois (1903, p. 195) predicts that “such a double life, with double thoughts, double duties, and double social classes, must give rise to double words and double ideals, and tempt the mind to pretence or revolt, to hypocrisy or radicalism.” Which was it to be? Would things remain as they were? Or was the time right for social action?

Charisma, Churches, and Civil Rights

Without exception, each person I interviewed spoke of ministers’ roles in the Civil Rights Movement. Many credit Reverend Dobbins with being the catalyst that
launched the movement in Pensacola and Reverend H. K. Matthews with being the force that carried the torch forward and led the struggle for social justice.

Reverend Dobbins, an African Methodist Episcopal minister, found himself thrown into a world that bore little resemblance to his native Detroit. He questioned the separate and unequal status of African Americans in Northwest Florida. He noticed what the participants in this study have described. He noticed the city buses where Blacks could only sit in designated areas even when there were no Whites in empty seats on the bus. He learned of the lesser pay for Black teachers. He began to ask questions. He asked the members of his congregation, he asked other ministers, he asked anyone who would listen. Dobbins’ questions and actions eventually spawned social and political protest in Pensacola. Dobbins’ influence led many African Americans to take a look at their environment, their lived experiences, and the day-to-day struggle of living in two worlds. Many were not happy with what they saw. Yet they did see promise in the church and church leaders in general as well as Reverend Dobbins and then Reverend Matthews in particular. Jessica reports, for instance:

Most of my generation; we were trained to be activists. That was something the churches did. I was always a part of the NAACP. That was a part of my life. I don’t know any other. To me, they were the five men out there that - Matthews, Dobbins, because Matthews and Dobbins was along the same, and then Reverend Williams, Reverend Brooks, and [Reverend] Otha Leverette. Those were the 5, I know because I was there.

It is interesting to note that Jessica’s list of five leaders includes four ministers. She goes on to point out that Reverend Matthews stood out above the rest. He was
willing to take risks, to stand up for what he believed to be right. Jessica’s statement on
the role of the church echoes the sentiments of another of the interviewees, a minister,
who states, “I think that politics and the church ought to go together, go hand-in-hand
together. The only way that Blacks can come together and find out true information is
right there in the church.” Perhaps this view of the duty of the church to the community
propels some ministers into action.

Writing on the role of the church during the Civil Rights Movement, Brink and
Harris (1963, p. 102) observe that “Today it can hardly be questioned that, especially in
the South, the Negro church has done as much as or more than any other segment of
Negro society for the Negro’s cause.” The church was widely seen as the headquarters
for the movement. It was where African Americans came together to plan, and it was
central to getting the word out in the Black community. Brink and Harris (1963, p.103)
argue that “given the amorphous, formless quality of the Negro revolution, there was no
place for an organized leadership to come from except the church.” From the church
came a new breed of ministers, a breed willing to speak up and speak out, a breed that
would eventually take to the streets in nonviolent protest. Reverend Matthews
epitomized that new breed in Pensacola. Jessica puts it this way

H. K. was very instrumental in that. The establishment, whatever you call it, the
system, seemed to know and they would try to take the leader – what they
considered the leader, and so Matthews was really the 1 that they made an
example of. They heard his voice a lot more than they wanted to and so he was
the 1 they made the example out of and put in jail. They could not go to him and
say “be quiet.” And I think because they couldn’t shut him [Matthews] up they
made an example out of him . . . . They truly shut him up. I saw what happened when he went to jail. They shut up this town; they shut the Black community down.

Mansbridge and Morris (2001, p. 246) find that duty “derives not only from the demands of reason but also from the commitments I have as a member of a community. Moral condemnation and moral praise by respected leaders or peers activate these internal moral commitments.” It is hard to say what motivated Pensacola ministers to act. Perhaps one factor was that these leaders were not dependent on outside sources for their income. For the most part, their livelihood came from their local congregations. That circumstance may have given them a sense of independence allowing for greater commitment to the Black community.

Mansbridge and Morris (2001) also provide insights into religious resources in an oppositional culture. Their research (2001, p. 50) has “confirmed what past scholars of social movements have demonstrated: that preexisting networks are a key part of the mobilization process.” The church entails rich networks where ordinary people often emerge as leaders. Such was the case with Reverend Matthews. Here’s what Roy had to say along these lines:

Reverend Matthews was naturally considered in many ways our leader. He was the person that we all kind of looked to for a sense of direction. He had marched with Martin Luther King. He had marched with other noted Civil Rights leaders. He was in and out of Pensacola to go important national meetings so he had the pulse of what was really happening on a national level which put him in a position of power, in a manner of speaking, in the leadership capacity.
Even though Reverend Matthews was the most vocal leader of the Civil Rights Movement in Pensacola, he supported Dr. King’s non-violent approach. King (1959, p. 459) wrote,

The Negro people can organize socially to initiate many forms of struggle which can drive their enemies back without resort to futile and harmful violence. Our powerful weapons are the voices, the feet, and the bodies of dedicated, united people, moving without rest toward a just goal.

Reverend Matthews used such value-centered leadership. Commenting on his leadership, one participant reports that

Reverend Matthews kept us in check and made sure that we helped get the message out that there would be no violence . . . . We feel blessed and to this day we thank him for watching over us because he knew we entertained some thoughts that if we were to do [act on] would have been detrimental to the movement and to our personal lives, and he helped us get through that time through his personal leadership. I was affiliated with the Black Panthers. But Reverend Matthews saw to it that we kept the affiliation with the Black Panthers out of the news. What we [Black Panthers] stood for at the time that would have been the wrong signal to send [to the community].

Another interviewee observes that

There were a lot of ministers who were active . . . . Matthews was always called because he was not afraid. He just let folks know where he was coming from. He was effective. First of all, he was honest and he did what was right and he fought for what was right. He did not back down from anybody or anything. He
went to jail first. He fought first. They did everything they could but he was right there. He was a giant as far as Blacks were concerned. He did a tremendous job back then during that time.

Perhaps Morris (2000) sums it up best when writing about the leadership of Reverend T. J. Jemison, a Black minister who successfully led the bus boycott in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. His comments could well have been written of many African American ministers who were active during the Civil Rights era. Morris (p. 439) writes: “As a minister he was clearly connected to the Black masses and the Black clergy network . . . . This network gave him access to the resources and organized work forces of the church community.” This seems to have held true for the Pensacola community as well.

Confrontation not Communication

Through the voices of these participants, a sense of what Pensacola and indeed the South were like during the mid-20th century emerges. It was a city that made history when one of its citizens filed suit in federal court to demand that Blacks have the same educational opportunities as Whites. Karen Augustus filed suit in state court in 1962 to protest the display of Confederate symbols at Escambia High School where she was a student. There had been a number of instances of violence, fights, and walkouts at the school. As I mentioned, separate private schools for Blacks and Whites had been an outgrowth of the continual turmoil and unrest. It would take a court order to end the display of iconic symbols at Escambia High School. The 5th Circuit docket (507 F2, at 155, 1975) shows that
The court affirmed district court findings that the display of a Confederate flag was a focal point of racial irritation, offensive to a racial minority, and contributed to violence and the disruption of the school. The ruling further stated that school officials could prohibit the display of a symbol in circumstances that warrant a reasonable fear on the part of school officials that the display would substantially disrupt discipline in the school. The records before the courts revealed many substantial racial disturbances; indeed, the school had to be closed on more than one occasion to avoid racial violence.

Lawrence Scott (Paige, 2006, May 5) recalls teaching business classes in Pensacola during this period. Outdated books for Black students were typical. That didn’t stop Scott, though. He says, “Getting the books and supplies the students needed was most important . . . . My friend and I would make up books using everyday supplies to get the students the information they needed.” So it was in the Black schools. Supplies were inadequate, sometimes no books at all were available, and, as stated earlier, Black teachers were paid less than their White counterparts.

Not only was there separation in education in grades k-12, but higher education was separate as well. The State of Florida established 12 Black junior colleges and one senior college for Black students. It “developed its first 2-year college for Black citizens in Pensacola” (Smith, 1994, p. xxi). The petition for a Black junior was presented to the School Board by “the Negro Citizens Committee for the Junior College” (Smith, p. 1):

This group . . . asked the board to consider developing methods for starting a 2-year college . . . . That should be designed to accommodate the needs of the Negro citizens of Escambia County. Pensacola Junior College which had been
developed to meet the needs of the White citizenry was already in operation at Pensacola High School.

Booker T. Washington Junior College (BTWJC) for Blacks was established in 1949. Prior to its establishment, Black citizens had no “institutions of higher education in the immediate vicinity” (Smith, p. 5). There were other problems as well.

In the field of health care, for example, discriminatory employment practices and treatment continued. In response to the boycott of Baptist Hospital, mentioned earlier in this chapter, the executive director at the time, Pat Groner, (“Baptist Hospital Protest,” 1969) is quoted in the Pensacola News Journal as saying, “It was obvious the [protestors] intended to force their way onto the grounds and into the hospital.” Matthews and the others were charged with disturbing the peace, yet they were only trying to enter the hospitality shop. They were protesting that Blacks could clean the shop but were not allowed to eat there. What is striking about this incident is that there was no attempt by the establishment to discuss the issue of the treatment of the employees. It seems that it was much easier to call the police than to look for ways to ameliorate the disagreement.

In every aspect of their lives, African Americans continued to exist as second-class citizens. Dr. Tonea Stewart, actress and educator, who performed in Pensacola (20 October, 2006) at The University of West Florida’s Center for Fine and Performing Arts, describes an incident in the Mississippi Delta during this same period:

My father was a plumber and an electrician with a fourth grade education. He could fix anything. One Saturday morning, his boss called him to the local department store to fix the water fountain. He rushed over to the store but forgot
to take his lunch with him. My mother told me to take his lunch to him. When I got to the store, he had just finished fixing the water fountain. He introduced me to the fellows and took a bite of the sandwich. He went to take a sip from the fountain he had just fixed. The boss man called his name sternly just as he was about to drink from the fountain. My father caught himself and answered, “Yes sir, you’s sho right, I forgot.” He took his sandwich, put it back in his metal lunch box, and told me to “run on home.” I never forgot that day. I had skipped to the store to take the lunch to my daddy; I slowly walked back home with tears streaming down my face. The way I looked at the world changed forever that day.

This incident could well have happened in Pensacola or any other town in the South. Blacks had a role to play and were expected to stay in that role. Whites, too, were caught in the same tableau. Everyone had a racialized role to play. The picture was similar wherever you went. Lunch counters were not integrated; the only Black employees in the bank cleaned the floors and the restrooms. There were no Black letter carriers. Black teachers taught Black students; White teachers taught White students. Things were the way they were. Race was a major factor in virtually every relationship.

The history of race relations in Pensacola is stormy. Voting Rights continued to be one of the areas of contention. The *Pensacola News Journal* reported (“NAACP starts action,” 1963), “Real war has been declared throughout the south which excludes Negroes from the right to vote by NAACP. The NAACP will press this fight in all the southern states until Negroes are guaranteed the right to vote” (p. A3). In 1984,
Reverend H. K. Matthews urges Blacks to vote. He is quoted in the *Pensacola Voice* ("Operation Big Vote," 1984):

> I came to remind you of what you already know. We have the right to vote. That was purchased with blood, sweat and tears and has cost some their lives. There was a time when we couldn’t walk into the polling place and pull the lever without being intimidated. It is a disgrace for any Black person not to go to the polls and vote. (p. 1)

Exercising the right to vote was critical to changing the lived experiences of Blacks in Pensacola. There were no Black school board members, no Black county commissioners and no Black state representatives. In order to effect institutional change, Blacks would have to participate in the decision making process. The vote gave them the power to change race relations from inside the system. Eventually, a voting district representing African Americans would be created in Pensacola.

An article in *The Colored Citizen* ("Jury Rights of Negros, 1942, p. 1) foretells what will come to pass. The article reads: “The jury rights of Negroes and full participation in voting are some of the fundamentals that the NAACP has been striving for years and here and there the effects of its work is being seen.” More work is to be done. A leader will emerge to continue that work. In the next chapter, that leader, Reverend Hawthorne Konrad Matthews, tells his story in his own words.
CHAPTER V

IN HIS OWN WORDS

They went to great lengths
To silence me
Everybody does not have the stamina
To fight racism

To stand up under the pressure
Like an agitator
Spun around and around
Slung the dirt out of the system

It was my time
I think I had the vision
I listened, I never went back
I never forgot

The flagrant, obvious, conspicuous racism
I shall never forget
I was in the line of fire
I got hurt a bit

I guess I was scared
Feelings of confusion and utter disgust
Recognized as nothing
A strong faith to press forward

Sometimes Black causes are not Black causes
We are wrapped in this single garment of destiny
Coming together, moving forward
That was done by providence
It was my time

“For years he was the most vocal advocate of Civil Rights in Pensacola,”

Quite a lot has been written about this minister turned political activist. In fact, Matthews’ own editorials punctuated many local newspapers in northwest Florida and south Alabama during the 1960s and 1970s. In one editorial (Matthews, 1976), he wrote, “How can a community that prides itself on its charity and love tolerate this political and social move to revoke and limit the rights of fellow Americans because of their race, religion, or even who their parents were” (p. A2). Perhaps a *Pensacola News Journal* (“Civil Rights Leader,” 2004) editorial characterizes him best: “His life should be remembered most for his unwavering commitment to the cause of freedom, justice, and equality for all people and the courage he displayed in leading a movement that continues to affect American society even today.” In February 2006, the City of Pensacola dedicated a park to him. Matthews is quoted in the *Pensacola News Journal* (Wilson, 2006, p. C3) as saying, “I can remember a time in this city when I wouldn’t even have been able to walk across this park.”

The co-owner of the *Pensacola Voice*, Jacqueline Miles, quoted in the Pensacola News Journal (Wilson, 2006), remembers Matthews as a part of her childhood. Under his leadership, she became involved with the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People’s Youth Council. Miles recalls how Matthews told members that “under no circumstances were they to get involved with the Black Panthers. Ours was a nonviolent movement.” (p. C1)

Matthews’ leadership in that nonviolent movement has long been recognized in the local community. Recently, History Makers augmented the national attention he has also gotten. This organization, whose purpose is to build “an internationally recognized, archival collection of thousands of African American video oral histories,” contacted
Matthews for inclusion in its “African American Video oral history project.” According to the letter he received (J. Delk, personal communication, September 1, 2006)

The purpose of this archive is to educate and to show the breadth and depth of this important American history as told by the first person to highlight the accomplishments of individual African Americans . . . . To showcase those who have played a role in African American led movements . . . . And to preserve this material for years and generations to come.

In October 2006, the organization’s video team interviewed Matthews at Pensacola’s St. Mark church where he had been pastor when he was arrested for leading a Civil Rights rally in 1978. A Pensacola News Journal (Dogan, 2006) article describes Matthews’ accomplishments and names some of the other leaders who have already been interviewed:

He was jailed for justice. He marched in the streets for equality. He faced death threats, and he sacrificed his family, career and livelihood while fighting for equal Rights. A long time coming, he joins “a growing list of history makers including Douglas Wilder, Virginia’s first Black governor; David Dinkins, former New York mayor; and Andrew Young, former U.N. ambassador and mayor of Atlanta. (p. C1)

It took years, though, before Reverend Matthews’ contributions were widely recognized. After years of activism and struggle, he sounded both seriously discouraged and steadfastly committed. He wrote (Matthews, 1976) 30 years ago, for instance, “My friends, I am tired. The move for equality and fair treatment has been weakened. I
threaten my own safety and freedom by speaking to you today . . . . I am a minority among a minority; not wishing to be enslaved.” (p. A2)

The Early Years

Reverend Matthews was born during the Jim Crow era in 1928 in Snow Hill, Alabama. His maternal grandmother, Lucy Troy Johnson, reared him in rural Alabama. His mother had died when he was “very young, in fact, six weeks old.” He was his mother’s only child. However, he does have a brother and a sister. They are his father’s children and “were not a part of his life.” After his mother’s death, Matthews was left with his grandmother when his father moved to another town and began a new family. Contact with him was rare. Matthews says this about his father:

He lived 18 miles away from us in Camden, Alabama. My father remarried. We would go periodically, my grandmother and me. We would catch the bus and go visit with my daddy for a little while, during the summer months. He was a farmer. He was quite a busy man. There was not a lot of interaction between the two of us. I loved him as my father, and I am certain he felt the same way. We just did not do a lot of communicating. We were not estranged from each other in any way. His name was John Henry Matthews. My father died on the 13th of November, 2004.

Given the limited interaction with his father, Matthews’ primary influence was his grandmother. He speaks of her with respect:

I was the only one living in the household, my grandmother and me. I say that with pride and authority. She was a Christian lady who believed very strongly in
the principles and precepts set by the Master. She subscribed to those, and she instilled them in me. Even though I strayed from them for a while, I never forgot her teachings. I never forgot her influence. She had a tremendous influence on my life.

Matthews’ grandmother set an example that emphasized church and ensured that he was actively involved in it at a young age. Matthews credits her with a great deal:

   My grandmother was the greatest influence I had growing up. Her love for me and for people, her persistence, and her desire to see me become something in life had the greatest influence on me. Even though I often disappointed her, she was always my protector, my hero, the wind beneath my wings. She was everything for me.

Matthews describes a lifestyle that was unsophisticated and typical then of rural areas throughout the South. His time was spent playing outdoors, visiting family in the local community, and attending church. There were very few amenities. A pot-bellied stove provided heat and was used for cooking. Matthews recalls, “We had outside toilets, never had an indoor toilet during the whole time I grew up.” Visits to town were infrequent. The only time he actually went to town as a child was by bus to Selma, 35 miles away. The bus belonged to the Snow Hill Institute, which used to be a little Tuskegee. It was a boarding school where my great grand uncle was the founder. W. J. Edwards was the founder of Snow Hill Institute. It was a blossoming institute. It was a school which drew mostly from students from places like New Orleans, Atlanta. Every now and then, the only time we would really go any place we would go to see a picture show; not a movie, we
called it a picture show. We would go there on a bus hat belonged to Snow Hill Institute. They would get a load of us, and we would all go and pay 25 cents to go to the movie.

Even shopping for clothes did not require a trip to town. Instead, clothes came from mail-order houses. Since Blacks were not allowed to try clothes and shoes on in the store, it was easier to order them from companies like Sears, Roebuck, and Company or National Bella Hess. Matthews recalls getting clothes from both companies. He also recalls that groceries came from a local area known as “the station.” Matthews says, “It was called “the station” because that’s where the train came and stopped. For our groceries, my uncle, Isadore Lott, who lived at the station, had a grocery store. He killed his own beef and did his own butchering, and that’s where we bought our groceries.”

Matthews’ family would probably have been considered elite among African Americans. Even though they did not have a lot, they were educated and were entrepreneurs. As we have seen, Matthews’ great uncle founded the local boarding school for Blacks. That uncle had graduated from The Tuskegee Institute. Matthews’ grandmother was a county schoolteacher, and two of his uncles owned grocery stores. These family members served as examples and role models for young Matthews.

His grandmother instilled in him the value of education alongside the value of faith. Matthews attended the segregated public schools where his grandmother taught. Their location varied from year to year depending on where the superintendent assigned his grandmother. There were no administrators in the school, not even a principal. Matthews recalls that his grandmother served as principal, teacher, aide, disciplinarian,
and counselor. She was everything. She was the school. A typical day during Matthews’ early school years started with a long walk.

We walked 13 miles one way going to and from school every day. That was 26 miles a day. We walked in the rain and the cold, because the only thing we got from the bus was the dust. There were no buses for us. And of course with her teaching I did not go to Snow Hill schools which we bypassed. She was appointed by the superintendent of schools of Wilcox County.

Upon arriving at school, Matthews and his grandmother had to get the place in order before classes began. This often included cutting wood for the school’s stove. Sometimes people living in the area would have the fire going when Matthews and his grandmother arrived at the school, but that was not typical. Matthews never got used to the cold buildings. The buildings, which were more often than not local church buildings, were often in poor physical condition with cracks in the wood that allowed the cold wind to blow in. Matthews learned at an early age the reality of being Black in the South. He learned that getting an education was not to be taken lightly and that moving forward required sacrifice.

Shiloh was the [school] where we walked 13 miles a day. The other schools we would catch a mule and a wagon. Sometimes [my grandmother and I] boarded with people in the community [due to the distance between home and school]. These were 1-room schools with a pot-bellied heater.

Perhaps the responsibilities and hardships he faced at such a young age helped build Matthews’ strong personality and character. He learned what it was like to take charge, to accept responsibility for his actions, and to respond to life’s challenges by
finding solutions. He learned to lean on family and the community when the going got tough. The valuable life lessons he learned from his grandmother helped shape the man Matthews would eventually become.

Matthews’ world also included other family members nearby:

There were two families. I guess in Snow Hill we were all cousins. There was a community of cousins, I guess you could say. We had just down the road from me, we had the Lee family. I think there were seven of those children, two girls and five boys, and those were my cousins. We were all relatives right there in the area. And then I had relatives about two and half miles away in . . . . “The station.” We lived over in an area by Spring Hill Institute.

The church and his grandmother as well as his “community of cousins” who seem to have shared common values shaped Matthews’ worldview. Like the community of care the interviewees described in the preceding chapter, the community cared for Matthews and his grandmother by ensuring that their needs were met. Indeed the village was responsible for caring for its own.

About the time Matthews turned 13, his grandmother retired from teaching. Until graduation, he then attended Snow Hill Institute that his great grand uncle had founded in 1893. After returning to Snow Hill from Tuskegee, Edwards (1918) had written,

I was more convinced than ever before of the great need of an Industrial School in the very midst of these people, a school that would correct the erroneous ideas the people held of education; a school that would make education practical rather than theoretical; a school that would train men and women to be good
workers, good husbands, good wives, and finally train them to be fit citizens of the State and proper subjects of the Kingdom of God. (p. 35)

Edwards thus founded the Snow Hill Institute as a trade and agricultural school with grades one to 12 based on the Tuskegee Institute model. At its peak, the school had 27 buildings, 35 staff, and over 400 students. It operated as a private school for African Americans until Dr. Edwards retired in 1924. It then became a public school operated by the State of Alabama until 1973, when court-ordered desegregation led to its closing.

Matthews graduated from Snow Hill Institute in 1947.

Leaving Home

From the Snow Hill Institute, Matthews went to Alabama State College (ASC) in Montgomery. ASC is a four-year, state-supported college originally located in Marion but moved to Montgomery because of racial tensions. Now known as Alabama State University, ASC figured prominently in the Montgomery Bus Boycott and the direct-action campaigns of the Civil Rights Movement.

Matthews’ grandmother paid his college expenses. He also worked in the Dean of Students Office at ASC. Matthews stayed at Alabama State only one semester, though. His aunt and uncle were in charge of the dining services there, and he “didn’t want to be monitored.” He knew that his aunt and uncle would report his every move to his grandmother. He wanted to do as he pleased. Matthews then went to Alabama A & M University where he stayed for three and a half years. Matthews preferred being farther away from home so Alabama A & M was a logical choice. An historically White institution of higher learning was not an option.
Matthews studied English at Alabama A & M. He developed a few casual relationships but none that he calls friendships. Most of these acquaintances were from Alabama, Louisiana, and other states in the South. Matthews attended parties but remained aloof from his acquaintances. He also dated but not seriously. He was not involved in any campus activities. In fact, after leaving school, he did not keep in touch with anyone he had met during his college years. During this period, Matthews remained restless and decided to leave college with only one semester remaining! He never returned.

I was just wild and wasn’t doing that well in school, but I wasn’t doing that bad in school. I just wanted to get away. I wanted to be a free spirit and just do as I please basically. That was my mindset. I just wanted to get away.

In 1950, Matthews entered the U.S. Army during the Korean Conflict. He served six years. Matthews “was awarded the Purple Heart with three clusters during the Korean War” (“Matthews Quits Employment,” 1978). During the time he served in Korea, Blacks were still in segregated units. Moreover, “Base facilities, such as post exchanges, clubs, theaters, and hospitals, were often denied to them [African Americans] or provided on a separate and distinctly unequal basis” (Klinkner and Smith, 1999, p. 166). Typically, Black soldiers held positions as cooks or other service-related jobs. Matthews, however, served as a Howitzer Operator. While serving in Korea, Matthews was wounded three times. Matthews is reluctant to talk about these experiences, even though he remained in Korea 14 months. A review of the archival data reflects his reluctance to talk about his tour of duty in Korea. Even after reviewing hundreds of print articles, I located only two short references to this time in his life.
While Matthews was still in Korea, Executive Order 9981 barring segregation in the Armed Forces was passed (Government Printing Office, 1957). Preliminary steps toward integration began. Matthews’ unit got integrated, but racial tensions and racial incidents increased. Klinkner and Smith (1999, p. 167) quote one veteran who said of African American soldiers, “Dying stateside was just as good, if not preferable to dying on foreign soil; all they had to lose was their lives.” Matthews voiced similar feelings upon his return to America:

When I got back from the war, I noticed that those we had been fighting were treated better than we were. Somehow that just didn’t seem right to me. I am an American citizen. It just didn’t sit well with me. I left and when I got back, I was saying to the world “look world, I’m back,” and I discovered the world didn’t even know I had even been gone. I felt utter disgust and hurt to know that I, and I don’t know how many other Black people, had spent time in Korea fighting an enemy for this country, and this country recognized me as nothing. It was hard to take.

In an interview years earlier, Matthews also expressed what he felt returning from Korea. To a Pensacola News Journal columnist (Taylor, 1969, p. A18), he said, We find ourselves free on paper, but yet slaves to a degree, slaves in that we are not allowed to share in the good life that other Americans and even people form foreign countries enjoy. I stand this morning not with a chip on my shoulder, but certainly with a degree of disgust and dissatisfaction with the system of this America of ours. I know what it is to fight and shed blood for this country and yet return to the shores of the very same country that I as an American fought to
protect and still feel myself being denied the Rights and privileges that are
granted those persons who are natives of the country I fought against. Nothing is
more sickening than this.

DuBois (1919, p. 13) wrote similarly of African American soldiers of World
War I upon their return to America: “From the slavery of uniform, we are returning
from war . . . . This is the country to which we Soldiers of Democracy return . . . . We
return from fighting. We return fighting.”

Despite the absence of significant social and political changes in America, a
number of financial and educational benefits were available to Matthews. His military
service qualified him for the Serviceman’s Readjustment program, more commonly
known as the GI Bill of Rights passed in 1944. Matthews would eventually use these
benefits to seek training in the new field of computers.

Matthews returned to Snow Hill fighting the discouragement he felt, fighting to
fit in, fighting to understand why this democracy excluded its darker-skinned citizens.
He returned to the community where he knew he would be cared for, he returned home
to his grandmother. During the year back in Snow Hill, Matthews did not work. He used
the time to reflect on what he wanted to do and where to go. He says, “There was
nothing in Snow Hill except my grandmother who raised me.” He knew he would
eventually leave, even though his grandmother never did because “she had to attend to
her chickens.”

In 1957, Matthews moved to Pensacola to live with his uncle, Abbott S.
Johnson, a minister who also owned a grocery store. Matthews enjoyed living with his
uncle and working in his store. Matthews worked there until his uncle sold it roughly
one year after Matthews began working there. He developed close friendships with his uncle’s children that would last a lifetime. In fact, one cousin, Katherine Johnson Goldsmith, became one of his best friends. They kept in touch and supported each other until her death in 2005. Like many members of the Johnson family, Katherine was educated. She was a registered nurse and the first African American to teach nursing in the Florida Community College System.

Matthews lived with his uncle until he could afford to move out on his own. He says he worked in his uncle’s grocery store because it “was just something to do.” After the store closed, he worked at odd jobs ranging from day laborer to dairy work. He says, “All I wanted to do was to work a day or two to catch me another bottle of liquor. That’s all I was interested in at that time. I wasn’t concerned about nothing else.” So Matthews continued to drink and go from one job to another.

The life Matthews lived during his first few years in Pensacola was nothing like his life in Snow Hill. He married his first wife in 1957 but did not change his lifestyle, at least not the drinking. This marriage lasted more than 20 years. His wife was a native of Mariana, Florida. During much of the time he was married, he did not attend church, in fact, going to church was “the last thing on [his] mind.” While still working at different jobs, Matthews began studying computers at the local junior college. He was still living a lifestyle that never seems to have satisfied him. For just over two years, he lived that way. He knew he needed to do better. He wanted to make his grandmother proud of him.

In November 1959, Matthews’ life changed forever. Going to school on the GI Bill, he was getting $80 dollars a month in educational benefits. He also had another
$50 a month from renting a room to a boarder. According to Matthews, this Friday evening began as usual with heavy drinking.

The check [from the GI Bill] came on Friday. I started drinking that Friday night, and that Sunday morning I had $17 left out of that $80. I had drunk up $63 worth of liquor and beer and wine and whatever else and setting people up. You know, when you’re drunk, you got all kind of friends. That Sunday, the 20th, with the $17 I still had, I bought a quart of Speerman Beer. I was in bed, and I didn’t say anything to my wife. I didn’t say anything to anybody. I poured up a glass of beer, and I held it up and I looked at it. And I said to myself when I drink this, I’m not drinking any more. That was on Sunday night, November 20, 1959. From that day to this day, I have not had a drink of alcohol. I made no conscious effort to stop. It just happened overnight. I give the Lord the credit for taking the desire away from me.

Everyone seemed to expect Matthews to return to the lifestyle he had been living. Matthews himself often wondered just what caused him to turn away from alcohol: “People asked me, what happened. I say to people I don’t know what happened; I just don’t know what happened.” Though Matthews never quite figured out how he turned away from alcohol to activism, one of his friends thinks that Matthews’ conscience eventually caused him to look inward and make the change.

I would go to two [night] spots on Jordan and Alcaniz. That’s where the juke was. Boy, I’d get loaded and I’d be coming home. I’d be stumbling and staggering, making one step forward and two steps backward. There was a field down below my house, and the children would be out there playing, including
my son, who is now 56, and they would say, “There go yo’ ole drunk daddy.”

And he would get in a fight, and I never paid that too much attention. But this friend of mine said, “You might not realize it and this might be a part of it, maybe subconsciously that triggered you to stop drinking.” If it did, thank God for it.

Once Matthews sobered up, he took a look at what was going on in his community. He saw a city divided. He saw all the conditions and scenarios described in the last chapter.

Lifting the Veil

Life in Pensacola in the 1960s was much like life in any other small Southern town. About this era, Brink and Harris (1963, p. 23) write, “Not many Negroes have any real idea of what it means to be a part of White society. Because of the segregation and discrimination that have shackled their lives, they rarely know the freedom of being able to select the restaurant or hotel of their choice.” Although Matthews was aware of such racism in Pensacola and elsewhere, prior to 1960, he took no interest in social action or getting involved. Then he happened to hear a wake-up call:

I recognized the racism that existed, but that was not on my front burner. I have often described Pensacola as 1 of the most racist cities in the world, and I think that was a pretty accurate description during that particular era. It wasn’t until 1960 that I guess the giant within me was awakened by a preacher by the name of Reverend W. C. Dobbins who came to pastor at St. Paul United Methodist Church.
Perhaps the reason Matthews responded so readily to Dobbins had more to do with timing than with the actual words spoken by Dobbins. It might well be that Dobbins’ message resounded with Matthews because of his own beliefs about the roles ministers should play in the community. Matthews wrote an article in the *Pensacola Call and Post* (“Failure of the Church,” 1969) commenting on the role of the church. Matthews believes

Those of us who are ministers must make our gospel broad enough to cover more than just the narrow space behind our pulpits . . . . We must take it outside the boundaries of our church grounds. Our aims should be to teach our people to rebel against slavery in any form . . . . Which directly affects them and their livelihood. You can’t possibly preach the gospel without preaching deliverance in all forms. We must restore the faith . . . of people in our religious leaders by proving to them that we are interested in the total human being. (p. 4)

Reverend Matthews had seen members of the African American community routinely treated with disrespect and contempt. They lived in the shadow of fear. He shared these feelings:

All of this stuff was just kind of stacked up on the inside, and it was awakened. It was lying dormant within me because I had seen how my grandmother was treated; how she was called auntie, how her first name was auntie; Black men’s first names were boy or uncle or preacher. I knew that wasn’t my name, and I knew auntie was not her name ‘cause I had always known her as Lucy P. Johnson, and to me she was mother. I mean that’s all I ever called her was mother. It took getting the liquor out of my life, the alcohol out of my life for me
to recognize, after some prodding by Reverend Dobbins and the Pensacola Council of Ministers, what I had within me.

When Matthews speaks of Dobbins and the Pensacola Council of Ministers, he emphasizes that they saw that he had a special way of talking to people and genuinely listening to their concerns. In fact, Dobbins and the Council asked Matthews to join their group even before he became a minister, which was highly unusual. They felt that he was ready for service because he had already begun work on his own. A strong bond developed between Matthews and Dobbins:

I worked with him and the Council. I was the only non-minister who was accepted into the Pensacola Council of Ministers because I, in those few months, I gained the reputation. I was working at Baptist Hospital as a janitor and gained the reputation of at least listening to what people had to say if they came with complaints. I listened, and I would at least seek answers so they welcomed me into the Pensacola Council of Ministers almost a year before I did my initial sermon.

In 1956, Reverend Dobbins had established the Council of Ministers to “encourage Blacks to demonstrate for what rightfully belonged to them” (Harris, 1976). Two years later, Matthews started the NAACP Youth Council and served as its advisor. Matthews explains his reasons for getting involved in the NAACP (Harris):

I became committed because having lived in the South, in all America, really, having seen people deprived simply because they belonged to a minority group, I felt this organization offered me an opportunity to work toward an end – to make the word ‘democracy’ a reality in our society. (p. B1)
During the same period, two White organizations were established in northwest Florida. Both the White Citizen’s Council and the Federation for Constitution Government of Escambia County were determined to fight the integration of schools and to maintain the existing system. As new organizations were being formed on both sides of the race issue, President Kennedy (“Kennedy Asks Unprecedented,” 1963) appealed to Congress to help address the escalating divisions and violence sweeping the South:

> Look into your hearts and help end rancor, violence, disunity, and national shame by passing the Civil Rights bill . . . . Demonstrations have increasingly endangered lives and property, enflamed emotions and unnecessarily divided communities. This is not the way this country should rid itself of racial discrimination. The problem is now before Congress. (p. A6)

Pensacola joined other cities in protesting social injustice. With the support of the Council of Ministers, Dobbins and the NAACP Youth Council began a letter writing campaign to downtown stores requesting that they “voluntarily desegregate their public lunch counters” (Butler, 2001, p. 293). The letters made it clear that if the owners did not integrate the lunch counters, sit-ins would begin. True to form, White business owners ignored these letters. One member of the NAACP Youth Council told me,

> I think myself and the others, we were sophomores in high school. Reverend Dobbins would conduct what we called mild mass meetings, and he would provide us with education and the history of the Civil Rights Movement specifically. He also talked about right versus wrong, justice versus injustice. Essentially, the culmination of his leadership led to the sit-in movement as we
knew it in the late ‘50s, which was about 1958, 1959, 1960 in that area. He led
the movement to integrate the lunch counters here, and for that he became
known on the one hand as a troublemaker and on the other hand as a hero, a hero
in the Black community, a troublemaker in the White community.

Another person who worked downtown during that time recalls that the only
positions Blacks held were cleaning or stocking the stores:

Even though I was working at Carmanella’s, I was cleaning. I did stock. There
was a Lerner, and there was a Leonard. But this was Leonard. They tried to get
him to hire Black people, and he said he wasn’t going to hire anybody. He said
he served more out the back door to niggers than he did out front. During the
time that the marches and sit-ins were going on, there was no one store
downtown that was trying to do things; there was not one. None of them:
Kresses, Elebesh’s, Newberry’s, Carmanella’s, Sam’s Style Shop, Ed White,
and Douglas Allen, none of them hired Blacks.

Dobbins was tenacious in his attack on such institutionalized racism and
segregation. Emulating the tactics in use throughout the South, he and Matthews set out
to launch the sit-ins. He rallied the Pensacola Council of Ministers. Under its auspices
as well as the support of the adult branch of the NAACP, sit-ins began.

On April 5, 1960, “Dobbins and nine youths entered the Whites-only dining
area at the city’s Woolworth” (Butler, 2001, p. 293). This began the sit-ins. Youth
played pivotal roles in them. Reverend Matthews, as advisor to the NAACP Youth
Council, was fully involved. In fact, he launched a chapter of another organization - the
Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) – to broaden their scope. He also began a youth auxiliary of SCLC. Matthews explained the reason for two youth groups:

The NAACP Youth Council was free to do a lot of things the adult branch could not do. But there were restrictions; there were limitations with the NAACP. Those limitations were not put on us with the SCLC. For instance, we could not use the word boycott with the NAACP. That was a no-no because there had been [law] suits filed. And there were just certain tactics that the NAACP was not at liberty to use that SCLC could use. We were never in competition with each another. It was a joint venture. And things that the NAACP was limited in doing we could do as the SCLC chapter. There was just a coming together of the two entities and moving forward with what we had to do. We used both of them to our end.

After the sit-in at Woolworth’s, that activity stopped for more than a year in large measure due to renewed attention to school desegregation. In the summer of 1961, Carswell, the judge in the Augustus desegregation case, ruled that Escambia County schools were in violation of the Brown decision but did not give specific directions on how or when integration should occur. Escambia County School attorney, William Fisher, stated that the plan should favor gradual desegregation. Procedures were put in place to discourage Black students from transferring to White schools. The NAACP (Randolph, 1969) objected to the school integration plan:

The main objection, according to Reverend Matthews, is that all Negro schools will remain predominantly Negro and some schools remain all White. At the same time, formerly all-White schools will be attended solely by White students.
and provides the least amount of integration at those schools. Matthews said he believed that the plan does not effectively eliminate the dual school system as ordered by the courts. (p. C3)

This action, along with escalating racial tension and resistance by Whites, led Matthews and Dobbins to resume the sit-ins. With the addition of the SCLC youth group, the number participating in the sit-ins increased. Matthews recalls,

Our tactics were to hit the merchants in the pocket book. These tactics were very effective because we had no trouble marshalling followers at that time. I have seen the time that I could walk out my door and in 30 minutes, I could have 150-200 kids to do whatever we wanted to do. The boycott had two effects. It kept most African Americans out of the downtown . . . . It kept Black people from going into those stores. In addition . . . people are not too prone, Black or White, to cross picket lines. White people also honored the boycott, even though in their minds they were dishonoring it. So they didn’t come [downtown], which meant that the merchants would suffer and rather than continue losing money, they negotiated with us and agreed to let us sit at the counter.

The sit-ins, selective purchasing, and boycotts angered some Whites who turned to violence against the youth. Pensacola police ignored the violence. Matthews reports other official misbehavior:

The policemen would come in, pick flash light batteries up off the counter, and stick them in the kids’ pockets, then arrest them for shoplifting. White people would come in. We had occasions where they threw battery acid on the kids and burned them with cigarette butts. We went through it in just trying to get the
right to sit at the lunch counter. That did not deter us. We had sit-ins day in and
day out. We eventually were successful in desegregating the lunch counters.

Reverend H. K. Matthews, Civil Rights Leader

Despite the harassment and violence, the protests continued and even expanded.
In 1963, Reverend Dobbins was assigned to a church in another state. One participant
comments, “I think they moved him out because of that [Civil Rights activism]. But he
was very instrumental.” Another participant also reports that Reverend Dobbins was
reassigned “maybe in part because of his activism here.” Then Reverend Matthews took
over at the helm:

After Reverend Dobbins, who was the movement’s first mover and shaker in
Pensacola, left the area, then the mantel of leadership was kind of just thrust
upon me. I was, according to the people, the acknowledged leader of the Black
community.

Matthews describes how he felt about taking the leadership role:

It was my time. And needless to say, I gloried in a lot of it. It made me feel like I
was ‘sho nuff’ something being declared the leader by the people. I never
declared myself a leader that was far from me. Leaders, I think, are born. That
inward trait of leadership is brought out at a later time either by circumstances or
by people. I think in my situation, it was brought out by both circumstances and
people. When I recognized my own self-worth, then I was not afraid to step up
to the plate and assume those leadership roles that people said that I had.
During this period, Matthews also participated in national protests. In 1965, he was one of over 600 protestors to march across the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, Alabama on what is commonly referred to as Bloody Sunday. Matthews recalls,

When the call came out for people to come to Selma to be a part of the march, to show solidarity, to show some unity, I had a 1957 pink and white Ford Fairlane, and I jumped in my little Ford and I took off to Selma. And I was not a leader in the march by any stretch of the imagination. I was just a part of the movement. I was just one of the hundreds in the march who happened to have been attacked, who happened to have been in the line of fire and got a little hurt. I was not jailed in Selma, just beaten. I didn’t get jailed in Selma.

Matthews’ account alludes to how “With little warning the troopers advanced on the marchers, shooting tear gas into the crowd and assaulting the demonstrators with nightsticks. Selma police, along with supremacist groups, attacked the marchers from behind” (Winters, 2000, p. 33). While Matthews escaped being jailed there, he did not escape injury:

I guess I was hit several places, but my knees took the worst bruise. I think I was hit while I was on the ground and didn’t think too much about it, but I was hurting and went to the doctor in Selma and got some ABC’s or whatever they give you for pain, but in later years it was discovered that I have degenerative arthritis in that knee which bothers me every day. It wasn’t a fun thing.

Matthews went on to share his thoughts about being attacked by law enforcement officers:
The very people who should have been protecting us were the ones who attacked us. How can human beings treat other human beings in this fashion? How could they possibly attack unarmed people whose only purpose was to get across that bridge and get to Montgomery? I cannot understand. I never will understand except that they were eaten up by ignorance and stupidity. During that time, I think the focus in hiring deputies and troopers was to get the worst kind that you could get. I think that they wanted to get the most ignorant; the most backwoods people to keep niggers under control.

Despite having been injured in Selma, Matthews was determined to continue fighting for social justice. Yet a Pensacola News Journal editorial (“Negroes have attained,” 1965) concluded that “there can be little question they have attained all of the really important legal objectives they have battled for during the past decade” (p. C1). Matthews of course disagreed with this analysis. Although he did not participate in the second march across the Pettus Bridge, his activism did not wane:

There was a continuous effort for opening up of public accommodations in Pensacola. The opening up of public accommodations, movies, downtown department stores, the lunch counters, and then employment for Blacks, there were just many, many pushes that we initiated in order to bring about some semblance of Civility as it relates to us – employment, open public accommodations, and the like.

We see, then, that “Matthews became spokesman for the Black community at a crucial juncture in the area’s Civil Rights Movement. He assumed leadership after schools integrated but before many establishments served Blacks” (Butler, 2001, p.
One participant comments on how Matthews assumed the role of leader in the local Civil Rights Movement:

He was naturally considered our leader. He was the person that we all kind of looked to for a sense of direction. He had marched with Martin Luther King. He had marched with other noted Civil Rights leaders. He was in and out of Pensacola to go to important national meetings so he had the pulse of what was really happening on a national level, which put him in a position of power, in a manner of speaking, in the leadership capacity.

Like other African Americans throughout the South, Matthews responded to the needs of his community and became involved in the local movement. While Matthews describes himself as a disciple of Dobbins, it might be more appropriate to say that Reverend had already begun to fight even before he met Dobbins. In an interview with a reporter for the *Pensacola News Journal* (Taylor, 1969) Matthews is quoted as saying,

For in this year of 1969 we as Black people in America and especially in Pensacola, we find ourselves not being able to drink from the Fountain of Freedom. . . . Black people are no longer satisfied with the Rights being doled out to them by those who propose to be in power, but they want a share of America. This is all they want, no more and no less, and they are determined not to wait any longer. (p. A18)

Continuing in the same article, Matthews addresses two areas of concerns for Blacks and concludes that, “America, in this year of 1969, has defaulted on its promise to the Black people of this country.” He further comments that,
We have a mighty long way to go here in Pensacola. Two of the worst areas in the City of Pensacola are those of Equal Employment Opportunities and access to so-called public accommodations . . . . Equal opportunity in the field of employment for Black people in this city is viewed by the average Black person through mighty hazy glasses, glasses that are clouded over by the clouds of suspicion and distrust . . . . The absence of Black people in meaningful employment in our city is so conspicuous until it is frightening.

Matthews had come a long way from Snow Hill and had experienced the beginnings of the changes that his own efforts would further. Still, he had a long way to go. Let us now look at the remainder of this Civil Rights journey.
CHAPTER VI
REVEREND MATTHEWS AT THE HELM

Gerald McKenzie, a prominent Pensacola attorney, talked about Matthews’ status (Moon, 2004):

H. K. Matthews is highly respected in the Pensacola community. He has earned this respect by providing strong leadership in the area of Civil Rights and human Rights . . . . Unfortunately, Mr. Matthews had to suffer personal setbacks and costs that very few of us would be willing to endure. (p. C1)

LeRoy Boyd, community activist and founder of Movement for Change, says of Matthews, “I just love the man. He did so much in our community for so many people” (Moon, p. C1). Boyd was a member of the NAACP Youth Council during the Civil Rights era and participated in many of the protests that Matthews led. Boyd often refers to Matthews as his mentor.

This mentor’s style was confrontational. His speeches used language that outraged most Whites and perhaps farther fueled their resistance to integration.

Matthews did not feel that Blacks should be thankful for Rights guaranteed to them by the Constitution:

We were not really waging a war against White people. We were waging a war against evil, right against wrong, and we felt that based on the Constitution, based on the Constitution that I use every Sunday [the Bible], that we had that
right. We felt that God was on our side. There was a strong faith; a strong
determination to press forward for what we knew was rightfully ours.

Matthews knew that his style was offensive to the White power structure, while
Reverend B. J. Brooks’ style was much less aggressive. The two of them devised a plan
to get the job of equal Rights and social justice done. Who would take the lead in
different situations would vary depending on which was likely to be effective.
Matthews describes the division of labor he and Brooks established back when Brooks
was president of the local NAACP chapter:

There were instances when White people would just dogmatically refuse to deal
with H. K. Matthews. They would just say, “We’re not going to deal with him.
He’s too pushy. He’s too boisterous. We’re not going to deal with him.” So, we
would say to Reverend Brooks, you handle this, and he would go with the same
demands but in a calmer way and so we got what H. K. Matthews and the SCLC
wanted, but it was accomplished by Reverend Brooks and the NAACP.

Thus local Black organizations worked together to achieve their shared goals.
Brooks was often the front man in face-to-face interactions with local officials. When a
more forceful tactic was needed, Reverend Matthews took the lead.

And all we wanted was results and it really didn’t matter who got the credit. So,
we used White people in that when they thought they were getting rid of me,
they had me in Reverend Brooks with the same demand, and they granted those
things in a lot of instances. And then in a lot of things, he would go in a calm
voice, and they felt he was a pushover. But he was not by any stretch of the
imagination. And they wouldn’t listen to him. So, he would say, Matt, you need to go and light them up a little bit. And I would go and light them up a little bit.

While housing, employment, education, public accommodations, and police brutality were among the Civil Rights issues Reverend Matthews and other local leaders addressed, two areas consumed much of Matthews’ energy. One was school integration, as we have already seen in preliminary terms, the other, the killing of an unarmed Black man by Pensacola police.

Integrating Pensacola’s Schools

The transition from segregated schools to integrated ones challenged longstanding social norms. Most Whites wanted to maintain the status quo. In fact, as we saw, it took a court order in 1962 to force school integration in Escambia County. The Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals ruled that the Escambia County School District violated the Brown decision and mandated that integration should begin in 1962. Integration proceeded slowly, though, in part because the court included no specific dates and in part because of the restrictive policies put in place by the School Board. In order for Black students to transfer to a White school, they had to complete a transfer form. Matthews describes the process and restrictions in a *Pensacola News Journal* (“Transfer Forms Requested,” 1969) article:

Black parents whose children attend racially unbalanced schools are being asked to petition school authorities for transfers to schools whose populations are predominately White. Applications will be made for transfers to school with less than 10 percent Black populations; requests must be submitted to the Escambia
County School Board for final approval. Students for whom transfers are approved must furnish their own transportation. (p. A2)

With such restrictions in place, very few Black students completed the paperwork for transferring to predominantly White schools.

In 1969, the District Court mandated that Escambia County School Board put in place a plan to move integration forward. Matthews commented at the time (“Zone Integration Hit by Matthews,” 1969) as recorded in the *Pensacola News Journal*:

> Escambia is under court order to speed integration of its schools. And the County School Board has proposed a zone plan to be considered in U. S. District Court. After studying the distribution of the student population as provided for under this plan and the closing down of certain schools (all Black and no White), it occurred to me that this was not a good plan after all and would certainly cause objections to be raised in the Black community. (p. A2)

Matthews goes on to describe the racial makeup of local schools at that time, a full eight years after court-ordered integration:

> There is one school which has 331 White and two Blacks; one has 139 White and one Black; one has 675 Whites and seven Blacks; one has 398 Whites and one Black; one has 824 Whites and one Black, and one school has 578 Black and 78 White; and some of the schools are going to remain lily White.

Moving the Escambia County School system toward full integration was so slow that the U.S. Office of Education provided emergency funds to Escambia County to speed it up. Black leaders questioned the allocation of funds for the desegregation
plan as well as the makeup of the committee formed to carry out the mandate. Bogan, (1973, January 18d), writes in this article in the Pensacola News Journal:

Three Negro leaders charged Escambia County with bad faith in the failure to comply with U. S. Office of Education guidelines for the $225,000 emergency desegregation project. The three [Matthews, Leverette, and Brooks], along with other community leaders, have faulted the administration for failure to form an advisory committee prior to the submission of the program proposal as required by the guidelines. (p. A3)

Matthews and other leaders also continued bringing attention to the small number of Blacks employed as educational personnel (Jackson, 1969) writes:

Reverend Matthews complained that the 465 non-White teachers employed by the Escambia County school system fail to comprise the 20 to 27 percent ratio set by U.S. District Judge Winston Arnow’s order. Total teachers listed in the report were 2,171 for the countywide system. “This order went into effect July 1, 1969, if it is not in force by fall, the NAACP will seek relief in the courts. (p. A3)

By the early 1970s, Pensacola could best be characterized as volatile with many Whites resisting court-ordered integration and Blacks pushing for integration. Letters to the editor of the Pensacola News Journal were filled with advice on how to handle the “race problem.” The advice ranged from mild to sarcastic. Here is one example from a 1973 letter to the editor (Wiggins, 1973):

I think it is time someone made a comment concerning the demands of the NAACP representatives in this area and those who are imported into the
situation. The demands that the name “Rebel” and “Rebellaires” be changed and that the singing of “Dixie” should be stopped are childish, immature and of no consequence to serious minded young people and adults. If this is all that the NAACP has to complain about, then the situation has been blown up out of all proportions. Why not let the school authorities punish the offenders and get on with the education of children? (p. B3)

As we will soon see, this letter concerns the situation that emerged at Escambia High School (EHS). Another example of advice from a White writer to Black activists (Lanius, 1973) follows:

“Dixie” always was a grand song and I am sure it always will be. Those people who use the song as an excuse to stir up strife and dissension are, of course, merely troublemakers, who would use any flimsy excuse to foment discord. If they really think that this wonderful country is such a terrible place to live, why don’t they go to Africa or the Soviet Union? (p. B3)

The school most resistant to integration was Escambia High School. Matthews recalls that it was called at that time the Escambia High Rebels. They waved the Confederate flag. They carried it at the football games; they had Johnny Reb running up and down the field at the football games. Our contention was, and I say I led it but with the assistance of Reverend Brooks, and Reverend R. N. Gooden, and Reverend Otha Leverette. We were all leaders. The Black kids were, as they are now, in the minority at Escambia High School. The White kids . . . . Were flaunting it [the flag] in [the Black kids’] face because I know it offends you . . .
And that was the problem at Escambia High School, they flaunted the flag. They used Johnny Reb. The band played “Dixie.”

When violence erupted at Escambia High School late in 1972, Reverend Matthews helped to address students’ concerns and worked with the Escambia County School Board to ease tension there. The principal of EHS looked for ways to stem the growing racial turmoil. He “scheduled several meetings . . . . With dissident groups in an effort to ease tensions on his campus. Sheriff’s deputies were stationed at the school for two days prior to Christmas holidays in an effort to ease tensions at the school” (Bogan, 5 January 1973a, p. A1). The leaders of the NAACP made it clear that students would not return to school in the spring if their demands were not met. Since “Florida state funding for public schools is based on the number of pupils reporting to class” (Bogan, p. A1), that strategy made practical sense.

As January approached, the school board and the Civil Rights groups were unable to reach a compromise. The boycott was set to go, but (Bogan, 5 January 1973a, p. A1) “two days before classes resumed, Escambia County school superintendent J. E. Hall announced a compromise to prevent school boycotts that satisfied Blacks, angered Whites, and increased White resistance to Black equality in the Florida panhandle.” The compromise included an agreement that charges against students and faculty arrested during the disturbances at EHS would be dropped and that a moratorium on “Dixie” would be put in place to provide a cooling-off period until interracial councils could decide on official school songs and symbols.

When the School Board rejected the superintendent’s compromise (Jackson, 1973), the boycott of Escambia County schools began. Deputies were on site at EHS.
On January 5, 1973, Gooden of the state’s NAACP “announced a compromise concerning the Escambia High situation” (Board, Blacks reach accord,” 1973, p. A1). The compromise had been negotiated without the approval of the local NAACP, however, and did not address the critical issues of “Dixie” and the rebel flag. Concerned about the continuing lack of progress, Florida’s Education Commissioner met with the Escambia County School Board (Newman, 1973):

If local Blacks go to court protesting use of the Confederate flag at Escambia High School, they well may win. In 1970, a Louisiana District Court ruled that “retention of Confederate flags in a unitary (desegregated) school system is no way to eliminate racial discrimination.” The ruling was later affirmed by the U. S. Fifth Circuit Court in New Orleans. (p. A1)

The band continued to play “Dixie.” Weapons were confiscated from both Black and White students, and the fighting continued. Some Black students and staff were arrested. Parents, other concerned citizens, and the superintendent of schools met to look for solutions. Matthews, Brooks, and Leverette presented a petition to the School Board. Matthews made it clear that if its demands went unmet, they would call for a “walkout by Black students.” The response to these demands was swift (Bogan, 15 January 1973c):

The Board adopted a resolution declaring that boycotts and walkouts are not excusable reasons for school absences. In other words, from this day forward those students will get zeroes for those days . . . no leniency will be shown to students where parents claim to be keeping them out for fear of disruptions. (p. A3)
The boycott of schools resumed, and Brooks announced, “We are not going back until that song and that flag are gone” (Bogan, 13 January 1973b, p. A1).

Concerned about Black students’ education, Black leaders started “Freedom Schools.” Such schools did not originate in Pensacola. “The idea came from Charles Cobb, a member of SNCC and a Howard University student who laid the plans for such schools during the summer of 1964 while participating in Civil Rights activities in Mississippi” (Zinn, 2000, p. 512). According to Reverend Matthews,

The first Freedom School was established at Allen Chapel A. M. E. Church. We had people; retired teachers and other people came in and taught there. I must admit that our Freedom Schools in Pensacola were successful. I even organized Freedom Schools in Defuniak Springs because of some of the same reasons.

With school integration taking center stage in the media not only in Escambia County but elsewhere in Florida as well, State legislators W. D. Childers and R. W. “Smokey” Peaden, both from Pensacola, weighed in on the rebel flag and “Dixie.” Both men attended the School Board meeting on January 15. Their presence added to the growing unrest (Bogan, 15 January 1973c):

We are backing legislation to eliminate all unlawful and illegal boycotts from affecting state funds based on average daily attendance. This will eliminate the Blackmail aspect of the protest. “I [Childers] am really surprised at Reverend Brooks since he is on the state payroll and his salary is paid by state dollars . . . he should expend his energies helping build roads. (p. A3)

While local activists and state officials argued, the Justice Department intervened (Newman, 1973). Its representative refused to say who had asked for the
intervention. He reported, “I’ll simply be asking the federal court to enjoin or amend the desegregation order to prohibit the display or use of the Confederate flag in the entire unitary school system of Escambia County” (Newman). Thus, the local court was forced to take action.

After days of testimony from both sides, Judge Winston Arnow issued a temporary injunction against use of the rebel symbols. It would be several months before a final decision would be made. During this time, Reverend Matthews became more vocal. He was considered an agitator and a thorn in the side of the White community:

I was always accused of being a rabble-rouser, being a Communist, being an agitator. I always wore that agitator thing proudly. ‘Cause I said an agitator is like those old washing machines. It’s the thing that was in the middle that spun around and round and round and slung the dirt out of the clothes. I said that’s me. I’m here to sling the dirt out of the system if I can.

Unrest at EHS again boiled over. After Judge Arnow’s ruling, Black parents were elated, but White parents were angry and felt that their heritage was being discounted. The School Board sided with White parents and decided to fight the court ruling. Black students felt more and more disenfranchised. Fighting resumed, and Matthews was called to the scene:

I was the one again who was foolish enough to get immersed in it. I went to the school. Not only did the students call me to that campus at Escambia High School. The principal also called me one of the mornings when things got out of hand because he told me he could do nothing with the Black kids, and he wanted
me to come and assure them that they were going to be all right. That was my first felony arrest at that time. I went to the scene. The deputy school superintendent met with me and promised that students would not go to jail if they dispersed peacefully. I addressed the students through a deputy’s bullhorn, begged everyone to cease fighting, and asked the students to obey the officers. I also announced that nobody is going to jail. After my announcement, I was arrested and taken to jail along with five other Blacks. That was my first felony arrest.

Matthews was charged with riot incitement. This arrest set the pattern for what was to come. Eventually, Matthews would be arrested many more times:

I had a total of 35 arrests in the city. I can’t recall them all. It was trespassing here, picketing here. It was just trumped up stuff, anything they could get to try to make life difficult for me.

Other Black leaders began to emerge. They urged interracial cooperation and shied away from the radical views of Matthews and Brooks. Tension and racial disharmony began spreading to other local high schools. Matthews got called to Pensacola High School:

The students wanted to have a Black history assembly at Pensacola High School. The administration refused. I just pulled all of the Black students out of the school and set them on the lawn outside of Pensacola High School, you know where that little circle is and went back to work. I was working at the employment service. I told them [the students] to stay there until they [the
administration] agreed. And I told the principal, “They’re going to stay out here until you decide to let them have a Black history assembly.”

Matthews was certain that his tactic would work so he returned to his job at the Employment Security office.

I guess it wasn’t 15, 20 minutes later a deputy sheriff called me and said, “Reverend Matthews, you need to come up to the school.” I said, “For what?” “So these students can get back in class.” I said, “They’re not going back until they decide to have a Black history program.” And so we hung up. About five or six minutes later, he called me back, “Look, I’ve talked to the principal, I’ve talked to administrators. Come please and get these kids back in class. They’re going to have a Black history assembly and they said that they want you to speak.” So I went, and I told them to go back to class and when the decision is made when you are going to have the assembly, I’ll speak. They went back to class.

Matthews’ activities did not go unnoticed. People wanted him fired. Matthews says, “The boss I had at Florida State Employment Service knew what I was doing even though people were writing letters to L. F. “Bud” Shebel down in Tallahassee about my activities.”

On the advice of legal counsel, Matthews asked for a letter from the state head of Employment Services stating that there “will be no attempt to regulate my activities involving Civil Rights when I am serving as a representative of the NAACP . . . . While I am off work, as long as what I am doing is not illegal or immoral.” In response to Matthews’ request, L. F. Shebel (personal communication, April 30, 1969) wrote:
As you aware, it has been necessary on several occasions for Mr. Pearce to investigate complaints at our request from persons unknown in the Pensacola community regarding your involvement in the Civil Rights Movement. Your manager, Mr. Pearce, has kept this office fully informed of your activities, and we are aware of the problems that you have encountered as a Civil Rights leader in your community . . . . I can assure you that if your manager, or representatives from the state office, considered your activities . . . . To be illegal or immoral, that this would have been brought to your attention long ago.

Matthews’ activism continued uninterrupted. He spoke out on school integration, protested unfair hiring practices, and wrote editorials criticizing local elected officials and the use of tax funds to purchase riot equipment. He seemed to have his hand on the pulse of the community.

They went to great lengths to try to silence me, to make me shut up. And sometimes I say to myself, maybe I should have. But the more that I look at it, I say, “No I shouldn’t have.” I went to court on my first felony arrest, inciting a riot, and went to court and was exonerated by an all-White jury. I had a little hope at that time in the justice system. That hope was soon to be dashed.

Not only was the White community growing angrier with Matthews, but also some in the Black community distanced themselves more from him as well. McMillan, a Black elementary school principal, started the Escambia County Coalition without inviting recognized leaders of the local Civil Rights Movement to join the coalition. Instead he asserted that “The demonstrations and confrontations of the 60s that drew attention to the Black’s problem and destroyed unfair laws have now become
counterproductive and create an atmosphere of mass hysteria that make any real progress impossible” (“Black Groups Express Unity,” 1973). With deepening divisions in the Black community as well as continued resistance from many White citizens, Judge Arnow made his final decision about the Confederate symbols. Matthews recalls that the judge “ruled that they were racial irritants and that they should be done away with at Escambia High School.” Though the Escambia County School Board fought the ruling and committed $15,000 in taxpayers’ funds to challenge the verdict, the ruling stood. Years later, it would be overturned, but the school already had a new song and mascot.

Official Violence

There were two incidents that would propel Matthews even more to the forefront of the Civil Rights Movement. One, already mentioned, was the killing of an unarmed Black man by a White police officer, the other, the suspicious drowning of five Black men. In late 1974, within weeks of each other, these two incidents occurred.

On November 30, five Black men from Atlanta drowned in Santa Rosa Sound. A Department of Justice investigation declared the deaths accidental. Black tempers flared again on December 20, 1974 when Escambia County Sheriff’s Deputy Doug Raines shot and killed an unarmed Black man named Wendell Blackwell. “A grand jury ruled the death justifiable homicide; Blacks called it murder.” In response, Reverend Matthews requested a Justice Department probe of and local grand jury investigation into the Blackwell shooting, demanded Sheriff Royal Untreiner suspend Douglas Raines until all investigations ended, force his
deputy to take a polygraph test concerning the event, and hire more Black
deputies (Broadview Interviews, personal communication, August 1978).

Amidst the growing suspicions in the Black community that Blackwell’s death
was in fact murder, Black activism intensified. Matthews recalls,

We were having nightly mass meetings after the killing . . . . The deputy blew
his brains out at a distance of three feet with a .357 magnum and then pulled a
pistol from underneath his head. Anybody knows if you hit somebody with a
.357 magnum and your hands are behind your head like this (demonstrated the
posture), they’re not going to stay like that. You’re not going to just lie down.
But he blew his brains out. We feel they planted a drop gun under his head.

Black leaders were outraged when the grand jury ruled Blackwell’s death a
justifiable homicide. They solicited Sheriff Untreiner’s help, but Untreiner refused to
fire Raines. Thereafter, according to Matthews,

Every night after the mass meeting we would gather at the jail. We had night
marches at the jail and surrounded the jail. Sometimes there were 300 to 350,
people but the sad thing about that is that there were one or two amongst us
who, when we made our plans, before we could get to our destination, the folk
knew we were coming.

Protests continued nightly. Black leaders vowed to continue to protest until
justice was carried out.

Every night that we went to the jail, we would sing spiritual songs, chant – Civil
Rights chants. And I knew that finally they were going to get sick of us, and
they were going to do something to stop it. I knew that. There was no doubt in
my mind that they were going to allow these rabble-rousing niggers to just keep coming and do nothing about it. So every night we went out there, and we sang songs and we had prayers and we had scripture readings. It was a very festive atmosphere. It wasn’t a clowning atmosphere but a festive atmosphere. And we always sang a chant; two, four, six, eight, who shall we incarcerate? Untreiner, Raines, the whole damn bunch. That was the chant.

One evening, the gathering took a decidedly different twist.

This particular night we sang the chant. I never led the chant. Reverend Jimmy Lee Savage, an African American preacher here in town, he was young then but that was 30 years ago, said, “Now we’re going to do the two, four, six, eight chant and since Governor Askew has shown that he is sympathetic to our plight we’re going to leave his name out.” So he started the chant.

Deputies moved in to disperse the crowd and gave the protesters two minutes to leave the premises. But

A minute and 14 seconds later, they waded into the crowd and beat us with clubs and all that stuff. They arrested some of us. They arrested me, Reverend Brooks, Reverend Leverette, three of the leaders and some of the participants. They claimed that some of them [members of the crowd] had clubs, some of them had knives. Some of them may have. We could not control that in a crowd that big. Matthews was again arrested, as were Reverend Brooks and several other protesters.

The charge was extortion by threat. This time the outcome would be different. The White establishment was determined to rid itself of this rabble-rouser.
Everybody was bonded out on $2000 bond except when it came to me and Reverend Brooks. Our bonds were $2000 plus a $20,000 bond for extortion by threat, an old statute that’s on the books. Extortion by threat in that we were trying to force the sheriff to do something against his will, and that was to get rid of Doug Raines and Jim Edson too. And so that was the next felony charge, and we went to court.

Matthews and Brooks did not have the money to put up for their release. However, a local businessman came to their rescue. According to Matthews,

We finally got bonded out, Reverend Brooks and I. Dr. Donald Spence bonded us out and we went to court, but before we went to court, they played that shotgun recording and when they played it I said, “Whew, boy thank God, that cleared me.”

The *Pensacola News Journal* (Gordon, 15 July 1975a) summarizes the court findings:

One Pensacola Black leader was sent to county jail when he lost his appeal of a trespassing and unlawful assembly conviction. Matthews was arrested along with 46 other persons during demonstrations last February. (p. A8)

Matthews soon learned that the recording would not be enough to clear him.

When our trial was held, they played that recording. It clearly showed Reverend Savage’s voice. It showed me leading a song and a prayer and then Reverend Savage’s voice leading the chant, and I said, “Whew! It clears me on that.” Like I said, that was not the case they convicted me anyway.
Matthews was convicted of extortion committed by verbal threats of bodily harm. The *Pensacola News Journal* (Cox, 1975) reported,

> Among the statements alleged to Matthews was the chant, “two, four, six, eight, who shall we assassinate?” The information that led to Matthews’ conviction alleged that Matthews and Reverend B. J. Brooks, Sr. “did verbally and maliciously threaten injury” to Deputy Doug Raines, Sheriff Royal Untreiner and numerous other deputies. (p. A1)

While out on bond, Matthews did not take a back seat. He continued to lead protests and continued to aggressively pursue the goal of getting Deputy Raines fired for murdering an unarmed, Black man.

In mid-summer, Matthews held a press conference and announced an upcoming rally. Matthews was arrested before the rally could take place. He gives this account:

> That night I was getting ready to go to the mass meeting at St. Mark, my doorbell rang. There were two deputies. My bond had been revoked. They were coming to take me to the County Jail. The judge said he would be a fool to let a man go free and still be out on bond who was threatening to do the same thing that he had been convicted of. So they picked me up that one night. They sentenced me the next morning, two o’clock the following morning.

The *Pensacola News Journal* (“Picketing by Blacks,” 1975) carried this account of Matthews’ press conference:

> Black protesters will re-establish picket lines Saturday at Escambia County Jail.

> In a noon press conference today, the Reverend H. K. Matthews, local coordinator of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, said preliminary
plans are also being prepared for “the largest protest march ever held in Pensacola.” He said the call for the demonstration march will be made by the Reverend Ralph Abernathy, national president of the SCLC in Atlanta, and will include Blacks from the entire southeastern U.S. (pp. A1, A4)

Matthews was emphatic as well as straightforward about why Blacks continued to protest:

The mass arrest of protest demonstrators on February 24 was designed to break the backs of Blacks in Escambia County. However, this is simply not going to work. Our position at the present time is to ignore the threats being made upon us, the physical violence and whatever else is being done to stamp out the Black demonstrations. We are going to establish our cry for equal justice. Our goals are the same as they always have been. Our aim . . . is to establish equal treatment for all people and especially the removal of sheriff Deputy Doug Raines who we feel murdered Wendell Sylvester Blackwell on Dec. 20, 1974.

Matthews’ actions were considered an affront to the criminal justice system of Pensacola. His outspoken manner continued to irritate many White citizens. He was considered a special irritant for the Sheriff’s office. The Pensacola News Journal reported (Cox, 1976):

Pensacola Civil Rights leader Reverend H. K. Matthews was ordered arrested Wednesday after a newspaper story said he announced Black protesters would resume picketing at Escambia County Jail. Circuit Court Judge Kirke M. Beall said he read an account Wednesday of Matthews’s press conference and said “That was the exact reason for it [issuing the arrest warrant] . . . . You have to be
a damned fool as a judge to let a man continue the same activities he was
convicted of.” He was out [of jail] at the mercy of the court on bond. Beall said
instructions on the warrant indicated Matthews was to have no bond. (p. A1)

On July 12, the First District Court of Appeal agreed to hear Matthews’ plea for
bond. According to the Pensacola News Journal (Cox, 1976),

Matthews was taken into custody by a special order from Circuit Judge Kirke M.
Beall. Beall denied him bond. Pensacola attorney, Paul Shimek, Jr. who is
representing Matthews termed Beall’s ruling “arbitrary and capricious.” He said
he was pleased the appeal court had decided to hear the case. “I’d say that it’s
very unusual for a court to take the time to sit on a Saturday to hear a case . . . .
It obviously has moved them to the point of feeling they’re compelled to review
obviously a thorny problem.” (p. A1)

Matthews’ lawyer filed a habeas corpus petition, that is, a move to get a person out of
jail. Beall rejected the petition and issued a guilty verdict (Cox, 1975, p. A1).
Matthew’s attorney asked for leniency in sentencing. Beall replied, “Everyone who had
any dealings with this man businesswise or otherwise had nothing good to say about
him. He is not amenable to probation.” Subsequently, Matthews was sentenced to five
years in state prison for extortion (Henderson, 1975). This time the conviction would
have to be appealed to the Florida Supreme Court.

Matthews was sentenced to state prison at Lake Butler Reception Center. His
attorney appealed the sentencing and asked for his client’s release. Appellate Judge
John Rawls heard the appeal but needed Matthews’ court records before making a
decision. Ed Duffee, Matthews’ lawyer in Tallahassee, said that “records from
Escambia officials had been slow coming.” Matthews was released on appeal from prison in October (Brooks, 1975, p. C1).

Matthews’ arrest gained national attention, prompting the attorney for the national NAACP to remark (Gordon, 25 July 1975b) that his and Brooks’ convictions were a shocking abuse of the criminal process . . . . The court abused its discretion in denying Matthews bail pending appeal. It is our view that this situation should shock the conscience of not only this community, but the national community as well. There was no rational basis for the court denying bail. Matthews is not a criminal, he is deeply rooted in this community and public interest does not require his incarceration. Apparently, the only thing that concerned the court, expressed at the time of sentencing, was that he would speak out. This is not a crime in this country. (p. A1)

According to the national NAACP, the case had broader implications (Cox, 1975):

This matter of the conviction came up as the national convention of the NAACP in Washington. We determined that the full resources of the NAACP would be thrown into the effort to have the convictions reversed. We, as an organization, are extremely concerned about any judicial result that gags our local NAACP officials and interferes with their affective challenge to injustice. What is all the more frightening about this situation is that the court is allowing itself to be used as an instrument to suppress the right of protest, assembly and speech. (p. A1)

The editorial staff of the Pensacola News Journal weighed in on Matthews’ sentencing (Jasper, 1975) by questioning the reasoning behind the sentence:
The decision of Circuit Judge Kirke M. Beall to sentence . . . . In the state prison on a conviction of extortion, in that a jury found him guilty of leading a crowd of demonstrators to chant: “two, four, six, eight, who shall we assassinate?”

Ordinarily, in these editorial columns, we try to refrain from commenting upon decision of jurors . . . . But this is no ordinary case. This is a case, which engages the emotions of a community trying to ascertain whether justice has prevailed, or whether one more Black man who has become a nuisance has been trod upon and kicked aside. (p. A14)

Matthews was again arrested in December 1975 for unlawful assembly while he was out on appeal of the extortion conviction. It would take years for his prison sentence to be dismissed. The Pensacola News Journal records this account (“Askew Lifts Sentence,” 1978):

Governor Reubin Askew and the Cabinet commuted the prison sentence of Black Civil Rights activist Reverend H. K. Matthews. Matthews’ five-year sentence for extortion was commuted to time served – 63 days. The governor said his case involves an important question of the First Amendment right to free speech and indicated he believed even if Matthews had led the chant, such action should not be prohibited. Askew stated, “I believe this country must be big enough to entertain dissent,” the governor said. (p. A1)

Matthews recalls,

Governor Askew called me because he and I were kind of friends as far as those people go. I had encouraged him to run for governor. He’s a Pensacolian. He said, “H. K, don’t worry. Just go home and go to sleep. You’re not going back to
prison.” So, I went before him and the cabinet for commutation of sentence. He
commuted my sentence to time served, 63 days. He didn’t want to pardon me.
He could have pardoned me, but he said he didn’t want to do that because he
wanted my case to go all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court, which it did, but it
was thrown out based on a technicality.

Askew was “a personal acquaintance of Matthews.” who said he “decided to consider
the case because he felt Matthews’ sentence was excessive and because there are First
Amendment freedom of speech issues at stake.”

The *Pensacola News Journal’s* editorial staff (Jasper, 1978) at the time had this
to say about the Florida Executive Clemency Board:

The commutation does not restore Matthews’ Civil Rights or pardon him. It
simply cuts back the sentence to the time already served . . . . And since it was a
commutation and not a pardon, the door is still open for Matthews to take the
case on up to the U.S. Supreme Court for a resolution of whether Matthews was
engaging in free speech or trying to intimidate officials into a given course of
action . . . . The clemency board took what we believe to be not only merciful
but reasonable paths. (p. A22)

After his release from prison, Matthews returned to Pensacola, to where it all
had all begun. *The St. Petersburg Times* (Clendinen, 1978) provides this fitting
summary:

The winter of 1974-75 was the hardest time in a period of grim events that tried
the faith and patience of Black men and women in Pensacola. There was the
eruption of bitter fight over the use of the rebel flag . . . . There was the mysterious drowning of five Black men from Atlanta . . . . There was the killing of a young Black man named Wendell Blackwell . . . . And a few days later the finding of the body of a young Black woman who some thought had been at the scene with Blackwell . . . . three and one half years later . . . . Conner [Agriculture Commissioner and member of the Clemency Board] stated, “I have concluded with the matter that was before us.” (p. B8)

So it was that the life of Reverend H. K. Matthews resumed in the City of Pensacola. It was a different life, a changed life. Who can capture that time better than Reverend Matthews in his own words?

There were people who distanced themselves from me just like I had the plague. If you don’t want to be despised by a segment of society, just don’t do anything but, you know, people are people. Wasn’t it Art Linkletter who said people are funny? I came back to Pensacola. Nobody would touch me. I was pastoring a little church over on 8th Avenue, but that wasn’t enough to live on. Matthews could not find employment. His situation was desperate:

There was a Judge Bennett who owned a nursing home, and I begged him with almost tears in my eyes to give me a job mopping floors in order to make some provisions. He wouldn’t touch me. I finally got a job working at the Human Relations through the Community Action Program (CAP). Willie Junior, head of CAP, hired me. John Frenkel, who owns the Pensacola Interstate Fair, called Willie Junior and told Willie Junior that if he didn’t fire me from that job, he was going to resign from the board of directors for CAP. So, guess what? Willie
Junior fired me from a dollar and some odd cents an hour job. So consequently, that’s when I found myself. I had to get out of here. They virtually drove me out of Pensacola.

A Pensacola News Journal (Norman, 1977) article at that time begins with the caption “H. K. Matthews has financial problems” and reads:

Community Action Program Director Willie Junior announced that the Reverend H. K. Matthews has been temporarily withdrawn from the payroll “based on a number of questions concerning such things as his residency in the county.” The announcement came less than an hour after Pensacola Mayor Pro Temp John Frenkel informed the Pensacola News Journal that he would resign as chairman of the Community Action Program board if Matthews isn’t withdrawn from the CAP project which is designed to aid destitute persons. Frenkel stated, “I’ve worked hard to bring up the reputation of this group, and it concerns me that we’re doing anything for this man.” (pp. B1, B4)

Matthews’ response to Frenkel’s statement was included in the newspaper coverage (Norman, 1977):

Mr. Frenkel has no legal right, nor does he have a moral right to condemn anyone for seeking an opportunity to live, work and walk the streets of his home. The Wild West days of running people we don’t like out of town are days of the past. The community, particularly the decent citizens, is appalled . . . . Therefore, we call on Mr. Frenkel to publicly retract his statement and resign from the Board. Frenkel responded, “Consider the source from which it came.” (p. B4)
Unable to find employment in Pensacola, Matthews returned to his native Alabama. He told me how he applied for a job at Jefferson Davis Community College. The man who was president of the college knew my background. He knew my reputation, but he hired me anyway as a financial aid clerk to assist, and that’s how I got to Jeff Davis. Consequently, through the years I was promoted to financial aid director, then to assistant director of the fiscal program, and then finally in the last eight years of my tenure there, I was the compliance officer. I started out as the ADA compliance officer dealing with the Americans with Disabilities Act. They moved me to the point that I was compliance officer for everything. That’s how I got there.

Matthews had come full circle back to the red clay of Alabama. He returned to his roots to begin life anew.

My first marriage ended in divorce. I remarried in 1979. My first wife left at the time when I really, really needed a support system. I hold no bitterness about this, because she did what she felt she had to do. My activities caused my first marriage to end. It caused the breakup of my first marriage.

Matthews had learned from such experiences:

Ironically, my personal life, as result of what I went through, the only thing I can say is that it strengthened me spiritually. It has made me more aware and more cognizant and more sympathetic to the needs of others. But it has also made me aware of the needs of H. K. Matthews, needs that I neglected to a great degree when I was going through this. I have vowed never again to put my family at risk, if I can help it. So, that’s the lesson that came out of it. And I find that often
times when you’re doing what you do, the people you help the most are the ones who think of you the least. Doesn’t make sense, does it?

Yet Reverend Matthews’ values, commitments, and achievements make a great deal of sense. His leadership, based on high risks and great costs, continues to make sense to all those citizens now enfranchised and included because he and his allies insisted that social change is possible and social justice is essential.
CHAPTER VII
DISCUSSION

As I reflect on the leadership practices of Reverend H. K. Matthews, I return to the questions guiding my research. Specifically, I want to look at his leadership in the context of traditional leadership theories. I want then to examine leadership beyond the boardroom – indeed beyond formal organizations, for the most part.

I have attempted to examine the Civil Rights Movement in the context of traditional leadership practices. That such practices seem to work very well in formal settings is apparent. Through my interviews with Reverend Matthews, as well as the other participants, I have come to understand more about civic policies and social engagement and how lived experiences shape worldviews. It is not possible to file away such experiences. Rather, they often become the wellspring that renews commitment to equal Rights and social justice.

To understand commitment and conceptualize ways in which individuals come to participate in social movements (Robnett, 1996) continues to be a central concern for social movement theorists. There is no clear evidence of what factors move individuals to mobilize either for or against a social issue. Carson (1987) believes that, at least in the case of Dr. King, too much has been attributed to King’s exceptional qualities and too little to the social factors that made it possible for him to act. In the Pensacola Civil Rights Movement, I asked the same question in connection with Reverend Matthews.
The answer I forged in this study is open-ended. It revolves around noting that Reverend Matthews, while charismatic, is a lot more acerbic than Dr. King was. In Pensacola as we have seen, circumstances were ripe for major changes. Reverend Matthews’ relationship with the local power structure was tenuous at best and volatile during the worst times. Other Civil Rights leaders with a more palliative approach eventually made the inroads for which paved the way.

In 1969, Dr. Arthur J. Vidich, a social anthropologist, predicted that, “Today’s student radicals more than likely will become tomorrow’s leaders” (p. A2). While Vidich’s forecast concerns student dissenters, he could well have been predicting the future of any effective agent for social change. Many of the leaders of the 1960s and 1970s did go on to effect change from within the system. Julian Bond, John Lewis, and Thurgood Marshall are well known examples. Reverend Matthews is another example. The education he received through his struggle for social justice continually guided his actions that rested, above all, on the beliefs and principles that his grandmother had instilled. The principle that most guides him is, “Stand up for what you believe is right.” That principle seems characteristic among agents of social change, whether well known or not.

Recently, Kanter (2006) took note of her and others’ “enthusiasm for social entrepreneurs who create organizations enabling others to serve society.” She goes on to say no leadership is evident until and “unless resources were used courageously to improve the state of the world” (p. 93). Similarly, George (2006) asserts that leaders “are more concerned about serving others than they are about their own success or
They connect with people and empower them to take risks” (p. 52). Matthews could not agree more:

If this is what you’re in the business for to see how much press you can get, electronic and written, you can just quit. You have to be committed. People can tell commitment. They can tell when you’re doing something for self-aggrandizement.

Broadly, Matthews meets contemporary leadership standards by Kanter’s and George’s definitions.

Yet he was no leader within established channels. Instead, he challenged firmly established structures and practices as a mostly local leader in a national, even international, movement. McAdam, McCarthy, and Zald (1996), previously referenced here, state that social movements emerge when the established political order is vulnerable to challenge. Such was the case in Pensacola.

Reverend Matthews and Conventional Leadership

Are there parallels between traditional leadership theories and Matthews’ practices? Let’s review for a moment the theories of leadership discussed earlier. Warren Bennis (2003) emphasizes that a leader must have a clear idea of what needs doing and must take action to get it done. Similarly, Kouzes and Posner (2002) emphasize that a leader must inspire a shared vision. McCauley and Van Velsor (2004) speak of the transformational perspective that many leaders often develop. While similar to the idea of increased self-awareness, the transformational perspective focuses on the environment in which one lives and on gaining insight about others.
Matthews envisioned a different future and inspired others to share that vision. He was keenly aware of his environment and those around him. McCauley and Van Velsor (2004) emphasize that critical awareness and knowledge are gained through experiential involvement. Their observations generally refer to conventional leadership settings. While Matthews’ leadership was not in the conventional setting, his observations and increased self-awareness were the basis of his willingness to act. By his own account, Matthews stresses taking action once the vision has been defined:

I have always heard, and I have always subscribed to the fact, that actions speak louder than words. I can go into some of these stores where I know we were responsible for getting Blacks hired, and they [Blacks] act like they don’t know me and don’t want to be associated with me. I’m not just talking about me; I wasn’t the only person in Pensacola fighting for Rights. I was the one who paid the dearest price. Our leadership tactics were very effective. We had no trouble marshalling followers at that time which is contrary to what we’ve got now with the leadership.

Bennis (2003) further asserts that leaders must possess “daring” attitudes while Kouzes and Posner (2002) refer to such attitudes in terms of challenging the process. Perhaps no other leadership practice describes Matthews better than this one. During his 20 years as a social activist, he went up against the “institutional process” and landed himself in jail repeatedly. Then United Nations Ambassador Andrew Young (NAACP seeks to expose racism,” 1978, p. A1) described Matthews as a “political prisoner” because he was jailed for fighting for social justice for Blacks.
All the while, Matthews remains passionate in his belief that the Rights he fought for are guaranteed not only by the American Constitution but also by the Bible. According to Bennis (2003), such passion is essential to effective leadership. But what of shared leadership? He would be the first to tell you that leadership requires “followship.” Finzel (1994) describes the role of such servant leaders. They give people room to be themselves while seeing themselves as partners in the process. Matthews is quick to mention other leaders in the local Civil Rights struggle. His philosophy is emblematic of servant leadership:

If you have no followship, just about everything that comes up falls apart.

Currently, as it relates to the African-American community pursuing injustices, the action does not get too far off the ground. I think it’s due to the fact that those persons who are leaders in the community have a rough time marshalling followship. I think what has happened to us as a people – this is no reflection on the present leaders in Pensacola – is that we are willing to follow as long as there is a crisis. When I say crisis, I mean that you can look at, like I’m looking at that wall. But my contention has always been that as long as our skins are Black and until things change, we will always be in a crisis.

Perhaps one of the most striking aspects of Matthews’ leadership style is his personality. Self-described as a rabble-rouser and agitator, he is difficult to describe as charismatic. Perhaps he is better described as an “articulator” (Morris and Staggenborg, 2004) who linked the Civil Rights Movement in Pensacola to the larger society. However he is described, Matthews is clear that action for social change must be inclusive:
It has always been my contention that we are a people who react rather than act. We react to situations. It matters not what our educational status is, it matters not what our monetary status is, it matters that we are all wrapped up in a single garment of destiny. And if we are going down this highway, and we wrapped up in this single garment of destiny, and we make this trek together, we can survive if we choose to. Division has been our enemy all along, I contend. If people can divide us and give us the big head, then they can conquer us.

Matthews’ belief that social action must be inclusive is further evidenced by his challenge to African American ministers. He was able to endure beatings and jail time by calling on the inner strength he received from a higher calling. Not unlike Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. who wrote a scathing letter to White ministers about their lack of support for the Civil Rights Movement, Reverend Matthews (1969) addressed an equally scathing message to local Black ministers in “The Failure of the Church in Dealing with Social Problems.” There he wrote that

The church, as a religious institution, is failing to come to grips with the social problems that are prevalent among many of our citizens, especially those of minority groups. Our aims as ministers should be to teach our people to rebel against slavery in any form . . . . Any minister who deprives his people of the knowledge of social situations existing in our community is less than a man . . . . We must restore the faith and confidence [of members] in our religious leaders by proving to them that we are interested in the total human being. (p. 4)

In an article in the Pensacola Call and Post (The Black Man’s Waiting Period is Over,” 1969) Matthews also challenged segregationist practices in White churches:
Black people helped to build the churches in the City, but I can say without fear of contradiction that if some of the same laborers who are responsible for the existence of these structures would attempt to worship in them, they would be denied the privilege of doing so if that church just happened to have been built for White Christians. I heard a White minister in this city say and I quote, “I just don’t think that my people are ready to hear a Negro minister.” (p. 4)

Reverend Matthews and Movement Leadership

While it is clear that Matthews’ leadership style embraced many standards demarcated in various leadership theories, it is equally clear that social protest models include practices left unaddressed in most theories of leadership. It takes widening the scope of these theories to view the full sweep of his leadership. All the while, Matthews’ effective use of traditional leadership practices to reach desired goals is noteworthy. As we have seen, his servant leadership includes coalition building, inspiring a shared vision, challenging the process, and taking action.

But what of those practices left unaddressed in traditional leadership models? How would Matthews’ actions and style best be described? What can be said of this singular individual whose involvement spanned decades and reached beyond the boundaries of Northwest Florida? His involvement was widespread and spanned several fronts including public and private accommodations.

When Matthews’ speaks of humanity being clothed in a single garment of destiny, his voice seems to echo with unusual wisdom. His mind seems transfixed on another place and time. Perhaps Matthews, like Dr. King (Carson, 1987), is profoundly
aware of the qualities he shares with all people. Perhaps this sense of shared humanity and common destiny, along with the seeming other-worldliness of his voice, is what inculcated in others to share his vision and passion for justice. By giving voice to African Americans’ dreams and visions, he helped transform the environment of Blacks in Pensacola and northwest Florida.

Carson (1987) states that the values of Southern Blacks were permanently transformed by sustained protest activity and community organizing, mass meetings, freedom schools, and political activities during their Civil Rights struggle. Their participation in social protest resocialized Black citizens. The same holds true in Pensacola. Reverend Matthews articulated the shared visions and dreams of Blacks. He was not afraid to speak out against social injustice. He became an agent of resocialization as well as an agent for social change. Matthews seemed to have a knack for pushing the right buttons to ensure that he got the attention of the targeted audience as well as extensive media coverage. His actions imply that negative press is better than no press.

Matthews spoke out on almost every topic that affected the local community. While it is impossible to record every area he addressed in his speeches, education, law enforcement, and equal opportunity in housing and employment are perhaps where his activism made the greatest impact. As I read old newspaper accounts, I wondered why he did not just let it go. His life would have been much easier and a lot safer. But Matthews’ vision and passion were not about playing it safe.

Take, for example, the sit-ins. They put Reverend Matthews and the youth involved in the movement in direct opposition to established norms. They also point to
effective organization and the mobilization of youth. Youth played a pivotal role in integrating lunch counters, schools, and places of employment. I look with wonder at the resolve not only of Reverend Matthews but also of these young people to change society for the common good. When they were spat on, they did not retaliate. Even when they were burned with cigarettes and sprayed with pepper spray, they held fast to the principles of non-violent resistance. They marched with their mentors and respected those mentors enough to follow the principles of non-violent resistance.

Non-violent resistance, even to arbitrary and capricious misuse of official power, is another lesson from the leadership of Reverend Matthews. The men, women, and youth who participated in the marches were arbitrarily arrested and beaten by local law enforcement officials. Further, these same officers stood by while fellow citizens committed violent acts against the protestors. Again, the response of the protestors was the same. They did respond to violence with violence.

Matthews’ opinion is that citizens have the right, indeed obligation, to participate in political dissent when established norms and social institutions are unjust. Matthews viewed the actions of law enforcement officials as unjust. He, along with hundreds of others, marched for months to bring attention to their misuse and abuse of authority. Though his protests eventually landed him inside the very system he was targeting, his actions also led to the firing of one officer and the indictment of another. As a social “irritant,” Matthews was extremely effective.

His leadership and achievements suggest that political dissent and Civil disobedience were essential to advancing the cause of social justice in Northwest Florida. Equally important was group cohesiveness. Matthews relied on other ministers
as well as youth and community participation. According to Matthews, such cohesiveness seems to have eroded. The “haves” distance themselves from the “have-nots.” Matthews and other participants find this the most disturbing development of the past several decades. Intragroup segregation, similar to what experienced prior to integration, is common. For example, a Black professor recently asked, “What could I possibly have in common with her [a housekeeper]?” (personal communication, June 2006)

Yet intragroup segregation among Blacks is not new. Since slavery, divisions within the race have been discernible. A common saying during the 60s was, “If you’re White, you’re right; if you’re light, you’re all right; if you’re Black, get back.” Many African Africans seem to adhere to this philosophy today. The “house nigger” stereotype persists. Blacks whose skin color is closer to that of the majority group are often afforded greater opportunity and are assumed worthier not only by many in the majority group but also by many African Americans themselves.

I do not mean to suggest that all is lost or that no lessons were learned from the achievements of Civil Rights activists in particular Reverend H. K. Matthews. One of the most powerful lessons learned is coalition building. The Civil Rights Movement in Pensacola, and other cities in the South, shows what can happen when a cohesive group sustains its activism over time. One of the most impressive changes that occurred early on in Pensacola’s Civil Rights Movement in Pensacola was the integration of lunch counters. When most of the South had just begun to address this issue, Pensacola had already moved past that hurdle several years earlier.
Another lesson learned is the importance of the Black church. Omar, one of the participants, reminded me that the African American church has always been the place where Blacks go for spiritual nourishment, political direction, and refuge. Not much has changed in the 21st century. The church is still the “go to” place for African Americans, and it remains an integral part of Black politics. Many political leaders are either ministers or hold prominent positions within their churches. For example, Fred Gray, the lawyer who successfully defended Rosa Parks, is also a minister. Jesse Jackson is another example. And of course there is Reverend H. K. Matthews, northwest Florida’s best-known Civil Rights activist, who still pastors a small church in Brewton, Alabama.

Reverend H. K. Matthews’ journey is a roadmap filled with potholes, valleys, and mountaintop experiences. Further study on the man and his times might well include the voices of the youth who are now adults. What are they now doing? How did their participation as youth inform who they are today? What do they say of Reverend Matthews? It would also be interesting to hear the voices of the law enforcement officials, storeowners and other employers, and White teachers. Their views would enrich the narrative about Reverend Matthews as well as enlarge our knowledge of Pensacola’s history. Further, Reverend Matthews’s story might have been enriched by hearing the voices of his children and his first wife. What was it like to have been married to such an outspoken activist? What was it like having such a father? What of his parishioners? Did they support his activities? Do they think he could have done things differently? What role should the church have played in the movement?

Matthews has remained committed to social justice. He continues to encourage others to do their part. In fact, at a 2004 SCLC voting rally in Pensacola, he urged
people to get out and vote. One of the enduring legacies of the Civil Rights Movement is the right to vote. In passing the torch, Matthews recalls the past and issues a challenge in the Pensacola News Journal (Norman, 2004):

Economically successful African Americans need to remember what made their comforts possible. “So many people who suffered under the yoke of oppression are now suffering from amnesia.” He encouraged people to find strength in their faith for activism through Civil disobedience if necessary. “God has not given us the spirit of fear . . . . God is God all by Himself and does not need the permission of George Bush or Jeb Bush to be God.” (p. C3)

What would be a fitting final word about this man? Matthews’ unwittingly summarizes his accomplishments. While at a ceremony when a 2.5-acre park was named for him, Matthews (“Park is Named for Reverend H. K. Matthews,” (2006 May/June), “Finally, I am somebody . . . . To name a park after me is overwhelming.” That Matthews would utter these words 45 years after he took the helm of leadership in the Civil Rights struggle in Pensacola, seem more telling than any other words written about him. History Makers has interviewed him as one of a select few. He has had a book written about him. He has received numerous honors, both locally and nationally. Yet, the benchmark he uses to mark his success is this small park named in his honor in the city where his struggle for social justice began. Matthews urges African Americans to find strength in their faith for activism through Civil disobedience if necessary. Matthews’ message echoes that of Lewis (Kozol, 2005) who cautions that resegregation is a growing concern in America today. Lewis believes that those who fought so hard for integration have been betrayed. Matthews accuses economically
successful African Americans of having developed amnesia about the Civil Rights
Movement. He challenges them to remember what made their comforts possible.

Matthews understands that the “single garment of destiny” covers all of us. His
story is a rich tapestry of human emotions and daring. He is a risk taker, an agitator, a
rabble-rouser, a leader, and a history maker. His leadership created counterspaces for
the voices of African Americans to be heard and to be taken into account.
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APPENDIXES
Appendix A

Institutional Review Board Approval Letter
May 30, 2006

Ms. Lusharon Wiley
4255 Bonway Dr.
Pensacola, FL 32504

Dear Ms. Wiley:

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) for Human Research Participant Protection has completed its review of your proposal titled “Agent for Change: The Story of Rev. H.K. Matthews” as it relates to the protection of human participants used in research, and has granted approval for you to proceed with your study. As a research investigator, please be aware of the following:

- You acknowledge and accept your responsibility for protecting the rights and welfare of human research participants and for complying with all parts of 45 CFR Part 46, the UWF IRB Policy and Procedures, and the decisions of the IRB. You may view these documents on the Office of Research web page at http://www.research.uwf.edu. You acknowledge completion of the IRB ethical training requirements for researchers as attested in the IRB application.

- You will ensure that legally effective informed consent is obtained and documented. If written consent is required, the consent form must be signed by the participant or the participant’s legally authorized representative. A copy is to be given to the person signing the form and a copy kept for your file.

- You will promptly report any proposed changes in previously approved human participant research activities to the Office of Research and Sponsored Programs. The proposed changes will not be initiated without IRB review and approval, except where necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to the participants.

- You are responsible for reporting progress of approved research to the Office of Research and Sponsored Programs. If the project continues beyond one year, you must request a renewal by the IRB before approval of the first year lapses. Project Directors of research requiring full committee review should notify the IRB when data collection is completed.

- You will immediately report to the IRB any injuries or other unanticipated problems involving risks to human participants.

Good luck in your research endeavors. If you have any questions or need assistance, please contact the Office of Research and Sponsored Programs at 850-6378.
Sincerely,

Dr. Keith Whinnery, Chair
IRB for Human Research
Participant Protection

cc: Dr. Mary Rogers

Ms. Sandra VanderHeyden, Director
Research and Sponsored Programs
Appendix B

Informed Consent Form
Informed Consent

Title of Research:  Agent for Change: The Story of Rev. H.K. Matthews

I. Federal and university regulations require researchers to obtain signed consent from participants involved in human research. After you have read sections II through V below, please sign and date the form to indicate your consent.

II Statement of Procedure: Thank you for your interest in this research project being conducted by Lusharon Wiley, an assistant dean of students at a regional university located in the southeastern part of the United States, and a doctoral student at the University of West Florida. This phase of the research process involves interviews with individual participants. Your participation in this study will allow me to gain greater insight into the life and times of the Civil Rights era.

I understand that as a participant in this study:

(1) I am participating in the study as someone who is aware of the Civil Rights struggle that took place in northwest Florida and south Alabama during the 1950’s and 1960’s

(2) I will be asked for my thoughts and recollections of the racial, social, and political climate of the Civil Rights era in this geographic region

(3) I will be asked my opinion on various local leaders and their social impact on the local community

(4) I am aware that this research will require me to participate in at least one individual interview

(5) The length of the interview will not exceed one hour at any given time unless agreed upon by both the researcher and me

(6) The researcher will share study results with me if I wish.

(7) All research data will be kept confidential. Individual names will be replaced with identifying initials known only by the researcher except in the case of Reverend H.K. Matthews. At no time will my name be referenced in the study results unless prior consent has been obtained by the researcher.

(8) I may discontinue my participation in this study at any time without penalties or repercussions.

(9) I understand that, depending on the time of the day the interview is held, the researcher may provide light refreshments.
III. Potential Risks of the Study:

(1) There are no foreseeable risks to participants involved with the study.

IV. Potential Benefits of the Study:

(1) Data obtained from this study may provide valuable insight into human motivation and risk-taking

(2) Information obtained from this study might provide guidance on leadership practices especially as they relate to African Americans

(3) Insight into leadership practices among status quo members versus grassroots leadership may be gained

V. Statement of Consent: I certify that I have read and fully understand the Statement of Procedure given above. I agree to voluntarily participate in the research described in this document. My participation is given without coercion or undue influence. I further understand that I may discontinue participation in this research project at any time. I will be given a signed copy of this consent form.

Please contact the researcher, Lusharon Wiley, by phone at 850.474.2161 or by email at lwiley@uwf.edu, should you have any questions or concerns.

____________________________        _______________
Participant’s Name (Please print)   Date

____________________________
Participant’s Signature