

EAST CAROLINA UNIVERSITY

CHARLES JOHNSON, THE CHURCH OF THE NAZARENE,  
AND CIVIL RIGHTS IN MERIDIAN, MISSISSIPPI

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO  
THE FACULTY OF THE DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY  
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE  
MASTER OF ARTS

BY WESLEY L. BISHOP

GREENVILLE, NC

APRIL 2011

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AND CIVIL RIGHTS IN MERIDIAN, MISSISSIPPI

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To my dad, Lester Bishop, 1926-2009

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## Abstract

Charles Johnson, an African American minister in the predominately white denomination of the Church of the Nazarene, was a leader in the civil rights movement in Meridian, Mississippi. He had to navigate the rather conservative leanings of his denomination and predominance of Jim Crow segregation in Meridian. Johnson had a profound impact on the struggle for equality in Meridian, but he, unfortunately, could not exhibit the same degree of influence on the Church of the Nazarene. This work examines the difficulties and successes of Johnson as a churchman and an activist.

## Introduction

When one thinks of the role of religion and the Church<sup>1</sup> in the civil rights movement, the Church of the Nazarene does not immediately spring to mind. When one thinks of African American religion, the Church of the Nazarene is not even a footnote. As W. E. B. DuBois pointed out over a century ago, African Americans in the South were (and still are) overwhelmingly Methodist or Baptist.<sup>2</sup> This reality makes the life of Charles Johnson even more fascinating. Why did he join the predominately white (in the United States) Church of the Nazarene? Why did he stay with the denomination when he had opportunities to change affiliations, especially with the denomination's ambivalence towards civil rights? How did he become a leader in the civil rights movement in Meridian Mississippi, who touched major national figures and events? What motivated him to stay in the struggle in Meridian?

In some ways, Johnson is out of the mainstream, while in other ways he is very much in the mainstream of African American life. He is out of the mainstream because he is a minister in the Church of the Nazarene. He is in the mainstream because he is a member of the Democratic Party and an activist for civil rights. Because of this, his life provides a window into how the Church of the Nazarene viewed civil rights and how the city of Meridian has changed during the time Johnson has lived there. Set against this backdrop, Johnson offers a view of an African American man working in two separate spheres. These worlds may seem out of step with each other, but Johnson has navigated them rather successfully. Johnson has brought religion and

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<sup>1</sup> When the word "Church" (with an uppercase "C") appears by itself, it refers to all Christian churches generally, unless it is used in a proper name. When the words "church" or "churches" (with a lowercase "c") appears, it refers to a local congregation or congregations. The word "denomination" refers to a group of churches with a common polity. The term Church of the Nazarene always refers to the denomination. Local Nazarene congregations will contain some qualifier.

<sup>2</sup> W. E. B. DuBois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York: Barnes & Noble Classics, 2003), 139.

civil rights into one discussion; for him they are two sides of the same coin. Johnson is an important figure because he has had great influence on the city of Meridian and a somewhat lesser influence on the Church of the Nazarene.

Johnson's life occupies these two seemingly contradictory spheres—the ecclesiastical world and the world of day-to-day life in Meridian—yet, Johnson has managed to work in both spheres often with one feeding the other. His foundation in the Church has informed and animated his civil rights work in Meridian. At the same time, his civil rights activities have spilled over into the church world—at times causing difficulties. The common thread running through these two spheres is Johnson's commitment to holiness theology as taught by the Church of the Nazarene and its application in the practical world.

When one understands how Charles Johnson joined the Church of the Nazarene, his affiliation with the denomination is more understandable. Johnson came into the Church of the Nazarene because of personal relationships that he formed as a teenager. He has stayed in the Church of the Nazarene because of those relationships and others he formed over the years. Nevertheless, more important than those relationships is his deep commitment to Nazarene theology and its holiness message. While the Church of the Nazarene may have considered Johnson's civil rights activity outside the normal duties for a minister, the denomination has come to recognize his civil rights work.

In the early 1960s, Johnson arrived in Meridian, Mississippi at the height of the civil rights movement. He moved there as a young minister in his twenties to serve as pastor of a tiny congregation of African American Nazarenes. On his first day, he confronted a threat of violence that awakened his conscience to the injustices that many African Americans faced on a

daily basis. From that point, he was in the civil rights movement in Meridian, which is an extension of who he was and his belief in holiness theology.

In his landmark book, *Civilities and Civil Rights: Greensboro, North Carolina, and the Black Struggle for Freedom*, William H. Chafe argued thirty years ago that “few [studies] have examined the story of social change from the point of view of people in local communities, where the struggle for civil rights was a continuing reality year in and year out.”<sup>3</sup> Chafe went on to examine the successes and challenges in race relations of Greensboro over a thirty-year period. This study is an attempt to do a similar task with Meridian, Mississippi, and the Church of the Nazarene as seen through the life of one man who exerted influence on both. Charles Johnson played a role in the civil rights movement in Meridian and in the Church of the Nazarene.

Growing up in the Church of the Nazarene, I did not realize the history of the denomination with African Americans. I was keenly aware of non-white Nazarenes in other parts of the world. My mother was the missions president of the church where I grew up, and so we hosted missionaries to Africa and other places from time to time. Living in South Dakota at the time, I personally encountered few African Americans. As a teenager, we moved to Kansas City, Missouri, with a much larger African American population, and I soon became aware that African Americans were in the Church of the Nazarene, but I was still ignorant of the history. As I prepared for ministry in the Church of the Nazarene, I read W. T. Purkiser’s book *Called Unto Holiness: The Story of the Nazarenes in the Second Twenty-Five Years, 1933-1958*, where he briefly told the history of the mid-twentieth-century efforts of the Church of the Nazarene to bring African Americans into the denomination. I was struck by the four-page history of the

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<sup>3</sup> William H. Chafe, *Civilities and Civil Rights: Greensboro, North Carolina, and the Black Struggle for Freedom* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), 3.

Nazarenes' work "among the blacks." That section stood out more than anything else in the book. It caught my attention in such a way, that occasionally I returned to the book to reread it to contemplate the deeper history. Purkiser's account was very positive when he highlighted what appeared to be wonderful deeds by the denominational leaders to provide an avenue for African Americans to enter the denomination. I learned about the formation of the all-black Gulf Central District in the southeastern United States.<sup>4</sup> From that initial, brief encounter with the history of the Church of the Nazarene and African Americans, I wanted to further explore how the denomination not only handled bringing African Americans into the denomination, but how the Church of the Nazarene viewed civil rights. I had imagined that the Church of the Nazarene was a champion of racial equality, but upon closer examination, I have come to realize that when it came to civil rights, the denomination often fell short of the mark of equality.

For Charles Johnson, religion and civil rights are inseparable, and his theology drove him as he worked to build his congregation, worked for the Church of the Nazarene on the denominational level, and sought civil rights for the citizens of Meridian. As important as many things were in his life—family, relationships with fellow Nazarenes, and the suffering of African Americans in Meridian—the one thing that drove him was his belief that holiness theology extended beyond the doors of the church building. He has a well-developed philosophy about the interplay between civil rights and religion. He says, "The civil rights movement and...Christianity walk together."<sup>5</sup>

While these two spheres overlap, one must examine Johnson's impact on each independently. In doing so, it is much easier to understand the man when one considers his

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<sup>4</sup> W. T. Purkiser, *Called unto Holiness*, volume 2 *The Story of the Nazarenes: The Second Twenty-five Years, 1933-1958* (Kansas City: Nazarene Publishing House, 1983), 197-200.

<sup>5</sup> Charles Johnson, interview by author, Meridian, Mississippi, July 30, 2010.

relationship with and in the Church of the Nazarene separately from his life in Meridian, Mississippi. That is what follows.

Chapter one examines Johnson and the Church of the Nazarene, with the denomination's ambivalent stance on civil rights. Despite the occasional troubles and inner turmoil, Johnson remained with the Church of the Nazarene. He labored in relative anonymity for the first fifteen years of his ministry. While Johnson was struggling to build his congregation, the Church of the Nazarene was struggling with its own internal debate over what the denomination should say and do about the civil rights movement. Johnson was not directly involved in the discussion in the 1960s, but he later exerted some influence on the denomination.

Chapter two examines how Johnson went from a young minister to become a lion of the civil rights struggle in Meridian. Many leaders of the civil rights movement in Meridian have acknowledged Johnson as one of the main local leaders. He also was involved in the Mississippi Burning case. He had served as an advisor to Michael Schwerner and James Chaney, two of the three civil rights workers murdered in nearby Neshoba County, Mississippi, in 1964. He testified at the federal civil rights trial. Many of the local leaders have died or moved away, but Johnson is still there fighting for civil rights up to the present time. Throughout, one must keep in mind that Johnson and his theology are the common thread that runs through the story.

Chapter three examines the impact that Charles Johnson had on the Church of the Nazarene and civil rights in Meridian, Mississippi. While Johnson has exerted great influence on Meridian from early in his time there, his impact on the Church of the Nazarene was somewhat downplayed and late in development.

## Chapter 1

### Charles Johnson and the Church of the Nazarene

One key relationship guided Charles Johnson to the Church of the Nazarene, and several other relationships have sustained him through difficult times. Johnson also found solutions to life's difficult questions in holiness theology as taught in the denomination at different times. The Church of the Nazarene has ignored, disciplined, and celebrated Johnson. The denomination's ambivalent stance on civil rights caused Johnson's influence on the denomination to move more quickly in response to the civil rights movement. At the same time, Johnson has held firm to his convictions and did not allow the Church of the Nazarene to dictate the level of his involvement. He is not one to back down from a difficult situation or allow anyone to co-opt him.

Born March 5, 1938, Charles Johnson grew up in Orlando, Florida, where segregation ruled social interactions between whites and blacks. Johnson calls his family "just a normal poor black family." Johnson had a rather normal childhood: running, playing games, saving money to buy candy, and worrying about his mother. He also encountered his share of racism, witnessing brutality of whites towards African Americans regularly. Authorities rarely, if ever, brought whites to justice over such mistreatment. Johnson says that most whites he encountered always seemed angry. He does not recall many positive encounters with whites, as "the idea had been placed in my heart and my mind that you couldn't trust white folks."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Charles Johnson, interview; Polly Appleby, *What Color is God's Skin?: Stories of Ethnic Leaders in America* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1984), 28-33; Kathy Tharp, "Another Title for Charles Johnson—Black Consultant," *Herald of Holiness*, August 1, 1983, 5; Neil B. Wiseman, "Charles Johnson's Legacy of Leadership: Johnson Serves Forty-four Years and Counting," *Grow Magazine*, Fall 2005, [http://www.growmagazine.org/archive/fall2005/charles\\_johnson.html](http://www.growmagazine.org/archive/fall2005/charles_johnson.html) (accessed 2/27/2010); Jerry Appleby, "Blacks, Whites, and the Holy Spirit," *Preacher's Magazine*, December/January/February 1982-1983, 26. Hereafter, the *Herald of Holiness* will be cited as *HH*.

As a teenager, Johnson came under the influence of C. R. Smith, a white man who was a member of a Church of the Nazarene from Fitzgerald, Georgia. Smith had moved to Orlando and sold appliances in African American neighborhoods. Seeing that Smith was in business, Johnson followed him around, hoping to work for him and make some money. While Johnson worked for Smith, he noticed that Smith's interactions with African Americans were different from other whites. Smith did not display the anger that Johnson was accustomed to seeing in whites. Smith's African American customers would miss payments, cuss him out, and mistreat him, but Smith would not retaliate or mistreat anyone in return. This was at a time when Smith could have done almost anything imaginable to his African American customers with no repercussions. Smith's attitude made the young Johnson curious; he wanted to know why Smith was different from other white people that he had met.<sup>2</sup>

As their relationship developed, Smith began to share his religious experience with Johnson. Johnson recalls, "So this man impressed me like nobody else in this world ever impressed me. And I then began to listen to him as he told about his experience of how he got saved [religious conversion to Christianity] and all that." Johnson witnessed how Smith handled his business and listened to his Christian testimony. Johnson believed Smith's most impressive trait was his demonstration in life of what he said. Smith demonstrated the Christian life to Johnson, and Johnson wanted what Smith had. Johnson puts it this way, "He never preached me a sermon; he showed me one."<sup>3</sup>

Smith did not content himself with mere one-on-one evangelism; with his friend Earl Gorman, he organized an evangelistic event in the African American neighborhood. Smith

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<sup>2</sup> Charles Johnson, interview; Appleby, *What Color*, 33-34; Appleby, "Blacks, Whites," 26; Wiseman, "Charles Johnson's Legacy"; Tharp, "Another Title," 5; JoeAnn Ballard to Oliver Phillips, February 15, 2005 (Nazarene Archives, "History of Nazarene Bible Institute and the Gulf Central District" by JoeAnn Ballard 2221-27).

<sup>3</sup> Charles Johnson, interview; Tharp, "Another Title," 5; Appleby, *What Color*, 33-34; Appleby, "Blacks, Whites," 26.

contacted the Home Missions Department of the Church of the Nazarene to provide a speaker for this evangelistic meeting. Smith and Gorman organized the meeting, secured an elementary school in the African American community to have the meeting, and invited people from the community.<sup>4</sup> This meeting had a profound impact on Johnson's life.

Smith personally invited Johnson to attend the meeting in the late 1950s, which Johnson did mostly out of respect for Smith. When Johnson arrived, he noticed whites and African Americans sitting together—something unheard of in the South during the 1950s—singing and worshipping. The speaker at the meeting was Warren A. Rogers, an African American Nazarene minister and the newly appointed district superintendent of the Gulf Central District of the Church of the Nazarene—the all-black district for the Church of the Nazarene in the southeastern United States. Johnson became a Christian that day, saying, “I was saved in that meeting.” After the meeting, the denomination did not abandon this group of African Americans. Seventeen people, including Johnson, joined the Church of the Nazarene after that meeting. The denomination planted a church in the African American community called Praise Temple. Rogers later noted that “Florida was the most fertile area for planting new churches at that time.”<sup>5</sup>

The Church of the Nazarene had begun a serious attempt to reach African Americans in the late 1940s. At the “Second Annual Conference of the Church of the Nazarene, Colored,” in 1948, John Knight, district superintendent of the Florida District, “attended the conference because he was desirous of having a Colored work started on his District.” Leon Chambers, in

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<sup>4</sup> Charles Johnson, interview; Appleby, *What Color*, 34; Appleby, “Blacks, Whites,” 26; Tharp, “Another Title,” 5.

<sup>5</sup> Charles Johnson, interview; Appleby, “Blacks, Whites,” 26; Mark Steigenga, “Loosing the Chains: Revival Preacher Brings Message of Total Freedom,” *Ludington (Mich.) Daily News*, October 19, 2001, <http://news.google.com/newspapers?id=rZUKAAAAIIBAJ&sjid=50sDAAAAIIBAJ&pg=6475%2C5306874>; Neil B. Wiseman, “\$44.50 Expands Brotherhood in Mississippi,” *HH*, September 15, 1978, 16; Tharp, “Another Title,” 5; Appleby, *What Color*, 34, Warren A. Rogers with Kenneth Vogt, *From Sharecropper to Goodwill Ambassador: The Warren Rogers Story* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1979), 46-47.

his 1953 report as district superintendent of the Gulf Central District, mentioned that he had visited the white districts of the South to promote African American evangelism. He reported, “I was asking for White men to open Sunday schools, missions, and preaching points. The response was wonderful. From all over the South, our consecrated men and women have responded.”<sup>6</sup> These reports mention neither Orlando nor C. R. Smith by name, but one can suspect that Smith had heard the calls to reach African Americans.

In 1953, the Church of the Nazarene had formed an all-black district, called the Gulf Central District (GCD), across the southeastern United States in an effort to promote fellowship among African American congregations. When the denomination set up the Gulf Central District, funding was an issue. The African American Nazarene churches were small, poor, and far-flung, with about one or two per state. The district superintendent would have to travel from Texas to the East Coast, and the Gulf Coast to the Ohio River to cover his territory of responsibility. As such, the denomination asked the white districts contiguous with the GCD to help with the funding at the rate of about \$200 to \$400 each. Most districts appeared happy to comply with the request, while some districts were slow to send in their allotment. In a handwritten letter to General Superintendent D. I. Vanderpool, J. C. Mathis, district superintendent of the Northeast Oklahoma District, claimed that “This is the first information I have had regarding this 200 dollars. I just supposed all expenses for the Colored work was taken from General Budget [general operating budget for the denomination]. I think the General Budget should carry this work in the future.” Reverend Mathis stated his reluctance more forceful than most, but some district leaders were reluctant to support the work. Roy F. Smee, of

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<sup>6</sup> Wiseman, “Charles Johnson’s Legacy”; R. Franklin Cook, “Nashville Conference Heralds Heritage of Urban Ministry,” *HH*, May 15, 1981, 17; “Second Annual Conference of the Church of the Nazarene, Colored,” attached to Bowes to Powers, December 22, 1948 (Nazarene Archives, Powers Collection, 2304-12); “Report for Gulf Central District, 1953” (Nazarene Archives, Vanderpool Collection 906-12).

the Department of Home Missions, also expressed his belief that African Americans should be more responsible for their own expenses. In writing to a district superintendent in West Virginia, the state housing the training school for African American ministers, he stated that “The burden of my heart is to some way get our colored churches to see the necessity of becoming self-supporting.”<sup>7</sup> As reflected in this statement, there was unmistakable evidence of a paternalistic mindset in the thinking and expressions of denominational leaders.

In many places, moreover, white denominational leaders often expressed their frustration that the African Americans were not taking the responsibility that the whites thought they should. Several leaders articulated the clear belief that African American leadership was lacking. In 1953, Alpin Bowes, who worked in the Home Missions Department, drafted a letter for Vanderpool to send to district superintendents, which stated, “We are now realizing that we cannot do this job right by waiting for the colored people to provide their own leaders.”<sup>8</sup>

Some white denominational leaders complained that the African American leaders could not deal with finances and other responsibilities. R. W. Cunningham, the African American successor to the white E. E. Hale at the Nazarene Bible Institute, became the object of scorn among the leaders of the Church of the Nazarene. At first, the leaders thought he would be the savior of the African American effort in West Virginia. Within a few years, Cunningham drew fire from other leaders. Roy F. Smee complained that “Brother Cunningham seems so helpless when it comes to financing his church program.” Cunningham’s star was tarnished. The

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<sup>7</sup> Alpin P. Bowes to D. I. Vanderpool, July 13, 1953; Alpin P. Bowes memorandum to D. I. Vanderpool, no date; J. C. Mathis to D. I. Vanderpool, September 24, 1953; Roy F. Smee to Edward C. Oney, September 22, 1953 (all in Nazarene Archives, Vanderpool Collection 906-12).

<sup>8</sup> Alpin P. Bowes to Hardy C. Powers, November 24, 1948 (Nazarene Archives, Powers Collection 2304-12); Hardy C. Powers to Clayton W. Kidd, February 19, 1948 (Nazarene Archives, Powers Collection 2303-30); Draft letter for D. I. Vanderpool’s signature written by Alpin Bowes dated March 12, 1953, attached to Bowes to Vanderpool, March 2, 1953 (Nazarene Archives, Vanderpool Collection 906-12).

following year, D. I. Vanderpool felt it necessary to call Cunningham and write him twice to boost his spirits, because Cunningham had been thinking about resigning his position.<sup>9</sup>

Other denominations also discovered the thorny issue of integration. Two studies in recent years have looked at the Methodist Church's struggle with integration. In *Methodists and the Crucible of Race, 1930-1975*, Peter C. Murray offers a scathing critique of the Methodist Church's handling of African Americans in their denomination. The Methodists intentionally segregated African Americans into the Central Jurisdiction. The Methodists motives were to placate southern members who refused to join with the northern branch unless they did not have to deal with African Americans so they put them in the all-black Central Jurisdiction. In *When the Church Bell Rang Racist: The Methodist Church and the Civil Rights Movement in Alabama*, Donald E. Collins, examines the Methodist Church's response to the civil rights movement in the state of Alabama. He contends that the civil rights movement "was the defining event" in Alabama in the 1950s and 1960s, and the Methodist Church failed to bring about change.<sup>10</sup> Collins and Murray agree that the Methodist Church was on the wrong side of history in matters of civil rights, especially in the South. The Gulf Central District in the Church of the Nazarene was born of the desire for African American churches to fellowship. While there are parallels between the Methodist's Central Jurisdiction and the Nazarene's Gulf Central District, the motivations of the Nazarenes differed from those of the Methodists.

The Church of God (Anderson) and the Church of the Nazarene are both in the Wesleyan-Arminian theological tradition. James Earl Massey's work, *African Americans and*

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<sup>9</sup> Hardy C. Powers to Louise Robinson Chapman, December 24, 1949 (Nazarene Archives, Powers Collection 2304-12); Roy F. Smee to Edward C. Oney copied to D. I. Vanderpool, September 10, 1953 (Nazarene Archives, Vanderpool Collection 911-6); D. I. Vanderpool to R. W. Cunningham, March 24, 1954, and August 11, 1954 (Nazarene Archives, Vanderpool Collection 906-12).

<sup>10</sup> Peter C. Murray, *Methodists and the Crucible of Race, 1930-1975* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2004), 3-5, 15, 199; Donald E. Collins, *When the Church Bell Rang Racist: The Methodist Church and the Civil Rights Movement in Alabama* (Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 1998), 10, 11, 137.

*the Church of God, Anderson, Indiana: Aspects of a Social History*, examines a denomination that occupies the same theological ground as the Church of the Nazarene. Contrary to Collins's and Murray's strong condemnation of the Methodist Church's attitudes toward African Americans, Massey's work is largely positive. Massey argues that African Americans came into the Church of God with great alacrity. Massey shows that of the white Wesleyan-Holiness denominations, the Church of God was the only one that had any demonstrable success in reaching African Americans. In comparing the Church of God to the Church of the Nazarene, Massey argues that the Nazarenes have had paltry results in evangelistic efforts among African Americans. The Church of God operated on an integrated basis early in the twentieth century, but it moved toward separate meetings by the middle of the century.<sup>11</sup> Because of their common theology, Massey's work is beneficial when comparing the Church of God (Anderson) and the Church of the Nazarene.

With marginal numbers among African Americans, it seems strange that several African Americans would come together to form a Church of the Nazarene in Orlando. Charles Johnson admits that when the Nazarenes first came to the African American neighborhoods in Orlando, many blacks were skeptical. He says, "We didn't know what Nazarenes were; we didn't know whether they were Methodists or Baptists." Johnson's reason for joining the Church of the Nazarene was what he saw in C. R. Smith's life. The Church of the Nazarene had no African American ministers immediately available to lead the new congregation, so whites led the African American church. Charles Jacobs, a white man, served as pastor of the church until

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<sup>11</sup> James Earl Massey, *African Americans and the Church of God, Anderson, Indiana: Aspects of a Social History* (Anderson, Ind.: University of Anderson Press, 2005), 18, 19, 53, 54, 71, 72, 225. James Arminius was a Dutch theologian in the early seventeenth century who influenced John Wesley. John Wesley was an English minister in the Church of England in the eighteenth century. Wesley is credited as the founder of Methodism. In the nineteenth century, a revival of holiness theology in the Wesleyan-Arminian theological tradition gained momentum. The term "holiness" here refers to denominations in this Wesleyan-Arminian tradition. It is not synonymous with Pentecostal or Pentecostal-Holiness.

Archie Williams, an African American was assigned to the church. That was the first African American Church of the Nazarene in the state of Florida. The church grew to between fifty and seventy-five regular attendees. Johnson found something in the Church of the Nazarene that attracted and held him.<sup>12</sup>

Johnson continued attending the new church, married his first wife Carrie, and assumed the responsibilities of a young married man. He recalls: “I felt the Lord called me [to be a minister], but I didn’t know what to do or how to go about answering the call, ‘cause I never had been taught anything like that.” He spoke with Williams and Smith concerning this, and Smith encouraged Johnson to pursue the call by getting an education. The Nazarene college in the southeastern United States, Trevecca Nazarene College (now University) in Nashville, Tennessee, did not admit African Americans in the late 1950s. Smith told Johnson about the African American training college in Institute, West Virginia, but Johnson hesitated. Johnson made the excuse that he could not afford to go to college, because he was newly married and had debts to pay. How could he afford to go off to West Virginia while owing money in Orlando? Smith had the solution; Smith told him: “Charles, give me those [debts]. I’ll take care of those.” Smith assumed every debt that Johnson had accumulated and paid them off so that he could afford to attend bible college. Johnson still has a deep love for Smith, as he says with a tone of fondness, “He was so great.”<sup>13</sup>

The Church of the Nazarene was born in a climate of social activism. It grew out of the holiness revivals of the mid- and late-nineteenth century. In 1923, the denomination retroactively set its birthdate as 1908, but the currents that formed it were present decades prior to 1908. The Church of the Nazarene was essentially a break-off of the Methodist Church, with

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<sup>12</sup> Charles Johnson, interview; Appleby, *What Color*, 34; Rogers, *From Sharecropper*, 9.

<sup>13</sup> Charles Johnson, interview; Appleby, *What Color*, 34-35; Appleby, “Blacks, Whites,” 26.

many former Methodists filling the pews in the new denomination. The first use of the term “Church of the Nazarene” was in 1895 when former Methodist minister Phineas F. Bresee started a church in Los Angeles, California. His associate, J. P. Widney claimed that the name came to him in a dream. Bresee began planting churches across the western United States, starting at the Pacific and moving east. In 1907, Bresee’s group joined with a group from the East—based in New England and New York—in Chicago to form the Pentecostal Church of the Nazarene.<sup>14</sup> A year later, they joined with a group from the South—mainly Texas, Oklahoma, and Arkansas—at Pilot Point, Texas, thus effectively uniting all sections of the United States. Other groups joined over the next few years, including a group from the southeast United States. Much of Bresee’s early work in Los Angeles was in the skid row area and among Chinese immigrants. The founders of the Church of the Nazarene were socially active. Through the 1920s, the denomination continued to try to reach disadvantaged populations in the United States, but the influence of fundamentalism pushed it to abandon these early principles and withdraw from the outside world.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> The Church of the Nazarene was originally named the Pentecostal Church of the Nazarene. “The General Assembly of 1919...officially changed the name...to Church of the Nazarene because of new meanings that had become associated with the term ‘Pentecostal.’” (*Manual of the Church of the Nazarene*, [Kansas City: Nazarene Publishing House, 2005], 22.) The *Manual* is published after each General Assembly of the Church of the Nazarene. Hereafter, it is cited as *Manual* with the publication year.

<sup>15</sup> For more detailed accounts of the history of the Church of the Nazarene, see the following. Timothy L. Smith, *Revivalism and Social Reform: American Protestantism on the Eve of the Civil War* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980) for an account of the holiness revivals of the nineteenth century. Timothy L. Smith, *Called unto Holiness*, volume 1, *The Story of the Nazarenes: The Formative Year* (Kansas City: Nazarene Publishing House, 1962); W. T. Purkiser, *Called unto Holiness*, volume 2 *The Story of the Nazarenes: The Second Twenty-five Years, 1933-1958* (Kansas City: Nazarene Publishing House, 1983); Stan Ingersol, *Nazarene Roots: Pastors, Prophets, Revivalists, & Reformers* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 2009); and Floyd Cunningham, et al., *Our Watchword and Song: The Centennial History of the Church of the Nazarene* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 2009). For more about the founding see the following biographies of Bresee. E. A. Girvin, *Phineas F. Bresee: A Prince in Israel* (Kansas City: Nazarene Publishing House, 1916); Donald P. Brickley, *Man of the Morning: The Life of and Works of Phineas F. Bresee* (Kansas City: Nazarene Publishing House, 1960); and Carl Bangs, *Phineas F. Bresee: His Life in Methodism, the Holiness Movement, and the Church of the Nazarene* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1995).

A brief account of that Pilot Point meeting illustrates the tensions that existed in the fledgling denomination and in the country. Three months after Vicksburg, Mississippi, fell in 1863, C. B. Jernigan was born on a nearby plantation. Because of his father's service in the Confederate Army, he grew up poor. He became a minister, still carrying hostile feelings towards Northerners. In 1908 at Pilot Point, Jernigan declared, "I have never hugged a Yankee before, but I am going to hug one now!"<sup>16</sup>

In the early years, the Church of the Nazarene spent little time thinking about racial equality, but when they did it seems that often the denominational leaders sensed that they were not doing all they could to promote civil rights. One way to gauge the feelings of the Church of the Nazarene toward race relations appears in the pages of the *Herald of Holiness*, the denomination-wide magazine. The Nazarene Publishing House published the *Herald* that carried articles written by denominational leaders, pastors, and professors from Nazarene colleges and universities. While the denomination published the magazine, it does not speak officially for the denomination. Official pronouncements for the Church of the Nazarene come either through the quadrennial General Assembly, the General Board of the Church of the Nazarene, or the Board of General Superintendents. Members of the Church of the Nazarene and readers of the *Herald* also made their voices heard on issues addressed in the periodical through letters to the editor. Most of these articles were short on practical applications, but also contained a palpable sense of a white man's burden.

In the pre-civil rights era, the *Herald* said very little about race relations. Only a few articles appeared on the topic of African Americans, all of them complaining about how the Church of the Nazarene neglected them. The first article came in 1917; the second appeared one

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<sup>16</sup> L. Wayne Sears, "Good Religion Makes a Rebel Hug a Yankee: C. B. Jernigan," in Neil B. Wiseman and L. Wayne Sears, eds., *Architects of the Enduring: Uncommon Stories from Everyday Nazarenes* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 2001), 15-16.

and a half years later. Both articles addressed the “problem” of race relations. The 1917 article claimed that only “applied Christianity”—whatever that is—would solve the problem. In 1919, Robert J. Kirkland, who had apparently moved to the South to pastor a church, noted that segregation prevented “colored folks” from attending “the white man’s church.” Kirkland was the first to tie Nazarene missionary efforts in Africa to reaching African Americans.<sup>17</sup>

Two articles appeared during the 1930s that addressed the lack of African Americans in the Church of the Nazarene. In April of 1932, Geren C. Roberts wrote an article about evangelizing African Americans. The article spent four of nine paragraphs recounting how “the Negro has played a dramatic role in the drama of the world.” Roberts suggested that each city with a large African American population “should have strong Churches of the Nazarene (colored) pastored and taken care of by sanctified men and women,” although he did not specify if these pastors would be white or black. Fairy Chism, a Nazarene missionary to Africa, wrote an article for the *Herald* in 1937, one year before Johnson’s birth, while she was on furlough in the United States. Chism harshly criticized the Church of the Nazarene for not doing more for African Americans. She inquired, “But can we not do something for that part of Africa which lives with us and is part of us?” Her time in Africa heightened her sensitivity toward African Americans. She rebuked both the readers and the leadership of the denomination, stating that “We have twelve million African Africans for whom we almost never make a plan.” Good intentions did not impress Chism. She concluded the article, “What is the matter with us? Perhaps you know. I do not.” Notably, this article does not contain the subtle racism present in the previous articles, no doubt a result of her long association with black Africans.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> “A Problem to be Met,” *HH*, September 26, 1917, 2; Robert J. Kirkland, “The Negro Problem,” *HH*, May 7, 1919, 6.

<sup>18</sup> Geren C. Roberts, “A Neglected Field,” *HH*, April 27, 1932, 7-8; Fairy Chism, “What is the Matter with Us?” *HH*, July 31, 1937, 6. In referring to “African Africans,” Chism meant African Americans.

In an apparent effort to raise awareness of denominational efforts to evangelize African Americans, the Church of the Nazarene printed a brief pamphlet entitled “‘Lift up thy Prayer’ for our United States Negro Work” in the mid-1950s. This short pamphlet included a brief introduction by Louise Robinson Chapman and a list of various prayer requests for this endeavor. Of note, the pamphlet contained seven photographs. The photograph on the front is of Harold M. Lambert, an African American, and his family. Throughout the remainder of the pamphlet, there are photographs of the Nazarene Bible Institute; D. I. Vanderpool, the white General Superintendent in charge; E. E. Hale, the white president of NBI; M. M. Snyder, a white retired minister in New Orleans, and early supporter for work among African Americans; Leon Chambers and his wife, the white district superintendent of the Gulf Central District; and R. W. Cunningham, professor at NBI. Cunningham was the only African American pictured except for Lambert.<sup>19</sup> There is no indication of the circulation of this pamphlet.

Over twenty years passed before the subject of race relations again appeared on the pages of the *Herald*, this time from the pen of an African American, Rev. Joe Edwards, pastor of Providence Church of the Nazarene in Oklahoma City. He challenged the Church of the Nazarene to “rise to the spirit of the occasion” to see African Americans join the denomination. In an addendum to the article, Alpin Bowes, of the Home Missions Department for the denomination, introduced Edwards to the readers.<sup>20</sup> Edwards’s article appeared in 1958, the year of the evangelistic crusade in Orlando that brought Johnson into the Church of the Nazarene.

A recent addition to the scholarship on the civil rights movement and religion is Mike Trice’s 2007 dissertation entitled “Religious Newspaper Coverage of the Civil Rights Struggle:

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<sup>19</sup> “‘Lift up thy Prayer’ for Our Negro Work” (Nazarene Archives, Black Book File 199-39); The exact date is unclear. Based on the mention of Leon Chambers as district superintendent of the Gulf Central District (he was appointed in 1953) and E. E. Hale as president of the training institute (he left in 1954), the date can be fixed as late 1953 to early 1954.

<sup>20</sup> Joe Edwards, “When People Pray,” *HH*, February 12, 1958, 6-7.

1954-1964.” The more conservative Christian media rhetorically came down on the side of civil rights, but their endorsement of civil rights lacked conviction. In reference to the attempted integration of Central High School in Little Rock in 1957, Trice writes, “Many of the conservative press tried to soft-pedal the issue without directly opposing integration.” He concludes, “The biggest differences are along the theological perspective. In general, the mainline Protestant press was decidedly more supportive of the African-American push for integration and equal rights than that of the fundamentalist press, with the Catholic press falling somewhere in between.”<sup>21</sup>

The Nazarene press responded to the race issue in a similar fashion to the fundamentalist press. The Church of the Nazarene is not in the purview of Trice’s study. The Church of the Nazarene’s theology is conservative, but most leaders—then and now—would bristle at the fundamentalist label. As Stan Ingersol notes, several denominational leaders have historically decried fundamentalism creeping into the Church of the Nazarene.<sup>22</sup>

Early histories of the Church of the Nazarene were devoid of references to race relations or African Americans. The first official history, M. E. Redford’s *The Rise of the Church of the Nazarene*, appeared in 1948; subsequent revisions appeared in 1965, 1971, and 1974. Redford limited his account to the formative years of the Church of the Nazarene and the eastern, western, and southern streams that flowed into the denomination. The hundred-page book does not refer to race or African Americans, or any other social issue.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Mike Trice, “Religious Newspaper Coverage of the Civil Rights Struggle: 1954-1964,” PhD diss., (University of Southern Mississippi, 2007), 2, 87, 371.

<sup>22</sup> Stan Ingersol, “Strange Bedfellows: The Nazarenes and Fundamentalism,” <http://www.nazarene.org/files/docs/Strange%20Bedfellows%20The%20Nazarenes%20and%20Fundamentalism.pdf> (accessed 4/8/2011).

<sup>23</sup> M. E. Redford, *The Rise of the Church of the Nazarene* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1974).

The task of writing the first scholarly denominational history fell to the Harvard educated historian and Nazarene minister, Timothy L. Smith. Smith's work, *Called unto Holiness: The Story of the Nazarenes: The Formative Years*, put the Church of the Nazarene in the broader history of the Christian Church and the holiness movement. *Called unto Holiness* followed up on Smith's earlier book, *Revivalism and Social Reform: American Protestantism on the Eve of the Civil War*. In that first book, Smith argued that urban advocates of holiness theology pioneered social reforms during that time; abolition was among those reforms. When *Called unto Holiness* appeared in 1962, the civil rights movement was gaining steam, but Smith mentioned little on race relations. Smith's task was to write the history of the first twenty-five years, which took the account to 1933. Towards the end of the book, in a section dealing with the rising tide of fundamentalism in the 1920s, he noted that the denomination took a "clear stand against secret societies [that] ruled out involvement with the Ku Klux Klan."<sup>24</sup>

During this time, the denomination's publishing company (Nazarene Publishing House, and its trademark Beacon Hill Press) also published some books focusing on African American evangelism. While historically relevant and revealing, many such works, however, mirror the thoughts and ideas set forth by England's Rudyard Kipling, an individual widely regarded as one of the country's most noted poets of imperialism.<sup>25</sup> Louise Robinson Chapman, the second wife of early leader J. B. Chapman, authored the first book to treat the subject of African American evangelism in the Church of the Nazarene. Her 1952 book, *The Problem of Africa*, dealt mostly with missionary work on the continent of Africa, where she had spent much of her adult life as a missionary. Chapman argued that whites were responsible for Africans being in America:

"Three hundred years ago the white man went to Africa with rum, guns, and trinkets and

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<sup>24</sup> Smith, *Called unto Holiness*, 318, 341-344; Smith, *Revivalism and Social Reform*, originally published in 1957 by Abingdon Press.

<sup>25</sup> See Rudyard Kipling, "The White Man's Burden," <http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/5478/> (accessed 5/5/2011).

returned with human merchandise in the person of slaves.” African Americans were one of the most daunting challenges for the Church of the Nazarene in the United States. She argued that the relationship between the two groups would be mutually beneficial. She also trumpeted the beginning of “our Bible Training Institute [later Nazarene Bible Institute] at Institute, West Virginia,” which was specifically for African Americans. Chapman went on to challenge the denomination to support the new training college, organize African American churches, and “make its members aware of the great need.”<sup>26</sup> Chapman connected the fertile missionary work of the Church of the Nazarene to the need to include Africans in America in the denomination.

Putting African American evangelism in the category of missions, Mendell Taylor’s three-volume history of Nazarene missionary endeavors, *Fifty Years of Nazarene Missions*, contains a brief section on “Work Among the Colored People (1914----)” in volume three, *World Outreach Through Home Missions*. Taylor recapitulates the history of the denomination’s efforts to work with African Americans. He summed up, perhaps in an understatement, the early years (pre-World War II) of Nazarene efforts, “This composite picture reveals that an interest was present in promoting work among the colored people, but altogether too often the efforts did not produce anything permanent.”<sup>27</sup>

In 1960, Carol Gish published *Missionary Frontiers at Home*, which outlined efforts of the Church of the Nazarene to evangelize various ethnic groups in the United States. As with Chapman, Gish argued that “The Negro in America, then, is the white man’s responsibility.” She took great pains to argue that African Americans were the same as everyone else, but then she wrote, “This is not to say, of course, that all American Negroes have become educated, cultured, law-abiding, Christian citizens. If that were so, there would be no reason to consider

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<sup>26</sup> Louise Robinson Chapman, *The Problem of Africa* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1952), 67-69.

<sup>27</sup> Mendell Taylor, *Fifty Years of Nazarene Missions*, volume 3, *World Outreach Through Home Missions* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1958), 140, 148-156.

the Negro frontier facing the Church today.” Not all whites (or any other group) had “become educated, cultured, law-abiding, Christian citizens.” She also connected African American evangelism with African missionary work. Gish stated, “There have never been any official acts of discrimination against the Negro or any other group in the history of the Church of the Nazarene.” She wrote that twice; while that may have been true in a strict technical sense, minorities saw their share of discrimination in the denomination although it may not have been “official.”<sup>28</sup> The argument about the “right type” of African American was a frequent refrain for authors.

When the denomination finally, officially addressed civil rights, the leaders showed their timidity. The Church of the Nazarene first officially addressed the issue of racial discrimination in 1956, at the time Johnson was getting to know C. R. Smith. The members of the 1956 General Assembly issued a rather weak statement against racial discrimination. They acknowledged the “world-wide discrimination against racial minorities.” This discrimination was “incompatible with the Scriptures,” the assembly urged each Nazarene to “humbly examine his personal attitudes and action toward other races as a first step.” They did not state what the subsequent steps should be. This measure passed the General Assembly “by a vote of 101 for and 0 against.”<sup>29</sup>

The denomination had an inconsistent record on implementing what the leadership preached. A few white Nazarenes tried to reach across the color line. One of those was J. B. Chapman, an early general superintendent, but he died before he could implement his vision. J. B. Chapman’s wife, Louise Robinson Chapman, carried on the effort started by her husband to

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<sup>28</sup> Carol Gish, *Missionary Frontiers at Home* (Kansas City: Nazarene Publishing House, 1960), 11-13, 33-45.

<sup>29</sup> *Manual*, 1960, par. 605; Church of the Nazarene, *Journal of the Fourteenth General Assembly* (Kansas City, Nazarene Publishing House, 1956), 131. Hereafter, the *Journal of the General Assembly* will be cited with the ordinal number with, date, and page number.

urge the Church of the Nazarene to reach out to African Americans. One other success was Paul Holderfield, a racist former Golden Gloves boxer turned minister. Holderfield, from Little Rock, served as a firefighter after ending his boxing days. His turning point came during the volatile period over the integration of Central High School when he snubbed an African American friend. Later, Holderfield sensed deep guilt and regret. He went on to become a minister in the Church of the Nazarene, starting the interracial Friendly Chapel Church of the Nazarene where he served until his death.<sup>30</sup>

The record, though, has many more failures than successes. Some leaders in the Church of the Nazarene believed the efforts to include African Americans were pointless. General Superintendent Orval J. Nease thought the future of the work would amount to nothing. General Superintendent Hardy C. Powers wrote to Louise Robinson Chapman specifically that “many people have discouraged [him] about the work.” Todd Reneger also notes that some district superintendents opposed African American evangelization because it would siphon off funds from white churches.<sup>31</sup>

Twenty years after their involvement, two of the early white leaders involved in expanding African American participation in the Church of the Nazarene later reflected on their experiences in the 1950s. Edwin E. Hale, who served as the first president of the African American bible college, and Leon Chambers, who served as the first district superintendent of the Gulf Central District, were key white men involved in implementing the effort to bring African American into the denomination and responded with detailed accounts. To Hale, the

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<sup>30</sup> D. Shelby Corlett, *Spirit Filled: The Life of the Rev. James Blaine Chapman, D.D.* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, n. d.), 142; Paul Holderfield and Kathy Tharp, *Brother Paul: The Paul Holderfield Story* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1981); Paul Holderfield, *Bro. Paul: Looking for Jesus* (North Little Rock, Ark.: Allied Printing Co., n. d.)

<sup>31</sup> Hardy C. Powers to Louise Robinson Chapman, February 4, 1949 (Nazarene Archives, Powers Collection 2304-12); Todd Reneger, “Reconciliation with African American Christians: A Biblical Model for Anglo American Christians in the Church of the Nazarene,” DMin diss. (Fuller Theological Seminary, 2007), 48-49.

general superintendents were the only ones that cared. It appears that they knew they had to do something, but they were not terribly enthusiastic about it. When it came to the southern districts, Hale stated bluntly, “The white districts did not want negro Churches.” He did go on to say, however, that “We knew the time would come when the Districts would absorb the Gulf Central District, and, in fact, that the school was a temporary arrangement.” He also revealed some apparent disunity among the general superintendents. Two general superintendents, Orval J. Nease and G. B. Williamson, apparently were skeptical about the work among African Americans. Hale also noted that some of the most resistant district superintendents were the first to support integrating African Americans. Chambers took a slightly different angle towards the various white districts. He noted that when he went to the southeastern districts to support the African American evangelization “all the districts cooperated.” He made a profound statement that underscores the relationship of the denomination with African Americans when he stated, “White people never understand black people as much as they think they do.”<sup>32</sup>

More often than not, the denomination supported the status quo when it came to race relations, both officially and unofficially. Within the papers of Hardy C. Powers, he left something called “A Statement of Policy for Handling the Problem of Race Relations.” At the top, someone wrote “Article,” but it appears this did not become an article in a Nazarene publication. The first point stated the Christian rationale for accepting people of different races. Point three, however, stated, “Therefore, when dealing with the Christian attitude toward other races we are always to keep in mind the problems and sensitivities of those whose attitudes we seek to change.” In other words, leaders had to take into account the “sensitivities” of racists. At the bottom of the page is a handwritten note stating, “Suggested that guidance be *verbal*.” It

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<sup>32</sup> E. E. Hale to Raymond W. Hurn, July 24, 1972 (Nazarene Archives, Black Book File 199-41); Hale to Hurn, August 13, 1972 (Nazarene Archives, Black Book File 199-41); Leon Chambers to Hurn, July 22, 1972 (Nazarene Archives, Black Book File 199-39).

is not clear to whom this directive was aimed. Further, in 1953, when Clarence Barrows, a Nazarene layman from Ohio, sought to send some African American children to the district's summer camp for children, district leaders rejected his request. General Superintendent D. I. Vanderpool and district leaders told Barrows to accept the status quo. Ohio Nazarenes would not accept African American children attending camp with their white children.<sup>33</sup>

Leaders also stereotyped African Americans as given to vices and voodoo. In his first report as district superintendent of the Gulf Central District, Leon Chambers stated, "One of our Colored pastors told me the hindrance in his church is 'hou-do-ism.' It keeps people afraid. Yes, this is here in America. Gambling, drinking, adultery – all of the sins of Africa are found here. The Witch doctor? No! But we have the 'hou-doist' and the fortune teller." While some African Americans may have been under the influence of "hou-do-ism," they certainly did not have a monopoly on "gambling, drinking, [or] adultery." For Chambers to call these the "sins of Africa" showed ignorance; these are the sins of all humanity.<sup>34</sup>

Other examples of stereotyping occurred frequently in the correspondence; many of these were so subtle as to almost escape detection. Several letters contain subtle comments that show a racist undercurrent. Alpin Bowes, for example, could not figure out "what to call these fellows," writing that "the Southern Negroes liked to be called 'Elder,'" but western and northern African Americans did not.<sup>35</sup> Invariably, the white leaders of the Church of the Nazarene did not understand African Americans.

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<sup>33</sup> "A Statement of Policy for Handling the Problem of Race Relations," no date (Nazarene Archives, Powers Collection 2305-21), emphasis in the original; Cunningham, *Our Watchword and Song*, 373.

<sup>34</sup> "Report for Gulf Central District, 1953."

<sup>35</sup> Alpin P. Bowes to Hardy C. Powers, November 24, 1948; Hardy C. Powers to W. O. Fisher, April 30, 1951 (Nazarene Archives, Powers Collection 2304-19); D. I. Vanderpool to Leon Chambers, December 9, 1954 (Nazarene Archives, Vanderpool Collection 906-12).

White and African American leaders worried about funding for the African American work and the Gulf Central District, but leaders often pushed the need to the side. Apparently, Louise Robinson Chapman pressured Hardy C. Powers to push for funding of the work. In 1949, as the work was getting off the ground, Powers wrote to Chapman that the denomination had other priorities. He wrote, “I heartily agree with you regarding more publicity for the colored work. However, we have refrained from doing this lest we might distract from the Easter Offering [for foreign missionary work], upon which we feel so much depends at this time.” It seems that at times, denominational leaders made Africans in Africa a higher priority than African Americans.<sup>36</sup>

The most shocking display of racism revolved around the location of the denominational publishing house, headquarters, and seminary. The denomination chose Kansas City, Missouri, a central location, as the site of the Nazarene Publishing House. They secured property near 30<sup>th</sup> Street and Troost Avenue in Kansas City. That site also became the site of the denominational headquarters, and later Nazarene Theological Seminary. Through the middle part of the twentieth century, the publishing business boomed, creating pressure on space. In the early 1950s, the denomination decided to move headquarters some thirty blocks south to 63<sup>rd</sup> Street and The Paseo in Kansas City. The denomination rationalized the move as one of space and necessity, or so the dominant line went. Purkiser reiterated the same logic in his contribution to *Called Unto Holiness*.<sup>37</sup>

While disclaiming racism as a motive, the committee that explored the move offered African Americans moving into the area as a reason for relocation. At the January 1948 General Board Meeting of the denomination, the board set up a commission to study moving the

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<sup>36</sup> Hardy C. Powers to Louise Robinson Chapman, March 14, 1949 (Nazarene Archives, Powers Collection 2304-12).

<sup>37</sup> Smith, *Called Unto Holiness*, 263-266; Purkiser, *Called Unto Holiness*, 147-148, 173-175, 243-245.

publishing house, headquarters, and seminary. The commission presented its findings to the General Assembly later that year. They outlined the reasons for moving the complex: traffic congestion, worker safety because of the necessity of crossing a busy street, and noise. Their third point addressed the “racial problem” in the area. A swelling African American population in Kansas City pushed the color line closer to denomination property. The committee stated that, “Negroes have completely engulfed the old Nazarene area [location of Kansas City First Church of the Nazarene] around Twenty-fourth Street and Troost Avenue,” which was a few blocks north. The report went on, stating that “M. Lunn [manager of NPH] has conferred with city officials and business leaders in our community, and all are agreed that it is only a matter of time until ours will be a **Negro area**.” They claimed, “We are not arguing on the basis of racial discrimination, but we are realistically facing the fact that a strong Negro population in a community develops problems and situations that are not conducive to the best interests of work such as ours, and for which we are not justified in taking responsibility.”<sup>38</sup>

One other incident likely went unnoticed when it first occurred but showed denominational discomfort with giving African Americans too visible of a role. The Church of the Nazarene published a magazine, *Other Sheep*, informing readers of international missionary activity. For the December 1959 issue the editors chose a nativity scene depicted by African Americans—no country of origin was given. Reneger notes the uproar that ensued: “Before publication, word seeped out about the cover and its caption. Letters began to flow in from all across the denomination protesting the cover. Bending to pressure, the cover was changed to depict a group of Anglo children singing Christmas carols.”<sup>39</sup> While the denomination had been

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<sup>38</sup> *Journal of the Twelfth General Assembly* (1948), 60-61 (bold type in the original); see also Cunningham, *Our Watchword and Song*, 368-369.

<sup>39</sup> Reneger, “Reconciliation with African American Christians,” 49-50; see appendix two and three of Reneger for representation of the two covers.

saying some of the right things about race relations and civil rights, when it came down to putting black faces on the nativity, they could not do so.

Charles and Carrie Johnson stepped into this ambivalent morass, and they left Orlando for Institute, West Virginia, just outside of Charleston. While there, Johnson studied for the ministry under the tutelage of Clarence Bowman and R. W. Cunningham, African American leaders in the Church of the Nazarene. Johnson lists those two, along with Warren Rogers, as the greatest African American influences from the denomination on his life. Johnson studied the routine material in preparing for the ministry, but something was missing.<sup>40</sup>

The Church of the Nazarene prides itself on its unique theological perspective as a denomination in the Wesleyan-Holiness tradition. As such, they emphasize not only personal salvation but also the experience of entire sanctification (also known as Christian perfection, heart holiness, and a variety of other terms). “Two months before [he] was sent to Meridian,” Johnson’s preparation for the ministry became complete “one Thursday evening.” In a service, Edward Lawlor, later general superintendent for the denomination, preached a sermon at the bible college, and Johnson experienced entire sanctification. He says, “God filled me with his precious Holy Ghost, enabled me, broke down all of the facades and all of the entrenched anger that, as a black man, I had stored up for years, and did away with all of the other things and put love in my heart, real love.” Johnson says that was what prepared him for the ministry and his ultimate entry into the civil rights movement. That religious experience, in his final months of bible college, allowed him not to retaliate when confronted with violence and threats from those opposed to the civil rights movement. In the early 1980s, Johnson told Jerry Appleby that “My

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<sup>40</sup> Charles Johnson, interview; Tharp, “Another Title,” 5; Wiseman, \$44.50 Expands,” 16; Wiseman, “Charles Johnson’s Legacy”; Appleby, *What Color*, 35; Appleby, “Blacks, Whites,” 26; “Black Nazarene Church Emerging as Evangelistic Force,” *HH*, January 1, 1979, 23. See Mark R. Quanstrom, *A Century of Holiness Theology: The Doctrine of Entire Sanctification in the Church of the Nazarene, 1905 to 2004* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 2004) for a detailed history of the doctrine in the denomination as well as an explanation of the doctrine itself.

being filled with the Holy Spirit is the only way God could have used me in Meridian, Miss. Otherwise, I would have been dead a long time ago.”<sup>41</sup>

Charles Johnson completed his studies for the ministry at Nazarene Bible Institute, as prescribed by the Church of the Nazarene. Warren Rogers asked, and Johnson agreed to go to Meridian, if somewhat unenthusiastically. Johnson was the new pastor of Fitkins Memorial Church of the Nazarene. In 1961, the Gulf Central District granted him a district minister’s license, and the denomination ordained him in 1964. Johnson’s path into the ministry was rather typical for anyone entering the ministry.<sup>42</sup>

Prior to Johnson’s arrival, Meridian had been a center of African American evangelism in the Church of the Nazarene. Fitkins Memorial Church of the Nazarene started before 1947. The denomination held the “First Negro Conference in the South of the Church of the Nazarene” in Meridian on January 25, 1948, “in the Fitkin [sic] Memorial Church of the Nazarene.” Later that same year, the second annual African American conference came to Meridian; this is the conference where John Knight expressed his desire to reach African Americans in Florida. At some point between 1948 and 1955, the church closed, only to reopen in 1955. The church barely survived the late 1950s, when the Gulf Central District leadership thought about shutting the doors. Roger Bowman, who would become another key African American figure in the Church of the Nazarene, kept the church going until Johnson arrived.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Charles Johnson, interview; Appleby, *What Color*, 35-37; Appleby, “Blacks, Whites,” 29; JoeAnn Ballard, “Nazarene Bible Institute,” <http://www.joeannballard.com/West%20Virginia.pdf> (accessed 1/3/2011).

<sup>42</sup> Gulf Central District Church of the Nazarene, *Ninth Annual Assembly Journal* (Kansas City: Nazarene Publishing House, 1961), 23; Gulf Central District Church of the Nazarene, *Twelfth Annual Assembly Journal* (Kansas City: Nazarene Publishing House, 1964), 23. The Church of the Nazarene requires all prospective ministers to complete a specified course of study before ordination. Ministers are credentialed on three levels: locally licensed by a local church, district licensed by the district, and ordained by a general superintendent of the denomination. Licensing is a probationary period while a minister completes education and/or gains experience. Ordination is for life, unless surrendered voluntarily or taken away for cause (such as moral lapse or joining another denomination).

<sup>43</sup> Chris Brenneman, “45 Years in the Ministry,” *wtok.com*, July 16, 2006, <http://www.wtok.com/news/headlines/3362611.html> (accessed 2/27/2010); Nazarene Communications Network,

Despite its role as central to African American activity, Fitkins was a small church. At the first African American conference, Fitkins Memorial reported fourteen members, fifteen in average Sunday school attendance, and fifteen young people. In 1955, the church reported only six members, a Sunday school enrollment of fifty-five, and an average of thirty-five attending Sunday school. (Unfortunately, the denomination did not require churches to report average worship attendance until 1982.) As the 1950s wore on, attendance declined.<sup>44</sup> The fledgling church never gained attendance. The assignment would not have excited many would be ministers, because of the attendance record, and the racial component of life in Mississippi made the position that much less attractive. It certainly was not a dream assignment for any minister, but that is the position to which Rogers assigned Johnson.

It would be difficult to fictionalize worse conditions than those Johnson faced when he drove his donated car into Meridian. The church building was deplorable, the parsonage was equally deplorable, the pay was next to nothing, and he was married with a baby. On top of that, Johnson was a rookie pastor with little experience. When Johnson arrived, the church had three

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“Mississippi Pastor Celebrates 45 Years with Church,” ncnnews.com, July 21, 2006, [https://www.nph.com/nphweb/media/umedia/HQ1/NCN/enews\\_archive/old/gnews0629.html](https://www.nph.com/nphweb/media/umedia/HQ1/NCN/enews_archive/old/gnews0629.html) (accessed 2/20/2010); Hardy C. Powers, S. T. Ludwig, and John Stockton, “Conference Memo,” September 22, 1947 (Nazarene Archives, Powers Collection 2303-37); “First Negro Conference in the South of the Church of the Nazarene,” (Nazarene Archives, Powers Collection, 2305-22); “Second Annual Conference”; Charles Johnson, “1970 Negro Church Information,” July 9, 1970 (Nazarene Archives, Stan Ingersol personal files, 199-50); “Fitkins Memorial – Mississippi District,” <http://app.nazarene.org/FindAChurch/viewReport.jsp?reportId=21196&orgId=3838> (accessed 2/14/2011). There is some difference in the spelling of the churches name. In official Church of the Nazarene material, the name is Fitkin (without the “s”), while secular sources, save for the Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission, refer to the name as Fitkins (with the “s”). The church sign (as viewed and photographed by the author) reads “Fitkins” (with the “s”). I have used “Fitkins” with the “s,” because that is the name on the sign and the usage by Johnson and his members, while retaining “Fitkin” when using direct quotations.

<sup>44</sup> “First Negro Conference”; Leon Chambers to Alpin B. Bowes, no date, (Nazarene Archives, Vanderpool Collection 906-12); Gulf Central District Church of the Nazarene, *Third Annual Assembly Journal* (Kansas City: Nazarene Publishing House, 1955), statistical section (no page number); Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission, “memorandum from Edgar C. Fortenberry,” no date, SCRID# 2-46-0-104-1-1-1, Series 2515: Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission Records, 1994-2006, Mississippi Department of Archives and History, July 14, 2010, [http://mdah.state.ms.us/arrec/digital\\_archives/sovcom/result.php?image=/data/sov\\_commission/images/png/cd02/011285.png&otherstuff=2|46|0|104|1|1|1|11052|](http://mdah.state.ms.us/arrec/digital_archives/sovcom/result.php?image=/data/sov_commission/images/png/cd02/011285.png&otherstuff=2|46|0|104|1|1|1|11052|) (accessed 12/22/2010).

adults and ten children in attendance. The parishioners were also very poor, and the task ahead of him was daunting.<sup>45</sup>

The church building was barely usable when Johnson arrived. The building that housed the African American conferences a little over a decade earlier had fallen into disrepair. In an understatement, a 1979 *Herald of Holiness* article called it “a small concrete-block structure” with “similar difficulties and problems” as the house where the Johnsons lived. Johnson describes the building this way: “In that little old building, that they gave me when they sent me here to pastor, it sprinkled on the outside and rained on the inside.” The original building was one open room with the restrooms in the rear of the parsonage, which was on the same property. Birds would fly into the belfry, and “when they start[ed] singing, we start[ed] singing,” Johnson jokes.<sup>46</sup> Johnson can share a chuckle about that now, but it seems unlikely that it was humorous at the time.

The parsonage where Johnson’s family lived was also in nearly unlivable condition. The 1979 *Herald* article called it “a small concrete-block parsonage where, in the rainy season, water oozed through the cement joints between the concrete blocks and up through the concrete floor.” The house was a four-room house with block walls and a concrete floor. Johnson’s description is quite blunt: “And where we lived in that piece of thing there, four block walls.” In that “piece of thing,” mold was a constant threat. It had sweating walls that affected the health of his family;

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<sup>45</sup> Charles Johnson, interview; Wiseman, “Charles Johnson’s Legacy”; Appleby, *What Color*, 37; Tharp, “Another Title,” 5; Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission, “Memorandum from Edgar C. Fortenberry to Director, Sovereignty Commission,” April 23, 1970, SCRID# 2-46-0-104-1-1-1, Series 2515: Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission Records, 1994-2006, Mississippi Department of Archives and History, April 20, 2006, [http://mdah.state.ms.us/arrec/digital\\_archives/sovcom/result.php?image=/data/sov\\_commission/images/png/cd02/011285.png&otherstuff=2|46|0|104|1|1|1|11052|](http://mdah.state.ms.us/arrec/digital_archives/sovcom/result.php?image=/data/sov_commission/images/png/cd02/011285.png&otherstuff=2|46|0|104|1|1|1|11052|) (accessed 3/7/2010).

<sup>46</sup> Charles Johnson, interview; Ballard to Phillips; JoeAnn Ballard, interview by author, telephone, November 18, 2010; “Black Nazarene Church,” 23.

his baby daughter became ill with pneumonia. Neil Wiseman noted that the neighborhood was full of similarly built houses.<sup>47</sup>

With the dilapidated church building and parsonage in a run-down neighborhood and a very low attendance, the church had little money with which to support a pastor. Johnson's starting salary was \$2.50 per week. In the midst of a shared poverty, the Johnsons and the congregation developed a close relationship, helping each other as they had need. Johnson would be quick to help someone in need, and the congregation would be quick to help the Johnsons. Johnson also spent the first fifteen years of his ministry in Meridian working outside the church to supplement his income from the church. He worked for the Head Start program and other civic agencies. Wiseman noted that "His ministry and outside employment complement each other."<sup>48</sup> Johnson's work outside the church could be described as a sort of ministry. His work seemed to be in a line that was helping those in need.

As a small church, Fitkins Memorial received a monthly check from denominational headquarters to help finance operations. The leadership, however, would not send the check directly to Johnson or the church. Instead, they sent the money to the minister of the white Church of the Nazarene in Meridian. Johnson would then have to go to the white minister's house to pick up the check, and as if to heap indignity upon indignity, Johnson had to go to the back door to get the check. Johnson sees this as a lack of trust on the part of the white leadership for blacks handling their own money. He summed up the situation, "I got to Meridian, the Nazarenes who professed the whole everything [were] more racist than the world." JoeAnn Ballard tells of how the denomination did not allow Fitkins to have a bank account.<sup>49</sup> The

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<sup>47</sup> Charles Johnson, interview; Ballard to Phillips; "Black Nazarene Church," 23; Ballard, interview; Wiseman, "Charles Johnson's Legacy."

<sup>48</sup> "Black Nazarene Church," 23; Appleby, *What Color*, 39; Wiseman, "Charles Johnson's Legacy."

<sup>49</sup> Charles Johnson, interview; Ballard, interview.

denomination had made the pronouncement in 1956 about racial equality, yet they failed to trust the African American leaders that they appointed.

One additional problem that Johnson encountered when arriving in Meridian was that many were suspicious of him. Whites were suspicious because he was not from Meridian. African Americans were suspicious because they did not know who the Nazarenes were. Other African American ministers were the most suspicious; they believed the Church of the Nazarene was some sort of cult outside the Christian mainstream. Johnson spent a great deal of time explaining what the Church of the Nazarene was and dispelling myths and misunderstandings. According to Johnson, other ministers went so far as to try to ensure that his church did not grow. He says, “So they did all they could to see that I didn’t grow, I didn’t move.” The church also suffered from a serious lack of visibility in the community. Wiseman notes that “The tiny one-room church building was located on an out-of-the way side street.”<sup>50</sup>

Johnson had dreamed of going to San Diego to minister; he knew there was a church there for him. After ministering in Meridian for only two years, Johnson thought his dream had come true. One day while he was sweeping water out of the church building, the postal worker brought a special delivery letter from that church in San Diego requesting him to come in for an interview. Johnson remembers, “I wanted to tell my wife to pack while I prayed.” Johnson was as good as gone. Johnson’s recollection is vivid as he describes the scene:

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<sup>50</sup> Charles Johnson, interview; Wiseman, “Charles Johnson’s Legacy”; Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission, “memorandum from Director, Sovereignty Commission to Herman Glazier,” April 21, 1970, SCRID# 2-46-0-102-1-1-1, Series 2515: Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission Records, 1994-2006, Mississippi Department of Archives and History, July 14, 2010, [http://mdah.state.ms.us/arrec/digital\\_archives/sovcom/result.php?image=/data/sov\\_commission/images/png/cd02/011262.png&otherstuff=2|46|0|102|1|1|1|11029|](http://mdah.state.ms.us/arrec/digital_archives/sovcom/result.php?image=/data/sov_commission/images/png/cd02/011262.png&otherstuff=2|46|0|102|1|1|1|11029|) (accessed 12/22/2010); Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission, “Weekly Activity Report by Edgar C. Fortenberry,” April 20-24, 1970, SCRID# 2-46-0-103-1-1-1-1, Series 2515: Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission Records, 1994-2006, Mississippi Department of Archives and History, July 14, 2010, [http://mdah.state.ms.us/arrec/digital\\_archives/sovcom/result.php?image=/data/sov\\_commission/images/png/cd02/011266.png&otherstuff=2|46|0|103|2|1|1|11033|](http://mdah.state.ms.us/arrec/digital_archives/sovcom/result.php?image=/data/sov_commission/images/png/cd02/011266.png&otherstuff=2|46|0|103|2|1|1|11033|) (accessed 12/22/2010); MSSC, “Fortenberry to director.”

And I thought it was a blessing. I thought God was telling me, “Come on.” But after I got through reading the letter and was excited to tell my wife about it, he spoke to me. He said, “You stay right here.” A lot of folks don’t believe that, but it was, and here I’m standing in the water [inside the church building], child suffering. I wrote ‘em back that I couldn’t accept it.

As much as he wanted to leave, Johnson stayed in Meridian. His family suggested numerous times that he get out of there. Johnson stayed because he felt that God wanted him to stay in Meridian. In later years, Johnson found out that his dream church in San Diego had serious problems and experienced a split.<sup>51</sup>

Despite the situation, Johnson dove into his work as minister at Fitkins. Originally, his intention in going to Meridian was to pastor the church and build the membership; it was not to be a civil rights activist. He invested his time in working with people in the community as a form of church outreach, and he took time to mentor other young African Americans in the Church of the Nazarene. Johnson became aware of the fact that many of the city’s African Americans were so impoverished that they really did not care about the church or religion.<sup>52</sup>

Even the church where Martin Luther King Jr. would serve as minister struggled with its role in the civil rights movement early on. Houston Bryan Roberson’s book, *Fighting the Good Fight: The Story of the Dexter Avenue King Memorial Baptist Church, 1865-1977*, explores the Montgomery, Alabama, church where King served as pastor. The congregation hesitated when it came to making waves on social issues. King’s idea in coming to Dexter Avenue was to minister in the church: preach, oversee programs, seek new members, and so forth. He did not intend to get involved in any sort of social or political activity. His pastorate, however, began a mere fifteen months before Rosa Parks’s arrest for violating the color line on a Montgomery bus.

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<sup>51</sup> Charles Johnson, interview.

<sup>52</sup> Appleby, *What Color*, 39; Ballard, interview; Ballard to Phillips.

After that the congregation of Dexter Avenue Church was pulled into the center of the civil rights movement; the members organized and hosted meetings regarding the bus boycott.<sup>53</sup>

A growing interest for scholars is the role the white church played in the fight for equality. One of the earliest works on this theme is James Findlay's *Church People in the Struggle: The National Council of Churches and the Black Freedom Movement, 1950-1970*. Findlay focuses his study on the role of the National Council of Churches (NCC) in the civil rights movement. Later, the NCC became involved in the Mississippi Delta Region in what they called the Delta Ministry. In the end, the NCC started down the road of racial reconciliation, but it was only a start.<sup>54</sup>

Despite the Church of the Nazarene's continual failures, Charles Johnson cast his lot with the Nazarenes. This tends to illustrate the power that one individual can have on another. C. R. Smith's influence on Johnson's life overrode any concerns he may have had regarding what the Church of the Nazarene was or was not doing. This denomination, which proclaimed the equality of all humanity, tacitly forced Johnson to go to an ill-funded and ill-equipped bible school for African Americans rather than the typical university route that most whites took when preparing for the ministry. Nonetheless, Johnson studied, graduated, and seemed ready to enter the ecclesiastical world.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Houston Bryan Roberson, *Fighting the Good Fight: The Story of the Dexter Avenue King Memorial Baptist Church, 1865-1977* (New York: Routledge, 2005), xvi, 84-86, 140, 143.

<sup>54</sup> James F. Findlay, Jr., *Church People in the Struggle: The National Council of Churches and the Black Freedom Movement, 1950-1970* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 4, 123, 225. The NCC is a group of mainline (usually considered more liberal—theologically and politically—than the Church of the Nazarene). The Church of the Nazarene is not a member of the NCC (<http://www.nccusa.org/members/> accessed 10/9/2010). The Church of the Nazarene is a member of National Association of Evangelicals and the World Methodist Council (e-mail correspondence with General Secretaries Office of the Church of the Nazarene, 10/12/2010). The Mississippi Delta is an area of northwest Mississippi. It runs along the east bank of the Mississippi River from Memphis, Tennessee to Vicksburg, and approximately 60 miles east.

<sup>55</sup> Charles Johnson, interview. C. R. Smith's story unfortunately died with him a few years ago. No one will probably know the reason for Smith's efforts to reach African Americans in Orlando. Smith's life illustrates a growing area of study for scholars, namely that all whites were not Klan members or even Klan sympathizers. Across the South there were whites who opposed segregation and supported civil rights. See Constance Curry, et

Nevertheless, Johnson slowly built the membership and attendance from those original thirteen in that leaky old building. In 1964, he built a new red brick sanctuary, doing much of the work himself. Johnson even impressed the Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission, which had nothing kind to say about him. Edgar Fortenberry acknowledged that “Rev. Johnson has been successful in building up attendance, interest and activities of the membership of the church.” The numbers bear out Fortenberry’s analysis. In 1968, the church had fifty-two members, and one year later, they reported seventy-four members. During the intervening year, Fitkins averaged 120 in Sunday school attendance. In 1967, the Johnsons moved from the ramshackle old house to a new three-bedroom parsonage. Moreover, on Easter Sunday 1968, the church welcomed 315 worshippers.<sup>56</sup>

As far as preaching, Johnson considers himself a “holiness preacher,” and has for the last fifty years. He says, “That’s why I can’t compromise what I know in the gospel, in the Nazarene doctrine; I can’t compromise it to satisfy the mass[es of people]. I have to preach it like I know it.” This all goes back to his understanding of holiness and his experience of entire sanctification at bible college. To Johnson, holiness and civil rights are inseparable, because both involve the whole person. Civil rights “had to” enter his preaching during the height of the civil rights movement. Johnson rooted his philosophy of preaching in the biblical concepts of God’s love and holiness. He explains, “So holiness is God’s love toward us to give us the ability to reach out for that love from each other and through him.” Johnson also says that “Holiness represents justice.” He goes on to say that civil rights and Christianity “has to walk together hand in hand,

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al., *Deep in our Hearts: Nine White Women in the Freedom Movement* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2000). Other whites (see Chapter Two) can be counted in the same way. Others, like Smith, have taken their stories with them to their graves. Smith was an appliance salesman who was a member of a Nazarene church.

<sup>56</sup> Charles Johnson, interview; MSSC, “Weekly Activity Report”; Gulf Central District Church of the Nazarene, *Seventeenth Annual Assembly Journal* (Kansas City: Nazarene Publishing House, 1969), statistical section (no page number); Charles Johnson, “1970 Negro Church Information”; *The Gulf Central Informer: The Church of the Nazarene*, February 1968, 1.

‘cause rights, the word ‘right’ are hand in hand with the word ‘righteousness.’ So if I’m going to be righteousness then I got to be right. And if I’m going to be right then I’ve got to help my brother to be, to get him to be right so he can go on to righteousness.”<sup>57</sup> Holiness, God’s love, justice, civil rights, and righteousness all fit together in Johnson’s thinking. Johnson’s theology is closely related to liberation theology, which is the connection between freedom of the oppressed and religion. Religion, true religion, in Johnson’s view, sets people free from oppression, which may be sin, inequality, or poverty. Ultimately, freedom from God, and the individual must surrender to God.

Johnson’s theology, aside from the emphasis on holiness, is very close to King’s. One of the major liberation theologians is James H. Cone. Cone’s work, *Martin & Malcolm & America: A Dream or a Nightmare*, compares and contrasts the lives, beliefs, and outlooks of King and Malcolm X. He notes that King’s belief was a mixture of the “black Baptist church” and “white, Protestant liberalism.” Cone argues that King was no black separatist, as he saw Malcolm X’s views on separation as untenable and impractical. African Americans simply would not and could not pick up and move to Africa; the only practical solution, according to King, was integration. While the white church was a source of grief for King because of its lack of response, Cone argues that King directed his harshest criticism at well-to-do African American ministers who sat on the sidelines in the struggle.<sup>58</sup> Johnson’s philosophy was, and still is, largely in line with King’s. Johnson’s expectation was that Bible believing Christians should support civil rights. Johnson was a thorough integrationist but shared King’s disappointment with the white church’s anemic response.

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<sup>57</sup> Charles Johnson, interview.

<sup>58</sup> James H. Cone, *Martin & Malcolm & America: A Dream or a Nightmare* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1991), 121, 129-131, 139-142, 147-148.

As a young, overworked, underpaid minister, Johnson also took time to mentor other young African Americans from the Church of the Nazarene and promoting the denomination across the GCD. JoeAnn Ballard remembers the trip she took with Johnson across many states when he took the time to mentor her. Ballard is still in contact with Johnson, stating, “He’s a person that I could talk to and be mentored by constantly over the years.” District leaders also commended Johnson for sending five students to the Nazarene Training College (formerly Nazarene Bible Institute) in 1968. In 1965, he held “a very successful revival in Memphis [Tennessee] Friendship Church” of the Nazarene. In 1967, Johnson took his congregation and choir to Prentiss, Mississippi, where they had an “outstanding revival.”<sup>59</sup> Johnson’s efforts as minister at Fitkins resulted in a church, which had been given up for dead in the late 1950s, becoming a vibrant hive of activity in less than a decade.

While Johnson built his church and worked for civil rights in Meridian, the issue of civil rights captivated the United States during the 1960s. While civil rights elicited infrequent mention in the *Herald* before 1964, the issue became more frequent from 1964 through the end of the decade. Articles, editorials, and letters to the editor about civil rights peppered the pages of the *Herald* at the rate of at least one per year and often more. As the 1960s progressed, one can see the Church of the Nazarene struggling with the issues of civil rights and race relations. The rhetoric ranged from middle of the road to liberal. The authors spoke in favor of civil rights, but not always with great enthusiasm. The variety of authors offered a variety of opinions.

In February of 1964, as debate raged over civil rights legislation, L. Guy Nees, pastor of First Church of the Nazarene in Los Angeles, stepped into the fray of the Church’s role “in

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<sup>59</sup> Appleby, *What Color*, 39; Ballard, interview; Ballard to Phillips; *The Gulf Central Informer: The Church of the Nazarene*, May 1968, 1 (Nazarene Archives, US/Canada District Collection, 1292-3); *The Gulf Central Informer*, June 1965, 1; *The Gulf Central Informer*, May 1967, 2; *The Gulf Central Informer*, August 1967, 1 (all located in the Nazarene Archives, US/Canada District Collection, 1292-3).

today's social revolution." Nees listed several social ills of the day including "the burning issue of our times, civil rights." He appealed to the historical stance of the holiness movement toward slavery in the mid-nineteenth century, citing Timothy Smith's recent—at the time—*Revivalism and Social Reform*. He also cited the acknowledged founder of the Church of the Nazarene, Phineas F. Bresee, who had started the First Church of the Nazarene in Los Angeles, as a social activist.<sup>60</sup>

Less than three weeks after the Civil Rights Act of 1964 became law, General Superintendent G. B. Williamson published an article in the *Herald* entitled "'Meritocracy.'" One should notice that the word "meritocracy" was in quotation marks in the title and throughout the article. He noted, "'Meritocracy' includes the principle that any person may lawfully live, lodge, eat, travel, and do business according to the state of his prosperity."<sup>61</sup>

In the "Pro & Con: Letters to the Editor" section, the *Herald* frequently reprinted letters that expressed opposing viewpoints on various topics. These letters give valuable insight into what the average reader, most likely a member of Nazarene churches, thought. The November 4, 1964, issue of the *Herald* carried the two letters to the editor dealing with civil rights. Both authors testified to good race relations in their areas.<sup>62</sup> These letters are somewhat anecdotal, but they do demonstrate the divergent opinions that existed in the membership of the Church of the Nazarene.

One of the more valuable articles came from A. F. Harper, executive editor for the Department of Church Schools (i.e. Sunday schools) for the denomination. In his February 1965 article, Harper acknowledged his personal struggle over race relations. Harper knew that discrimination was wrong, but when he considered the possibility that he would lose \$3,000 in

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<sup>60</sup> L. Guy Nees, "The Role of the Church in Today's Social Revolution," *HH*, February 12, 1964, 5.

<sup>61</sup> G. B. Williamson, "'Meritocracy,'" *HH*, July 22, 1964, 2.

<sup>62</sup> Martha J. Sherman, letter to the editor; R. Earl Cotton, letter to the editor, *HH*, November 4, 1964.

value of his house in his “all-white neighborhood,” if an African American family were to move in, he had to pause. Money was not Harper’s only concern; he was concerned for his wife. He wrote, “My wife would feel uneasy living in close proximity to a Negro community,” although he did not elaborate. Playing on age-old fears of miscegenation, Harper wrote that “Some of my friends fear that an integrated society must of necessity mean increasing intermarriage between Negroes and whites and eventually a completely fused population.” Harper concluded that he was dubious about this.<sup>63</sup> He shows the deep internal conflict that waged within his soul and no doubt in the souls of many readers.

In the same issue as Harper’s article, G. G. Trivett, a Canadian reader, chastised the *Herald* for neglecting the issue of civil rights. At a time when the civil rights movement was front-page news everywhere else, the editors of the *Herald* had been derelict in their duty to cover the story. Trivett was indignant that the church bombing in Birmingham, Alabama, only received a one-sentence mention, “and the killing of three civil rights workers [Michael Schwerner, James Chaney, and Andrew Goodman] had passed without mention.” He suggested that the Church of the Nazarene was more concerned with preventing smoking and other vices than racial inequality. He asked why a church had no problem confronting a member who sold tobacco in the course of business, but would not inquire about the same member’s racial prejudice.<sup>64</sup>

Harper’s articles and Trivett’s letter caused an avalanche of letters. Four of the six letters in the “Pro & Con” section of the April 7, 1965, issue of the *Herald* dealt with either Harper’s article or Trivett’s letter. Mrs. John Scott of Maryland claimed that she had “been meaning to write [the same letter as Trivett] for two years,” though she did not mention why she had

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<sup>63</sup> A. F. Harper, “Toward Christian Understanding,” *HH*, February 3, 1965, 5-6.

<sup>64</sup> G. G. Trivett, letter to the editor, *HH*, February 3, 1965.

procrastinated. She said that she “would like to see our church [denomination] take a stronger stand with this problem. This kind of prejudice is not compatible with the gospel of holiness.” On the other side of the argument was Mrs. A. D. Ellison of Mississippi. She was offended that a Canadian would have the temerity to comment on the state of race relations in the United States. “Certainly no Christian condones violence,” wrote Mrs. Ellison. “I can only speak for my lovely state,” she intoned.<sup>65</sup> Mrs. Ellison seemed unconvinced that many Christians’ silence had given tacit approval to violence against the three civil rights workers killed in her “lovely state” less than a year earlier.

Harper’s article brought responses from two men. Charles E. Roberson of California wrote an approving letter. He noted, “I am gratified that responsible leaders in our church [denomination] are speaking out in favor of truly Christian attitudes” although Harper vacillated greatly in the article and the statement was not very forceful. Harold C. Frodge of Illinois had the opposite take on Harper’s article. He argued that “The article is definitely pro-Negro, pro-civil rights.” Frodge correctly noted that Nazarenes were on both sides.<sup>66</sup>

Over the next few years, several authors wrote articles on the civil rights issue. W. T. Purkiser suggested that alcohol and gun control would reduce crime and poverty, but failed to mention how it would have helped the poor. C. Neil Strait addressed the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. Purkiser rebuked James Foreman’s *Black Manifesto* as an act of treason.<sup>67</sup> Most authors tended to view the problem in religious terms and called for spiritual solutions such as prayer, loving each other, and turning to God.

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<sup>65</sup> Mrs. John Scott, letter to the editor, *HH*, April 7, 1965; Mrs. A. D. Ellison, letter to the editor, *HH*, April 7, 1965.

<sup>66</sup> Charles E. Roberson, letter to the editor; Harold C. Frodge, letter to the editor, *HH*, April 7, 1965.

<sup>67</sup> J. Harrison Hudson, “In Search of Real Brotherhood,” *HH*, August 17, 1966, 6-7; W. T. Purkiser, “Sanctified Smugness,” *HH*, September 20, 1967, 10; W. T. Purkiser, “Violence and Strife in the City,” *HH*, September 20, 1967, 10-11; C. Neil Strait, “The Church & Race Relations,” *HH*, July 17, 1968, 6-7; Eugene Stowe, “The Gulf Central District – Hail and Farewell,” *HH*, July 11, 1969, 2; W. T. Purkiser, “Rhetoric or Treason?” *HH*, July 30, 1969, 10-11. For a summary of the Black Manifesto see “Churches: Black Manifesto,” *Time*, May 16, 1969, <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,902585,00.html> (accessed 11/15/2010).

In 1964, Nazarenes met in Portland, Oregon, for their quadrennial General Assembly. This meeting occurred as the Civil Rights Act was in its final stages, and shortly after the three civil rights workers disappeared in Neshoba County, Mississippi. As they gathered in Portland, the *Oregonian*—Portland’s newspaper—noticed. The authors speculated that the denomination would make a stronger statement about racial discrimination than they had previously made eight years earlier, which they did. The authors also noted that only five of the 678 delegates were African Americans, four of whom were from the all African American Gulf Central District.<sup>68</sup> Johnson was at this General Assembly.

The statement on “race and discrimination” from the 1964 General Assembly was much stronger in favor of equality than the 1956 version. The denomination stated, “We believe that all races should have equality before the law, including the right to vote, the right to equal educational opportunities, the right to earn a living according to one’s ability without discrimination, and the right to public facilities supported by taxation.” It also connected this statement to the denomination’s belief in “holiness of heart.” The amendment passed with “a vote of 73 for and 2 against.”<sup>69</sup> The oddity in this 1964 pronouncement is the use of the phrase, “the right to public facilities supported by taxation.” Apparently, the Church of the Nazarene believed that African Americans had a right to attend public schools, have access to courthouses, post offices, parks, and places supported by tax dollars, but not to private businesses such as hotels, restaurants, churches, and other places that were not supported by tax dollars.

Four years later, the Church of the Nazarene adopted a resolution that altered the phrase about tax-supported facilities. The statement was essentially the same, except to say that “each individual...should have...equal access...to all public facilities.” They dropped the “supported

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<sup>68</sup> “Nazarene Church Will Consider Stronger Stand on Race Issue,” *Oregonian*, June 20, 1964, 13.

<sup>69</sup> *Manual*, 1964, par. 603, section 1; *Journal of the Sixteenth General Assembly* (1964), 141-142.

by taxation” caveat. The resolution passed “by a vote of 105 for and 0 against.”<sup>70</sup> The denomination has made minor alterations since the 1968 statement in 1980, 1993, and 2005. Notably in 1980, they dropped the word “race” from the title of the section; since then, it has read merely “discrimination.” The statements against racial discrimination belie the racist attitudes of some Nazarenes, including some leaders. All this debate and talk of equality took place while Johnson had to go to the white minister’s back door to pick up his church’s financial assistance check from the denomination.

In 1997, a unique book that serves as a bridge between the discussions of the black and white churches looked at the civil rights movement equally from black and white perspectives. The uniqueness lies in the fact that the author profiles five key players on both sides of the civil rights movement. Charles Marsh’s *God’s Long Summer: Stories of Faith and Civil Rights* examines Freedom Summer of 1964. Marsh notes that both sides (pro- and anti-civil rights) claimed “that God was on their side.” Marsh explores what happens if one takes those claims seriously. He notes that previous scholars have marginalized the role of religion on both sides of the civil rights movement.<sup>71</sup> Marsh contributes to the understanding of the pivotal summer of 1964, in which Charles Johnson played a role.

Following up on Findlay’s study of the NCC and the civil rights movement, Michael B. Friedland argues that the liberal white clergy played a vital role in the movement. In *Lift Up Your Voice Like a Trumpet: White Clergy and the Civil Rights and Antiwar Movements, 1954-1973*, Friedland examines two of the biggest social issues of the 1960s: the civil rights movement and the antiwar movement. Friedland notes that the clergy were more liberal than most of their

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<sup>70</sup> *Manual*, 1972, par. 704.3; *Journal of the Seventeenth General Assembly* (1968), 155.

<sup>71</sup> Charles Marsh, *God’s Long Summer: Stories of Faith and Civil Rights* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1997), 3-5.

parishioners.<sup>72</sup> The white, northern liberal became a key base of support for the civil rights movement. The white Nazarene clergy (save perhaps a few isolated members) were not among these liberal clergymen.

One particularly noteworthy book appeared in the early 1960s by Nazarene sociologist F. O. Parr, an assistant professor at Olivet Nazarene College (now University) in Kankakee, Illinois. Parr published this book, entitled *Perfect Love and Race Hatred*, himself and offered chilling insights into the racial attitudes of members, pastors, and district superintendents in the Church of the Nazarene. Parr did not use the terms “Nazarene,” “Church of the Nazarene,” or “Olivet Nazarene College” in the book. He refers to the denomination throughout as the “Perfect Love Church” and the college as “Perfect Love College.” Parr apparently used this thinly veiled mechanism to lend some anonymity to the respondents to his survey. He refers to the *Herald of Holiness* as a publication from Perfect Love Church, but cites the *Herald* and the *Manual* by name in the bibliography. Any reader familiar with the Church of the Nazarene would certainly be able to deduce what Parr’s allusions were. Although he does not use the term, Parr concluded that race was a social construct.<sup>73</sup>

In the sixth chapter, Parr distilled his research on the racial attitudes of people associated with the “Perfect Love Church.” He surveyed district superintendents and ministers from Midwestern states: Illinois, Indiana, Wisconsin, Michigan, Ohio, Iowa, and Missouri. He also surveyed students in his sociology classes at Olivet from mostly lower division class, survey students, but he also included a few upper division students. Parr noted that most of the respondents were committed Christians who believed wholeheartedly in the doctrine of perfect

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<sup>72</sup> Michael B. Friedland, *Lift Up Your Voice Like a Trumpet: White Clergy and the Civil Rights and Antiwar Movements, 1954-1973* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 7, 10, 99, 113.

<sup>73</sup> F. O. Parr, *Perfect Love and Race Hatred* (Bourbonnais, Ill.: n. p., n. d. [1964]), 3, 5-10, 15, 18-105, 108. Note on the title: The term “perfect love” is synonymous with the Church of the Nazarene doctrine of entire sanctification; see *Manual*, 2009, 13, <http://www.nazarene.org/files/docs/Manual2009-2013.pdf> (accessed 12/5/2010).

love espoused by the Church of the Nazarene, but they still had residual racism. He was curious how churches and members responded to “the problem of Negroes moving into the area of the church.” Had these churches relocated, integrated, or something else? What were the attitudes of those involved in these situations? Parr focused his study on urban areas where more African Americans lived in the upper Midwest and where such trends most affected churches. He found twenty-seven churches had encountered African Americans moving into the surrounding area. Of those, seventeen “had sold their buildings to Negro congregations.” Others moved because their membership had moved out of the area, largely because African Americans had moved into these areas. He stated that “Thirteen churches were reported to be integrated.” Thirteen of fifteen district superintendents responded: three favored integration without conditions; five favored integration under certain circumstances; three said that they did not know; and two gave no answer. Interestingly, no one in this position stated opposition to integration; if they opposed it, they were among those who left the question blank.<sup>74</sup>

Parr included a number of the responses given by those who took the survey. These responses demonstrated the ambivalent attitudes of Nazarenes. He included several examples, but a few responses from pastors stand out: “In general we are not ready to accept integration in our churches. However, we should take advantage of every opportunity to evangelize the colored.” Another put it this way: “As much as I love and appreciate the colored people, I do believe we should not integrate.” One district superintendent addressed the issue of African American leadership, stating, “If a church could be integrated, I feel that a white minister could be used and thus have better leadership.” Some in the denomination did not fully trust African Americans to provide adequate leadership.<sup>75</sup> These responses reflect contradictory attitudes

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<sup>74</sup> Parr, *Perfect Love and Race Hatred*, 74-92.

<sup>75</sup> Parr, *Perfect Love and Race Hatred*, 74-92.

towards African Americans. The respondents professed love and concern for African Americans, but no one wanted African Americans around. It is clear from Parr's work that Nazarenes were dealing with issues of a changing cultural landscape. In theory, many wanted to integrate—or, at least not discriminate—while they held to some personal negative feeling towards African Americans.

The Church of the Nazarene received some negative publicity because of the Gulf Central District in a 1964 Orlando, Florida, newspaper article. The article apparently criticized the Church of the Nazarene for operating a separate African American district. Alpin Bowes, office secretary for the Department of Home Missions, fired off a letter to D. I. Vanderpool urging him to do some damage control. Bowes mentioned, "The facts are that Southern whites in the church do not know what to do about Christian Negroes."<sup>76</sup> While Parr had found that northern whites were uneasy with African Americans, the southerners in the denomination were hostile.

Lewis Baldwin, in *The Legacy of Martin Luther King, Jr.: The Boundaries of Law, Politics, and Religion*, explores the intersection of "law, politics, religion, and morality" with "King's thinking." Baldwin also looks at the somewhat uneasy relationship between King and Billy Graham. Graham, an acknowledged leader in white evangelical Christianity, looked at King with some discomfort over the tactics used in the civil rights movement. While Graham was no segregationist, his view was more in line with the let's-take-it-slow mentality.<sup>77</sup> Many white Christians were guilty of outright racism and support of segregation. Graham's views of civil rights closely mirrored those of the Church of the Nazarene.

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<sup>76</sup> Alpin P. Bowes to D. I. Vanderpool, May 23, 1964 (Nazarene Archives, Vanderpool Collection 908-16).

<sup>77</sup> Lewis V. Baldwin, et al., *The Legacy of Martin Luther King, Jr.: The Boundaries of Law, Politics, and Religion* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2002), xv, 15, 32, 37-38, 81-101.

David Chappell, in his book *A Stone of Hope: Prophetic Religion and the Death of Jim Crow*, takes exception with oversimplification of the civil rights movement. Echoing Cone and Baldwin's analysis of King's complex theology, Chappell argues that the alliance of northern liberals and southern theologically conservative African Americans was a strange marriage. Chappell notes that two major southern denominations went on record in the 1950s against segregation. The southern branch of the Presbyterian Church, formally called the Presbyterian Church in the United States (PCUS), and the Southern Baptist Convention voted by large margins to support the Supreme Court's ruling in *Brown v. Board of Education*.<sup>78</sup> It is certainly easier to "go on the record" about something than it is to implement real change. The Church of the Nazarene often went on the record, but failed to follow through with concrete action.

Johnson's views of racial equality are very close to what King was saying. Johnson was (and still is) a thorough integrationist. Johnson expresses his disappointment with white leaders in the Church of the Nazarene for their failure to embrace equality and implement real efforts to include and elevate African Americans in leadership positions.

British historian Mark Newman's landmark book, *Divine Agitators: The Delta Ministry and Civil Rights in Mississippi*, looks at the NCC's attempt to put theoretical talk about civil rights into action in the Delta Ministry. Newman concludes that while the ministry—largely a northern white endeavor—was effective, it did not and could not solve all the problems. Newman goes so far as to contend that the Delta Ministry became the glue that held the civil rights movement together in Mississippi in the late 1960s, as other African American-led groups became more radical or dissolved. Harvey views the Delta Ministry more pessimistically than Newman, arguing that the Delta Ministry did not find welcoming arms. White churches in the

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<sup>78</sup> David L. Chappell, *A Stone of Hope: Prophetic Religion and the Death of Jim Crow* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 2, 3, 108.

South showed indifference, and black churches were suspicious of the whites and their long-term commitment.<sup>79</sup> Here, again, Newman—like Findlay and Friedland—focuses on the liberal wing of Protestantism saying it was indispensable to the movement. The Church of the Nazarene made no similar commitment to alleviate suffering on the part of African Americans.

As Fitkins grew in the late 1960s, Johnson did not receive much recognition from the denomination, and his activity as a minister and civil rights activist were largely unnoticed by the denominational leaders. He had little personal impact on the Church of the Nazarene in the 1960s. He and his congregation enjoyed fellowship with fellow African American Nazarenes across the Gulf Central District. The Church of the Nazarene, at the time, failed to live up to its soaring rhetoric.

Then in 1968, the delegates to the General Assembly voted to close down the district and integrate African American churches into their corresponding geographic districts, putting Fitkins in the Mississippi District.<sup>80</sup> White Southerners in the denomination now had to interact with African Americans. The closing of the GCD signaled the Church of the Nazarene's dramatic shift in its organization vis-à-vis integration and African Americans after 1968. As General Superintendent Eugene Stowe wrote, integration was the wave of the future, and the Church of the Nazarene was following the flow. He wrote that "The [white] district superintendents [in the South] involved have pledged their unqualified cooperation." Charles Johnson had a different experience.<sup>81</sup>

The process of closing down the GCD lasted several years. The General Board of the Church of the Nazarene gave Raymond Hurn, secretary of the Home Missions Department, the

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<sup>79</sup> Mark Newman, *Divine Agitators: The Delta Ministry and Civil Rights in Mississippi*, (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2004), xi-x, 225; Harvey, *Freedom's Coming*, 210-211.

<sup>80</sup> Charles Johnson, interview; W. Talmadge Johnson, interview by author, telephone, November 11, 2010; "Black Nazarene Church," 23.

<sup>81</sup> Stowe, "Hail and Farewell," 2.

task of overseeing the integration of the black churches into their respective districts. In 1969, he reported that the “domestic districts” welcomed “our Negro people,” and the “black Nazarenes” were in good spirits. Mississippi was one of the last districts to integrate. The new Nazarene Bible College in Colorado Springs, Colorado, absorbed the African American training school.<sup>82</sup> Integration may have been complete on paper and in theory, but integration in the hearts of Nazarenes was another matter.

After the closing of the GCD, the denominational leaders set up the Negro Advisory Committee and the Advisory Committee on Racial Minorities to give voice and direction to non-whites in the Church of the Nazarene. Charles Johnson was not a part of either committee, likely because he was an unknown quantity to the white leaders. Perhaps they were uncomfortable with his civil rights activity.<sup>83</sup>

As integration moved forward, authors continued to address race relations in Nazarene publications, but the content and tone of the articles changed from pronouncements about civil rights to advice on integration. Ronley Bedart noted in *The Nazarene Preacher* that whites should be sensitive to call African Americans “black” rather than “colored” or “Negro.” He further called Nazarene ministers to reevaluate how they handled integrated neighborhoods and congregations.<sup>84</sup>

The question of racism receded from the *Herald* in the early 1970s. Sometime in the early 1970s, leaders of the Church of the Nazarene began encouraging churches to celebrate “Brotherhood Sunday,” which was a means of raising the awareness of cross-cultural ministry.

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<sup>82</sup> *Proceeding of the General Board of the Church of the Nazarene*, 46<sup>th</sup> Annual Session, January 13-15, 1969, 124; *Proceeding of the General Board of the Church of the Nazarene*, 47<sup>th</sup> Annual Session, January 19-21, 1970, 121-122; *Proceeding of the General Board of the Church of the Nazarene*, 48<sup>th</sup> Annual Session, January 18-19, 1971, 1226-128; *Proceeding of the General Board of the Church of the Nazarene*, 49<sup>th</sup> Annual Session, January 17-18, 1972, 148-149.

<sup>83</sup> “Minutes: Negro Advisory Committee,” January 11, 1971 (Nazarene Archives, Black Book File 199-37).

<sup>84</sup> Ronley R. Bedart, “What Holiness Means to Race Relations,” *The Nazarene Preacher*, November 1971, 5-7, 45.

Several articles appeared in the *Herald* that reminded readers of Brotherhood Sunday, and touted the successes of cross-cultural ministry in various locations, most notably former GCD District Superintendent Warren Rogers's efforts in Sacramento, California. Hurn also announced that the denomination would be sponsoring scholarships to boost African American enrollment at Nazarene colleges.<sup>85</sup> All of these post-1970 articles were very positive and upbeat. The authors largely sidestepped controversial issues and did not directly challenge their largely white readers. They did not acknowledge the transgression of racism, but they did acknowledge the transgression of the denomination's failure to reach out effectively to African Americans.

In 1973, a wave of books on minority ministry appeared from the Nazarene Publishing House, and its imprint Beacon Hill Press. These three books—*Missions: Both Sides of the Coin: Mexico, American Indian, and Home Missions Field* by H. T. Reza, *Mission Possible: A Study of the Mission of the Church of the Nazarene* by Raymond Hurn, and *The Challenge of the Other Americans* by Sergio Franco—marked the high water mark for this type of literature. The authors purported to advance ways in which the Church of the Nazarene could build the African Americans in the membership. Franco, a Mexican by birth, was the most direct in confronting his readers and challenging the prevailing method of Christianizing and Americanizing converts. Franco's work paved the way for *Black Evangelism: Which Way from Here?* the following year. This book came from "selected messages from the Conference on Urban Ministry" held in Kansas City, Missouri in September of 1973. Of note, African Americans gave all the addresses included in the book, save for the last chapter by Sergio Franco; Raymond Hurn and John Oster,

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<sup>85</sup> John Oster, "Sacramento District Builds a Bridge of Fellowship," *HH*, February 16, 1972, 20; Raymond W. Hurn, "Bond of Brotherhood," *HH*, February 16, 1972, 21-22; John C. Oster, "Brotherhood—A Human Family Experience," *HH*, February 14, 1973, 6-7; Roger E. Bowman, "True Soul Brothers," *HH*, February 13, 1974, 3; C. William Fisher, "The Bridge is Love...Across the Color Gap," *HH*, February 13, 1974, 10-11; Ann Ogden, "Yes, Lord, Yes," *HH*, May 8, 1974, 34; Nina Beegle, "A Center for Hope in Topeka's Inner City," *HH*, December 1, 1982, 11-12.

both white, wrote the prologue and epilogue respectively. *Christianity Today* noted approvingly the conference that led to *Black Evangelism*, which was one of few references to the Church of the Nazarene in non-Nazarene media.<sup>86</sup>

Roger E. Bowman, one of the contributors to *Black Evangelism*, wrote a brief history of the Church of the Nazarene's efforts among African Americans called *Color Us Christian: The Story of the Church of the Nazarene Among America's Blacks*. The book traces the meager efforts in the early years of the denomination through the creation of the Gulf Central District and its ultimate closing. Bowman concluded that "While the Church of the Nazarene has experienced a slow and late beginning among blacks in America, it is encouraging to witness a growing awareness and sensitivity that is producing definite and positive results." This book marked the end of the flurry of Afrocentric books from the Church of the Nazarene. Others followed, but the flow diminished greatly. Warren Rogers's autobiography came out in 1979. Tharp's biography of Paul Holderfield came out in 1981. Appleby's profile of six ethnic leaders in the United States appeared in 1984.<sup>87</sup>

Lest one think that race relations were a driving issue for the denomination, one must realize that leaders addressed the issue scantily. The books published by the denominational press about race relations were few. Most of the books dealt with other issues, mainly theology. W. T. Purkiser's 1971 book, *Interpreting Christian Holiness*, addressed the issue in a vague way. Purkiser addressed social issues such as the poor and disadvantaged; he failed to mention race.

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<sup>86</sup> H. T. Reza, et al., *Missions: Both Sides of the Coin: Mexico, American Indian, and Home Missions Field* (Kansas City: Nazarene Publishing House, 1973), 113-132; Raymond W. Hurn, *Mission Possible: A Study of the Mission of the Church of the Nazarene* (Kansas City: Nazarene Publishing House, 1973), 32, 84; Sergio Franco, *The Challenge of the Other Americans* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1973), 10, 13, 16, 20, 102-108, 110; Ralph S. Bell, "Black Evangelism: Which Way from Here?" in Raymond W. Hurn, compiler, *Black Evangelism: Which Way from Here?* (Kansas City: Nazarene Publishing House, 1974), 24-36; James S. Tinney, "Nazarene: Black Quest," *Christianity Today*, December 7, 1953, 53-54.

<sup>87</sup> Roger Eugene Bowman, *Color Us Christian: The Story of the Church of the Nazarene Among America's Blacks* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1975), 82; Rogers, *From Sharecropper*, Tharp, *Brother Paul*, Appleby, *What Color*.

In 1977, George Allen Turner, a Free Methodist, wrote a book, *Christian Holiness in Scripture, in History, & in Life*, where he addressed the issue briefly. He chastised the “modern holiness movement” for not doing all it could in the matter of civil rights.<sup>88</sup> Hundreds of other books appeared on various topics, but they remained silent on the issue of race relations.

With this continued mixed record on race relations, Johnson continued to pastor Fitkins. Even while going through the trials of the civil rights movement, and the wilderness years after the closing of the Gulf Central District, Charles Johnson labored as the minister of Fitkins Memorial Church of the Nazarene. Johnson’s work as minister can get lost in the flurry of his civil rights involvement.<sup>89</sup>

Throughout the 1970s, Fitkins Memorial Church of the Nazarene continued to grow. In 1973, the membership surpassed one hundred members; in 1979, it surpassed two hundred members. In 1983, it surpassed three hundred members, and in 1988, it surpassed four hundred. In 1981, Fitkins had the second largest membership in the Mississippi District, falling behind McComb First Church of the Nazarene, the largest predominately white congregation, by only one member. Two years later, Fitkins surpassed McComb First in membership to become the church with the largest membership on the Mississippi District. In 1978, Fitkins had the second highest Sunday school average at 179, falling behind McComb First, which was at 261. The Sunday school attendance also continued to grow into the 1990s, with only a few downturns in the average. The Church of the Nazarene started tracking worship attendance in 1982, at which point, Fitkins averaged three hundred in attendance. By 1986, Fitkins had the largest attendance of any Nazarene church—black or white—in the Mississippi District. They averaged 305

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<sup>88</sup> W. T. Purkiser, *Interpreting Christian Holiness* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1971), 60-62; George Allen Turner, *Christian Holiness in Scripture, in History, & in Life* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1977), 91-92.

<sup>89</sup> Charles Johnson, interview.

compared to McComb First's average of 192.<sup>90</sup> Numbers, however, cannot tell the complete story.

While Johnson and Fitkins became a part of the Mississippi District officially, unofficially Johnson felt alienated from the white churches and ministers across Mississippi. Johnson did not find the brotherhood from white Nazarenes as promised in those *Herald of Holiness* articles in the early 1970s. He missed the fellowship and understanding that he found on the GCD. Despite the distance separating African American churches of the Nazarene, Johnson felt a strong bond when they would gather at district assemblies and other functions throughout the year. Now, with churches in close geographic proximity, he felt a great chasm between him and others on the mostly white district.<sup>91</sup>

While Johnson considered other ministerial opportunities, his congregation wanted to leave the Church of the Nazarene. He stayed in Meridian with the Church of the Nazarene. Tharp noted that the Mississippi district superintendent, D. W. Lynch, "had the difficult assignment of pulling together opposing forces on the Mississippi District." She did note that Johnson felt ostracized, but Lynch was not the mediator that Tharp would have her readers believe. Charles Johnson gives credit to several people for his decision to stay in the Nazarene fold. Among those were his African American mentors: Warren Rogers, Clarence Bowman, and R. W. Cunningham. On the white side of the ledger, Johnson gives credit to his old friend from Orlando, C. R. Smith, and the Mississippi district superintendent, W. Talmadge Johnson who came in 1975.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Mississippi District Church of the Nazarene, *Sixtieth Annual Assembly Journal* (Kansas City: Nazarene Publishing House, 1973); *Sixty-fifth Annual Assembly Journal*, 1978; *Sixty-sixth Annual Assembly Journal*, 1979; *Sixty-eighth Annual Assembly Journal*, 1981; *Sixty-ninth Annual Assembly*, 1982; *Seventieth Annual Assembly Journal*, 1983; *Seventy-third Annual Assembly*, 1986; *Seventy-fifth Annual Assembly Journal*, 1988.

<sup>91</sup> Charles Johnson, interview.

<sup>92</sup> Charles Johnson, interview; Tharp, "Another Title," 5; Talmadge Johnson, interview; Appleby, "Blacks, Whites," 28-29; Cook, "Nashville Conference," 17.

During the early years of transition, white Mississippi Nazarenes virtually ignored African Americans. At the 1970 Mississippi district assembly, the district superintendent's report mentioned nothing about African American churches becoming part of the district. Fitkins, even as a growing church, received little attention in the *Mississippi Nazarene*, the district newsletter.<sup>93</sup> Despite the district superintendents' assurances that they would welcome African American churches, the record is clear that, at least at first, they were outsiders.

Johnson had a year of transition in 1975. He bowed out of the civil rights movement and came into deeper fellowship with white Nazarenes. It is not entirely clear if these two events were connected or coincidental. By 1975, Johnson had married his second wife, Shirley; his first wife, Carrie, had passed away. After attending the Mississippi District Church of the Nazarene Assembly, Charles and Shirley were driving home from Jackson, Mississippi, when they sensed "the Spirit of God...close in the car." Johnson felt that God was calling him to leave his visible leadership role in the civil rights movement. Johnson pulled his car over to pray about the matter, and he felt that God's will was for him to step aside from leadership. Johnson consented to what he felt was God's will for his life. He called a press conference and publicly stepped out of involvement in the civil rights movement.<sup>94</sup>

Because of the lack of fellowship between the whites and African Americans on the Mississippi District, Charles Johnson was on the brink of complete withdrawal from the Church of the Nazarene in 1975 when Talmadge Johnson became district superintendent. When Talmadge Johnson arrived, he noticed coldness on the part of Charles Johnson. Others on the district—pastors and lay leaders—told the new district superintendent "not to expect much out of

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<sup>93</sup> Mississippi District Church of the Nazarene, *Fifty-seventh Annual Assembly Journal* (Kansas City: Nazarene Publishing House, 1970); *Sixty-second Annual Assembly Journal*, 1975; *The Mississippi Nazarene*, August 1974, 1 (Nazarene archives, US/Canada District Collection 374-3).

<sup>94</sup> Appleby, *What Color*, 41-42; Appleby, "Blacks, Whites," 28; Tharp, "Another Title," 5; Charles Johnson, interview.

the blacks.” He recalls meeting Charles and Shirley Johnson at a Shoney’s restaurant in Hattiesburg, Mississippi, on a “get acquainted” tour of the district. Charles had developed a distrust of the white leadership within the denomination. Talmadge Johnson says, “Later, I realized that Charles himself was suspicious of me. Not me personally so much as of me positionally.” Later, they were together in a worship service where the new district superintendent preached, but he still sensed distance between him and the African Americans present. Talmadge Johnson recalls, “I remember that about midway through my message that whatever I said or whatever God used, Charles Johnson came alive and began, as they say, to be a witness and to respond, and when he responded then his people responded.” After the service, Fitkins hosted a social so the congregation could talk with the new district superintendent. Talmadge recalls Charles coming up to him and suggesting that they were cousins because of their common surname. Talmadge responded that they were not cousins but brothers. The two Johnsons formed a solid relationship during the five years that Talmadge presided over the Mississippi District. Talmadge notes that within two years, the African American Johnsons went from being outsiders to insiders.<sup>95</sup> Charles Johnson remained firmly in the Church of the Nazarene.

In 1978, Johnson finally gained acclaim from a wider audience in the Church of the Nazarene. Johnson had labored in anonymity—at least as far as whites in the Church of the Nazarene were concerned—for seventeen years through tough times in Meridian, Mississippi. That year marked Charles Johnson’s first appearance in the *Herald of Holiness*. The Mississippi District Assembly elected Johnson to serve on the District Advisory Board—a board made up of pastors and lay people to govern the district with the district superintendent. He was the first African American elected to serve on that board on the Mississippi District. Johnson later served

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<sup>95</sup> Charles Johnson, interview; Talmadge Johnson, interview.

as the Sunday school chairperson for the district. It took hours of backbreaking labor, but Charles Johnson began receiving recognition for his labor.

Talmadge Johnson, as district superintendent, advocated for Johnson and Fitkins to gain more visibility in the denomination. Talmadge Johnson “fell in love with their choir, their music, which was awesome.” He went to Raymond Hurn, director of the Home Missions Department, and tried to convince him that the Fitkins choir needed to sing at the 1976 General Assembly in Dallas, Texas. Hurn had already scheduled another choir to sing, but Johnson insisted—and kept insisting—that Fitkins needed to be there. Hurn finally relented and scheduled Fitkins’s choir to sing. In 1978, the Church of the Nazarene hosted an evangelism conference in Oklahoma City, and again Talmadge Johnson went to work for Charles Johnson. He convinced Don Gibson, the conference’s coordinator, to have Charles and Shirley Johnson sing at the conference. Talmadge had gone to Gibson without Charles and Shirley’s knowledge, and Gibson consented and asked the Johnsons to sing. Talmadge Johnson was present at the meeting and notes that it was a rather dull, lifeless meeting. The Johnsons rose to sing, and Talmadge Johnson says, “And literally the gathering just came alive.” The song led to an emotional outpouring that some older Christians used to call “holy pandemonium.” He then concludes, “Well, that literally put Charles and Shirley on the map.”<sup>96</sup>

After Talmadge Johnson arrived, Fitkins also garnered more attention in the district newsletter. In 1978, the key year for Johnson’s ministry, several events transpired that showed Talmadge Johnson’s commitment to African Americans. In August 1978, a group of white

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<sup>96</sup> USA Canada Mission, “Black Ministries Pastor of the Month 2003,” <http://www.missionstrategy.org/missionstrategy/PastoroftheMonth2006/tabid/215/Default.aspx> (accessed 2/20/2010); Steigenga, “Loosing the Chains”; “Tabor Campmeeting: June 18-22 Tabor Campmeeting, Evangelists Charles & Shirley Johnson,” June 18, 2008, [http://www.ecotn.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=62%3Atabor-campmeeting&Itemid=1](http://www.ecotn.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=62%3Atabor-campmeeting&Itemid=1) (accessed 2/20/2010); USA Canada Mission, “Charles Johnson Appointed Interim District Superintendent,” no date, [http://www.missionstrategy.org/enews200512\\_charlesjohnson.html](http://www.missionstrategy.org/enews200512_charlesjohnson.html) (accessed 2/20/2010); Talmadge Johnson, interview; Tharp, “Another Title,” 5-6; Appleby, “Blacks, Whites,” 29.

Nazarene men from Mississippi descended on Meridian to remodel the Johnson's parsonage.<sup>97</sup> Talmadge Johnson saw to it that Fitkins become a full part of the district. Without his efforts, Charles Johnson would likely have left the Church of the Nazarene.

That same year, Fitkins moved to its current location, leaving the old leaky building and the one built in 1964 behind that had become inadequate to house the growing congregation. On October 22, 1978, 345 people gathered in the new location to dedicate the new church building. General Superintendent V. H. Lewis came, and Mississippi Governor Cliff Finch sent his greetings.<sup>98</sup>

Charles Johnson soon became a focal point for African American ministry in the Church of the Nazarene. In the January 1, 1979, issue of the *Herald*, an article entitled "Black Nazarene Church Emerging as Evangelistic Force" appeared. The article highlighted Fitkins's dedication of its new building. Over the previous seventeen years, Johnson's church grew from three adults and ten children. The article recapitulates Johnson rise from those meager beginnings. The author shied away from direct mention of Johnson's civil rights activity, and instead focused on his ministry and social activism as far as working to improve job opportunities for African Americans.<sup>99</sup>

Johnson continued to mentor and encourage member of his congregation to follow God's will for their lives. In 1977, a teenager from Syracuse, New York, named Charles Tillman moved to Meridian with his family, and they began attending Fitkins. Like a young Charles Johnson twenty years earlier, Tillman "was sensing and feeling a call into ministry." Tillman

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<sup>97</sup> *The Mississippi Nazarene*, June 1977, 4; *The Mississippi Nazarene*, June 1978, 3; "Mississippi Men for Missions," *The Mississippi Nazarene*, September 1978, 1; "Meridian Fitkin Makes Major Move," *The Mississippi Nazarene*, August 1978, 1 (Nazarene Archives, US/Canada Collection, 374-3).

<sup>98</sup> "Mississippi Men for Missions," *The Mississippi Nazarene*, September 1978 (Nazarene Archives, US/Canada Collection, 374-3); Wiseman, "\$44.50 Expands," 16; Talmadge Johnson, interview; Appleby, *What Color*, 42; "Black Nazarene Church," 23; "Meridian Fitkin Dedication Service Schedule," *The Mississippi Nazarene*, October 1978, 1 (US/Canada District Collection, 374-3).

<sup>99</sup> "Black Nazarene Church Emerging as Evangelistic Force," *HH*, January 1, 1979, 23.

relates how Johnson advised him go to school, and followed him throughout his ministry.

Tillman currently serves as pastor of Woodville Church of the Nazarene in Richmond, Virginia.

He is also on the National Black Strategic Readiness Committee for the denomination.<sup>100</sup>

Johnson's preaching has had a powerful impact on his parishioners. Tillman gives credit to Johnson for preaching "accountability and responsibility." Tillman says, "He taught me through church that a man takes responsibility for his offspring.... He preached about having a firm and solid relationship with the Lord." Dianne Adams, a current member of Fitkins, notes that when she first attended Fitkins in the early 1980s, Johnson preached a strong evangelistic sermon. Adams says that January 1, 1980, was her spiritual birthday. She recalls that the sermon was entitled "Get the Real Thing."<sup>101</sup>

In the early 1980s, the Church of the Nazarene was still struggling with its record of weak support for civil rights. In 1983, the sequel to Timothy Smith's first volume of *Called unto Holiness* came from the pen of W. T. Purkiser. He looked at the second quarter century of Nazarene history. The timeframe of his work allowed Purkiser to undertake a brief discussion of race relations. Writing in the early 1980s, Purkiser had seen the civil rights movement and its effects, but his discussion of the Church of the Nazarene's work "among the blacks" covers barely three pages out of over three hundred. The section is extremely optimistic, trumpeting the wonderful works of the denomination.<sup>102</sup> Like many of the articles from the *Herald*, Purkiser's mention of African Americans is all positive. Denominational leaders still did have the courage to admit any past failures or shortcomings.

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<sup>100</sup> Charles Tillman, interview by author, telephone, November 18, 2010; "Biography of Rev. Charles A. Tillman," <http://palcon2010.org/charles-tillman-bio.html> (accessed 2/20/2010).

<sup>101</sup> Tillman, interview; Dianne Adams, interview by author, Meridian, Mississippi, July 30, 2010.

<sup>102</sup> Purkiser, *Called unto Holiness*, 197-200.

The Church of the Nazarene continued to churn out articles and host meetings about African American evangelism. In the May 15, 1982, issue of the *Herald*, Johnson appeared as a participant at an urban ministry conference in Nashville, Tennessee. Johnson's early mentor, C. R. Smith, appeared as a "living testimony to a white businessman impacting an inner city of Blacks. One of his first 'converts' was Charles Johnson (Meridian, Miss.) who now pastors the largest American Black Nazarene congregation."<sup>103</sup> It seems that the Church of the Nazarene had finally embraced Charles Johnson. But was it because the leaders genuinely embraced him, or were they merely interested in promoting him because he pastored the largest African American Church of the Nazarene?

The leaders of the Church of the Nazarene began to realize that Charles Johnson was a valuable asset to the denomination, not only as a singer and as pastor of the church with the great choir. Johnson began playing a key role in the expansion of the Church of the Nazarene among the African American community. Charles Johnson's name was ubiquitous in the *Herald of Holiness* reports on ethnic conferences that the denomination began holding. The year after, the Church of the Nazarene held a conference in Nashville on urban ministry, and the *Herald* highlighted the relationship between Johnson and C. R. Smith. Denominational leaders appointed Charles Johnson as an ethnic consultant for African Americans. At the 1984 conference, Johnson spoke of the need for people to plant churches in African American neighborhoods. The *Herald* also noted the 1987 meeting of black Nazarenes. Johnson was responsible for overseeing the planting of African American churches, supporting African

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<sup>103</sup> R. Franklin Cook, "Nashville Conference Heralds Heritage of Urban Ministry," *HH*, May 15, 1981, 16-17.

American ministers, and other duties related to African American relations in the Church of the Nazarene. This took him across the United States.<sup>104</sup>

Readers of the *Herald* became acquainted with Charles Johnson in 1983, when he was the subject of a feature profile by Kathy Tharp. Tharp touted Johnson's elevation to African American coordinator for the Church of the Nazarene. The piece was largely positive, highlighting Johnson's life and his early years as pastor in Meridian. Tharp mentioned Johnson's "years of active involvement in civil rights," but it largely dealt with jobs and equal access, shying away from some of the more controversial aspects.<sup>105</sup> Tharp's article contributed to the positive spin that writers associated with the Church of the Nazarene were doing. Tharp's article appeared a year after Purkiser's *Called Unto Holiness* that briefly trumpeted the success of the Church of the Nazarene in race relations.

In the early 1980s, Charles Johnson's stock was rising in the Church of the Nazarene. Jerry Appleby interviewed Johnson for the *Preacher's Magazine*. The interview dealt with Johnson's life, including his involvement in the civil rights movement and some of the more controversial aspects. Notably, much of the material contained in Jerry Appleby's interview appeared in Polly Appleby's 1984 book, *What Color is God's Skin?* Johnson is quite careful not to talk about the negative aspects of race relations in the Church of the Nazarene. While he credited Talmadge Johnson for keeping him in the denomination, he did not point blame at any specific person for pushing him away.<sup>106</sup>

Johnson's rise to the upper echelons of leadership in the Church of the Nazarene brought some controversy. The Church of the Nazarene has come to embrace Johnson's civil rights

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<sup>104</sup> Cook, "Nashville Conference," 16-17; Tharp, "Another Title," 6; "National Black Churchman's Conference at Orlando," *HH*, August 15, 1984, 24-25; "Black Nazarenes Meet," *HH*, August 1, 1987, 35; Charles Johnson, interview.

<sup>105</sup> Tharp, "Another Title," 1983, 5-6; Charles Johnson, interview; Talmadge Johnson, interview.

<sup>106</sup> Appleby, "Blacks, Whites," 26-29; Appleby, *What Color*, 28-42.

record, but that has not always been the case. The denomination did not have a glowing record of accomplishment on race relations. While many leaders and authors said and wrote the right things, they most often fell short of the ideal. Charles Johnson's views did not correspond with those of the leaders. JoeAnn Ballard has learned that Johnson's activities in the civil rights movement were "against the policy probably of the church at that time." She continues, "So he was pushing against the situations that existed in the city, but he also was pushing against the situation that was in the evangelical community [including the Church of the Nazarene] at that time." She further notes that evangelical Christianity, during the civil rights movement, taught that one must not fight the status quo.<sup>107</sup> This difference of how much the church should be involved in the civil rights movement was likely the root of the tension when Fitkins integrated into the all-white district.

Johnson's rise in the late 1970s did not dispel all the unease with his past. It is also noteworthy that Johnson's rise to prominence coincided with his public "retirement" from the civil rights movement in 1975. It seems that Johnson's elevation to denominational leadership was contingent on his continued retirement from the civil rights movement. In the late 1980s or early 1990s—Johnson cannot recall the exact year—things changed dramatically. Johnson recalls one blatant act of the denomination's retaliation for his activity. A Meridian police officer had allegedly shot and killed a handcuffed African American man. The mayor of Meridian asked Johnson to lead a commission to investigate the shooting. Johnson's profile in civil rights matters began to rise again, which made some white Nazarenes uncomfortable. Someone wrote the district superintendent that Johnson "was at it again"—involved in civil rights activity—and was an embarrassment. The district superintendent then wrote Johnson's

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<sup>107</sup> "National Black Churchman's Conference," 24-25; "Black Nazarenes Meet," 35; "Historic Conference for Black Pastors Convenes in Kansas City," *HH*, August 1991, 10; Ballard, interview.

supervisor at denominational headquarters. At this time, Johnson had stepped aside as minister of Fitkins, but he still resided in Meridian.<sup>108</sup>

The leadership unceremoniously fired Johnson. The supervisor from headquarters assured the district superintendent that Johnson would not be representing the Church of the Nazarene any longer. The supervisor dispatched the “white gentleman” under him to Meridian to talk with Johnson. This man dismissed Johnson immediately from all his duty as African American ethnic coordinator for the denomination. The much-ballyhooed promotion to the position only a few years earlier had come crashing down. Johnson was concerned about his salary from the denomination because he had brought in an interim pastor to handle church operations and preaching while he traveled for the denomination. The interim pastor, consequently, was earning the salary from the church. Johnson asked for ninety days, but the supervisor’s assistant rebuffed him. Johnson asked why the denomination dismissed him, and the man who fired Johnson replied that it was a “pilot program” and the funds were exhausted. Within a couple months, however, the denomination had placed someone else in Johnson’s old position.<sup>109</sup>

So long as Johnson maintained his retreat from the controversy of civil rights issues and race relations, the denomination was pleased to keep him in a place of prominence. Once Johnson crossed that line and spoke out on controversial issues, the denomination cut him off from his position of leadership. The denomination has come to embrace Johnson’s past activity, but that is only in the last decade or so. The leadership focused on less controversial issues such as employment and job training. It shied away from issues of police brutality and other controversial issues. Johnson was also at the center of nearly every account of race relations and

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<sup>108</sup> Charles Johnson, interview. Johnson is, understandably, reluctant to name names when discussing these events.

<sup>109</sup> Charles Johnson, interview.

African American/ethnic ministry articles in the *Herald* during the late 1970s and 1980s, but in 1991, the *Herald's* account of the African American conference conspicuously did not mention Johnson's name.<sup>110</sup> The average white reader would probably not have noticed, but it is clear that by the early 1990s, Charles Johnson had become something of a pariah in the Church of the Nazarene because of his reentry into the more controversial aspects of his civil rights activity. His retirement from the civil rights movement was temporary. Moreover, he has since attained a great deal of respect in the Church of the Nazarene.

Johnson has had a somewhat rocky relationship with the Church of the Nazarene, but he remains committed to the denomination and its holiness theology. The relationships he has formed with individuals over the years—with white and African American Nazarenes—have sustained him through his successes and challenges.

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<sup>110</sup> "Historic Conference for Black Pastors," 10.

## Chapter 2

### Charles Johnson's Civil Rights Activity in Meridian, Mississippi

“He could have done it [shot and killed Johnson] and said I was resisting arrest and nothing would have been done about it,” recalls Johnson about a terrifying event of his first day in Meridian, Mississippi. In 1961, the new minister, fresh out of the Nazarene Bible Institute in West Virginia, arrived in Meridian to shepherd the small congregation at Fitkins Memorial Church of the Nazarene. Warren Rogers, his supervisor, requested that Johnson send him a letter reporting on his safe arrival in Meridian. As Johnson made his way to the downtown post office in a donated car bearing South Dakota license plates, he saw an angled parking space on the opposite side of the street. Seeing that traffic was clear, Johnson made a u-turn to pull the car into the open space. As Johnson exited the car, letter in hand, a local police officer sprinted toward him from the barbershop across the street. The officer let loose with a string of epithets and racial slurs. Johnson's first thought was that he had simply violated some traffic law by making the u-turn in his new hometown, but he violated something much worse: Mississippi's color line of the 1960s. The out-of-state license plates aroused the officer's suspicions. This intense scene became more tense when the officer drew his .357 Magnum, leveled it at Johnson, and threatened to “blow [his] brains out.” Suddenly, the officer holstered his weapon, turned, and walked away “like a robot.”<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Charles Johnson, interview; Polly Appleby, *What Color*, 38; Seth Cagin and Philip Dray, *We are not Afraid: The Story of Goodman, Schwerner, and Chaney and the Civil Rights Campaign for Mississippi* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1988), 249; Steigenga, “Loosing the Chains”; Ida Brown, “The Once Impossible Dream is now Possible,” *Meridian (Miss.) Star*, January 18, 2009, <http://meridianstar.com/local/x681147694/The-once-impossible-dream-is-now-possible> (accessed 2/27/2010); Ida Brown, “Pioneers Remember Struggle for King's Dream,” *Meridian (Miss.) Star*, January 14, 2007, <http://meridianstar.com/local/x681074970/Pioneers-remember-struggle-for-King-s-dream> (accessed 2/27/2010). Hereafter, the *Meridian Star* is cited *MS*.

After fifty years, Charles Johnson points to that single, horrific event as his entry into the civil rights movement. At the time, he was in his early twenties, married, and in a new city. Over the last half century, since his confrontation with the police officer, Charles Johnson has been active in the civil rights movement in Meridian and around the country. He arrived in Meridian seeking only to serve as pastor of his small congregation of three adults and ten children. At the time, Johnson did not think of himself as a crusader for civil rights. He was not excited about his ministry assignment; even now, he admits, “For one thing, I didn’t want to come here.” Reports of violence against African Americans in Mississippi were ubiquitous in the press at that time. Johnson read newspaper and magazine accounts of how officials had sicced police dogs on African Americans seeking to attend the county fair. He fancied himself ministering in the sun and on the beaches of San Diego, California.<sup>2</sup>

Surprisingly, to the modern reader born after the civil rights era or outside the South, the thought of African Americans prohibited from attending the county fair seems strange. Timothy Tyson, in his memoir *Blood Done Sign My Name: A True Story*, relates an incident in Oxford, North Carolina, when African Americans first gained admission to the county fair on the same days as whites in 1970. Tensions flared during a burlesque show when an African American man “yelled out his appreciation for the white dancers” in an interracial audience. A white man struck him with a chair, fists flew, and someone brandished a knife.<sup>3</sup> This event highlights the tensions that simmered under the surface between blacks and whites. Whites found it unacceptable to comingle with African Americans at something as simple as a county fair.

Charles Johnson became the civil rights activist that he became because of that incident. Something “broke loose that day” in Johnson’s heart that thrust him into the role of not only

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<sup>2</sup> Charles Johnson, interview; Appleby, *What Color*, 37.

<sup>3</sup> Timothy B. Tyson, *Blood Done Sign My Name: A True Story* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2004), 39-40. He notes that in previous years, the organizers had “set aside a day or two for ‘Negroes.’”

minister, but also as civil rights activist. To Pastor Johnson, those roles do not—and cannot—occupy two separate spheres; they are the same role. Johnson did not fight the civil rights battle merely because he was personally offended that day. While Johnson admits that he was afraid that day, he says, “I knew the power of Almighty God that day, and so from then on I was in” the civil rights movement. Johnson’s confrontation with officer Lee Roberts that day was merely a catalyst.<sup>4</sup>

It is as if the gun-wielding officer awakened a sleeping giant. After the confrontation, the scales fell from Johnson’s eyes. Rather than seeing the fearful side of the civil rights struggle—violence, dogs, guns, and the like—he saw the human need side of the civil rights struggle. While violence instilled fear, the human need side inspired compassion. Johnson’s job was far from well compensated; his salary was next to nothing. The church was small, and the Gulf Central District did not receive adequate funds from the denomination. While God’s comfort came and dissipated his fear, Johnson “began to see all of the black people, my little few black ladies that I had [in the church] working for \$2.00 a day, forty hours a week, more than forty hours.” Johnson noticed that these poor folks could not earn much money because the Jim Crow laws limited their employment options. African Americans could shop at Woolworth’s and other retail outlets, but they could not work in those stores, unless it was an after-hours janitorial job. They could deposit their money in the bank, but they could not work as a teller. Beyond the financial and legal oppression, Johnson also sensed a spiritual need in the African American community. As Polly Appleby noted, “Charles found it harder and harder to talk to people about

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<sup>4</sup> Charles Johnson, interview.

Jesus when they were obviously undernourished.” This realization cemented the marriage between religion, civil rights, and the human need in Johnson’s mind.<sup>5</sup>

Meridian’s population in the early 1960s, when Johnson arrived, was around 40, 000. The economy was largely service-oriented. Most employment opportunities were menial jobs such as store clerks. Johnson notes that Meridian had no “smokestacks” (i.e. heavy industries). The one main industry was the manufacture and distribution of roofing materials by two companies: Flintkote and Atlas Roofing. According to the City of Meridian’s website, Meridian was Mississippi’s largest manufacturing center until 1930.<sup>6</sup>

In addition to the economic circumstances for the African American community, they also had to deal with a number of other challenges in Meridian in the early 1960s. Meridian was a mercurial city, in that it had divergent reputations nationally and locally. Nationally, the city had a negative reputation for racial violence. At the same time, many locals—white and black—believed Meridian to be a relatively liberal city that was somewhat open and tolerant toward African Americans. To be sure, segregation ruled the lives of citizens of Meridian as stridently as anywhere in the South. In fact, Johnson asserts that segregation was worse in Meridian than he experienced in his hometown of Orlando, Florida, or at bible college in Institute, West Virginia. When questioned about the comparison of segregation laws between Meridian and his previous places of residence, Johnson comments:

Meridian laws were [more stringent]. Well yes, back of the bus was a small item. They wished they could push you past the back of the bus. You couldn’t drink from the water fountains. You couldn’t even stand in areas where there were a lot of white folks; you couldn’t be caught in that area unless you were a maid or a chauffeur or something like

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<sup>5</sup> Charles Johnson, interview; Polly Appleby, *What Color*, 38-39; Steigenga, “Loosing the Chains”; “Black Nazarene Church,” 23; Appleby, “Blacks, Whites,” 27; Wiseman, “Charles Johnson’s Legacy”; Freddie Carmichael, “Historic Moment Reminder of Civil Rights Work,” *MS*, January 18, 2009, <http://meridianstar.com/local/x681147670/Historic-moment-reminder-of-civil-rights-work> (accessed 2/27/2010).

<sup>6</sup> Charles Johnson, interview; [http://www.meridianms.org/com\\_history.html](http://www.meridianms.org/com_history.html) (accessed 4/8/2011).

that. It was stringent laws. And there was no coming together, no meeting and congregating of white and blacks.

There is no question that Meridian was no bastion of freedom and equality.<sup>7</sup>

When Johnson arrived in Meridian, many of the residents seemed to believe that race relations were good. Much like white members of the Church of the Nazarene, white Meridianites failed to see the inequities to which they had become accustomed. Even many African Americans seemed content with their lives in Meridian, perhaps relieved that their city was not as bad as others were in Mississippi. Perhaps some African Americans succumbed to fear of reprisal for stepping out of line. Johnson saw through the façade of cordial race relations and the reality of the inequality in the status quo. Perhaps it took someone from outside Meridian to realize that residents had built good race relations on a shaky foundation that held African Americans at a lower social status despite illusions to the contrary. A rather young Johnson—in his twenties—soon became an advocate for real equality. He confronted the status quo with the belief that true equality was within reach.

The consensus of people involved in the civil rights movement in the Meridian area seems to be that the city was not as bad as other places. To the extent that this is true, whites and African Americans agree that race relations were relatively peaceful in Meridian. William Bradford Huie, a white journalist from Alabama, noted that Meridian was a “safe” city because the power elite abhorred violence, and Johnson concurs with Huie’s assessment of Meridian. Other Meridianites also have agreed over the years with this portrait of the city. Johnnie Faye Inge, one of the first African Americans to integrate Meridian High School, says that the leaders of Meridian “wanted to keep a tap on their racial problems. They really didn’t want a lot of trouble.” Former Mississippi state representative, Charles L. Young, stated that in Meridian,

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<sup>7</sup> Charles Johnson, interview; Carmichael, “Historic Moment.”

African American leaders and white leaders could sit down and talk, and that African Americans could “have some dignity.” Dr. Herbert Kornegay, an African American dentist from Meridian, suggests that Meridian had “no segregated areas.” Kornegay’s claim seems a bit dubious in light of other testimony. In an interview conducted in 1965, Judge William Neville, a white man, suggested that Meridian “never” had “racial trouble,” and that the city was “tolerant, [and] liberal.” This seems to be a bit of an overstatement. Neville admitted that the Ku Klux Klan was active in the area, but they would never do anything openly because “they’re damn cowards.”

Freddie Carmichael, current editor of the *Meridian Star*, notes in a recent editorial, “Meridian was not a Klan hotbed.” Threats were present, but outright violence was scarce, at least in the early 1960s. Rev. Duncan Gray, who served as the Episcopal priest at St. Paul’s Parish in Meridian during the height of the civil rights movement, states that “Meridian had a reputation in those days, through the fifties and sixties, of being a pretty awful place because [of] the Klan activity.” He goes on to say, several times, that Meridian was not nearly as bad as the reputation.<sup>8</sup> It may be fair to say, that the South in general suffered from overgeneralizations of racial problems, with Meridian caught in the middle. Meridian was no bastion of racial harmony, even if it was better than some places.

One could compare the attitudes of white Meridianites to that of whites in any number of southern cities during the civil rights era, but one city, also with a liberal reputation, stands out

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<sup>8</sup> William Bradford Huie, *Three Lives for Mississippi* (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2000), 55-56; Johnnie Faye Inge, interview with Donald Williams, Meridian, Mississippi, November 28, 1998, Civil Rights Documentation Project, Tougaloo College Archives, [http://www.usm.edu/crdp/html/transcripts/inge\\_faye.shtml](http://www.usm.edu/crdp/html/transcripts/inge_faye.shtml) (accessed 12/21/2010); Charles Lemuel Young Sr., interview with Donald Paul Williams, Jackson, Mississippi, November 14, 1998, Civil Rights Documentation Project, Tougaloo College Archives, [http://www.usm.edu/crdp/html/transcripts/young\\_charles-i.shtml](http://www.usm.edu/crdp/html/transcripts/young_charles-i.shtml) (accessed 12/21/2010); Hobert Kornegay, interview with Donald Williams, Meridian, Mississippi, January 6, 1991, Civil Rights Documentation Project, Tougaloo College Archives, [http://www.usm.edu/crdp/html/transcripts/kornegay\\_hobert.shtml](http://www.usm.edu/crdp/html/transcripts/kornegay_hobert.shtml) (accessed 12/21/2010); William Neville, interview with anonymous, Meridian, Mississippi, Summer 1965, J. Q. Adams Faculty Papers, Millsaps College Archives; Carmichael, “Historic Moment”; Duncan Gray, interview with Donald Williams, no location, April 6, 1999, Civil Rights Documentation Project, Tougaloo College Archives, [http://www.usm.edu/crdp/html/transcripts/gray\\_duncan.shtml](http://www.usm.edu/crdp/html/transcripts/gray_duncan.shtml) (accessed 12/21/2010).

for comparison: Greensboro, North Carolina. White citizens of Greensboro—much like their counterparts in Meridian—thought of themselves as progressive in race relations, and, to a limited extent, that was true. Greensboro was the first major southern city to announce that it would comply with the Supreme Court’s *Brown* decision in 1954, but they failed to integrate until 1971, which made it one of the last southern cities to integrate. Historian William Chafe calls Greensboro’s attitude one of “a pervasive commitment to civility,” but that civility was often a thin veneer that masked deeper problems. Chafe called African Americans of Greensboro “victims of civility.” Undergirding Greensboro’s civility—and other “liberal” cities like Meridian—was public deference on the part of African Americans toward whites, which whites mistook as African American happiness and acceptance of the status quo, thus leading whites to believe race relations were just fine.<sup>9</sup> As long as African Americans knew their place—and stayed there—all would be peaceful. Certainly, African American lives were often more comfortable in places like Greensboro and Meridian relative to other areas, but there was a tempest raging beneath the surface that whites could neither see nor understand.

Michael Schwerner noted that Mississippi was the toughest state regarding segregation and race relations. Charles Johnson concurs with that assessment; he states that compared to Mississippi, race relations in Alabama were better. He contends that the highest profile political figure of segregation, Alabama Governor George C. Wallace was not that mean. Wallace was more political than mean. But we [in Mississippi] had a mean political governor.” Ross Barnett, the governor, was mean according to Johnson. That meanness filtered down to the people of Mississippi, which in turn led to a hardening of the color line.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Chafe, *Civilities and Civil Rights*, 5-6, 8.

<sup>10</sup> Huie, *Three Lives*, 36-37; Charles Johnson, interview.

Several books have appeared covering the tribulations that African Americans faced during segregation. Neil McMillen's *Dark Journey: Black Mississippians in Age of Jim Crow* details the long history of violence against African Americans in Mississippi in the century after the Civil War. John Dittmer, in *Local People: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Mississippi*, relates several accounts of these trials. He notes that McComb, in southwest Mississippi, was a horrible place. That city was so dangerous that the United States Justice Department begged the Council of Federated Organizations (COFO) to stay out of the city. He notes, "There was total hostility toward the summer project [Freedom Summer in 1964] among the city fathers." Marsh relates how Fannie Lou Hamer received a severe beating accompanied by insults about her race and weight when she tried to integrate the buses and register voters in Winona, Mississippi, in the Delta region. Mildred Pitts Walter, a veteran civil rights worker, notes that as civil rights workers moved deeper into the Delta, they encountered more and stiffer resistance and violence.<sup>11</sup> Other areas of Mississippi, including neighboring counties faced worse violence, in quantity and severity, than Meridian and Lauderdale County.

Not all Meridianites felt that Meridian was a paragon of racial equality, even in the slightest form. Obie Clark was one of the dissenters to the notion of some racial harmony. Fay Inge claims Clark was Meridian's Malcolm X. Clark was an activist at the time, and later he became local president of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). Clark could not understand why African Americans would want to work with whites because of all the "oppressive policies and laws and ordinances that they had against us." Clark contends that many African Americans left Meridian during that time because they lacked

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<sup>11</sup> John Dittmer, *Local People: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Mississippi* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 265-271; Marsh, *God's Long Summer*, 18-24; Mildred Pitts Walter, *Mississippi Challenge* (New York: Aladdin Paperbacks, 1992), 106-128; Neil R. McMillen, *Dark Journey: Black Mississippians in Age of Jim Crow* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989).

opportunities. The “fine history of racial harmony” exacted the price of that exodus according to Clark. While Clark grudgingly admits that race relations may not have been as bad as elsewhere, things were far from satisfactory.<sup>12</sup> Saying that race relations were better in Meridian than in most areas of Mississippi may be true, but that is no great accomplishment when one considers the record of the state.

While race relations in Meridian at the time of Johnson’s arrival were somewhat less complicated than conditions in other cities and areas across the South, segregation was still in force. While violence was less pervasive in Meridian, whites often resorted to threats and intimidation to maintain the appearance of racial harmony. The reasons are numerous for the lid staying on Meridian. Meridian had a liberal—relative to other southern cities—white population. Meridian also had an active bi-racial committee that was “composed of business and religious leaders of both races, who met regularly to discuss the city’s problems.” Both Duncan Gray and William Neville served on the committee along with Charles Johnson and Charles Young. Neville suggested that the key to the success of the bi-racial committee was that it was “truly bi-racial”; the whites wanted to avoid picking “Uncle Tom’s.” It was a democratic process, Neville stated, “Really elected Negro leadership. Negro men picked by themselves and vice versa.” Johnny Barbour, pastor of Alan Chapel A. M. E. Church in Meridian, agrees that the committee gave blacks and whites the opportunity to talk and solve problems. The Meridian committee was more than show; Charles Johnson says, “That committee kept the lid on Meridian, because, here, we were all involved. And these men were sincere.”<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Faye Inge, interview; Obie Clark, interview with Donald Williams, no location, March 13, 1999, Civil Rights Documentation Project, Tougaloo College Archives, [http://www.usm.edu/crdp/html/transcripts/clark\\_obie.shtml](http://www.usm.edu/crdp/html/transcripts/clark_obie.shtml) (accessed 12/21/2010).

<sup>13</sup> Cagin, *We are not Afraid*, 248; Charles Johnson, interview; Neville, interview; Johnny Barbour Jr. and Clara M. Barbour, interview with Donald Williams, Jackson Mississippi, January 25, 1999, Civil Rights Documentation Project, Tougaloo College Archives, [http://www.usm.edu/crdp/html/transcripts/barbour\\_johnny-jr-and-clara-m.shtml](http://www.usm.edu/crdp/html/transcripts/barbour_johnny-jr-and-clara-m.shtml) (accessed 12/21/2010).

A lot of the credit for “keeping the lid on Meridian” also goes to the liberal whites of the community. The two biggest names were William Neville and Duncan Gray. Meridian also had a strong Jewish influence; some would even say that the Jews ran Meridian. As Johnson puts it, the bi-racial commission—including prominent white members like Duncan Gray and William Neville—helped keep the city quiet. Johnson says that Gray and Neville “were men that the whites looked up to plus they worked with the Rosenbaums, the Jewish movers of the money people [*sic*].” Johnson concludes, “So that kept Meridian [quiet], and they set the tone.”<sup>14</sup>

While as a judge, William Neville could exert great influence on the city, and Gray could exert a certain amount of influence from his ecclesiastical post. They did not hold the sway that the Jewish business leaders did. Charles Johnson, Duncan Gray, Johnny Barbour, and Hobert Kornegay all credit the Rosenbaum family with maintaining a level of racial harmony in Meridian. One of the Rosenbaums later served as mayor. Kornegay notes that the Jewish leaders had no love for the Klan because “they realized they were in the same boat that we [African Americans] were.”<sup>15</sup> In the early 1960s, Neville, Gray, and the Jewish leadership carried great influence in Meridian, thus minimizing the amount and severity of racial strife.

Meridian’s Jewish Community dates to the early nineteenth century. Over five hundred Jews lived in the city in the 1920s. The Klan had no love for the Jews, so the Jewish people empathized with African Americans. As such, Jewish leaders helped keep violence against African Americans to a minimum. They could not, of course, stop the violence altogether. In the late 1960s, the Klan bombed the synagogue and the home of Meyer Davidson, a local Jewish

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<sup>14</sup> Charles Johnson, interview.

<sup>15</sup> Charles Johnson, interview; Gray, interview; Kornegay, interview; Barbour, interview.

leader. Since then, Meridian's Jewish population has dwindled to a mere handful. The local synagogue can no longer support a rabbi, so services are held only once per month.<sup>16</sup>

Across the South, African Americans did not always have a close relationship with the Jewish community. Often both groups had more mutual animosity than mutual respect. Leon Litwack notes incidents of racial tensions between blacks and Jews. He relates one incident, in Atlanta, where two youths—one Jewish and one African American—exchanged racial epithets. Melissa Fay Greene, in her book *The Temple Bombing*, relates the account of the 1954 bombing of “Atlanta’s oldest and richest synagogue” in a city that, according to Mayor William Berry Hartsfield, was “The City Too Busy to Hate.”<sup>17</sup> It seems that when one group believed they could gain an advantage at the expense of the other, animosity rose. If they saw each other as co-sufferer at the hands of the dominant white population, they cooperated.

Liberal-minded white leadership aside, Meridian was still no upholder of racial equality. No white police officer would have pulled his weapon on a white man making a u-turn in downtown Meridian and threatened to “blow [his] brains out.” Violence was often an unpleasant unpleasant fact for African Americans across the South, and Meridian was no exception. Racial violence in Meridian, however, was less in quantity, if not severity. At the same time, something often more effective than violence was omnipresent in Meridian: fear and intimidation. While Charles Johnson was not physically harmed in his confrontation on his first day in Meridian, he was the victim of intimidation. In many ways, these threats of violence were a way for the Klan and other racists to keep African Americans in their place.

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<sup>16</sup> Jennifer Jacob Brown, “Jewish Influence Shaped Meridian’s History,” *MS*, September 27, 2009, <http://meridianstar.com/local/x546250800/Jewish-influence-shaped-Meridian-s-history/print> (accessed 2/15/2011); “History of Congregations Beth Israel & Ohel Jacob, Meridian, Mississippi,” *Encyclopedia of Southern Jewish Communities*, <http://www.isjl.org/history/archive/ms/HistoryofMeridianCongregations.htm> (accessed 2/15/2011).

<sup>17</sup> Leon Litwack, *Trouble in Mind: Black Southerners in the Age of Jim Crow* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1998), 21-22, 357-358; Melissa Fay Greene, *The Temple Bombing* (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley Publishing, 1996), 1, 2.

While the power elite “abhorred violence,” in the words of Huie, the Klan and other hate groups took to threatening African Americans and those who would assist African Americans. Laura Inge Love, wife of Rev. C. O. Inge and mother of Faye Inge, says that her late husband received threatening letters and phone calls at his church. Threats were commonplace when civil rights activity started, as revealed by Dittmer. Johnny Barbour states that intimidation was effective, in that “we were frightened.” The Klan also published a blacklist of African American leaders and complicit whites. Neville wore that as a badge of honor; the blacklist was more an avenue to intimidate whites and keep liberal-minded whites in their place. Johnson was also the target of numerous threats, nearly daily. It took a toll on his first wife, Carrie. Carrie would be at home while Charles was out at a meeting, and she would answer the phone only to hear threats. She would stand at the window while he was out, waiting and hoping her husband would return safely. Johnson notes that he sensed a pervasive fear in the African American community when he arrived.<sup>18</sup>

One demonstration of the desire to minimize the loss of life involved the warnings that many African Americans received. Charles Young said, “Well, I was fortunate during the movement because I was one of those persons that some of the Klan targeted, but some of the people that was associated with the Klan, as I say, would always somehow, when they were going to be shooting in some of our homes, we would always get the word, somehow.” It is noteworthy that Young said “always.” Charles Johnson only recalls one specific time that someone warned him. The chief of police told him that a scheduled meeting was a set up for his murder. Someone called him out into a rural area, where Johnson and the caller could block both

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<sup>18</sup> Huie, *Three Lives*, 55-56; Neville, interview; Laura Mae Holloway Inge Love, interview with Donald Williams, Meridian, Mississippi, November 28, 1998, Civil Rights Documentation Project, Tougaloo College Archives, [http://www.usm.edu/crdp/html/transcripts/inge\\_laura-love.shtml](http://www.usm.edu/crdp/html/transcripts/inge_laura-love.shtml) (accessed 12/21/2010); Barbour, interview; Sharp, “Another Title,” 5; Appleby, “Blacks, Whites,” 27; Charles Johnson, interview; Dittmer, *Local People*, 46.

ends of the road, trapping him. Johnson told Jerry Appleby that he had “police protection around [his] house every night.”<sup>19</sup> The higher echelons of power in Meridian clearly did not want violence or loss of life in their city.

In the face of these threats and the violence that did occur—violence increased in the latter part of the 1960s—African Americans took to protecting churches and other important locations in the civil rights movement. Those standing guard were armed, ready to defend life and property. Obie Clark remembered standing guard at First Union Baptist Church. He said, “I’ve still got my Browning automatic shotgun. And as a young man, then, I was just **wishing!** I was just **wishing** they would turn that corner off of Davis Street onto Thirty-eighth, so I could take care of business.” In 2007, Charles Johnson and Charles Young met at First Union to reminisce about their civil rights days. Young asked Johnson if he remembers when they sat “in that window with guns,” to which Johnson nodded his assent. Clark was supposed to be at the meeting with Johnson and Young in 2007, but his health prevented his attendance.<sup>20</sup>

As the 1960s wore on, Meridian lost its immunity to violence, and racists targeted churches and individual homes. In the late 1960s, violence erupted in Meridian; Duncan Gray said, “It was sixty-eight, when all hell broke loose.” Obie Clark said, “In 1969, there were twelve black churches in Meridian burned or bombed in a six-month period.” The Klan targeted First Union Baptist Church, Newell C. M. E. Church, New Hope Baptist Church, and Alan Chapel A. M. E. Church. Validating the notions that the Jewish population of Meridian was sympathetic towards African Americans, the Jewish synagogue became a target. Obie Clark contended that the Klan’s bombing of the synagogue finally awakened law enforcement. Prior to the synagogue bombing, local, state, and federal law enforcement claimed “they were doing all

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<sup>19</sup> Young, interview; Appleby, “Blacks, Whites,” 27; Charles Johnson, interview.

<sup>20</sup> Clark, interview, emphasis in the original; Barbour, interview; Brown, “Pioneers Remember.”

they could to apprehend those who were burning and bombing the churches, but there was nothing they could do.” The Klan also shot into Hobert Kornegay’s home and bombed Meyer Davidson’s home, a Jewish leader in Meridian.<sup>21</sup> It does not appear that the Klan targeted Johnson’s church.

The rise in the intensity of the violence in the late 1960s may have had numerous causes, but one of the causes was the rising tide of school integration during that time. Integration began with token integration in 1965, and the school district completed integration by 1970. The general recollection is that integration proceeded with relative ease and little controversy. While Charles Johnson’s children were too young to be involved in the schools in the mid-1960s, he did find himself involved in school matters in 1970. In 1965, Judge Neville was “disgusted with [the] school board” that they had not moved faster in getting the schools integrated. Students harassed the first five African American girls. At the same time, city and school officials tried to make the process as fluid and uneventful as possible. Hobert Kornegay recalls a conversation when Police Chief Gunn told him he “wouldn’t have no foolishness” with integration. The consensus seems to be that Meridian, while they had some incidents, handled the transition much better than other cities in Mississippi, at least initially. In 1969, the courts ordered the school district to stop delaying integration and come up with a plan of real integration. This was not as smooth as the token integration in 1965. The Meridian School District drew gerrymandered attendance lines that went into effect in January 1970. African Americans were not happy with the new setup. Obie Clark recalls, “And the first day, man, chaos broke out. It got bad. It got so bad till we wound up with a complete boycott of all the schools.”<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Gray, interview; Clark, interview; Kornegay, interview; Inge Love, interview; Barbour, interview.

<sup>22</sup> Neville, interview; Faye Inge, Interview; Inge Love, interview; Kornegay, interview; Gray, interview; Clark, interview; MSSC, “Weekly Activity Report.”

Many school districts around the South dragged their feet after the 1954 Supreme Court in *Brown*. Unfortunately, African American educational leaders often lost work when the schools truly integrated. School boards closed down the old black schools, often leaving them to deteriorate in the elements. African American educators saw their careers evaporate after the black schools closed. African American communities lost their neighborhood school. David Cecelski, a historian of North Carolina, notes that this was tragic. The “Negro schools” were in far worse condition than the white schools. Cecelski’s book, *Along Freedom Road: Hyde County, North Carolina and the Fate of Black Schools in the South*, covers a region far from Meridian, Mississippi, but demonstrates the strain of desegregation on the African American community. Each school district in the South effectively had two districts: one white and one black. African Americans ran the black school districts, meaning the teachers, principals, and administrators were all African American. Once integration came, most of the African Americans in education lost their jobs. Cecelski points out that in North Carolina the number of African American school principals plummeted between 1963 and 1970, which was the main period of integration.<sup>23</sup> One can suppose that similar statistics would hold across the South.

Charles Johnson found himself embroiled in the school issue when the school district fired an African American teacher. In addition to the displeasure over the attendance lines, the firing of an African American teacher in Meridian upset African Americans. Lionel Holmes, who taught world history at T. J. Harris High School—formerly all black—lost his job on April 14, 1970 for “incompetency, profanity, and failing to control students in class.” African American students began a boycott on April 16, coordinated by several local ministers, including

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<sup>23</sup> David Cecelski, *Along Freedom Road: Hyde County, North Carolina and the Fate of Black Schools in the South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994), 8.

Johnson. This incident catapulted Johnson onto the radar of the Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission.<sup>24</sup>

As important as integrating the schools were, the vote was more important to Charles Johnson. When asked what was the most important goal of the civil rights movement, Johnson says, “Well, if I had to pick from the top two it would be voting and economic access, because the voting is what really broke the back and what really got us economic access. Because a voteless people are a poor people...a hopeless people. And so we got [the] vote and we were able to do what we needed to do.” When African Americans got the right to vote, they forced politicians to heed the needs in the African American community. As with education, getting the vote was not easy. The obstacles for African Americans prior to the 24<sup>th</sup> amendment to the Constitution and the Voting Rights Act of 1965 are well documented with poll taxes, literacy tests, and other hurdles. Obie Clarks noted that when African Americans tried to register in Kemper County, his home county just north of Meridian, the workers at the courthouse called them Communists. McMillen notes that Kemper County had received the moniker, “Bloody Kemper,” because of the ferocity of racial violence in the early twentieth century. Once African Americans received the right to vote that did not necessarily mean unfettered access to the polls. Johnny Barbour worked to get African Americans registered to vote. Barbour also participated in voter education by showing new voters how to mark ballots and fill out the necessary paperwork. Many African Americans were still fearful and unsure about whether they could actually vote. Laura Inge Love was one of the first African Americans to work at the polls because even though blacks could vote, the city officials would not let them work at the polls. Obie Clark also noted how the election maps often cut up the city so an African American

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<sup>24</sup> Fortenberry, “Weekly Activity Report”; MSSC, “memorandum from Fortenberry”; MSSC, “memorandum from Director.”

majority only existed in one of the five wards, thus effectively diminishing the power of minority votes. Although he gave no specific examples, Clark also noted that during the early phase of African American voting, white candidates often paid a price for courting black voters. Nonetheless, as Charles Johnson stated, the right to vote garnered African Americans unprecedented access to not only the political process, but also other avenues for improved lives.<sup>25</sup>

Surrounding the issues of education, voting, and violence was the Meridian Police Department and, to a lesser extent, the Lauderdale County Sheriff's Department. Law enforcement often rode the line between civil rights activists and anti-civil rights activists. They played roles as both protectors and antagonists of African Americans. In Charles Johnson's experience, he met with the gun-wielding officer on his first day, but he also gives credit to the police for saving his life. In his interview with Appleby, Johnson talked about how "the chief of police [L. C. 'Roy' Gunn] had an infiltrator in the Klan," thus being able to warn Johnson of an impending threat to his life. More often than not, the police were in the role of antagonists towards African Americans; they often reluctantly performed their role as protectors. The officer that threatened Johnson's life in 1961 "quit the police department because he had to protect us civil rights workers."<sup>26</sup>

The views that many civil rights proponents have of Chief Gunn are certainly different from their views of the police force in general. Chief Gunn comes off as a reasonable man, but his accolades are not glowing. Duncan Gray said, "You wouldn't peg Chief Gunn as a flaming liberal." Johnny Barbour said, "And he was open to discuss and do things with you and wasn't just a downright racist, I guess." Charles Young said that Chief Gunn would allow African

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<sup>25</sup> Charles Johnson, interview; Clark, interview; Barbour, interview; Inge Love, interview; McMillen, *Dark Journey*, 198.

<sup>26</sup> Charles Johnson, interview; Appleby, "Blacks, Whites," 27.

Americans to demonstrate, within the law, and “he was going to make sure you stayed within those boundaries.” William Neville noted that Chief Gunn made it on the Klan’s blacklist for attempting “to work with the Negro citizens as well as whites.”<sup>27</sup>

Gunn’s moderate stance on race relations aside, rank-and-file police officers often held more hard-line attitudes on issues of race. Some major problems with the police force arose over time. Charles Johnson has been at the center of much of the protest over police brutality. Johnson’s crusade against police misconduct garnered attention from the Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission. In July of 1970, an incident occurred at the Okatibee Reservoir swimming area, northwest of Meridian, when African Americans “refused to move from [a] restricted swimming area at which time [an] altercation occurred [*sic*].” The Sovereignty Commission report does not state how the area was restricted. It is possible that the area was segregated, but that seems unlikely in 1970, or it could have been under some other restriction. The main problem was that someone allegedly assaulted a game warden when some African Americans refused to leave the area. Edgar Fortenberry, the Sovereignty Commission investigator, attributed the subsequent picketing to the police investigation of the incident. The report stated, “Chief Gunn stated he has been unable to determine demands of this Negro group and it is believed [the] picketing was results of alleged [*sic*] mistreatment of Negro youth in connection with [the] investigation of [the] beating of above mentioned game warden, which is not true.” Johnson and Rev. J. C. Killingsworth led the pickets of Meridian City Hall, location of police headquarters. A marginal note apparently by the hand of some in the Sovereignty

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<sup>27</sup> Gray, interview; Barbour, interview, Young, interview, Neville, interview.

Commission headquarters reads, “Mr. Fortenberry requested we wait until he checks Rev. Johnson’s activities again.” Johnson was fully on the radar of the Sovereignty Commission.<sup>28</sup>

Approximately three years later, Johnson was again at the center of another police controversy. Eddie Allen, a fourteen-year-old African American from Meridian, stole a car and led the police on a chase across the state line into Alabama. Allen fled the scene, and police shot him even though Allen was unarmed and not a direct physical threat to law enforcement or anyone else. Johnson, vice-president of the Black Ministers Conference in Meridian at the time, said that the conference “did not believe the shooting was racial,” but had more to do with police brutality.<sup>29</sup>

Law enforcement and the civil rights movement were intimately intertwined sometimes for good, but more often for ill. The Roberts brothers were at the center of the problem in Meridian. Lee Roberts was the police officer who threatened Johnson on his first day. Alton Wayne Roberts was his more infamous brother; he shot Michael Schwerner and Andrew Goodman during the murder of the three civil rights workers in 1964. After Johnson’s initial confrontation with Lee Roberts, he had another memorable run in with him later, at a late-night “curb market” where people can buy and sell goods after stores have closed. Johnson remembers the scene this way: “He met me there one night, and he looked at me and he said, ‘I’m going to kill you.’ And I told him, I said, ‘Well, you can kill me but you can’t eat me.’ And he was surprised that a black man said that to him.” Later, the former police officer became a judge, and he invited Johnson to have coffee with him. Johnson says, “I always was too busy, ‘cause I

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<sup>28</sup> Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission, “Weekly Activity Report by Edgar C. Fortenberry,” June 29-July 3, 1970, SCRID# 2-46-0-105-1-1-1, Series 2515: Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission Records, 1994-2006, Mississippi Department of Archives and History, July 14, 2010, [http://mdah.state.ms.us/arrec/digital\\_archives/sovcom/result.php?image=/data/sov\\_commission/images/png/cd02/011292.png&otherstuff=2|46|0|105|1|1|1|11058|](http://mdah.state.ms.us/arrec/digital_archives/sovcom/result.php?image=/data/sov_commission/images/png/cd02/011292.png&otherstuff=2|46|0|105|1|1|1|11058|) (accessed 12/24/2010).

<sup>29</sup> Associated Press, “Death Probe is Asked,” *Tuscaloosa (Ala.) News*, January 19, 1973, <http://news.google.com/newspapers?id=hw4fAAAAIIBAJ&sjid=K5wEAAAIAIBAJ&pg=7229,2946942&dq=fitkins-memorial-church&hl=en> (accessed 2/27/2010).

don't think his mind had changed that much." Despite the fact that Roberts and Johnson never met over coffee, they did "talk at distance."<sup>30</sup>

The Roberts did reconsider their views on civil rights over the years. While campaigning for judge, Lee Roberts confronted his past demons. According to Obie Clark, the Roberts brothers had participated in a counter demonstration where the future judge confronted Polly Heidelberg, a Meridian civil rights activist, and "told her all the things he would do to her." Later while campaigning, Heidelberg confronted her tormentor and begged the assembled crowd not to vote for Roberts. Clark notes, "And he got on his knees. He apologized. Guess what? Black folks in that district voted him in."<sup>31</sup>

Johnson recalls a heart-wrenching encounter with Alton Wayne Roberts. He recounts, "And lo and behold one day, I was standing on my front porch, and I looked down the street. Here comes a white man coming up the street walking with a string of fish and a poultry in his hand. I didn't know who it was. As he got closer, it looked like, I said, 'Hey, this looked like Alton Wayne Roberts.'" It was Roberts; he brought Johnson a peace offering and asked forgiveness for his past transgressions. "We hugged right then in the street, on the front porch of my house. That was really moving, this noted killer Klan[sman]." Johnson also notes how Judge Roberts's sons love him today.<sup>32</sup> Old hatreds certainly have softened with time. The thought of Roberts and Johnson embracing publicly would likely not have occurred during the height of tensions over civil rights.

Another instrument of oppression that has changed its tune over the years is the *Meridian Star*, the major newspaper of the city. Many have castigated the *Star* over the years for its poor record on race relations and civil rights. This is not the work of hindsight either. In his 1965

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<sup>30</sup> Charles Johnson, interview.

<sup>31</sup> Clark, interview.

<sup>32</sup> Charles Johnson, interview.

interview, William Neville expressed his dismay over the newspaper's record. Neville called the editor "paranoid." He went on, "My gosh he is the wildest, the most unreasonable man not only on this subject [civil rights] but on all other subjects." He accused the editor of not believing African Americans to be human. Neville also said that the local television stations were the same.<sup>33</sup>

Recent evaluations of the *Meridian Star* have gotten worse. Hobert Kornegay notes how the newspaper refused to address African Americans with titles such as Mr., Miss, or Mrs. Duncan Gray simply states, "But the newspaper was terrible." He notes, "They were beating the drum [for]...segregation." Gray does note that over time, the *Star* gradually changed. When asked about how the *Star* covered civil rights activity, Charles Johnson laughs and says, "Well *Meridian Star*'s an animal that only prints what the power structure would have printed. And during that time, in the '60's, we didn't get too much coverage from the *Meridian Star*." In a 2009 editorial, current *Star* editor Freddie Carmichael, writes, "This very newspaper failed to report it [James Chaney's efforts to register African American voters], so there's no recorded history. There is little record of the picketing, the voter classes or the community centers."<sup>34</sup> Carmichael overstates the lack of sources for the civil rights movement in Meridian, but coverage by the *Star* would certainly have enhanced a study of Meridian.

Despite all the negative aspects of life for African Americans in Meridian during the early and mid-1960s, they sought to make a better life for themselves. One of the major avenues toward making a better life was the presence of freedom schools. The public schools provided only a very rudimentary education for African American children, and whites dictated the curriculum. Even though African Americans often ran the day-to-day operations of the schools,

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<sup>33</sup> Neville, interview.

<sup>34</sup> Kornegay, interview, Gray, interview; Charles Johnson, interview; Carmichael, "Historic Moment."

whites controlled the purse strings. Freedom schools offered African Americans the opportunity to shape the curriculum for their children. The freedom school in Meridian was located diagonally across the intersection from Fitkins Memorial Church of the Nazarene on the site of an old Baptist seminary. The Council of Federated Organizations (COFO)—a conglomerate of civil rights organizations in Mississippi—operated the freedom schools across the state. Churches also supported the freedom schools through a variety of ways, such as providing books, space, finances, teachers, and other things.<sup>35</sup>

Freedom schools were not without a measure of controversy. Whites kept a close eye on what was going on at the freedom schools and who was helping at the freedom schools, although whites could not exert control over these institutions as they did over the public schools. Faye Inge notes that many African American schoolteachers hesitated or refused to participate in the freedom schools for fear of losing their jobs. Either local people outside the education field or college students from the North taught at the Freedom Schools. College students were able to help because the freedom schools operated in the summer. The curriculum was based on singing, and included black history, something prohibited in the public schools. The freedom schools not only educated African American children, but the white college students also received an education in the realities of life in the South. The school in Meridian served around one hundred or more students per year.<sup>36</sup>

Martin Luther King Jr. also visited Meridian and met with Charles Johnson. The Church of the Nazarene now celebrates Johnson's association with King. In an article noting Johnson's

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<sup>35</sup> Charles Johnson, interview; Young, interview, Faye Inge, interview.

<sup>36</sup> Charles Johnson, interview; Faye Inge, interview. For additional information on Freedom Schools in Mississippi, see Charles M. Payne, *I've Got the Light of Freedom: The Organizing Tradition and the Mississippi Freedom Struggle* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 302-306; Dittmer, *Local People*, 257-261; Walter, *Mississippi Challenge*, 141-145; and Clayborne Carson, *In Struggle: SNCC and the Black Awakening of the 1960s* (Cambridge, Mass.: University of Harvard Press, 1995), 109-111, 119-121. Carson notes that approximately two thousand students registered statewide in forty-one schools, which would mean an average of around fifty students per school.

forty-fourth anniversary in Meridian, the denomination stated, “Dr. Charles Johnson met and marched with Dr. Martin Luther King and Dr. Ralph Abernathy.” Johnny Barbour remembers King coming to Meridian when the three civil rights workers went missing. When Johnson and Charles Young met a few years ago, they reminisced about King’s visit and rally at First Union Baptist Church. Charles Johnson joined King’s organization, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), and was the assistant to the area representative for SCLC, Allen Johnson. Johnson was also a member of the NAACP and COFO. As Lyndon Johnson’s administration escalated the Vietnam War, Charles Johnson recalls meeting with King in Meridian about how the war was taking attention and resources away from the civil rights movement. When King was killed, Johnson says it was “like a cannon was fired through me.” One can see the look of disappointment on Johnson’s face more than forty years after the event, as his countenance drops when recalling those tragic events.<sup>37</sup>

The conditions in Meridian from the early 1960s to the early 1970s in many ways were similar to other areas of the South, but at times, they were different. African Americans suffered often out of the view of the white community. They fought for equal rights, equal access, and the right to cast a ballot. They endured violence, threats of violence, and unfair treatment. In the middle of the struggle to improve race relations in Meridian during the 1960s was Charles Johnson. One of his main avenues of protest was picketing. Charles Johnson was the foremost leader of picketing in Meridian during the civil rights movement.

Johnson noticed African Americans working for next to nothing after Officer Roberts threatened him. Therefore, he formed the Meridian Action Committee (MAC). He felt the need to help poor people pull their way out of poverty. African Americans could shop in the “five-

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<sup>37</sup> USA Canada Mission, “Fitkin Memorial Celebrates with Charles Johnson,” [http://www.missionalstrategies.org/fitkin\\_johnson.html](http://www.missionalstrategies.org/fitkin_johnson.html) (accessed 2/20/2010); Barbour, interview; Brown, “Pioneers Remember”; Charles Johnson, interview.

and-dime” stores, and deposit money in the banks, but they could not work in those places unless it was some menial work. Further, not only could African Americans not work at restaurants, they could not eat there, unless they went to the back door to get their order. Johnson’s methodology was quite simple. MAC would contact business owners and urge them to hire African Americans. Most often, the owners would scoff at the demands, at which time MAC would lead boycotts of the business, complete with picketing. According to Johnson, “Once the boycotts hit, they’d come around.” Johnson’s basic message during the boycotts: “Our message was: we have the right to—well, it was according to what the boycott was about.” As citizens, they had the right to engage in the same activity as any other citizen. If the group was boycotting a lunch counter, their message was that they had the right, as citizens, to eat at the counter. At the bank, they said that since they deposited money, they had the right to work where they deposited their money.<sup>38</sup> These demands for equality stemmed from Johnson’s views of rights.

The civil rights movement was not a monolithic movement with a central command. It was a grassroots effort on the part of Americans to secure equal rights. As such, different organizations sprang up in various locations with various goals and run by various people. In many locations, such as Meridian, economic access and similar issues played a role in the civil rights movement. Lizabeth Cohen overstates the role that consumerism played in the civil rights movement. Cohen argues that “Mass consumption begot a mass civil rights movement.” Without a doubt, economic access and opportunity factored in the civil rights movement, but Cohen overstates her case by saying that economic factors “begot” (i.e. gave birth to) the civil rights movement. While access to economic activity may not have “begot”—in Cohen terms—the civil rights movement, it was a major factor in driving it. With a sharp focus on New Jersey,

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<sup>38</sup> Charles Johnson, interview; Appleby, *What Color*, 40; Brown, “Once Impossible”; Tharp, “Another Title,” 5; MSSC, “Weekly Report,” April 1970; MSSC, “Fortenberry to director”; Appleby, “Blacks, Whites,” 27; Brown, “Pioneers Remember”; “Fitkin Memorial Celebrates.”

Cohen writes from an outsider's point of view, and her thesis may be more accurate in the North where African Americans were shut out of economic life by de facto segregation.<sup>39</sup> In Meridian, however, Charles Johnson was—and still is—the acknowledged leader of the boycotts and pickets that tore down many of the walls that barred African Americans from full participation in the economic activity of American life.

In the Civil Rights Documentation Project, which is a joint effort between the University of Southern Mississippi and Tougaloo College, Donald Williams interviewed numerous civil rights activists from across Mississippi.<sup>40</sup> In the collection of interviews on Meridian, person after person mentioned Charles Johnson as one of the prime local activists in Meridian, especially in the realm of economic access and jobs. Duncan Gray mentioned Johnson as one of the leaders with whom he worked. When Williams asked Hobert Kornegay about “the most significant individuals in Meridian,” Kornegay listed the “Jewish leaders...and some of the black preachers that had insight.” Among “the black preachers that had insight,” Kornegay listed Charles Johnson. When speaking about the integration of Weidmann's Restaurant, Faye Inge and her mother, Laura Inge Love, recalled, “It was all ministers who went down and sat at this restaurant.” Among those was Charles Johnson. Faye Inge's father, C. O. Inge, was also a leader, and she said, “At the time, the only two that I really remember [supporting civil rights activities] is my father and Reverend Johnson.” Johnny and Clara Barbour, civil rights activists in Meridian, also recall Johnson as one of those “who became active in the civil rights movement and everything.” Charles Young heaped great praise upon Johnson, stating that he “was very instrumental in a lot of activities in Meridian.” Later, Young stated, “Reverend Charles Johnson

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<sup>39</sup> Lizabeth Cohen, *A Consumer's Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* (New York: Vintage Books, 2003), 190; *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, s.v. “begot,” <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/begot> (accessed, 9/28/2010).

<sup>40</sup> See <http://www.usm.edu/crdp/index.html> for more information (accessed 12/28/2010).

was primarily the leader of the picketing program.”<sup>41</sup> Charles Johnson has earned a great deal of respect from his fellow Meridianites for his leadership of the picketing and boycotting. His leadership of the boycotts also garnered the attention of the Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission.

Charles Johnson has not shied away from taking credit. Without him, African Americans would not have seen the progress they did in Meridian in terms of economic access—job opportunities, access to shopping, and general equality. When businesses opened job opportunities to African Americans, he did not take just anyone in for a job interview. Appleby noted that “He began by taking qualified people to job interviews.” One of the problems that Johnson says he encountered was that when the bank would be willing to hire an African American as a teller, few, if any, African Americans had the skills necessary to be a teller. Johnson set up a training program to ensure that those who applied would have the skills. He says, “So then, we wrote grants to get in programs that would teach tellers, teach people how to become tellers, how to become secretaries, how to become whatever.”<sup>42</sup> This aspect of his civil rights work will be explored in more depth below. Charles Johnson took African Americans in Meridian from being mere shoppers at stores and depositors at banks to employees in those establishments.

The effects of the boycotts were that African Americans gained equal access to employment and other services. The success is evident from the response of those involved and other observers. William Bradford Huie noted that the boycotts were successful, because to him, jobs were the most important victory for African Americans. As mentioned earlier, Johnson disagrees with that. Tharp seems to tie the death threats that Johnson received to the success of

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<sup>41</sup> Gray, interview; Kornegay, interview; Faye Inge, interview (her mother was also present); Barbour, interview; Young, interview.

<sup>42</sup> Appleby, *What Color*, 40; Appleby, “Blacks, Whites,” 27; Charles Johnson, interview.

his boycotts: “As a result [of the pickets], Blacks received jobs all over the city and Johnson received death threats daily.” Fortenberry of the Sovereignty Commission acknowledged Johnson’s success. He noted Johnson’s formation and leadership of the Meridian Action Committee and how “this committee sponsors economic boycotts.” He further wrote that “Johnson has been able to negotiate with white merchants of Meridian in connection with any problems.” Appleby noted, “In an amazingly short time businesses throughout the city began to hire blacks.”<sup>43</sup> Previously, African Americans had spent their money in stores, they had deposited their little savings in the banks, and white business operators were content to let them spend their money. Once Johnson organized the boycotts and African Americans stopped spending money at local businesses, the business community took notice. While they may not have liked African Americans, the business owners certainly liked the money that African Americans spent.

Interestingly, Judge William Neville saw a different effect of African Americans getting better jobs. He saw that the family structure was changing. He noted that the woman in the African American family had been dominant because she often had the better paying job, or at least brought in the larger share of income. As men were getting better jobs, he theorized that it would “probably lead to more stable family life.”<sup>44</sup> Neville’s assertions are outside the scope of this study, but it would provide interesting fodder for other researchers.

As much notoriety as he received from picketing and other activities, one single event brought Charles Johnson national notoriety: the murder of James Chaney, Michael Schwerner, and Andrew Goodman. The FBI branded the case MIBURN, which was short for Mississippi Burning. The scholarly work on this case and the larger Freedom Summer of 1964, which

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<sup>43</sup> Huie, *Three Lives*, 60, 62-64; Tharp, “Another Title,” 5; MSSC, “Weekly Activity Report,” April 1970; Appleby, *What Color*, 40.

<sup>44</sup> Neville, interview.

precipitated the murders, is lengthy. The minute details of the case do not need to be rehearsed here. The basic outline of the story is as follows. Michael Schwerner, a white Columbia University graduate, and his wife, Rita, arrived in Meridian, Mississippi, in January of 1964 to work for the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE). Schwerner befriended James Chaney, a young African American from Meridian. As part of Freedom Summer, Andrew Goodman volunteered to go to the South to work. While Schwerner went to Ohio to prepare Goodman and other volunteers, the Klan burned an African American church in Neshoba County, Mississippi, which is just northwest of Lauderdale County. Upon returning to Meridian in late June, Schwerner wanted to go see the damage, so he, Chaney, and Goodman went to inspect the scene. While returning to Meridian, Deputy Sheriff Cecil Price of Neshoba County pulled them over for speeding and jailed them. Later that night, Price released the three, and they left for Meridian. A group of Klansmen, including some law enforcement, cornered their station wagon and murdered them before they could return to Lauderdale County. Then they burned the station wagon and sunk it in a lake, and then they buried the bodies of the three in an earthen dam. Local law enforcement accused Chaney, Schwerner, and Goodman of running off to Cuba or Europe. The FBI came in to investigate, and agents located the station wagon in July and the bodies in August. The conspirators did not face murder charges in Mississippi, but the federal government prosecuted them for violating the civil rights of the three in 1967. Some of the men served time in prison.<sup>45</sup> Charles Johnson was in the center of this case, having counseled Schwerner and Chaney—he never met Goodman—and testified for the prosecution at the federal trial.

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<sup>45</sup> Huie, *Three Lives*; Cagin, *We are not Afraid*. The University of Missouri-Kansas City School of Law maintains a website dedicated to the case, <http://www.law.umkc.edu/faculty/projects/ftrials/price&bowers/price&bowers.htm>, and has an extensive bibliography: <http://www.law.umkc.edu/faculty/projects/ftrials/price&bowers/bibliography.html> (accessed 12/28/2010). The FBI has extensive files online at <http://foia.fbi.gov/foiaindex/miburn.htm> (accessed 1/15/2010), but the redactors pen has eliminated every name save for the victims and the accused, which makes them of little value for this study.

Interestingly, in his 1965 interview, William Neville did not mention the murders; he did not even allude to them. His interview was only one year after the murders and two years before the trial. Nearly all the interviewees that Donald Williams interviewed talked about the murders. Obie Clark, one of the more radical leaders of the civil rights movement in Meridian, was attending school in St. Paul, Minnesota at the time. Since he was driving a car with Mississippi license plates, students and others naturally looked to him for his reaction when the three went missing. Clark correctly predicted that law enforcement would be involved. His classmates feared for Clark's safety upon his return home. Clark admits that he was afraid to go home; so fearful that when he passed through Memphis, he stopped to buy a gun. Hobert Kornegay, who donated some desks and books to the Schwerners' project, was "disgusted with the fact that they [local law enforcement] kept talking about the boys were in Europe." He also noted that many African Americans in Meridian could not believe that anyone allowed the three to go to Neshoba County. Faye Inge and her mother, Laura Inge Love, note that there was almost a fourth victim. Faye's brother, Clinton Inge Jr., desperately wanted to go with the three that fateful day. His father refused to allow the younger Inge to go. Schwerner, Chaney, and Goodman went to Neshoba County on Sunday, June 21, 1964; Inge's father refused to allow him to go, but the Inge women do not give a reason other than the father saying the son "had no business" going. Johnny Barbour's first Sunday as pastor of Alan Chapel A. M. E. Church was the day the three disappeared. Fannie Lee Chaney, mother of James, was a member of Barbour's new church. Barbour spent those tense weeks of late June and July consoling a grieving mother. He notes that white citizens of Meridian were eager to distance themselves from the case. Meridian became the epicenter because Chaney was from there and Schwerner's base of operations was there, even though the murders occurred in neighboring Neshoba County.<sup>46</sup> Local reaction

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<sup>46</sup> Clark, interview; Kornegay, interview; Faye Inge, interview; Inge Love, interview; Barbour, interview.

among the Meridian African American population was one of horror, while whites worried about the image of their city, wanting to maintain that appearance of liberality.

Charles Johnson's role in the case put him into a national spotlight, but that would not have happened had he not taken the risk of befriending "Goatee," as the Klan called Schwerner because of his facial hair. In 1964, Johnson was in his mid-twenties, pastoring a tiny African American church in the Jim Crow South, had endured threats to his life, had small children, and yet he offered an open hand to Schwerner when others were too afraid. According to Huie, Schwerner contacted ministers in the evening to see if they would support his work. Johnson was the only one who would give him public support. The Schwerners spent their first night in Meridian at Fitkins. Chaney and Schwerner would often sleep at the church or in their car across the street. Johnson recalls how they only felt safe sleeping during the day for fear of Klan activity at night. Carmichael notes how Johnson "fed the Schwerners beanie-weenies."<sup>47</sup>

From January to June, Johnson and Schwerner, along with Chaney, worked on a variety of civil rights tasks in Meridian and the surrounding area. The police arrested Schwerner for participating in a boycott. Huie noted that as summer approached, Rita Schwerner noticed that African Americans "were more afraid to take [them] into their homes." Schwerner and Chaney met frequently with Johnson, and observed Johnson as he built a new sanctuary on the church building. Schwerner and Chaney even helped Johnson dig the foundation. Those heady, optimistic days of the civil rights movement seem frozen in time. A half century later, Johnson searches for names and initials that people put in the cement sidewalk around the old building—now occupied by another congregation—while they were building the church. Time and the

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<sup>47</sup> Huie, *Three Lives*, 52; Cagin, *We are not Afraid*, 261; Charles Johnson, interview; Carmichael, "Historic Moment"; Brown, "Once Impossible"; Brown, "Pioneers Remember."

elements have dulled the names written in the sidewalk, but the memories are thick for those that were there.<sup>48</sup>

Johnson's optimism was shattered in late June when the three went missing. Other ministers in Meridian had believed he was playing with fire by helping Schwerner. Johnson stepped off the train in Portland, Oregon, to attend the General Assembly of the Church of the Nazarene only to be met with the headline in the newspaper rack that the three civil rights workers had gone missing. Huie noted that when Joseph Carter, from the New York *Herald Tribune*, told him that the three were missing, his response was, "God rest their souls." Huie knew the level of violence that the Klan was capable of and the extent to which they would go to perpetuate segregation. At the time, Johnson did not think the Klan had killed them; he says, "I was naïve, I guess. I couldn't believe that they would go that far to perpetuate segregation and to keep segregation and to hold people down ... I thought that maybe they had ran 'em out of town, something like that, ran 'em somewhere." Johnson never imagined that murder would be in the offing; he says, "I thought we were going to get through this thing without even breaking a fingernail."<sup>49</sup>

In his book, Huie discussed whether Schwerner, Chaney, and Goodman died in vain. Johnson is adamant that those three young men did not die in vain. When asked that question, he emphatically responded, "Oh, no. No way. No way. ... No, no way. 'Cause, man, had it not been for those, the death of those fellows we wouldn't have the Voting Rights Act [of 1965]." Johnson stated the same thing in 1996; Les Bayless quotes Johnson, "Because of them [the three] we have more elected Black officials in Mississippi than in any other state," and this has occurred within one generation. This horrific event became the catalyst for another pivotal

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<sup>48</sup> Huie, *Three Lives*, 62-64, 70; Charles Johnson, interview;

<sup>49</sup> Charles Johnson, interview; Appleby, *What Color*, 40; Huie, *Three Lives*, 9-10.

victory in the civil rights movement, at least for Johnson. Charles Young agreed with Johnson. While this conclusion may seem plausible, major historians and scholars of the civil rights movement do not necessarily concur. Dittmer ties the passage of the Voting Rights Act to the march from Selma to Montgomery, Alabama in 1965. Marsh ties it generally to “the Summer Project” of 1964. Walter, a veteran of the civil rights movement, ties the act loosely to the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party and its actions during the Democratic National Convention of 1964.<sup>50</sup>

Not only was Johnson a counselor to Schwerner and Chaney, but he was also the first witness called in the 1967 federal trial of the defendants. As noted earlier, the defendants did not stand trial for murder in Mississippi, but the federal government prosecuted them for civil rights violations. (Later, the State of Mississippi reopened the case.) Since Johnson was out of town when the murders took place, he was a background witness for the government. When Johnson took the stand, John Doar, the prosecutor, took Johnson through routine direct examination questions: his name, where he lived, how he knew Schwerner, and what sorts of activities he and Schwerner engaged in. Under cross-examination, Laurel Weir, one of the defense attorneys, started verbal fireworks that set the stage for the rest of the trial and propelled Johnson into the national and international spotlight. Weir peppered Johnson with questions about his and Schwerner’s affiliations with various civil rights organizations. He quizzed Johnson on Schwerner’s views on the Vietnam War, burning draft cards, and religious beliefs. Weir seemed incredulous that Johnson, a Christian minister, would work with Schwerner, a committed atheist. Weir kept pressing Johnson if he “advocated the same things” that Schwerner did. He then

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<sup>50</sup> Huie, *Three Lives*, 147-148; Charles Johnson, interview; Young, interview; Les Bayless, “Three Who Gave Their Lives: Remembering the Martyrs of Mississippi Freedom Summer, 1964,” *People’s Weekly World* (May 25, 1996), <http://www.hartford-hwp.com/archives/45a/046.html> (accessed 4/10/2011); Dittmer, *Local People*, 344; Marsh, *God’s Long Summer*, 8; Walter, *Mississippi Challenge*, 178-182.

asked if Johnson and Schwerner “advocated the same thing [as]...Stokely Carmichael.” Johnson kept deflecting the questions that they advocated such things as voting rights and better jobs. Weir then came to the point; he asked, “Did you ever, uh, did Mr. Schwerner ever advocate that white women should be raped?” Robert Hauberg, of the prosecution, objected. Weir rephrased the question, “Now, let me ask you if you and Mr. Schwerner didn’t advocate and try to get young male negroes to sign statements agreeing to rape a white woman once a week during the hot summer of 1964?” Hauberg objected again, but Judge William Harold Cox told Johnson to answer the question. Johnson asked Weir to repeat the question; Weir asked the question again, to which Johnson responded, “No, never.” Confusion ensued, as Judge Cox said, “Counsel, you ought to have a good basis for a question like that.” Thereafter, as Jack Nelson wrote, “Judge Cox, never known as a friend of the civil rights movement...overruled that the question be stricken.” With a multitude of defense attorneys for each of the eighteen defendants, each submitted their questions to the one attorney who would be asking questions. One of the attorneys, Mr. Alford, admitted handing the question to Weir. Alford then stated that the question came from Edgar Ray Killen, one of the defendants. The defense had overplayed its hand. Cox then stated, “I’m not going to allow a farce to be made of this trial and everybody might as well get that through their heads including everyone of these defendants right now.” The tide had turned.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Charles Johnson, interview; Cagin, *We are not Afraid*, 446; Howard Ball, *Murder in Mississippi: United States v. Price and the Struggle for Civil Rights* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2004), 124-125; *United States v. Cecil Price, et al.*, 5291 (S. D. Miss. 1967), <http://www.law.umkc.edu/faculty/projects/ftrials/price&bowers/Johnson.html> (accessed 12/29/2010); Jack Nelson, “18 Tried in Killings of 3 Civil Rights Workers: Mississippi Trial: For the Defence, Racist Pitch,” *Windsor (Ontario) Star*, October 10, 1967, [http://news.google.com/newspapers?id=KUU\\_AAAAIBAJ&sjid=DIIMAAAAIBAJ&pg=4213,5203721&dq=charles+johnson+meridian&hl=en](http://news.google.com/newspapers?id=KUU_AAAAIBAJ&sjid=DIIMAAAAIBAJ&pg=4213,5203721&dq=charles+johnson+meridian&hl=en) (accessed 12/29/2010); Associated Press, “Vows Klan, Deputy Conspired in Deaths,” *Daytona Beach (Fla.) Morning Journal*, October 18, 1967, <http://news.google.com/newspapers?id=dm4eAAAAIBAJ&sjid=nMkEAAAAIBAJ&pg=880,2019030&dq=charles>

Weir's motivation for asking the question appears somewhat unclear. Certainly, no one would have expected Johnson to answer yes. No one has produced any evidence that the accusation was true. It is doubtful that Weir, or any of the defense team, thought it true. Weir's question, regardless of who wrote it, aimed at one thing: to play on the fears of miscegenation on the part of southern whites, who made up the jury. Weir feigned ignorance as to the question's origin, but when one looks at the transcript, something different emerges. Weir kept asking Johnson about advocating the same ideas as Schwerner, so it appears that Weir was building to this very question. Regardless of the courtroom theatrics he tried to employ, it appears that this was Weir's strategy from the moment he rose to cross-examine Johnson.

As Johnson was sitting on the stand, he recalls thinking about "how stupid these people can be." He was also wondering how Judge Cox would handle the situation. Johnson has high praise for Cox's handling of the matter:

He came out. He came out. Yes, sir. But I was thinking then the extremes that they would go to, to try to cheat, [keep] segregation: murder, slander, anything that they could reach to keep segregation and to keep people bound. Think about it. And I looked at those men [the defendants], and they were all ignorant. They were, I mean, literally ignorant.

After that fracas, Johnson was finished with his testimony. In late October 1967, the jury reached its verdict, convicting seven defendants, acquitting nine, and failing to reach a verdict on the other three.<sup>52</sup> At this point, Johnson became sort of a star in the civil rights movement, and the Mississippi Burning case.

The State of Mississippi also began to keep a keen eye on Johnson, as mentioned earlier, through the Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission. The State of Mississippi formed the Sovereignty Commission in the 1950s as a means of perpetuating segregation. It became a sort

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+johnson+meridian&hl=en (accessed 12/29/2010); Johnny Lee Clary, "Racist Hall of Shame," <http://www.johnnyleeclary.com/racists.htm> (accessed 7/10/2010).

<sup>52</sup> Charles Johnson, interview.

of spy agency, spying on agitators. Johnson's name appears in many of the files, but with inaccurate information. In a memorandum, which can only be described as a dossier, the unnamed director stated that Chief Gunn said that Johnson had been a Methodist minister, but transferred to the Lutheran Church. It went on to say that Johnson was employed at the Head Start program, but "he certainly does not deserve to receive a salary as he spends no time whatsoever [there]...but devotes his entire time to agitating among the Negro youth." In the files, Johnson comes off as an egomaniacal man. The Commission described him as "emotionally unstable, not qualified to handle problems," and they accused him of starting the Meridian Action Committee and then becoming its "self-appointed life-time President." Johnson now wears the Sovereignty Commission epithets as a badge of honor, saying, "Knowing them, knowing their mentality, and knowing their philosophy, it didn't bother me at all. They had to play me down too, because their minds...thought in those terms. Their minds were so weak and full of hatred...they had to play me down. And so it didn't bother me."<sup>53</sup>

The early 1970s brought trying times to Charles Johnson, as his first wife, Carrie, passed away. He recalls it as the "only regretful part" of his involvement in the civil rights movement. His wife would wait at home while Johnson was out at a meeting fearing for his safety. The Klan and white supremacists "would call her in the midnight hour." The stress of Johnson's involvement "took a toll on" his wife. Even now, he speaks of that with a note of sadness in his voice and his head bowed. No doubt, the death of his wife was a shock to his system. After her death, Johnson's role in the civil rights movement and the Church of the Nazarene underwent a dramatic transformation. In 1975, he stepped out of leadership in civil rights; he had remarried

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<sup>53</sup> MSSC, "Director to Glazier," April 21, 1970; MSSC, "Fortenberry to director," April 1970; MSSC, "Weekly Activity Report by Fortenberry," 1970; Charles Johnson, interview; Yasuhiro Katagiri, *The Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission: Civil Rights and States' Rights* (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2001).

by this time. He called a press conference and publicly resigned as president of the Meridian Action Committee and stepped away from public involvement in the civil rights movement.<sup>54</sup>

His co-laborers in the civil rights movement were flabbergasted at his decision. All the work that he had been doing for nearly fifteen years had gained Johnson a measure of fame. He had met with political leaders from the local level to the halls of power in Washington, D. C. Many of his friends in the movement believed that in only a few years Johnson's name would have been a household name in civil rights. Johnson felt that the loss of status was worth it so long as he was following God's will for his life. He says, "The greatest challenge that I've had is to be able to do the will of my Father."<sup>55</sup> For several years thereafter, Johnson walked boldly ahead without returning to civil rights work.

Johnson dedicated his life more to the ministry, but he did not exit the political world entirely. As Johnson was stepping away from leadership in civil rights, the presidential election of 1976 was heating up. Democratic candidates lined up to take their shot at the vulnerable Republican "unelected" President Gerald Ford. The Watergate scandal had altered the American political landscape since Richard Nixon's landslide presidential election four years earlier. The Democratic field ran the gamut from arch-segregationist former Alabama Governor George Wallace to northern liberal former Vice-president Hubert Humphrey and western liberal California Governor Jerry Brown to a little known two-term Georgia Governor named Jimmy Carter. Johnson had met Humphrey previously and considered himself "a Humphrey man." Carter invited Johnson over to Jackson, Mississippi, "because he'd heard that I could help him become President ." Johnson went to meet Carter, but was unimpressed when he "saw a peanut

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<sup>54</sup> Appleby, *What Color*, 41-42; Appleby, "Blacks, Whites," 28; Tharp, "Another Title," 5; Charles Johnson, interview.

<sup>55</sup> Appleby, *What Color*, 41-42; Appleby, "Blacks, Whites," 28; Tharp, "Another Title," 5; Charles Johnson, interview.

farmer.” Johnson could not fathom what a peanut farmer would know about being President of the United States. He told Carter that he was sorry that he could not support his candidacy. Carter reassured Johnson that it was “okay,” and that if Johnson changed his mind he would appreciate the support. Johnson chuckles as he talks about how “that steam roller pushed Humphrey right off the block.”<sup>56</sup>

Johnson’s miscalculation profoundly embarrassed him, but Carter did not hold it against Johnson. Carter even invited the Johnsons to his inauguration. Carter also appointed Johnson to the National Man Power Board, which was dedicated to job development. Johnson’s work at job development grew out of his civil rights activity.<sup>57</sup> Johnson was no longer picketing and boycotting against businesses that refused to hire African Americans, but he was seeing to it that African Americans received the skills to fill those jobs.

Therefore, while Johnson had stepped away from boycotts and other forms of public activism, he maintained his role as advocate of job development and training. Johnson had been involved with education. He had worked with the Head Start program, and in 1972, Johnson started the Meridian branch of the Opportunities Industrialization Centers (OIC). This role moved Johnson from the halls of political power to the halls of corporate America. Johnson wrote and received a \$500,000 grant for his job-training program. The training program went beyond mere job skills to include training on proper attitudes in the workplace. In the 1979 *Herald of Holiness* article, the unidentified author spent six of fourteen paragraphs on Johnson’s

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<sup>56</sup> “Elections,” <http://web.archive.org/web/20091026141022/http://geocities.com/Athens/Agora/8088/Dem1976.html> (accessed 12/30/2010); Charles Johnson, interview.

<sup>57</sup> Charles Johnson, interview; “Fitkin Memorial Celebrates”; “Pastor of the Month.”

job development program. The author noted that in 1979, the program had 200 people enrolled with an average of 125 people placed in jobs per year.<sup>58</sup>

Johnson built a thriving community organization. In the early 1980s, he told Jerry Appleby that he was working the system to bring about better jobs for African Americans. Still, he downplays credit for the work that he has done: “I can’t take any personal credit, ‘cause it was a group.” In 1979, he led a staff of twelve at OIC with a budget of \$300,000.<sup>59</sup> While Johnson desired to end his public role in the civil rights movement, he could not entirely tear himself away from the political world.

Johnson also continued to move in political circles in Mississippi. In 1974, before his “retirement” from the civil rights movement, Governor William Waller appointed Johnson to the Governor’s Commission on Civil Rights. On that commission, he worked with former Meridian police officer (who had greeted Johnson on his first day in Meridian with a death threat) Lee Roberts, a justice of the peace. The next governor, Cliff Finch, appointed Johnson to the Governor’s Colonel Staff. William Winter, who succeeded Finch as governor, appointed Johnson to the Mississippi Marketing Council.<sup>60</sup> Johnson served three consecutive Democratic gubernatorial administrations, starting a little more than a decade after his arrival in Meridian. Just a few years earlier the thought of an African American man serving in a political capacity in Mississippi would have been unheard of.

Johnson did not stay permanently retired from civil rights activity. He remained out of the fray for about fifteen years, but has become increasingly re-involved over the years. One

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<sup>58</sup> “Black Nazarene Church,” 23; “Pastor of the Month”; “Fitkin Memorial Celebrates”; Appleby, “Blacks, Whites,” 28; Charles Johnson, interview.

<sup>59</sup> Charles Johnson, interview; Appleby, “Blacks, Whites,” 28; “Black Nazarene Church,” 23.

<sup>60</sup> Steigenga, “Loosing the Chains”; Charles Johnson, interview; “Fitkin Memorial Celebrates”; “Pastor of the Month”; “Mississippi Nazarenes Appointed by Governor,” *The Mississippi Nazarene*, February 1981 (Nazarene Archives, US/Canada District Collection file 374-4).

could hardly blame Johnson for bowing out permanently after a half-century of service in the civil rights movement. Why has Johnson reentered the fray? He says, “Well, they went on for years and then the bottom started dropping out; we started losing what we had. And I haven’t worked all this time to go back to where I was fifty years ago. I haven’t done that, so I had to step in, pull together some people, and now that I got them together I can sort of step out a little bit.” Johnson saw the progress that the civil rights movement had made was slowing. He is still active in school issues, community service, and remembrance celebrations. He has almost become a historic figure in Meridian.

## Chapter 3

### Charles Johnson's Impact on the Church of the Nazarene and Meridian, Mississippi

One of Johnson's major accomplishments was helping people see the need for civil rights, both in Meridian and in the Church of the Nazarene. In the 1988 film, *Mississippi Burning*, the completely fictionalized version of the murder of the three civil rights workers, as Agents Rupert Anderson and Alan Ward—played by Gene Hackman and Willem Dafoe respectively—cross the state line to enter Mississippi, they pass a large billboard that says, “Welcome to Mississippi, the Magnolia State.” The billboard also has a picture of a white family, presumably the typical Mississippi family. Anderson, a native Mississippian now working for the FBI, asks the younger Ward, “What’s got four eyes and can’t see?” Ward shakes his head, and with a smirk on his face replies, “What?” Anderson answers the riddle, “Mississippi” and then cackles with delight.<sup>1</sup> The riddle was a metaphor for Mississippian’s blindness to the reality of racism in their midst.

Johnson's ability to help people see the evils of discrimination makes him more than an interesting figure or a minor player in the civil rights movement in a remote area of Mississippi. In many ways Johnson is, as Charles Tillman, Johnson's protégé says, “a transformational leader.” He helped transform Meridian more than the Church of the Nazarene.<sup>2</sup> He is a man who, given some minor changes, could possibly have been a famous national figure in the civil rights movement. If he had been a minister in a predominately black denomination, or if he had been in a larger city, then he may have garnered more attention. If he had been a little older, he may have had more gravitas. Johnson's name recognition may not be on the level of Martin

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<sup>1</sup> Alan Parker, director, *Mississippi Burning*, DVD (Santa Monica, Cal.: Orion Pictures, 1988).

<sup>2</sup> Tillman, interview.

Luther King, Aaron Henry, or other lesser known movement figures, but his impact on the civil rights movement and the Church of the Nazarene is nevertheless noticeable.

The denomination said many of the right things about race relations and civil rights, but it failed to put those words into practice. As F. O. Parr's book suggested, the Church of the Nazarene proclaimed "perfect love," but often exhibited "race hatred." Johnson helped both Mississippi and the Church of the Nazarene to see the errors of their ways. Johnson has been a dedicated civil rights activist, minister, and man of God for fifty years. His path was not easy, and he received his share of criticism for his activity.

Christianity and civil rights go hand in hand says Johnson. Fifty years after he arrived in Meridian on a "temporary assignment" to shepherd a tiny church, Johnson discusses with anyone willing to listen how civil rights and Christianity are intertwined. He discusses how human rights and righteousness—being right in the eyes of God—are the same thing. No one can be righteous without rights. Absent his Christian faith and half-century of pastoral service, Johnson surmises that his life would have been vastly different, saying, "I'd probably be in prison somewhere."<sup>3</sup>

In some ways the Church of the Nazarene was in the same boat as Mississippi (at least in Agent Anderson's assessment); it could not see the racism in its midst. Over the last several years, the issue of race relations in the Church of the Nazarene has become of more interest, and authors have explored the topic with more depth and honesty than Smith or Purkiser. Designed—in layout and writing style—to be popular history, Stan Ingersol, head archivist for the Church of the Nazarene, offers an interesting contribution in *Nazarene Roots: Pastors, Prophets, Revivalists, & Reformers*. Ingersol explores some of the well-known, and some less renowned, figures in the history of the denomination. He examines the roles of women, African

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<sup>3</sup> Charles Johnson, interview.

Americans, and other minorities in the history of the Church of the Nazarene. This reflects an increasing consciousness regarding the contributions of non-whites and females to the denomination's history. Ingersol follows the work of Rebecca Laird's 1993 book *Ordained Women in the Church of the Nazarene: The First Generation*. Ingersol's account is positive, but he is not the booster of Nazarene greatness that Purkiser was.<sup>4</sup>

As part of a desire of denominational leaders to celebrate the centennial of the Church of the Nazarene, they commissioned a quartet of scholars to write a new official history entitled *Our Watchword and Song: The Centennial History of the Church of the Nazarene*. Harold Raser (Ph.D. in history from Pennsylvania State University), Stan Ingersol (Ph.D. in church history from Duke University), David Whitelaw (historical theologian), and Floyd Cunningham (Ph.D. in history from Johns Hopkins University—where he studied under Timothy L. Smith—and editor of the book) wrote the six-hundred-page book. Cunningham wrote the section dealing with race relations and civil rights, which is blunt, frank, and at times unsettling. One who is only familiar with Smith and Purkiser would believe that the denomination always came down on the side of civil rights must now reevaluate that thinking. The Church of the Nazarene certainly was not always on the wrong side of race relations. Cunningham spends more time on the issue of race than any other work, covering nearly twelve pages. The author sets the discussion of civil rights within the larger context of social justice, such as addressing issues related to poverty and the poor.<sup>5</sup> This new work reflects a growing consciousness on the part of the denomination to face up to its earlier shortcomings.

Brandon Winstead, a doctoral student, is currently working on a dissertation about the Church of the Nazarene and race relations; his working title is "Slowly, But Surely: Racial

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<sup>4</sup> Ingersol, *Nazarene Roots*, 161-163; Rebecca Laird, *Ordained Women in the Church of the Nazarene: The First Generation* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1993).

<sup>5</sup> Cunningham, et al., *Watchword and Song*, 363-375.

Segregation and Black Participation in the Church of the Nazarene, 1914-1969.” Some of his research appears in a recent article entitled “‘Evangelize the Negro’: Segregation, Power, and Evangelization Within the Church of the Nazarene’s Gulf Central District, 1953-1969.” His article discusses the role of the Gulf Central District. While Murray chastises the Methodist Church for the segregationist bent of their Central Jurisdiction, Winstead argues that the GCD was not a tool of segregation but was an avenue to bring African Americans into full fellowship in the denomination. While the African American churches of the Nazarene were far flung, they did feel a sense of kinship and camaraderie in the GCD. When the denomination phased out the GCD, many of its members felt a sense of loss.<sup>6</sup> Johnson certainly enjoyed the fellowship of the GCD and had to make a major adjustment when the Church of the Nazarene shut it down.

Many of the works on the white church—Findlay, Newman, Friedland, and others—make the white church out to be indispensable in the civil rights movement. To be sure, without the support of whites, especially northern liberals, the civil rights movement likely would have gained little traction. The Church of the Nazarene said many of the correct things: talking about Christian love for neighbors, the dichotomy of spending thousands of dollars on missionary work in Africa but almost nothing on reaching African Americans in the United States, and other things. At the same time, the actions did not always follow through on the rhetoric. As for Charles Johnson, he is a man who laid his life on the line for the civil rights movement. In doing so, he garnered a measure of scorn from white ministers and leaders in the Church of the Nazarene, while at the same time attracting a number of admirers from the same ranks. Johnson’s influence and work on behalf of the civil rights movement had a wider impact than in his adopted hometown of Meridian, Mississippi.

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<sup>6</sup> Brandon Winstead, “‘Evangelize the Negro’: Segregation, Power, and Evangelization Within the Church of the Nazarene’s Gulf Central District, 1953-1969.” *Didache* 8, no. 2 (Winter 2009). [http://didache.nts.edu/index.php?option=com\\_docman&task=doc\\_view&gid=764&Itemid=](http://didache.nts.edu/index.php?option=com_docman&task=doc_view&gid=764&Itemid=) (accessed 2/25/2009).

The Church of the Nazarene has changed its practices over the years, but it has been very slow in embracing changes ushered in by civil rights struggle and activities. Unfortunately, Johnson was not able to exert the same influence upon his denomination that he did upon his city. When asked about how the Church of the Nazarene has handled civil rights, Johnson says, “They have said the right things, but they slept.” He continues, “In the ’80s, the Church of the Nazarene had the chance to be an integral, positive force in the African American community, in winning souls, and bringing African Americans into the church.” While the denomination had great rhetoric and made modest gains, few tangible results came of the efforts of the Church of the Nazarene in reaching African Americans. Charles Johnson suggests that the Church of the Nazarene had the message that the African American community needed and wanted. Johnson continues, “They [African Americans] were looking to the Church of the Nazarene, but the Church of the Nazarene lost the opportunity to really see significant increase in people, in members.” Charles Johnson gives his assessment with a tone of regret and sorrow in his voice.<sup>7</sup>

Other Nazarenes are not quite as forceful in their views. Talmadge Johnson was the district superintendent of the Mississippi district from 1975 to 1980 and general superintendent for the denomination from 2001 to 2005. He states, “I think the church [denomination] in general has done very well” on race relations. JoeAnn Ballard, an acquaintance of Charles Johnson from the early sixties and a Nazarene, states, “Well, early on, the Church of the Nazarene began to realize the error of the problem.” She believes that the termination of the Gulf Central District exemplified the denomination attempting to be more inclusive. She concludes, “So, I think they are making an *effort* to be inclusive.” Charles Tillman believes that the denomination has attempted to right past wrongs, but has failed to make a significant mark in the African American community. In the 1970s, Edwin Hale credited the “Civil Rights

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<sup>7</sup> Charles Johnson, interview.

Revolution” for turning the attitudes of “some Nazarenes to change their minds.”<sup>8</sup> The Church of the Nazarene, however, did not lead on the civil rights issue; they followed.

Since the mid-1990s, the Church of the Nazarene has come around in its attitudes towards minorities in general and African Americans in particular. In a service of reconciliation in 1998, at the Nazarene Multicultural Conference held at Southern Nazarene University in Bethany, Oklahoma, General Superintendent Jerry D. Porte apologized to Roger Bowman, Roland Edouard, and Johnny Nells. Porter knelt before Bowman and apologized on behalf of “white Anglo-Saxon Nazarenes,” for the past sins of slavery, racism, sexual abuse, and mistrust. He apologized for not empowering African Americans to handle their own affairs in the church. Bowman accepted Porter’s apology.<sup>9</sup>

Johnson’s rise in the Church of the Nazarene in many ways is directly attributable to Talmadge Johnson’s accepting him as an equal. Talmadge Johnson, as district superintendent, advocated for Johnson and Fitkins to gain more visibility in the denomination. In June 2003, the Black Ministries Department of the Church of the Nazarene recognized Johnson as Pastor of the Month. The brief bio touts Johnson’s civil rights activity, highlighting his acquaintance with Martin Luther King and Ralph Abernathy. Johnson is also an active preacher in revival services. In 2004, General Superintendent J. K. Warrick appointed Johnson as the interim district superintendent of the Mississippi District.<sup>10</sup>

In 1984, Trevecca Nazarene College conferred on Charles Johnson the honorary Doctor of Divinity degree. Interestingly, when Johnson was seeking to go into the ministry in the late

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<sup>8</sup> Talmadge Johnson, interview; Ballard, interview, emphasis by Dr. Ballard; Charles Tillman, interview; Hale to Hurn, August 13, 1972 (Nazarene Archives, Black Book File 199-41).

<sup>9</sup> “Reconciliation Service with Jerry Porter,” *Cultural Expressions Magazine*, 1998, <http://www.culturalexpressionsmagazine.org/en/resources/viewvideo/45/multicultural/reconciliation-service-with-jerry-porter> (accessed 2/18/2010); Oliver R. Phillips, e-mail message to author, February 18, 2011.

<sup>10</sup> “Pastor of the Month.”

1950s, Trevecca was not an option for him, as the school did not admit African Americans at the time. Twenty-five years later, he stood at commencement with C. R. Smith at his side and received his doctoral hood.<sup>11</sup>

With the passing of the classic civil rights movement, Johnson and Fitkins have found new ways to help alleviate suffering. During one of the worst disasters in recent United States' history, Johnson and Fitkins went into action to help victims of Hurricane Katrina in late August 2005. Fitkins opened her doors to house, feed, and educate evacuees. Immediately after the vicious category-five hurricane struck the Gulf Coast, several Nazarene churches opened their doors to displaced victims. Fitkins's members' efforts were not short-lived; a month after the hurricane, they were still feeding one hundred people per day and working to find jobs for evacuees. One year later, Fitkins was still hosting Youth Excitement Team tutoring for evacuees. Three years after Katrina devastated the region, Hurricane Gustav slammed the area, and, as Nazarene Compassionate Ministries reported, "Fitkin Memorial Church of the Nazarene in Meridian, Mississippi, is serving as a sanctuary for many of the evacuees from New Orleans and Pascagoula [Mississippi]." <sup>12</sup>

Fitkins's members have also been involved in local compassionate ministries. Under Johnson's direction, Fitkins has been involved in numerous community service projects. In recent years, Johnson and Fitkins have promoted healthy living. The Youth Excitement Team, a non-profit community organization in Meridian, uses Fitkins for some of its programs. As Shelia

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<sup>11</sup> Charles Johnson, interview.

<sup>12</sup> Victor Boyd, interview by author, Meridian, Mississippi, July 30, 2010; Nazarene Communications Network, "Response to Katrina Catastrophe Continues," ncnnews.com, September 9, 2005, [http://ncnnews.com/nphweb/media/umedia/HQ1/NCN/enews\\_archive/old/gnews0536.html](http://ncnnews.com/nphweb/media/umedia/HQ1/NCN/enews_archive/old/gnews0536.html) (accessed 2/20/2010); Nazarene Communications Network, "Katrina Relief: Mississippi District Update," ncnnews.com, October 14, 2005, [http://www.ncnnews.com/nphweb/media/umedia/HQ1/NCN/enews\\_archive/old/gnews0541.html](http://www.ncnnews.com/nphweb/media/umedia/HQ1/NCN/enews_archive/old/gnews0541.html) (accessed 2/20/2010); Ida Brown, "Youth Excitement Team Offers Free Tutoring to Katrina Evacuees," *MS*, September 19, 2006, <http://meridianstar.com/features/x681067086/Youth-Excitement-Team-offers-free-tutoring-to-Katrina-evacuees> (accessed 2/27/2010); Nazarene Compassionate Ministries, "Hurricane Gustav Packs a Punch," September 2, 2008, [http://www.ncm.org/news/press/hurricane\\_gustav\\_packs\\_a\\_punch/](http://www.ncm.org/news/press/hurricane_gustav_packs_a_punch/) (accessed 2/20/2010).

McLain, reporter for WTOK-TV in Meridian, notes, “So it won’t be unusual to stop by Fitkins Memorial Church of the Nazarene on Thursday nights and see adults power walking, while the kids enjoy activities like basketball.” Johnson also participated in the house dedication for Surilla Ott, who grew up in Fitkins. After Hurricane Katrina, Ott found herself out of work, and she moved back to Meridian only to be homeless. Habitat for Humanity built a house for her and her disabled son. Johnson has also been active in the Interdenominational Ministerial Alliance, which helps provide Thanksgiving baskets for needy Meridian families.<sup>13</sup>

Education remains paramount in Johnson’s mind. In early 2010, Johnson took on the Meridian Public School District (MPSD) for perceived discriminatory practices in the hiring of a new superintendent. At the April 27, 2010, school board meeting, Johnson interrupted the proceedings to read a letter to the school board about the selection process. (In Meridian, voters do not vote on school board members; the mayor appoints the school board with approval from the city council.) The Meridian chapter of the SCLC protested that the community was not included in the process. Johnson feared that the school board would exclude qualified minorities from the process. Several groups were upset about the process and discussed the possibility of “marches, protests and boycotts.” The next month, Rev. Gary Houston spoke before the board, addressing the same concerns that Johnson had raised at the previous meeting. In late June, Johnson called for picketing and for parents to keep their children home on the first day of school because the board “deceived us.” Johnson called the interview process a “smokescreen” because “they already knew that they hired a person” before the public interviews. By his own

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<sup>13</sup> Shelia McLain, “Children First: Y.E.T. Promotes Healthy Living,” WTOK.com, January 10, 2008, <http://www.wtok.com/news/headlines/13688482.html> (accessed 2/27/2010); Deanna Roberts, “Habitat for Humanity’s Christmas Blessing,” *MS*, December 10, 2006, <http://meridianstar.com/local/x681072988/Habitat-for-Humanity-s-Christmas-blessings> (accessed 2/27/2010) “Thanksgiving Giving,” *MS*, n.d. <http://meridianstar.com/archive/x1448616083> (accessed 2/27/2010).

admission, Johnson has rebuilt a group that can deal with this. One of his main concerns is that the African American community keeps moving forward.<sup>14</sup>

Johnson is also one of the leaders in Meridian seeking to make sure that the struggles of the civil rights movement will live on. Johnson is active in the community march to remember Martin Luther King Jr. and the annual unity service held in February. Johnson points to the location “where the Martin Luther King march starts every year,” in front of the now torn down Baptist seminary that housed the freedom school, on the same corner as the original Fitkins Memorial Church and parsonage where Johnson lived when he first arrived. Johnson has served as coordinator for these events and as a featured speaker.<sup>15</sup>

Locals recognize Johnson as the last lion of the civil rights era in Meridian. The speaker for the 2007 Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Candlelight March and Memorial Service was William C. Brown, pastor of Fifth Street Missionary Baptist Church and New Vision Missionary Baptist Church in DeKalb, Mississippi. Ida Brown, of the *Meridian Star*, noted that William Brown had been in the community over twenty years, which means that when Rev. Brown arrived in Meridian, Charles Johnson had been in Meridian twenty years. In the January 14, 2007, issue of the *Star*, Ida Brown noted, “[Obie] Clark, [Charles] Johnson and [Charles] Young are among the few remaining key players in the civil rights movement still around in Meridian.” Obie Clark

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<sup>14</sup> Ida Brown, “Board Eliminates Three Positions,” *MS*, April 28, 2010, <http://meridianstar.com/local/x1164466475/Board-eliminates-three-positions> (accessed 7/9/2010); Byron Wilkes, “MPSD Dictates Employee Furloughs,” *MS*, May 18, 2010, <http://meridianstar.com/local/x2023209990/MPSD-dictates-employee-furloughs> (accessed 7/9/2010); Byron Wilkes, “Groups Upset with MPSD Interim Pick,” *MS*, June 30, 2010, <http://meridianstar.com/local/x1671033888/Groups-upset-with-MPSD-interim-pick> (accesses 12/31/2010); Charles Johnson, interview.

<sup>15</sup> Charles Johnson, interview; Brown, “Pioneers Remember”; Ida Brown, “Ministerial Alliance ‘Keeping the Dream Alive,’” *MS*, January 17, 2007, <http://meridianstar.com/features/x681074780/Ministerial-Alliance-keeping-the-dream-alive> (accessed 2/27/2010); Ida Brown, “Annual MLK Parade and Celebration Set for Jan. 21,” *MS*, January 12, 2008, <http://meridianstar.com/homepage/x681098755/Annual-MLK-Parade-and-Celebration-set-for-Jan-21> (accessed 2/27/2010); Steve Gillespie, “Unity Luncheon Scheduled for Thursday,” *MS*, February 20, 2006, <http://meridianstar.com/local/x681051964/Unity-Luncheon-scheduled-for-Thursday> (accessed 2/27/2010), Ida Brown, “Ministers Prepare for ‘A Night of Unity,’” *MS*, January 19, 2007, <http://meridianstar.com/religion/x681075302/Ministers-prepare-for-A-Night-of-Unity> (accessed 2/27/2010).

died on March 19, 2008. Charles Young died on April 29, 2009, and was eulogized as one of the major leaders of the civil rights movement in Meridian. Young had been a successful businessman and member of the Mississippi House of Representatives. Johnson hosted a rally in memory of Young and was saddened at “the loss of his close friend.” In reporting on Young’s funeral, Ida Brown noted, “The Rev. Charles Johnson, who, with the passing of Young, is now recognized as the city’s last remaining civil rights activist, was among several local pastors who provided prayer and scriptural readings.”<sup>16</sup> Johnson is receiving recognition for his years of service. While many of the leaders in Meridian, during the height the civil rights movement, have passed away—as with Young and Clark—or moved away—as with Duncan Gray and others—Johnson remains in Meridian.

In reflecting on the significance of Obama’s inauguration, Johnson commented to Ida Brown of the *Meridian Star*, that it marked the progress of African Americans in the United States. Obama was not elected by himself or for himself, he follows in the footsteps of “Polly Heidelberg, Fannie Lou Hamer, Aaron Henry, and Medger Evers.” One could also add Johnson’s name to the list. Johnny Barbour, the pastor of Fannie Lee Chaney, concurs when he says, “We’ve come a long way.”<sup>17</sup> Areas of society, formerly closed off to African Americans, are now open to all qualified individuals.

In January 2009, the editors of the *Meridian Star* reflected on the history of the civil rights movement as the United States prepared to inaugurate its first African American President.

As if to mark a harmonic convergence of Martin Luther King Jr. Day on Monday, January 19

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<sup>16</sup> Brown, “Ministerial Alliance”; “In Loving Memory of Rep. Charles L. Young Sr.,” [http://repcharlesyoung.com/The\\_Chairman.html](http://repcharlesyoung.com/The_Chairman.html) (accessed 12/31/2010); Ida Brown, “Meridian Loses Giant,” *MS*, April 30, 2009, <http://meridianstar.com/local/x681158001/Meridian-loses-giant> (accessed 2/27/2010); Ida Brown, “Young Leaves Long Legacy,” *MS*, May 6, 2009, <http://meridianstar.com/local/x681158645/Young-leaves-long-legacy> (accessed 2/27/2010); Ida Brown, “Obie Clark did a lot for ‘Not Doing that Much,’” *MS*, March 23, 2009, <http://meridianstar.com/editorials/x681104645/Obie-Clark-did-a-lot-for-not-doing-that-much/print> (accessed 12/31/2010).

<sup>17</sup> Charles Johnson, interview; Barbour, interview; Brown, “Once Impossible.”

and Obama's inauguration on Tuesday, January 20, the editors of the *Star* became introspective. The editors published an editorial entitled "We Honor and We Apologize," which summed up the struggle in east Mississippi. They listed the all-stars of the movement in the region: James Chaney, Obie Clark, Polly Heidelberg, Charles Johnson, and Charles Young. They wrote that "the civil rights pioneers of East Mississippi helped build the foundation of human values that made this milestone inauguration possible." The editors also noted their predecessors' dereliction of duty in reporting on the civil rights movement and speaking out against segregation and the racial sins present at that time. Randle Jennings, a local minister, wrote a letter challenging the *Star* and citizens of Meridian to put their words into action. He was discouraged that "non-African-Americans" did not turn out for the celebrations earlier in the week.<sup>18</sup>

As the elder statesman of the civil rights movement in Meridian, the *Star* naturally sought out Johnson for extended comment on Barack Obama's inauguration and the wider civil rights movement. He told Carmichael, "I never thought I'd ever live to see this day." Ida Brown noted that "Although Johnson admits that when he first heard of Obama he did not think he would be elected president, much less win the candidacy to seek election." Johnson thought it was "a waste of time." Brown went on to note that "Johnson said Obama's election to the presidency has instilled in him a new appreciation for America." The various authors also noted how Obama's inauguration brought a flood of memories about the civil rights movement to Johnson and others.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> "We Honor and We Apologize," *MS*, January 18, 2009, <http://meridianstar.com/opinion/x681147654/We-honor-and-we-apologize> (accessed 2/27/2010); Carmichael, "Historic Moment"; Brown, "Once Impossible"; Randle L. Jennings, letter to the editor, *MS*, January 24, 2009, <http://meridianstar.com/letters/x681148216/Follow-up-apologies-with-action> (accessed 2/27/2010).

<sup>19</sup> Carmichael, "Historic Moment"; "Locals Watch 'Historic Moment': Hundreds from East Miss. Made Trip to D. C. for Inauguration," *MS*, December 31, 2009, <http://meridianstar.com/local/x546255449/No-1-Locals-watch-historic-moment> (accessed 2/27/2010); Brown, "Once Impossible."

Johnson has also participated in a number of events that commemorate the civil rights movement. In February 2007, he participated in a Black History Month celebration at the Meridian Museum of Art entitled “Eyewitness: You Are There.” Johnson has also participated in several “Annual Mississippi Civil Rights Martyrs Memorial Service and Conferences.” These annual memorials are held in Longdale, Mississippi, which is the location of the church burning that prompted Chaney, Schwerner, and Goodman to go see it on that fateful day in 1964. The organizers’ goals include not just remembering the martyrs but also seeking justice for the lesser-known martyrs of the civil rights movement.<sup>20</sup> Johnson’s commitment to civil rights and equality—despite his brief “retirement”—remains as high as it did in the 1960s.

In April 2010, the Meridian chapter of the NAACP awarded Johnson the Long Distance Runners for Civil Rights award for “his activism in the civil rights movement from the 1960s to the present.” The NAACP picked the perfect recipient for the “Long Distance Runner” award. Johnson has not rested in his personal efforts in the civil rights movement.<sup>21</sup>

Johnson is a near-historic figure, and the site of the original Fitkins Memorial Church of the Nazarene is seen by some as an historic site. In *Weary Feet, Rested Souls: A Guided History of the Civil Rights Movement*, Townsend Davis identifies several key people and sites in the civil rights movement across the South. In the section on Meridian, Davis identifies five key sites in and around Meridian: James Chaney’s grave, the COFO offices, First Union Baptist Church, the

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<sup>20</sup> “Eyewitness: You Are There,” *MS*, February 14, 2007, <http://meridianstar.com/backstagepass/x681077107/Eyewitness-You-Are-There> (accessed 2/27/2010); Byron Wilkes, “Civil Rights Workers Remembered,” *MS*, June 22, 2010, <http://meridianstar.com/local/x1703934603/Civil-Rights-workers-remembered> (accessed 12/31/2010); “43rd Annual Mississippi Civil Rights Memorial Service and Conference and Caravan for Justice,” June 23-24, 2007. <http://www.crmvet.org/anc/2007arch/0706csg.htm> (accessed 2/20/2010).

<sup>21</sup> Jennifer Jacob Brown, “NAACP Names Man and Woman of the Year,” *MS*, April 28, 2010; <http://meridianstar.com/local/x1901489118/NAACP-names-man-and-woman-of-the-year/print> (accessed 12/31/2010).

Baptist seminary, and the “Old Fitkins Chapel [*sic*] of the Nazarene.” He also gives a brief account of “The Final Days of Chaney and Schwerner.”<sup>22</sup>

When asked why he continued his involvement in the civil rights movement, Johnson replies that because “Whatever broke loose that day, after that police [officer] drew that gun on me,” compelled “me” to make sure that future generations of African Americans would not be subject to such intimidation. It has neither ceased nor subsided as the years passed. Johnson may have “retired” from the civil rights movement in 1975, but one would be hard-pressed to identify a time when he was not active in the pursuit of civil rights, poverty relief, or some other cause.<sup>23</sup>

Even in his early seventies, Johnson exudes the buoyancy of a much younger man. Fitkins Memorial is a vibrant church that seems abuzz with activity. A Friday afternoon in July saw members rushing about trying to fix a collapsed ceiling in the sanctuary; and choir practice followed in the evening. Johnson’s hand is steady on the wheel. As important as civil rights has been to him over the last half century, Johnson’s biggest area of concern has been his ministry as pastor of the Fitkins Memorial Church of the Nazarene.<sup>24</sup>

Meridian is a city that has stagnated over the years, due in large part, according to Johnson, for lack of heavy industry. He says that people are moving to Birmingham, Alabama, and Atlanta, Georgia, where the jobs are. The only major industrial operation in Meridian is Peavy Electronics. Other area employers are the Meridian Naval Air Station north of the city,

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<sup>22</sup> Townsend Davis, *Weary Feet, Rested Souls: A Guided History of the Civil Rights Movement* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1998), 286-291.

<sup>23</sup> Charles Johnson, interview.

<sup>24</sup> Charles Johnson, interview.

and two hospitals: Rush Hospital and East Mississippi State Hospital. The city is home to some smaller operations.<sup>25</sup>

When asked why he has stayed involved in civil rights activity, Johnson answers, “I’m like Moses.” According to the book of Exodus, Moses—who had grown up in the palace of the pharaoh—was eighty years old when he led the children of Israel out of Egypt, across the Red Sea, and to their forty year journey through the desert to the edge of the Promised Land. Johnson views his role the same way. He has a comfortable lifestyle, and he could sit back, pastor his church, collect his salary, and live comfortably. He says, “Moses could not stand even... ‘em mistreating his Jewish brothers. And when I see mistreatment, and I see them just like sheep...with nothing to guide them.”<sup>26</sup> Johnson may have stepped back from civil rights activity in 1975, but he became re-energized when he perceived new setbacks in race relations. While Johnson’s role has changed over the years, his views have remained rather stable and his commitment to social justice is still anchored in his religious views.

In recent years, Johnson has also received the accolades and respect of a once fierce detractor, the *Meridian Star*. In a 2007 and 2009 article, Ida Brown notes how Johnson led African American maids of Meridian to demand better pay. They boycotted employers who would not pay at least one dollar per hour. Freddie Carmichael writes that “in East Mississippi, the civil rights movement was more than just a moment [*sic*]—it was the lifeblood for the likes of Rev. Johnson. They refused to give up despite the threats and obstacles.”<sup>27</sup>

There are not, however, two parts of Johnson’s life: civil rights and ministry. To him they are two branches of the same tree. Johnson believes his greatest accomplishment in the

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<sup>25</sup> Charles Johnson, interview; East Mississippi Business Development Corporation, “Meridian, Mississippi Workforce,” <http://www.embdc.org/economic/workforce.php> (accessed 2/18/2011).

<sup>26</sup> Charles Johnson, interview.

<sup>27</sup> Brown, “Pioneers Remember”; Brown, “Once Impossible”; Carmichael, “Historic Moment.”

civil rights movement to be that he operated within the group—within the law—to achieve the goals of “breaking down segregation in the stores, department stores, the banks, the travelling mode, the mode of travels, [and] I got people hired in areas they never were hired before.”

Likewise, in the world of ministry, Johnson says that his greatest accomplishment has been sending out over twenty ministers across the country.<sup>28</sup> Through all of it, Johnson has worked within the system to change the system: in Mississippi and in the Church of the Nazarene.

Beyond his civil rights advocacy, leadership in the denomination, and walking with powerful political figures, Johnson is above all a minister. His activities in these diverse areas have changed over the years, but his ministry at Fitkins has been constant, save for his leave of absence while serving the denomination. His impact has been far reaching from that small city in eastern Mississippi. He has built a large congregation from those original thirteen, he has sent out ministers across the United States, and he has helped the needy in his area, including a massive relief effort after Hurricane Katrina. His parishioners continually lavish praise upon their pastor. Rodney Burwell has been attending Fitkins for nearly three decades, and Johnson impressed him during his first visit. Burwell has completed the course of study in the Church of the Nazarene to become a minister. He and Johnson have traveled “on an evangelism tour,” and the two have become very close. Burwell notes that Johnson’s life is an open book, and that Johnson “takes his work for the Lord seriously.” Interestingly, Burwell says that Johnson’s activity, including civil rights, is wholly God’s work. He says, “[The Apostle] Paul said don’t get entangled in civilian affairs instead of pleasing [God] because we’re soldiers.”<sup>29</sup> Johnson has spent much time in the halls of political power advocating for civil rights, but both Burwell and Johnson suggest they are the same thing.

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<sup>28</sup> Charles Johnson, interview.

<sup>29</sup> Rodney Burwell, interview by author, Meridian, Mississippi, July 30, 2010. Burwell’s reference to St. Paul’s admonition about civilian affairs is in Second Timothy chapter two specifically verse four.

Other current members at Fitkins testify to Johnson's impact on their lives and community. Gail Beard recalls that while "a teenager, I remember many times I had gone to his office and said, 'I really need to eat today,' and he gave me lunch money." Dianne Adams first came to Fitkins on January 1, 1980, when Johnson preached a sermon called "Get the Real Thing." Adams says, "I gave my life to God that night, and I've been here ever since." Adams mentions Johnson's selflessness. Both she and Burwell mention Johnson putting "his life on the line." Many mention that he is giving of his time and resources. His parishioners note his straightforward approach to personal relationships, civil rights, and his ministry. Victor Boyd notes how "he'll take criticism and just keep ticking." Burwell says, "I wish that there were more men like him in the ministry—to have that sold out attitude [firm commitment to God] no matter what."<sup>30</sup>

Johnson is giving of time and resources in small matters as well as large ones. Boyd, Adams, and Beard mention his giving attitude toward others and his compassion. Beard notes that Johnson gives great and small amounts. She says, "If it's something as simple as a child needing to get a hair comb or cut, he finds a way to get that done, even if he has to do it himself." He also serves others in the area, including areas outside of Meridian. Johnson's activity has also caught the attention of the local media. He was involved with Habitat for Humanity, health and fitness programs, and food distribution during the Thanksgiving and Christmas holidays.<sup>31</sup>

In addition to Tillman, Johnson has guided many others into the ministry over the years. In the 1979 *Herald of Holiness* article, the author wrote, "Two young men have been called to the ministry from Rev. Johnson's church and are already pastoring: Rev. Robert Lanier in

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<sup>30</sup> Gail Beard, interview by author, Meridian, Mississippi, July 30, 2010; Burwell, interview; Dianne Adams, interview by author, Meridian, Mississippi, July 30, 2010; Boyd, interview.

<sup>31</sup> Beard, interview; Boyd, interview; Adams, interview; Roberts, "Habitat for Humanity"; McLain, "Children's First"; Brown, "Ministerial Alliance."

Wichita, Kans., and Rev. Alfred Glasper in Colorado Springs. Now another one [presumably Charles Tillman] is preparing at the Nazarene Bible College.” Tharp notes how Johnson’s role as ethnic coordinator led him into “catalytic church planting.” Even though Johnson is no longer the African American coordinator, he is still active in church planting. In the summer 2000 issue of *Grow* magazine, the author noted that Johnson was involved in a church planting in Florence, South Carolina. Chris Brennaman, reporter for WTOK-TV in Meridian, reports, “More than 20 pastors from churches across the country started out under Johnson’s leadership.” Talmadge Johnson concurs that Johnson’s impact is wide ranging, stating, “The last count I had was twenty-two persons have gone into some ministry with his stamp and his mentorship on them.”<sup>32</sup>

Despite his involvement in the civil rights movement, Charles Johnson does not define his life solely—or even mainly—by that; he defines his life by the efficacy of his ministry. When asked about his greatest accomplishment in ministry, Johnson lights up. That is the place where he takes the most pride in his accomplishment. He sees his greatest accomplishment as the impact he has had on mentoring and training other ministers and evangelists. He concludes, “That’s my accomplishment.”<sup>33</sup> Johnson had several defining events of a religious nature in his life before he moved to Meridian and entered the civil rights movement. Without those religious experiences, it is quite possible that Johnson would not have become a civil rights leader.

That African American teenager from Orlando who sought to profit monetarily from C. R. Smith wound up looking at Smith as a sort of spiritual father. Smith’s respectful treatment of African Americans, at a time when he could have treated them any way imaginable and gotten away with it, demonstrated something powerful to young Charles Johnson. Years later,

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<sup>32</sup> “Black Nazarene Church,” 23; Tharp, “Another Title,” 6; “South Carolina Launches Missional Emphasis,” *Grow*, Summer 2000, <http://www.growmagazine.org/archive/summer2000/default.html> (accessed 2/20/2010); Brennaman, “45 Years”; Talmadge Johnson, interview.

<sup>33</sup> Charles Johnson, interview.

Talmadge Johnson opened his arms and heart to a disenchanting Charles Johnson, leading to a bond that has endured. Through his civil rights activity and his Christian ministry, Charles Johnson has had a profound impact on the people of Meridian, the Church of the Nazarene, and countless lives of individuals affected by his spiritual offspring.<sup>34</sup>

As one who has been through the battles of the civil rights movement, Johnson is qualified to speak about the state of civil rights and race relations now. The civil rights movement has progressed over the years. Is that the end? Is the civil rights movement over? Has all the progress been made that is possible? According to Johnson, the answer is no. In a nod to progress, but with a note of caution, Johnson told Andrea Williams, of WTOK-TV, “Any race can come across the seas and become an integral part and brought right on into the American dream. But African Americans who have lived here and fought here and died on the battlefields across the world, still is the last one hired and the first one fired [*sic*].” Later, Johnson told Ida Brown, “We have not progressed as we should have.” He blamed complacency, and he spread the blame everywhere. He blamed the older generation and the younger generation for the complacency. “Some of us feel, ‘We have arrived,’” said Johnson. The younger generation simply does not understand because they “aren’t aware of the struggle, many of them don’t care because they think they have it made.”<sup>35</sup>

Johnson says that we will know that the civil rights movement has ended—reached its goals—when anyone, regardless of race, will compete on an equal footing for a job. Putting it bluntly, he says, “When you can see me, when you can look at me and you see a man, not a black man or white man; you see a man. When I can walk into anywhere, and it will be as if

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<sup>34</sup> Talmadge Johnson, interview; Charles Johnson, interview.

<sup>35</sup> Andrea Williams, “Celebrating a Dream,” *wtok.com*, January 19, 2004, <http://www.wtok.com/news/headlines/588142.html> (accessed 2/27/2010); Ida Brown, “Things are Better, but More Needs to be Done,” *MS*, January 14, 2007, <http://meridianstar.com/local/x681074952/Things-are-better-but-more-needs-to-be-done> (accessed 2/27/2010).

another man of that race walked in, not a black man and then profiling starts. ‘Where’s my purse?’”<sup>36</sup> To Johnson, progress has been made, but the civil rights movement is not over.

One way that progress can continue, according to Johnson, is to have some funerals. He is not advocating violence, but he is advocating the death of certain attitudes, on both sides. He says:

We need to have some more funerals. A few more funerals of those old heads that are still fighting the Civil War. Then this white and black group, what happened now had violence and that violence emanates from what’s been taught to their old heads. I mean the old black heads and the old white heads that are still fighting the Civil War [sectional animosity and racial strife] things for their get out of the way, bury them and this group will work out their own situation. But they don’t let ‘em do it.<sup>37</sup>

Johnson certainly has concerns about the future of civil rights, but he is at peace with his life. He told Jerry Appleby, in a 1982 interview, that he had no regrets about his involvement in the civil rights movement, and nearly thirty years after that interview, he still has no regrets. The only regret is the toll that his involvement took on his first wife, Carrie. Johnson says, “I’ve been to the top in the political field; I’ve walked with the Presidents.” Moreover, he concludes, “I’ve been to the top in the church. I’ve been the national coordinator for the Church of the Nazarene nationally of African American work.”<sup>38</sup>

Johnson’s work, effective as it has been in the church world and political world, has always been grounded in his religious life. He told Appleby, “I feel that somehow God ushered me into that situation [civil rights work].” Johnson still believes he is doing God’s work. Religion and civil rights are two sides of the same coin for Johnson.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Charles Johnson, interview.

<sup>37</sup> Charles Johnson, interview.

<sup>38</sup> Appleby, “Blacks, Whites,” 27; Charles Johnson, interview.

<sup>39</sup> Appleby, “Blacks, Whites,” 27; Charles Johnson, interview.

## Conclusion

Charles Johnson does not seek attention for himself, but he is happy to talk with anyone willing to listen. Since the time he chose to devote his life to his Lord, he has served Him the best way he could. He picked up his young family and moved from Orlando to West Virginia to pursue his theological education. He moved his family into less than a desirable location of Jim Crow-era Meridian, Mississippi. He stayed there even when he had the chance to leave. He preaches holiness from the Bible. He stood up to lead the struggle for civil rights in Meridian. He took a leadership role for the denomination. Johnson grounded each one of these actions in his religious life and experience.

Johnson's life has had a wide impact. He has met with denominational leaders in the Church of the Nazarene; he was a leader himself. He has mentored numerous ministers and evangelists that now minister throughout the United States in the Church of the Nazarene. Even though the Church of the Nazarene had an ambivalent stance towards civil rights, Johnson continued to support the denomination. When he had a chance to leave the denomination, he stayed. That African American teenager from Orlando, Florida, who sought to make a profit from C. R. Smith, has spread his influence to countless lives in countless places across the United States. Despite his movements in the heights of the ecclesiastical world, Johnson did not lose sight of his religious values and beliefs.

He has talked and met with major national figures such as Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and Ralph Abernathy; counseled civil rights martyrs Michael Schwerner and James Chaney; and met with Vice-President Hubert H. Humphrey and President Jimmy Carter. Many of the leaders of the civil rights movement in Meridian—Duncan Gray, Obie Clark, Charles Young, and others—

have acknowledged Johnson as one of the major leaders in Meridian. Johnson grounded his work for African American equality in Meridian firmly on his faith in God and belief in holiness.

## APPENDIX



### EAST CAROLINA UNIVERSITY

University & Medical Center Institutional Review Board Office  
117-09 Brady Medical Sciences Building • 600 Mayo Boulevard • Greenville, NC 27834  
Office: 252-744-2914 • Fax: 252-744-2284 • www.ecu.edu/irb

TO: Wesley Bishop, Personal information withheld for privacy.

FROM: UMCIRB

DATE: August 10, 2010

RE: Expedited Category Research Study

TITLE: "The Life of Dr. Charles Johnson: Minister, Activist, Man of God"

UMCIRB #10-0407

This research study has undergone review and approval using expedited review on 8.2.10. This research study is eligible for review under an expedited category number 6 & 7. The Chairperson (or designee) deemed this unfunded study **no more than minimal risk** requiring a continuing review in 12 months. Changes to this approved research may not be initiated without UMCIRB review except when necessary to eliminate an apparent immediate hazard to the participant. All unanticipated problems involving risks to participants and others must be promptly reported to the UMCIRB. The investigator must submit a continuing review/closure application to the UMCIRB prior to the date of study expiration. The investigator must adhere to all reporting requirements for this study.

The above referenced research study has been given approval for the period of 8.2.10 to 8.1.11. The approval includes the following items:

- Internal Processing Form (received 7.23.10)
- Interview Questions
- Interview Release
- Thesis

The Chairperson (or designee) does not have a potential for conflict of interest on this study.

**The UMCIRB applies 45 CFR 46, Subparts A-D, to all research reviewed by the UMCIRB regardless of the funding source. 21 CFR 30 and 21 CFR 56 are applied to all research studies under the Food and Drug Administration regulation. The UMCIRB follows applicable International Conference on Harmonisation Good Clinical Practice guidelines.**

**INTERVIEW RELEASE**

Topic of interview ("subject"): Rev. Charles Johnson, his life, and his activity in (but not exclusive to) the civil rights movement and as pastor of Fitkins Memorial Church of the Nazarene in Meridian, Mississippi as part of Wesley L. Bishop's thesis for the master's degree in history ("work").

**Interviewee** (the person giving the interview)

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Street: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ State/Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

All personal information will only be associated with the research on this subject. You will not be contacted by anyone for any reason other than potential follow up for this work.

**Interviewer** (the person conducting the interview)

Name: Wesley L. Bishop

Institu

Street

City:

Phone

Personal information withheld for privacy.

I, the interviewee, agree to be interviewed and recorded by Wesley L. Bishop (interviewer) about Rev. Charles Johnson, his life, and his activity in (but not exclusive to) the civil rights movement and as pastor of Fitkins Memorial Church of the Nazarene in Meridian, Mississippi. I also agree to allow descriptions of my experiences, as well as my words, photo, audio, or video recording, and any other biographical or other information or material that I choose to provide, to be used as part of the aforementioned work.

I retain the right to use any or all of the information and words I provide during this interview for my own purposes as I wish.

It is agreed between us that this release apply equally to any interviewer, publisher, or producer who publishes or produces work that incorporates descriptions of interviewee's experiences or other information or materials from this interview, and is irrevocable. I agree to allow a transcript and/or recording of any and all interviews conducted by the interviewer to be placed in the Archives of the International Church of the Nazarene and in the personal possession of the interviewer. I have the right to request a copy of the interview (either a printed transcript, a digital audio file, or both).

I, interviewee, release interviewer, author, and publisher from any and all copyright claims relating to the work for any of the uses above, in any and all editions, versions, and media.

**Cost of participation:**

None.

**Compensation for participation:**

None.

UMCIRS  
APPROVED  
FROM 8-2-10  
TO 8-1-11

**Potential risks and discomfort of participation:**

There may be possibility that the interview questions will illicit strong emotions but that risk will be minimized by allowing the interviewee to skip any questions that are uncomfortable for him/her to answer.

**Potential benefits of participation:**

While the interviewee will receive no tangible benefit from participation in the interview, they will be contributing to the understanding of an important period in the history of the United States.

**Voluntary participation:**

Participation in the interview is voluntary at all times. If, at any time, the interviewee desires to stop the interview, he or she is free to request an end of the interview with no negative consequences.

**Privacy:**

If the interviewee wishes to keep his or her name private (anonymous), the interviewer will grant the request. Otherwise, the name of the interviewee will receive credit for their words, ideas, and accounts of the subject in the body of the text, footnotes, and/or the bibliography. Only the name of the interviewee will appear with no other personal contact information.

\_\_\_\_\_ I approve the use of my name in the work.

\_\_\_\_\_ I wish to remain anonymous.

**Person to contact with questions:**

The interviewer will be available to answer any questions concerning this subject, now or in the future. You may contact the interviewer, Wesley Bishop (at the captioned information on page one). If you have questions about your rights as a research subject, you may call the Chair of the University and Medical Center Institutional Review Board at 252-744-2914 (days) and/or the ECU Risk Management Office at 252-328-6858.

I have read all the above information, asked questions and have received satisfactory answers in areas I did not understand. (A copy of this signed and dated consent form will be given to the person signing this form as the participant or as the participant's authorized representative.)

I (circle one) DO or DO NOT give Mr. Bishop permission digitally record the interview(s).

**Interviewee:**

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Print Name: \_\_\_\_\_

**Interviewer:**

By: \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Print Name: Wesley L. Bishop

UMCIRB  
APPROVED  
FROM 8-2-16  
TO 8-1-11

\*\*\*\*\*IMPORTANT INFORMATION\*\*\*\*\*

#### **Continuing Review/Closure Obligation**

As a investigator you are required to submit a continuing review/closure form to the UMCIRB office in order to have your study renewed or closed before the date of expiration as noted on your approval letter. This information is required to outline the research activities since it was last approved. You must submit this research form even if you there has been no activity, no participant s enrolled, or you do not wish to continue the activity any longer. The regulations do not permit any research activity outside of the IRB approval period. Additionally, the regulations do not permit the UMCIRB to provide a retrospective approval during a period of lapse. Research studies that are allowed to be expired will be reported to the Vice Chancellor for Research and Graduate Studies, along with relevant other administration within the institution. The continuing review/closure form is located on our website at [www.ecu.edu/irb](http://www.ecu.edu/irb) under forms and documents. The meeting dates and submission deadlines are also posted on our web site under meeting information. Please contact the UMCIRB office at 252-744-2914 if you have any questions regarding your role or requirements with continuing review.  
<http://www.hhs.gov/ohrp/humansubjects/guidance/contrev0107.htm>

#### **Required Approval for Any Changes to the IRB Approved Research**

As a research investigator you are required to obtain IRB approval prior to making any changes in your research study. Changes may not be initiated without IRB review and approval, except when necessary to eliminate an immediate apparent hazard to the participant. In the case when changes must be immediately undertaken to prevent a hazard to the participant and there was no opportunity to obtain prior IRB approval, the IRB must be informed of the change as soon as possible via a protocol deviation form.  
<http://www.hhs.gov/ohrp/humansubjects/guidance/45cfr46.htm#46.103>

#### **Reporting of Unanticipated Problems to Participants or Others**

As a research investigator you are required to report unanticipated problems to participants or others involving your research as soon as possible. Serious adverse events as defined by the FDA regulations may be a subset of unanticipated problems. The reporting times as specified within the research protocol, applicable regulations and policies should be followed.  
<http://www.hhs.gov/ohrp/policy/AdvEvtGuid.htm>

#8

**INTERVIEW RELEASE**

Topic of interview ("subject"): Rev. Charles Johnson, his life, and his activity in (but not exclusive to) the civil rights movement and as pastor of Fitkins Memorial Church of the Nazarene in Meridian, Mississippi as part of Wesley L. Bishop's thesis for the master's degree in history ("work").

**Interviewee** (the person giving the interview)

Name: Dianne Adams

Street: Personal information withheld for privacy.

City:

Phone:

All personal information will only be associated with the research on this subject. You will not be contacted by anyone for any reason other than potential follow up for this work.

**Interviewer** (the person conducting the interview)

Name: Wesley L. Bishop

Institu

Street: Personal information withheld for privacy.

City:

Phone:

I, the interviewee, agree to be interviewed and recorded by Wesley L. Bishop (interviewer) about Rev. Charles Johnson, his life, and his activity in (but not exclusive to) the civil rights movement and as pastor of Fitkins Memorial Church of the Nazarene in Meridian, Mississippi. I also agree to allow descriptions of my experiences, as well as my words, photo, audio, or video recording, and any other biographical or other information or material that I choose to provide, to be used as part of the aforementioned work.

I retain the right to use any or all of the information and words I provide during this interview for my own purposes as I wish.

It is agreed between us that this release apply equally to any interviewer, publisher, or producer who publishes or produces work that incorporates descriptions of interviewee's experiences or other information or materials from this interview, and is irrevocable. I agree to allow a transcript and/or recording of any and all interviews conducted by the interviewer to be placed in the Archives of the International Church of the Nazarene and in the personal possession of the interviewer. I have the right to request a copy of the interview (either a printed transcript, a digital audio file, or both).

I, interviewee, release interviewer, author, and publisher from any and all copyright claims relating to the work for any of the uses above, in any and all editions, versions, and media.

**Cost of participation:**

None.

**Compensation for participation:**

None.

**Potential risks and discomfort of participation:**

There may be possibility that the interview questions will illicit strong emotions but that risk will be minimized by allowing the interviewee to skip any questions that are uncomfortable for him/her to answer.

**Potential benefits of participation:**

While the interviewee will receive no tangible benefit from participation in the interview, they will be contributing to the understanding of an important period in the history of the United States.

**Voluntary participation:**

Participation in the interview is voluntary at all times. If, at any time, the interviewee desires to stop the interview, he or she is free to request an end of the interview with no negative consequences.

**Privacy:**

If the interviewee wishes to keep his or her name private (anonymous), the interviewer will grant the request. Otherwise, the name of the interviewee will receive credit for their words, ideas, and accounts of the subject in the body of the text, footnotes, and/or the bibliography. Only the name of the interviewee will appear with no other personal contact information.

DA I approve the use of my name in the work.

\_\_\_\_\_ I wish to remain anonymous.

**Person to contact with questions:**

The interviewer will be available to answer any questions concerning this subject, now or in the future. You may contact the interviewer, Wesley Bishop (at the captioned information on page one). If you have questions about your rights as a research subject, you may call the Chair of the University and Medical Center Institutional Review Board at 252-744-2914 (days) and/or the ECU Risk Management Office at 252-328-6858.

I have read all the above information, asked questions and have received satisfactory answers in areas I did not understand. (A copy of this signed and dated consent form will be given to the person signing this form as the participant or as the participant's authorized representative.)

I (circle one)  DO or DO NOT give Mr. Bishop permission digitally record the interview(s).

**Interviewee:** Personal information

Signature: [Signature] Date 7-30-10

Print Name: Dianne Adams

**Interviewer:**

By: [Signature] Date 7/30/10

Print Name: Wesley L. Bishop

11/11/2010 11:23

PAGE 02/00

**INTERVIEW RELEASE**

Topic of interview ("subject"): Rev. Charles Johnson, his life, and his activity in (but not exclusive to) the civil rights movement and as pastor of Fitkins Memorial Church of the Nazarene in Meridian, Mississippi as part of Wesley L. Bishop's thesis for the master's degree in history ("work")

Interviewee (the person giving the interview)

Name: Jaedan Ballard

Street:

Personal information withheld for privacy.

City:

Phone:

All personal information will only be associated with the research on this subject. You will not be contacted by anyone for any reason other than potential follow up for this work.

Interviewer (the person conducting the interview)

Name: Wesley L. Bishop

Institut

Street:

City:

Phone:

Personal information withheld for privacy.

I, the interviewee, agree to be interviewed and recorded by Wesley L. Bishop (interviewer) about Rev. Charles Johnson, his life, and his activity in (but not exclusive to) the civil rights movement and as pastor of Fitkins Memorial Church of the Nazarene in Meridian, Mississippi. I also agree to allow descriptions of my experiences, as well as my words, photo, audio, or video recording, and any other biographical or other information or material that I choose to provide, to be used as part of the aforementioned work.

I retain the right to use any or all of the information and words I provide during this interview for my own purposes as I wish.

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I, interviewee, release interviewer, author, and publisher from any and all copyright claims relating to the work for any of the uses above, in any and all editions, versions, and media.

**Cost of participation:**

None.

**Compensation for participation:**

None.

**Potential risks and discomfort of participation:**

There may be possibility that the interview questions will illicit strong emotions but that risk will be minimized by allowing the interviewee to skip any questions that are uncomfortable for him/her to answer.

**Potential benefits of participation:**

While the interviewee will receive no tangible benefit from participation in the interview, they will be contributing to the understanding of an important period in the history of the United States.

**Voluntary participation:**

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**Privacy:**

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I approve the use of my name in the work.

I wish to remain anonymous.

**Person in contact with questions:**

The interviewer will be available to answer any questions concerning this subject, now or in the future. You may contact the interviewer, Wesley Bishop (at the captioned information on page one). If you have questions about your rights as a research subject, you may call the Chair of the University and Medical Center Institutional Review Board at 252-744-2914 (days) and/or the ECU Risk Management Office at 252-328-6858.

I have read all the above information, asked questions and have received satisfactory answers in areas I did not understand. (A copy of this signed and dated consent form will be given to the person signing this form as the participant or as the participant's authorized representative.)

I (circle one) **DO** or DO NOT give Mr. Bishop permission digitally record the interview(s).

**Interviewee:**

Signature: Personal information withheld for privacy.

*Nov 11, 2010*

Print Name: Joe Ann Ballard

**Interviewer:**

By: Wesley L. Bishop

Date 11/9/10

Print Name: Wesley L. Bishop

#12

**INTERVIEW RELEASE**

Topic of interview ("subject"): Rev. Charles Johnson, his life, and his activity in (but not exclusive to) the civil rights movement and as pastor of Fitkins Memorial Church of the Nazarene in Meridian, Mississippi as part of Wesley L. Bishop's thesis for the master's degree in history ("work").

**Interviewee** (the person giving the interview)Name: Gay BeardStreet: Personal information withheld for privacy.

City:

Phone:

All personal information will only be associated with the research on this subject. You will not be contacted by anyone for any reason other than potential follow up for this work.

**Interviewer** (the person conducting the interview)Name: Wesley L. BishopInstitution: Personal information withheld for privacy.

Street:

City: C

Phone:

I, the interviewee, agree to be interviewed and recorded by Wesley L. Bishop (interviewer) about Rev. Charles Johnson, his life, and his activity in (but not exclusive to) the civil rights movement and as pastor of Fitkins Memorial Church of the Nazarene in Meridian, Mississippi. I also agree to allow descriptions of my experiences, as well as my words, photo, audio, or video recording, and any other biographical or other information or material that I choose to provide, to be used as part of the aforementioned work.

I retain the right to use any or all of the information and words I provide during this interview for my own purposes as I wish.

It is agreed between us that this release apply equally to any interviewer, publisher, or producer who publishes or produces work that incorporates descriptions of interviewee's experiences or other information or materials from this interview, and is irrevocable. I agree to allow a transcript and/or recording of any and all interviews conducted by the interviewer to be placed in the Archives of the International Church of the Nazarene and in the personal possession of the interviewer. I have the right to request a copy of the interview (either a printed transcript, a digital audio file, or both).

I, interviewee, release interviewer, author, and publisher from any and all copyright claims relating to the work for any of the uses above, in any and all editions, versions, and media.

**Cost of participation:**

None.

**Compensation for participation:**

None.

**Potential risks and discomfort of participation:**

There may be possibility that the interview questions will illicit strong emotions but that risk will be minimized by allowing the interviewee to skip any questions that are uncomfortable for him/her to answer.

**Potential benefits of participation:**

While the interviewee will receive no tangible benefit from participation in the interview, they will be contributing to the understanding of an important period in the history of the United States.

**Voluntary participation:**

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**Privacy:**

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I approve the use of my name in the work.

I wish to remain anonymous.

**Person to contact with questions:**

The interviewer will be available to answer any questions concerning this subject, now or in the future. You may contact the interviewer, Wesley Bishop (at the captioned information on page one). If you have questions about your rights as a research subject, you may call the Chair of the University and Medical Center Institutional Review Board at 252-744-2914 (days) and/or the ECU Risk Management Office at 252-328-6858.

I have read all the above information, asked questions and have received satisfactory answers in areas I did not understand. (A copy of this signed and dated consent form will be given to the person signing this form as the participant or as the participant's authorized representative.)

I (circle one) DO or DO NOT give Mr. Bishop permission digitally record the interview(s).

**Interviewee:**

Signature: Personal information withheld for privacy.

Print Name: Grant Beard

07/30/2010

**Interviewer:**

By: Personal information withheld for privacy.

Date 7/30/10

Print Name: Wesley L. Bishop

# 11

**INTERVIEW RELEASE**

Topic of interview ("subject"): Rev. Charles Johnson, his life, and his activity in (but not exclusive to) the civil rights movement and as pastor of Fitkins Memorial Church of the Nazarene in Meridian, Mississippi as part of Wesley L. Bishop's thesis for the master's degree in history ("work").

**Interviewee (the person giving the interview)**Name: Victor Bay

Street:

Personal information withheld for privacy.

City:

Phone:

All personal information will only be associated with the research on this subject. You will not be contacted by anyone for any reason other than potential follow up for this work.

**Interviewer (the person conducting the interview)**Name: Wesley L. Bishop

Institution:

Street:

City:

Phone:

Personal information withheld for privacy.

I, the interviewee, agree to be interviewed and recorded by Wesley L. Bishop (interviewer) about Rev. Charles Johnson, his life, and his activity in (but not exclusive to) the civil rights movement and as pastor of Fitkins Memorial Church of the Nazarene in Meridian, Mississippi. I also agree to allow descriptions of my experiences, as well as my words, photo, audio, or video recording, and any other biographical or other information or material that I choose to provide, to be used as part of the aforementioned work.

I retain the right to use any or all of the information and words I provide during this interview for my own purposes as I wish.

It is agreed between us that this release apply equally to any interviewer, publisher, or producer who publishes or produces work that incorporates descriptions of interviewee's experiences or other information or materials from this interview, and is irrevocable. I agree to allow a transcript and/or recording of any and all interviews conducted by the interviewer to be placed in the Archives of the International Church of the Nazarene and in the personal possession of the interviewer. I have the right to request a copy of the interview (either a printed transcript, a digital audio file, or both).

I, interviewee, release interviewer, author, and publisher from any and all copyright claims relating to the work for any of the uses above, in any and all editions, versions, and media.

**Cost of participation:**

None.

**Compensation for participation:**

None.

**Potential risks and discomfort of participation:**

There may be possibility that the interview questions will illicit strong emotions but that risk will be minimized by allowing the interviewee to skip any questions that are uncomfortable for him/her to answer.

**Potential benefits of participation:**

While the interviewee will receive no tangible benefit from participation in the interview, they will be contributing to the understanding of an important period in the history of the United States.

**Voluntary participation:**

Participation in the interview is voluntary at all times. If, at any time, the interviewee desires to stop the interview, he or she is free to request an end of the interview with no negative consequences.

**Privacy:**

If the interviewee wishes to keep his or her name private (anonymous), the interviewer will grant the request. Otherwise, the name of the interviewee will receive credit for their words, ideas, and accounts of the subject in the body of the text, footnotes, and/or the bibliography. Only the name of the interviewee will appear with no other personal contact information.

I approve the use of my name in the work.

I wish to remain anonymous.

**Person to contact with questions:**

The interviewer will be available to answer any questions concerning this subject, now or in the future. You may contact the interviewer, Wesley Bishop (at the captioned information on page one). If you have questions about your rights as a research subject, you may call the Chair of the University and Medical Center Institutional Review Board at 252-744-2914 (days) and/or the ECU Risk Management Office at 252-328-6858.

I have read all the above information, asked questions and have received satisfactory answers in areas I did not understand. (A copy of this signed and dated consent form will be given to the person signing this form as the participant or as the participant's authorized representative.)

I (circle one) DO or DO NOT give Mr. Bishop permission digitally record the interview(s).

**Interviewee:**

Signature: Personal information withheld for privacy. e 7/29/10

Print Name: Victor Boyd

**Interviewer:**

By: Personal information withheld for privacy. Date 7/30/10

Print Name: Wesley L. Bishop

#13

**INTERVIEW RELEASE**

Topic of interview ("subject"): Rev. Charles Johnson, his life, and his activity in (but not exclusive to) the civil rights movement and as pastor of Fitkins Memorial Church of the Nazarene in Meridian, Mississippi as part of Wesley L. Bishop's thesis for the master's degree in history ("work").

**Interviewee** (the person giving the interview)Name: Rodney ByrwellStreet: Personal information withheld for privacy.

City:

Phone:

All personal information will only be associated with the research on this subject. You will not be contacted by anyone for any reason other than potential follow up for this work.

**Interviewer** (the person conducting the interview)Name: Wesley L. BishopInstitution: Personal information withheld for privacy.

Street:

City:

Phone:

I, the interviewee, agree to be interviewed and recorded by Wesley L. Bishop (interviewer) about Rev. Charles Johnson, his life, and his activity in (but not exclusive to) the civil rights movement and as pastor of Fitkins Memorial Church of the Nazarene in Meridian, Mississippi. I also agree to allow descriptions of my experiences, as well as my words, photo, audio, or video recording, and any other biographical or other information or material that I choose to provide, to be used as part of the aforementioned work.

I retain the right to use any or all of the information and words I provide during this interview for my own purposes as I wish.

It is agreed between us that this release apply equally to any interviewer, publisher, or producer who publishes or produces work that incorporates descriptions of interviewee's experiences or other information or materials from this interview, and is irrevocable. I agree to allow a transcript and/or recording of any and all interviews conducted by the interviewer to be placed in the Archives of the International Church of the Nazarene and in the personal possession of the interviewer. I have the right to request a copy of the interview (either a printed transcript, a digital audio file, or both).

I, interviewee, release interviewer, author, and publisher from any and all copyright claims relating to the work for any of the uses above, in any and all editions, versions, and media.

**Cost of participation:**

None.

**Compensation for participation:**

None.

**Potential risks and discomfort of participation:**

There may be possibility that the interview questions will illicit strong emotions but that risk will be minimized by allowing the interviewee to skip any questions that are uncomfortable for him/her to answer.

**Potential benefits of participation:**

While the interviewee will receive no tangible benefit from participation in the interview, they will be contributing to the understanding of an important period in the history of the United States.

**Voluntary participation:**

Participation in the interview is voluntary at all times. If, at any time, the interviewee desires to stop the interview, he or she is free to request an end of the interview with no negative consequences.

**Privacy:**

If the interviewee wishes to keep his or her name private (anonymous), the interviewer will grant the request. Otherwise, the name of the interviewee will receive credit for their words, ideas, and accounts of the subject in the body of the text, footnotes, and/or the bibliography. Only the name of the interviewee will appear with no other personal contact information.

I approve the use of my name in the work.

I wish to remain anonymous.

**Person to contact with questions:**

The interviewer will be available to answer any questions concerning this subject, now or in the future. You may contact the interviewer, Wesley Bishop (at the captioned information on page one). If you have questions about your rights as a research subject, you may call the Chair of the University and Medical Center Institutional Review Board at 252-744-2914 (days) and/or the ECU Risk Management Office at 252-328-6858.

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I (circle one)  DO or DO NOT give Mr. Bishop permission digitally record the interview(s).

**Interviewee:**

Signature:  e 7-30-2010

Print Name: Rev. Rasmyl Barwell

**Interviewer:**

By:  Date 7/30/10

Print Name: Wesley L. Bishop

**INTERVIEW RELEASE**

Topic of interview ("subject"): Rev. Charles Johnson, his life, and his activity in (but not exclusive to) the civil rights movement and as pastor of Fitkins Memorial Church of the Nazarene in Meridian, Mississippi as part of Wesley L. Bishop's thesis for the master's degree in history ("work").

**Interviewee** (the person giving the interview)

Name: Charles Johnson

Street: Personal information withheld for privacy.

City:

Phone:

All personal information will only be associated with the research on this subject. You will not be contacted by anyone for any reason other than potential follow up for this work.

**Interviewer** (the person conducting the interview)

Name: Wesley L. Bishop

Institution:

Street: Personal information withheld for privacy.

City:

Phone:

I, the interviewee, agree to be interviewed and recorded by Wesley L. Bishop (interviewer) about Rev. Charles Johnson, his life, and his activity in (but not exclusive to) the civil rights movement and as pastor of Fitkins Memorial Church of the Nazarene in Meridian, Mississippi. I also agree to allow descriptions of my experiences, as well as my words, photo, audio, or video recording, and any other biographical or other information or material that I choose to provide, to be used as part of the aforementioned work.

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I, interviewee, release interviewer, author, and publisher from any and all copyright claims relating to the work for any of the uses above, in any and all editions, versions, and media.

**Cost of participation:**

None.

**Compensation for participation:**

None.

**Potential risks and discomfort of participation:**

There may be possibility that the interview questions will illicit strong emotions but that risk will be minimized by allowing the interviewee to skip any questions that are uncomfortable for him/her to answer.

**Potential benefits of participation:**

While the interviewee will receive no tangible benefit from participation in the interview, they will be contributing to the understanding of an important period in the history of the United States.

**Voluntary participation:**

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I approve the use of my name in the work.

I wish to remain anonymous.

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I (circle one) DO or DO NOT give Mr. Bishop permission digitally record the interview(s).

**Interviewee:**

Signature: Personal information withheld for privacy. Date 7-30-10

Print Name: Charles Johnson

**Interviewer:**

By: Personal information withheld for privacy. Date 7/30/10

Print Name: Wesley L. Bishop

Nov 10 10 10:01a

p.2

**INTERVIEW RELEASE**

Topic of interview ("subject"): Rev. Charles Johnson, his life, and his activity in (but not exclusive to) the civil rights movement and as pastor of Fitkins Memorial Church of the Nazarene in Meridian, Mississippi as part of Wesley L. Bishop's thesis for the master's degree in history ("work").

**Interviewee** (the person giving the interview)

Name: W. TALMADGE JOHNSON

Street

Personal information withheld for privacy.

City:

Phone

All personal information will only be associated with the research on this subject. You will not be contacted by anyone for any reason other than potential follow up for this work.

**Interviewer** (the person conducting the interview)

Name: Wesley L. Bishop

Institution

Street

Personal information withheld for privacy.

City:

Phone

I, the interviewee, agree to be interviewed and recorded by Wesley L. Bishop (interviewer) about Rev. Charles Johnson, his life, and his activity in (but not exclusive to) the civil rights movement and as pastor of Fitkins Memorial Church of the Nazarene in Meridian, Mississippi. I also agree to allow descriptions of my experiences, as well as my words, photo, audio, or video recording, and any other biographical or other information or material that I choose to provide, to be used as part of the aforementioned work.

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I, interviewee, release interviewer, author, and publisher from any and all copyright claims relating to the work for any of the uses above, in any and all editions, versions, and media.

**Cost of participation:**

None.

**Compensation for participation:**

None.

10:02a

p.3

**Potential risks and discomfort of participation:**

There may be possibility that the interview questions will illicit strong emotions but that risk will be minimized by allowing the interviewee to skip any questions that are uncomfortable for him/her to answer.

**Potential benefits of participation:**

While the interviewee will receive no tangible benefit from participation in the interview, they will be contributing to the understanding of an important period in the history of the United States.

**Voluntary participation:**

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I approve the use of my name in the work.

I wish to remain anonymous.

**Person to contact with questions:**

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I (circle one)  DO or DO NOT give Mr. Bishop permission digitally record the interview(s).

**Interviewer:**

Sign  Date 11/10/10

Print Name: W. TALMAGE JOHNSON

**Interviewer:**

By: Wesley L. Bishop Date 11/9/10

Print Name: Wesley L. Bishop

NOV-12-2010 04:47P FROM:

P.2 0/0

**INTERVIEW RELEASE**

Topic of interview ("subject"): Rev. Charles Johnson, his life, and his activity in (but not exclusive to) the civil rights movement and as pastor of Fitkins Memorial Church of the Nazarene in Meridian, Mississippi as part of Wesley L. Bishop's thesis for the master's degree in history ("work").

Interviewee (the person giving the interview)

Name: Rev Charles Tillman

Street

Personal information withheld for privacy.

City:

Phone

All personal information will only be associated with the research on this subject. You will not be contacted by anyone for any reason other than potential follow up for this work.

Interviewer (the person conducting the interview)

Name: Wesley L. Bishop

Institu

Street

Personal information withheld for privacy.

City:

Phone

I, the interviewee, agree to be interviewed and recorded by Wesley L. Bishop (interviewer) about Rev. Charles Johnson, his life, and his activity in (but not exclusive to) the civil rights movement and as pastor of Fitkins Memorial Church of the Nazarene in Meridian, Mississippi. I also agree to allow descriptions of my experiences, as well as my words, photo, audio, or video recording, and any other biographical or other information or material that I choose to provide, to be used as part of the aforementioned work.

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**Cost of participation:**

None.

**Compensation for participation:**

None.

**Potential risks and discomfort of participation:**

There may be possibility that the interview questions will illicit strong emotions but that risk will be minimized by allowing the interviewee to skip any questions that are uncomfortable for him/her to answer.

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I (circle one) DO or DO NOT give Mr. Bishop permission digitally record the interview(s).

**Interviewee:**

Sig: Personal information withheld for privacy. 11/10/10

Print Name: Charles Tillman

**Interviewer:**

By: Wesley L. Bishop Date 11/9/10

Print Name: Wesley L. Bishop

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