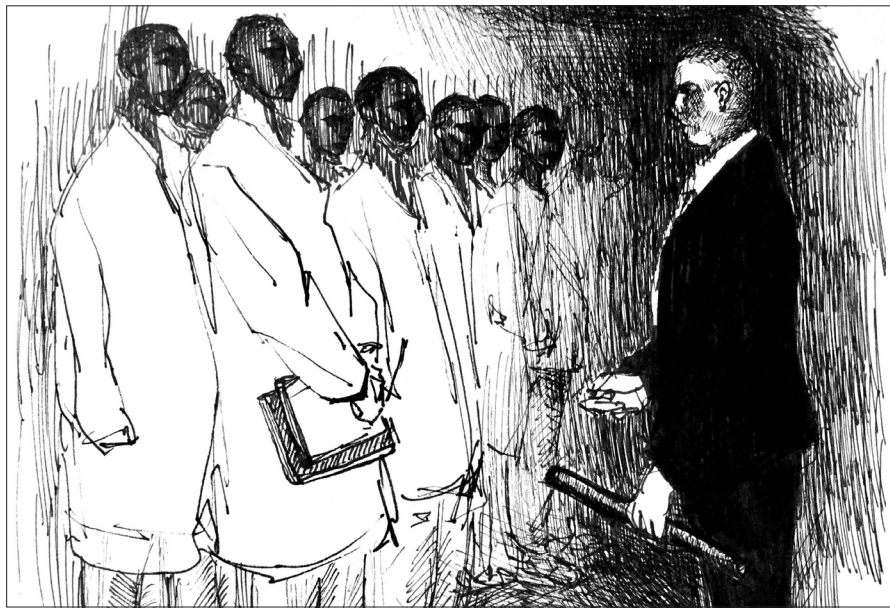


# The Montgomery Tribune

This Special Edition explores the racially charged demonstrations and protest events that rocked 1960 Montgomery Alabama

## STUDENTS TAKE ACTION

### Sit-ins in the Court House



Sheriff Mac Sim Butler allows students in hall, if quiet.

The demonstrations sweeping the south came to Montgomery today. Montgomery County deputies ousted 39 college students from a local diner. The students of Alabama State College fulfilled Dr. Martin Luther King's prediction from earlier this month. They attempted, but failed, to integrate a segregated lunch counter at the Montgomery County Court house this morning, February 25th. The rumors of the threatened protests proved true and Montgomery can anticipate more to come.

The students entered the diner in the basement of the Montgomery County Courthouse, sat at tables, and asked for service. Students stayed for 15 minutes and moved to the hallway when directed by police. The students complied with Sherriff Mac Sim Butler instructions to not be disruptive or block the halls. Unlike other student protests, the police did not arrest the

students. Later that afternoon, Governor Patterson ordered ASC President Trenholm to expel the protesting students. The Governor "threatened to withhold state funds and also demanded a full-scale investigation." That evening protestors delivered the student statement about the sit-ins to the newspaper office. Dr. Trenholm distributed mimeographed messages to the student body directing them not to continue the demonstrations.

The next morning a large group of students returned to the courthouse. They again left when asked returning to campus to rally and give speeches on the steps in front of the campus cafeteria. Dr. Trenholm instructed a group of the student leaders (including Bernard Lee, Joseph Peterson, and Elroy Embry) not to hold rallies on campus. The Governor has not commented on the continued protests.

### Prelude to Activism: Context and Motivations

Racially charged demonstrations and protests rocked Montgomery, Alabama in the spring of 1960. Montgomery—the home of the Confederate White House, Jefferson Davis Inauguration, and Alabama State College (the oldest state supported historically black college or university) strictly enforced one of the few city-wide codes enforcing separation of the races from social interaction in public settings and facilities. By the mid-twentieth century, Alabama and Montgomery in particular proved to be both a bastion of segregation and ground zero for the Civil Rights Movement.

"The South" and its populace approached the 100th anniversary of the

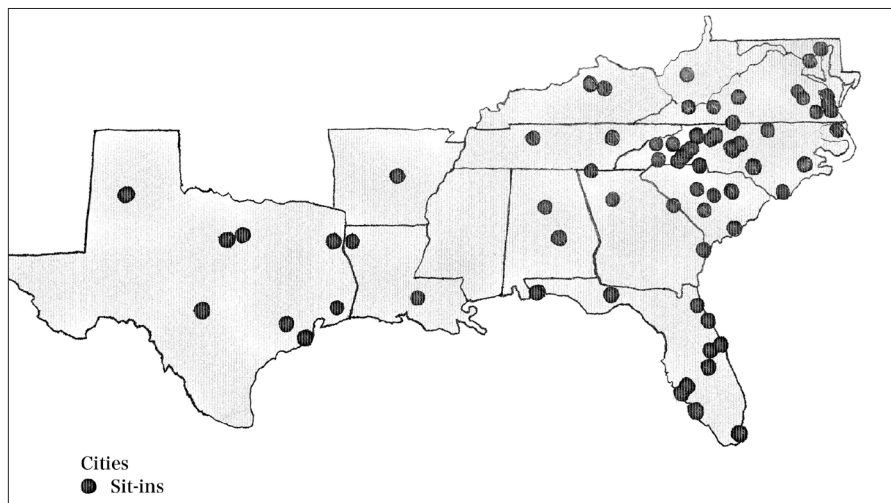
beginning of the Civil War (1860) with anticipation; some to commemorate the sacrifice in defense of by-gone way of life and others with impatience at the unfulfilled promise of change in that way of life.

In Montgomery, segregationists' resistance and suppression met each attempt to reverse the racial inequality imposed by a century of race-based second-class citizenship and reinforced the movement's commitment. Emmitt Till's lynching less than a two-hour drive by car from Montgomery tempered the hope fed by the Brown v. Board of Education (1954) US Supreme Court decision to integrate the schools. Yet, both prompted the success of the Montgomery Bus Boycott. In the five years since, white segregationists shot an integrated city buses, bombed the Boycott leaders' homes and churches, rioted until the University of Alabama expelled the sole student to integrate the college, and elected a staunch defender of the status quo as Governor. The spring of 1960 opened with much of White Montgomery proudly planning a number of high profile Civil War Centennial celebrations. An exploration of how these contextual factors shaped the personal histories, motivations, decisions, and actions of the leaders of student activist movement, government uncovers what contributed to the unrest disrupting the community.



Emmett Till's mother insists on open casket

## Racial Protest Sweeps the South



One sit in sparks multi-state movement

The Courthouse Sit-in was the first of its kind in the deep South, but the next step in a carefully cultivated Student-Driven Movement seeking the end of segregation. The protests challenging desegregation laws at lunch counters across the South began when NC A&T students in Greensboro, NC sat down at a Woolworth's counter on February 1.

Students from the Carolinas, Tennessee, and South Carolina joined their peers in local protests, encouraged by the success of Brown v. Board of Education and the 1955 Montgomery Bus Boycott. Governor John Patterson assured Montgomerians (Montgomery Advertiser, February 7) that he would "close every school in Alabama rather than see 'one Negro child' in a white school."

Local activists enrolled at Alabama State College (ASC) in the midst of the Bus Boycott and the wake of Emmitt Till's murder believing they had nothing left to lose, and wanting to make change. They served as runners for the Boycott and saw the retaliation bombings of their pastors' homes and churches. Through all, they embraced Dr. King's spiritual guidance to confront injustice with non-violence.

Authorities saw the lunch counter sit-ins as the next stage in Dr. King's emerging Movement. King's rally in Durham ignited the protest past the Carolinas. His prediction that they would spread to states throughout the South and even into Alabama galvanized state and city officials plans to stop King's campaign here, where it began. Whether inspired or directed, the ASC students increasingly felt responsible to join that Movement. With news of another Sit-In and each new threat from authorities students increasingly visited Reverend Abernathy, past ASC Assistant Dean of Students and Dr. King's closest colleague, for advice. Eventually, Mrs. Abernathy spoke up – take action tomorrow or never. The students agreed. The word spread quickly. Phi Beta Sigma fraternity called a meeting and the president invited his brothers to march with him in the morning. Bernard Lee, Eleanor Moody, and a few others met in Rev. Abernathy's basement to finalize the statement for tomorrow's newspapers. Everyone when home that night and prepared for the coming morning. This was why they came to ASC.

### Comparators



Men of the Sit-Ins  
St. John Dixon, James McFadden, Joseph Peterson, Joe Reed, Rev. Bernard Lee



Alabama State College President  
H. Councill Trenholm, Ph.D.



Alabama Official  
John M. Patterson, Esq.



Woman Student Activist  
Eleanor Shepherd

# Today's Debate: *You Decide*

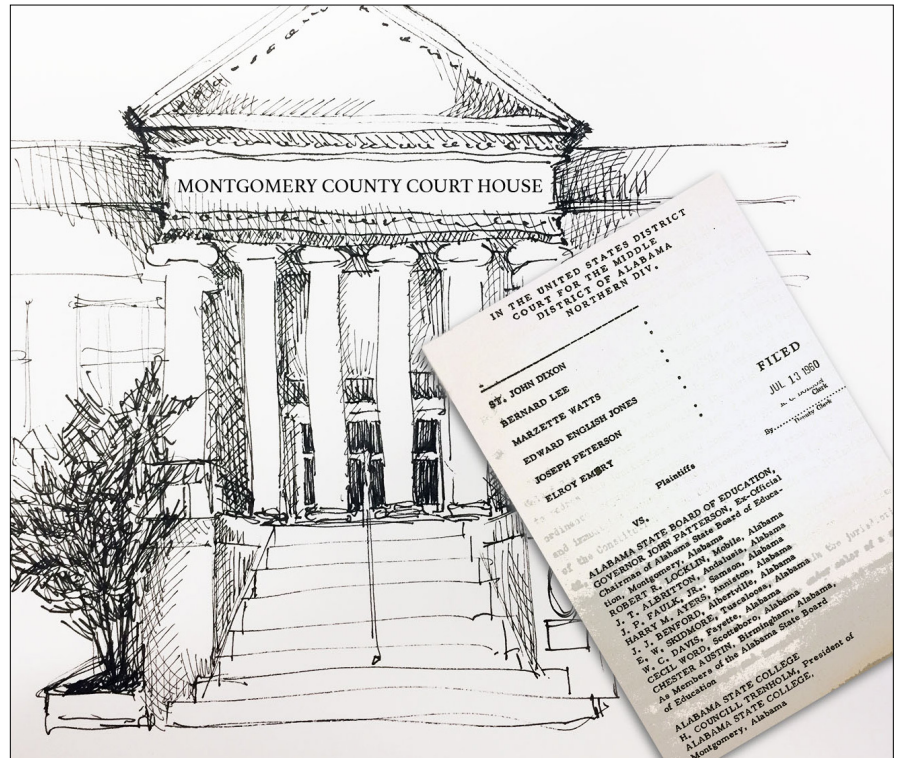
## Law Enforcement Protector or Antagonist?

What does a community do when thousands of its citizens swarm into its public spaces in anger? How does/should the law enforcement respond when laws or direct orders issued to retain the peace are ignored? Suppression of free speech turned into harassment or legitimate efforts to retain the peace? These are the questions Montgomery's citizens face in the wake of the student sit-ins.

By any measure, Sheriff Mac Sim Butler's decision not to arrest, but send the ASC students to the courthouse diner halls respected both their rights and societal custom. The students chose as their target a county building where the municipal segregation laws did not apply. No law had been broken. As long as the students complied with his instructions to remain quiet and not block the hallways, they could remain in that public space. In restraining his power, a peaceful conclusion was found - no arrests, no violence, no undue noise, no blocked halls, and the students left without being forced.

a planned service at the Capital in support of the expelled, Commission Sullivan released a statement to the press released declaring no tolerance for White nor Negro demonstrations. The morning of the planned service, five thousand White surrounded the Negro community gathering in Dexter Avenue Baptist Church before leaving for the capital. After a first attempt to begin the march, Floyd Mann, the State of Alabama Director of Public Safety convinced the leaders to abandon their planned march to the capital and personally escorted service-goers to safety. Sullivan's Montgomery officers stayed outside of the building doing nothing to disperse the White crowd, but quelling any violence.

Dr. King's organization placed an advertisement in the New York Times describing the Spring's events in Montgomery and inviting donations to support the Movement. The governmental authorities named in the New York Times advertisement sued alleging that this factually inaccurate representation



Disruptors launch lawsuit

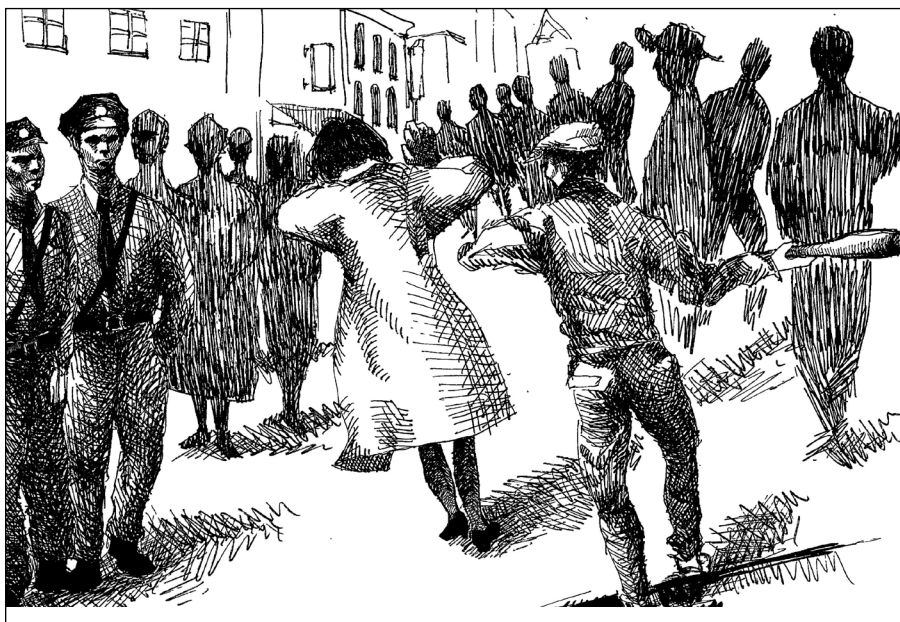
## CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE Instigation or Empowerment

Racial demonstrations continue to rock Montgomery after the State Board of Education decided to expel 9 and suspend 20 more students, fulfilling the punishment called for by the Governor soon after their unsuccessful sit-in at the Courthouse lunch counter. Instead of quelling their protests out of fear of the Governor's threats to close the school or respect for ASC President H. Council Trenholm's pleas for calm, student escalated the disruption.

Initially, students moved their protests off-campus at Dr. Trenholm's request, but almost all 2000 students marched through the halls during finals after sit-in leaders were informed of their expulsions. Contrary to ASC's typical student disciplinary processes, the Governor called a meeting of the Board of Education, which he chaired, and directed President Trenholm to prepare a report for their review. He did not notify the students of the meeting or invite them to speak on their behalf at the hearing. The Board ignored President Trenholm's proposed approach to the crisis. At the governor's direction, President Trenholm prepared a letter detailing the Board's decision; but the newspapers

delivered the decision before the President could. The Governor's decision most offended the students because it ignored Dr. Trenholm's council on how best to address the student disruption. As the Attorney General of Alabama, Patterson argued the need to defer to the administration's disciplinary system in quelling the protests surrounding Autherine Lucy's attempts to integrate the University of Alabama.

As feared by Dr. Trenholm, the disruptions increased. For 15 days Negro protestors gathered in 15 demonstrations across the city, at times bringing thousands into the streets of Montgomery. Students reported law enforcement surrounding the campus for most of the month. In one incident law enforcement arrested 35 students and a few faculty for protesting on campus after being instructed to leave. Student and administration leaders at a meeting in the school's auditorium convinced the student body to stop the protests; but not before the school denied hundreds of students' registrations for the next term. The public demonstrations stopped, but the Mass Meetings continued through the summer, continuing the threat to the campus and its state funding.



White protestor swings bat at negro shoppers head - no arrest

Louis B. Sullivan, Montgomery's Police Commissioner, took a different approach. Anticipating the Student Sit-in's inevitable arrival in Montgomery he used the press to clearly communicate that the City's Segregation laws would be enforced. It was the city's officers who stopped and questioned students in cars leaving the Courthouse. Montgomery's police were present, but did not intervene as the students' mass meetings and public demonstrations grew over the next 10 days, nor when rural whites patrolled Montgomery's downtown with bats, hitting one Negro woman in the head as she crossed the street. (However, the officers did confiscate the journalist's picture of the assault.) In response to

nationally injured their reputations. The expelled students' attorney, Fred Gray, acknowledges that the advertisement unnecessarily embellished the reality of law enforcement uneven efforts to maintain law and order in Montgomery. The Commissioner insists that law and order will be maintained while dispersing Negro gatherings and not even larger and at times violent white gatherings. Photographic evidence shows a large number of law enforcement personnel and vehicles positioned near campus egresses on at least one occasion. While there are inaccurate details in the description of events, do the facts support harassment and suppression, not enforcement of the law?

### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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UTK Leadership Studies Research Teams Past and Present

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### Information and Updates

This newspaper is a project of The App Farm ([www.playbonnechance.com](http://www.playbonnechance.com)). For more information about the "College Students Change the World - Montgomery 1960" project contact Dr. Karen D. Boyd, Associate Professor of Practice, Program Coordinator for UG Leadership Studies, Educational Leadership and Policy Studies (ELPS) [kboyd14@utk.edu](mailto:kboyd14@utk.edu) or 404-317-4493. For access to completed Montgomery 1960 resources and updates visit [www.csctw.org](http://www.csctw.org) after March 31, 2021.