

THE WESLEYAN WITNESS IN THE U.S. CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT:
THE ALLEN LEGACY AGAINST 20TH CENTURY AMERICAN APARTHEID

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In an address to the 1960 World Methodist Council in Oslo, Norway Archibald J. Carey, Jr., a pastor in the African Methodist Episcopal Church and a practicing attorney in Chicago, Illinois, focused on activists in the burgeoning civil rights movement whose religious witness drew from Wesleyan theology and praxis.¹ Those whom he specifically mentioned from his denomination understood their role as derivative from Richard Allen, who challenged Methodism and America in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, to establish justice and equality in both church and society. Carey, a confidante to the young Martin Luther King, Jr. and a federal appointee fighting employment discrimination, believed that he and others were emulating Allen through their participation in contemporary civil rights struggles.

I propose to tackle in this paper two interrelated issues. How did Carey and other Wesleyan clergy and lay understand the relationship between Methodism and societal change as pursued in this growing national crusade? How did they envisage Wesleyan theology and praxis and its application to the civil rights movement? Though the Allen legacy greatly informed and shaped the activism of such stalwarts as Carey, A. Philip Randolph, the militant labor leader, Oliver L. Brown of Brown decision fame, Rosa Parks, the Montgomery bus boycott heroine, and others, their praxis seemed tangential to the institutional behavior of the A.M.E. Church, the religious body to which they belonged. What accounted for this discrepancy between the Wesleyan and Allen mandate

for a strong societal witness against social and economic oppression and the tepid and reluctant involvement of this major African Methodist body? In summary, while the Wesley/Allen legacy ignited insurgent activism from an important cadre of A.M.E. ministers and members, it stirred uncertain and scattered denominational responses. Exploring this paradox will be the focus of this paper.

I believe that Wesleyan theology in interaction with African American theodicy in 18th century slavery and the social sanction of racial degradation became formative and core to the founding and doctrinal development of the African Methodist Episcopal Church. The Wesleyan witness, as Richard Allen envisaged it for African Methodism, favored an institutional structure to serve as an aegis and refuge for vulnerable, enslaved, and colonized peoples. The denomination which he seeded in 1787 through the Free African Society and founded in 1816 was intended to invigorate rather than mute the Wesleyan emphasis on the “new creation” and the establishment of a Kingdom of Grace that fully actualized societies built on righteousness and justice. This ethos energized and sustained the religious rhetoric and missional ministries of multiple generations of prelates, preachers, and parishioners during the four centuries in which African Methodism existed. From the 18th century through the 21st century there have been heroes and heroines of the faith, who, according to history and hagiography, took seriously the Allen legacy of preaching to the marginalized and developing a praxis of sacred and emancipationist efforts to free slaves, to fight for the poor, and to stand against segregationist and apartheid structures that oppressed African peoples throughout the diaspora. Embedded in celebratory denominational chronicles were learned litanies hailing such 19th century freedom fighters as Mother Sarah Allen, the widow of A.M.E.

founder Richard Allen, who opened her Philadelphia home to scores of fleeing fugitive slaves seeking a hiding place from bounty hunters trying to return them to bondage; the courageous Denmark Vesey, the Charleston exhorter, whose aborted insurrection would have manumitted innumerable South Carolina slaves; the legendary Henry McNeal Turner, the Civil War chaplain, Reconstruction politician, African emigrationist, and bishop who took African Methodism to the “mother” continent; and the daring Biddy Mason who braved bondage and the rigors of a rugged westward trek to establish the famed First A.M.E. Church in Los Angeles California. These stalwart stewards of the liberationist flame in their freedom church were honored more often in institutional memory than in denominational practice. Why it was difficult to sustain the church’s emancipationist energies into the 20th and 21st centuries is a question this essay seeks to address.

The Allen legacy actually invigorated A.M.E. development. When missionaries arrived in the post bellum South, for example, A.M.E. preachers presented the denomination as a proud, independent movement born in Richard Allen's protest against egregious racial discrimination at St. George Methodist Episcopal Church in Philadelphia. Reginald F. Hildebrand in *THE TIMES WERE STRANGE AND STIRRING: METHODIST PREACHERS AND THE CRISIS OF EMANCIPATION* notes that "African Methodists believed their denomination was uniquely suited to serve as the vehicle for conveying southern blacks from the shadows of slavery into the 'sunlight of liberty.'" That task included full enfranchisement and citizenship for those once held in bondage. Hildebrand called it the "gospel freedom", a peculiarly A.M.E. mission embedded in the

Allen legacy.² Moreover, the unapologetic use of "African" in the denominational title showed an unmistakable identification with militant assertions of black humanity and the rights of African Americans to equal treatment in both church and civic venues. Allen embodied all of these characteristics. Additionally, his rise from slavery and the purchase of his freedom, his effectiveness as a preacher to both blacks and whites, his determined effort to build black Wesleyan institutions, and his insistence upon peer, but brotherly interactions with white Methodists modeled attributes that elevated Allen to heroic standing among African Methodists. A.M.E.s recited the Allen story in countless settings across the centuries in the Americas and Africa and created a legacy and an institutional narrative that inspired builders and administrators of A.M.E. structures and energized activists who inveighed against social sin in various societal settings in the name of the A.M.E. founder.

This legacy was sustained in innumerable rituals and rhetoric enacted and articulated in formal institutional venues. Bishop William F. Dickerson in the Quadrennial Address to the 1884 General Conference in Bethel Church in Baltimore emphasized Allen's legacy as an unprecedented organizer among African Americans despite the strengthening grip of slavery in American society. Hence, he called for "a monument of bronze be erected to the memory of our founder" who established "the largest and most successful organization among colored Americans ever attempted on this Continent." In his quadrennial sermon, Bishop Henry B. Parks, at the centennial General Conference in 1916 in Philadelphia, credited Allen as "fearless and determined as a preacher." Moreover, "he stood square and erect upon all questions pertaining to righteousness, even-handed justice, race loyalty and devotion to God." Bishop Levi J.

Coppin, at this same General Conference, recalled in his Episcopal Address that Allen had opposed colonization as offering no improvement for African Americans and that he agreed to host the first convention to consider plans for the collective black elevation. Also, a Tennessee minister, Isaiah H. Welch, penned a pamphlet entitled **THE HEROISM OF THE REV. RICHARD ALLEN** which described the bishop as a freedom fighter in both the religious and civic arenas. Welch wrote that Allen “our hero must have credit for sounding the first loud tocsin of war against religious caste and ostracism and the need to continue the fight upon the same principles until the rights, privileges and immunities guaranteed by the Constitution are accorded us!”³

Two scholars, Charles H. Wesley and Eddie S. Glaude, while avoiding the hagiography of the other commentators, validated the Allen legacy as a foundational principle in the black liberationist ethos. Though Wesley, was an A.M.E. minister, he held a Ph.D. in history from Harvard University and wrote a definitive biography of Richard Allen. Wesley called Allen “an apostle of freedom.” Moreover, he said that Allen’s “career shows that the acceptance of inferiority and the spirit of submission are not racial characteristics.” Allen, he added, “was courageous and was ready and willing to fight for principles at all times.” Glaude goes further than Wesley in assigning a large liberationist significance to the Allen led exodus out of St. George Church in 1787. He contends that “most efforts toward liberation in African American history have been articulated as reenactments of Israel’s exodus from Egypt.” Israel, of course, was “The Promised Land” of liberty and Egypt was the oppressive place from which slaves sought escape. Exodus narratives in the African American experience, Glaude argues, described how “blacks constructed a salvific history in which God was on their side.” The Allen

exodus out of St. George was the precedent setting model and Allen represented an early example of a black Moses leading African Americans out of bondage into freedom. In the language of black religion, politics, and nationalism Allen's exodus was a profoundly important act of liberation.⁴

It seems that the institutional successes of the A.M.E. Church achieved between 1865 and 1916, however, displaced earlier emphases on the Wesleyan witness for establishing God's just and righteous Kingdom and the expectation of the parousia of Jesus Christ. The denomination, largely restricted to the North and Canada during the ante bellum period, grew exponentially after the Civil War. Thousands of former southern slaves, in response to black missionaries and sometimes at their own initiative embraced African Methodism. By 1880 membership had quadrupled to 400,000 and reached over a half million in 1916. During this same era the A.M.E. Church expanded to almost every state and spread to Liberia and Sierra Leone in 1891 and to South Africa in 1896.

Congregations also were established elsewhere in the Americas especially in Bermuda, the Caribbean and British Guiana. Additionally, the innumerable schools, colleges, seminaries, and a hospital in both the Americas and Africa testified to the denomination's large commitment to education. Moreover, the development of various denominational departments in publishing, pensions, financial administration, Christian education, and other areas showed a mature institutional infrastructure.

Despite the growing focus on internal denominational affairs during the several decades of the 20th century, there were notable clergy exceptions to this pattern. Reverdy C. Ransom, a social gospel pioneer who became a bishop, was forthright in his advocacy of black civil rights. At the 1906 Niagara Movement meeting in Harper's Ferry, West

Virginia he articulated protest principles which were reflected a few years later in the rhetoric of the N.A.A.C.P., the successor group to the Niagara Movement. Bishop John Hurst during the 1920s belonged to the national board of the N.A.A.C.P. Dwight V. Kyle, pastor of Avery Chapel A.M.E. Church in Memphis in the 1940s, headed the executive committee of the local N.A.A.C.P. and conspicuously defended aggrieved African Americans angry over police mistreatment. Additionally, Presiding Elder John Adams in the 1950s pushed for anti-employment discrimination while serving in Nebraska's unicameral legislature.⁵ Though extensively involved in church affairs, these clergy consciously embodied the Allen legacy and pursued it in the public square.

Busy with the business of denominational governance, managing the political crosscurrents of institutional reform and attending to the routine matters of electing and reelecting both worthy and ambitious persons to high church office, the task of sustaining the Allen legacy shifted from bishops and other leading ministers to rank and file preachers and laypersons. A. Philip Randolph, the militant labor leaders and practitioner of grassroots mobilization, Rosa Parks, the N.A.A.C.P. activist who inspired the Montgomery bus boycott, Archibald J. Carey, Jr., the Chicago preacher/politician who fought racial discrimination in housing on the local level and job bias in federal employment, and Oliver L. Brown and J. A. De Laine whose fight against school segregation culminated in the landmark Brown decision identified themselves as Allen heirs. Their activities became pivotal and indispensable to the start and success of the civil rights. They, rather than bishops and influential denominational officials, viewed themselves as the late 20th century apostles of Richard Allen. This task fell to a few socially conscious persons in the A.M.E. clergy and laity who embraced the

Allen example and took it to the public square to press for the establishment of a just and righteous Kingdom in which blacks could live as free and valued members of the human family. Randolph, Parks, Carey, Brown, and DeLaine, because they were in the thicket of social change, remembered the principles and praxis embedded in the Allen legacy. Denominational leaders, because institutional affairs drew most of their energies and attention, surely knew about the Allen legacy for social change and protest against racial injustice, but they only repeated the rhetoric, but seldom operationalized its mandates or pursued its challenges.

Howard D. Gregg, Ph.D., a veteran educator who served as Historiographer of the A.M.E. Church from 1968 to 1980, correctly tied the Allen legacy to the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s. Allen, he said, spearheaded “the first protest movement” among African Americans in his 1787 walkout from St. George Church. “The current protests, sit-ins, (and) freedom rides”, he argued, “are but an extension of the philosophy of protest” that Allen pioneered. Gregg added that Allen “deserves credit not only for the basic organizational structure of the African Methodist Episcopal Church but for his influence upon the United actions of Negroes for their own welfare.” Gregg in his useful volume, *THE A.M.E. CHURCH AND THE CURRENT NEGRO REVOLT*, chronicled in exhaustive detail nearly every utterance and action from the A.M.E. bishopric, clergy, and laity bearing upon the civil rights cause. Church affairs, however, remained their focus while civil rights advocacy became an occasional activity. Though he mentioned Randolph, Parks, Brown, and De Laine, he could not connect their broad and risky involvements with any significant institutional support from their denomination. Church leaders knew Allen’s protest narrative, but left its implementation

to sundry preachers and laypersons who actualized its possibilities in concrete successes in ending the second class citizenship of African Americans.⁶

A. Philip Randolph could be rightly called the "father" of the civil rights movement. His tactical contributions influenced the methodology of protest that activists embraced in the 1950s and 1960s. On the eve of World War II Randolph, the founding president in 1925 of the all black Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, demanded federal assurances that African Americans would have full access to employment in defense industries on a nondiscriminatory basis. In 1941 his threatened March on Washington which promised to mobilize multiple thousands of blacks elicited from President Franklin D. Roosevelt Executive Order 8802. This directive created the Fair Employment Practices Committee to prevent and enforce colorblind hiring, placement, and promotion policies in industries holding federal contracts. Randolph's method of grassroots mobilization as a tactic and strategy to accomplish social change was sustained in his organization, the March on Washington Movement (MOWM). Moreover, this effort laid foundations for his call in 1963 for another March on Washington during the height of the civil rights movement. This demonstration drew an interracial and interfaith aggregation of 250,000 persons to the nation's capital to press Congress to enact President John F. Kennedy's landmark civil rights proposal.

Randolph was the son of an A.M.E. pastor and he was born, reared, and educated in Florida where he followed conspicuously the Richard Allen model of involvement in transformational change for African Americans and the poor. Randolph, throughout his long life from 1889 to 1979, considered himself as 'one of the sons of African Methodism.' Moreover, he believed the A.M.E. Church represented the 'religious

reflection of the deep revolutionary currents set in motion by the French Revolution which had given rise to the doctrine of the Rights of Man.' With respect to Richard Allen, Randolph, according to Cynthia Taylor, one of his biographers, said his "walking out of the segregated Methodist Church was the opening act of the civil rights movement. Randolph wrote that the A.M.E. founder 'broke down the iniquitous partition wall of racial proscription and segregation in the Christian Church, not only in the United States but throughout the world.' Though Randolph held unorthodox religious views, Taylor contends that "his religiosity was a blend of an African Methodist social gospel and a Christian humanist perspective informed by a philosophical belief in the sacredness of the human personality."⁷

Despite the long stretch of time when he had no formal affiliation with an A.M.E. congregation, Randolph involved clergy and churches in his many efforts to organize black workers and to mobilize the grassroots in protests against racial discrimination. Though some A.M.E. leaders, like Bishop Archibald J. Carey, Sr. in the 1920s, thwarted his attempts to promote trade unionism among African Americans, he commended Bishop Reverdy C. Ransom and Reverend (later Bishop) Joseph Gomez for their Progressive thinking on labor matters. Randolph wanted his denominational leadership to stand up for the rights of workers and defy hegemonic authorities in the footsteps of 'such spiritual titans as Bishop Richard Allen. 'In the 1940s, when the MOWM was active, some A.M.E. clergy supported the organization. Most prominent among them was Reverend Archibald J. Carey, Jr., the son and namesake of Randolph's deceased critic, Bishop Carey. The younger Carey eagerly embraced the MOWM and invited Randolph to speak to his socially activist congregation, Chicago's Woodlawn A.M.E.

Church. When Randolph joined Bethel A.M.E. Church in New York City in 1957, he did so 'because I believe in it' meaning African Methodism. Allen's legacy as maintained in the ethos and rhetoric of the denomination was taken seriously by the labor leader. If most A.M.E. leaders were reticent about active protests against racial injustice, Randolph, a layman certainly was not. He understood Allen and he viewed the Wesleyan body he founded as an institutional expression of Wesley's "new creation." Realizing God's Kingdom and awaiting its fruition in the parousia of Jesus Christ, though hardly the language that Randolph would articulate, still required the kind of social consciousness that his embrace of the Allen legacy mandated. Randolph was more than willing to emulate the A.M.E. founder.⁸

The use of African Methodism as an analytical tool to describe Randolph's social insurgency is also crucial to explaining the actions of Rosa Parks and other A.M.E. laypersons who embraced an emancipationist ethos from their reading of the Allen story. Neither denominational leaders nor African Methodist scholars were alone in interpreting or invigorating the meaning of Methodism and the Allen legacy when applied to the civil rights movement. Randolph's role as an African American spokesman might be a better barometer to measure the vitality of the A.M.E. activist tradition than the rhetoric of Episcopal addresses or conference resolutions. Tracing the clerical careers of those in high church office seems less relevant to gauging the A.M.E. contribution and response to the civil rights movement than studies of the activities of rank and file laypersons. Rosa Parks, whose refusal to relinquish her seat to a white man, precipitated a bus boycott in Montgomery, Alabama lasting for 381 days during 1955 and 1956. That fateful day on December 1, 1955, however, happened because of Park's prior activities in

the black freedom struggle. Her husband, Raymond Parks, for example, had been active in the 1930s on the National Committee to Defend the Scottsboro Boys, a case where several black men had been falsely accused and found guilty for raping two disreputable white women. In the 1940s Rosa Parks joined the local N.A.A.C.P. and tried numerous times to register to vote and ultimately succeeded in 1945. Moreover, E. D. Nixon, the Montgomery N.A.A.C.P. president and an active member of Randolph's Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, chose Parks to serve as chapter secretary. Underlying Parks's activism was her deep religious faith nurtured at her hometown congregation, Mt. Zion A.M.E. Church in Pine Level, Alabama, and later at St. Paul A.M.E. Church in Montgomery where she was a Sunday School teacher and a stewardess. Her biographer, Douglas Brinkley, noted that after her arrest for her bus protest, Parks said that

While praying in a pew at St. Paul AME, she suddenly felt a blessing from God sweep over her, lifting the burdens from her soul and salving her earthly cares. She came away from the church feeling lighthearted, confident that the strange combination of circumstances that had put her at the vortex of a major civil rights struggle was the work of the Lord. She emerged from St. Paul AME convinced that the time for moral courage and universal love had come for Montgomery; she could hear the chimes of freedom ringing, and all she had to do was 'keep the faith.' Like (Martin Luther) King's, Rosa Parks's mind was no longer troubled, her conscience just as suddenly uncluttered. 'True peace of mind had swept over me.' Parks recalled.

This testimony also showed her spiritual attachment to African Methodism. She noted that her denomination functioned in the ante bellum abolitionist movement as the 'Freedom Church.' This legacy which Richard Allen pioneered made of Parks a lifelong A.M.E. member who always tied together the church's salvific witness against sin, slavery, and segregation.⁹

Though many bishops and pastors in major A.M.E. pulpits were too busy with institutional governance to be conspicuously involved in the civil rights movement, some ministers in smaller congregations, moved by the immediate impact of legalized segregation upon their families and parishioners, joined in the fight to end apartheid policies. Reverend Oliver L. Brown was active with the N.A.A.C.P. and sued the Topeka, Kansas public schools because his daughter, Linda, could not attend a nearby public school on account of her race. The N.A.A.C.P. shepherded the case through state and federal courts until it reached the U. S. Supreme Court. Brown, a native of Topeka, where he was born in 1918, attended Washburn University, worked for the Santa Fe Railroad, and served as an assistant minister at St. John A.M.E. Church in Topeka. At the time of the litigation, he had become the pastor at the smaller St. Mark A.M.E. Church in another section of Topeka.¹⁰

The N.A.A.C.P. aggregated the Brown case with four other suits and developed an omnibus assault against public school segregation. Perhaps, the most dramatic among the five was BRIGGS V. ELLIOTT which originated in Clarendon County, South Carolina. Another A.M.E. pastor, Reverend J. A. DeLaine spearheaded the suit. Like Brown, he was a bi-vocational clergyman and served as principal at the county's Scott Branch school. De Laine's African American students had no bus transportation to bring them to school like their white counterparts. When school authorities refused De Laine's request for a bus, he convinced parental plaintiffs through several legal attempts to demand equal treatment for their aggrieved children. The case was argued in a federal appeals court in Charleston where in a 2 to 1 decision De Laine's plaintiffs lost their suit. Judge J. Waties Waring, however, in his dissenting opinion said "segregation is per se inequality."

Waring's legal reasoning later would influence the thinking of the U. S. Supreme Court in its 1954 landmark Brown decision outlawing public school segregation.¹¹

For these bold actions De Laine endured harassment from the White Citizens Council and the Ku Klux Klan. Moreover, someone set his church, St. James in Lake City on fire. With his life in jeopardy De Laine fled the state and took refuge in New York City at the home of Bishop Decatur Ward Nichols, the A.M.E. prelate of the Northeast. De Laine served three modest sized congregations in Buffalo where he founded De-Laine-Waring Church, in New Rochelle, and in Brooklyn. He was denied denominational recognition and failed in his election to become Editor of the A.M.E. CHURCH REVIEW. Some bishops sent him money during his South Carolina troubles, but overall De Laine believed his embodiment of the Allen legacy seemed unacknowledged and unappreciated by the religious body that the founder had established. I have written elsewhere concerning this period in the civil rights movement that “the business of the church was the church and while ministers like De Laine were applauded (for their bravery), they pursued protest as matters of individual conscience and risk.”¹²

Archibald J. Carey, Jr., according to any objective observer, belonged to the light-skinned elite among African Americans. The family pedigree he inherited was unlike what Brown and De Laine could boast. He was a fourth generation A.M.E. minister, grandson of a Reconstruction politician, son of a bishop, possessed of a seminary and law degree, and a member of the most selective of social organizations including Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity and Sigma Pi Phi, better known as the Boule. Yet, Carey, like his father, opted for a ministry of activism aimed at the uplift of African Americans and ending their second class citizenship status. He became a significant and influential background

benefactor to the civil rights movement. As an early and indispensable supporter to the C.O.R.E., then a fledgling civil rights organization, as a confidante to Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, and a trusted troubleshooter for King with the Federal Bureau of Investigation, Carey played a crucial, but a largely surreptitious role as a major factor in the black freedom struggle.

Carey envisaged his clergy role mainly as an active advocate for black rights. Born in Chicago in 1908 Carey was graduated from the city's Lewis Institute and earned a divinity degree from Garrett Theological Seminary and a law degree from the Kent College of Law. He developed his two Chicago congregations into socially conscious churches, won two elections as a Chicago alderman, and served in the Eisenhower Administration as chair of a federal fair employment commission. Bishop Richard Allen, the A.M.E. Church founder, said Carey, shaped his understanding of ministry and its concomitant obligation to fight for the poor and disadvantaged in the public square. Concerning Allen, Carey called him "a fighter against segregation" and "a workman in the building of the Kingdom of God." Bishop Allen, he added, had been "dedicated not only to the calling of God but to service of man" and "in making a kingdom of men (into) a kingdom of heaven." Therefore, black Methodist ministers needed to be involved with the N.A.A.C.P., the National Urban League, and other civil rights organizations aimed at destroying the Jim Crow condition that had long oppressed African Americans. That was a Wesleyan mandate and Carey patterned his ministerial career to conform to this interpretation of Methodism.¹³

Bishop Archibald J. Carey, Sr. assigned his son in 1930 to his first pastoral

appointment, Woodlawn A.M.E. Church, a mission congregation of 49 members. Effective preaching and a socially involved ministry expanded the church to 1,500 members a decade later. By 1938 the junior Carey raised a building fund of \$40,000 and later purchased a large edifice and other properties. In 1949 Bishop George W. Baber re-assigned Carey to Quinn Chapel, the same that the elder Carey had served. Similar membership increases and physical improvements occurred during a pastorate that lasted into the 1960s. While at both churches Carey became known as a community activist. In the 1930s he pressed the school board to provide a new building for black residents. Some urged his appointment to the city school board. He belonged to the Scottsboro Defense Committee in 1937 and joined other Chicagoans in sponsoring a rally to free the unjustly incarcerated black Alabamians. He also backed efforts for a federal ban on lynching. In the late 1940s Carey became particularly active in the N.A.A.C.P. as a part of its official nationwide speakers bureau. He usually viewed the African American struggle for freedom in a global context. He often compared the condition of blacks with colonized peoples in Third World and noted that politicians who ignored racism in America imperiled the nation's international credibility.¹⁴

Like his father, Carey, while retaining his pastorates, became politically involved. He was elected and reelected as a Republican as an alderman for Chicago's Third Ward. In 1949 he fought a long, but unsuccessful battle to outlaw racial discrimination in publicly funded housing. The Carey Ordinance, though failing to pass, won nationwide notice and identified Carey as an emerging civil rights spokesman. That was his platform in an unsuccessful run for Congress in 1950 against the powerful Congressman William L.

Dawson and his effective Democratic political machine. Though he lost his aldermanic position in 1955 against a Dawson backed opponent, Carey already had been rescued as national G.O.P. officeholder. As an active campaigner for Dwight D. Eisenhower, Carey who had endorsed the General's 1952 presidential nomination had become an attractive Republican speaker.¹⁵

During the 1940s Carey became the founding father to an interracial civil rights organization, the Committee on Racial Equality (later renamed as the Congress of Racial Equality). A small group of pacifists and divinity students at the University of Chicago spearheaded C.O.R.E. in 1942. Though A.J. Muste of the Fellowship of Reconciliation (F.O.R.) had been their mentor and model in the pacifist cause, their interest in race relations drew them to two African American activists. They recognized Arthur C. Falls, a physician, and Archibald J. Carey, Jr., a pastor, as effective opponents of racial discrimination. Falls, the scion of a Roman Catholic family and the brother of a nun, became in the 1930s "one of the best known race Catholics" in Chicago. His reputation derived from chairmanship of the Catholic Interracial Commission. Additionally, there was wide awareness of Carey's crusades for racial equity in housing and public education. Moreover, his Woodlawn congregation was associated with insurgent causes and was known as a socially progressive church.¹⁶

James Robinson may have made the initial contact with Falls and his wife, Lillian, both fellow Catholics. Robinson remembered that the couple gave the F.O.R. race relations group a tour of Chicago's South Side. This introduction to the city's black population surely familiarized the forerunner group to C.O.R.E. with needed information about potential supporters. Bernice Fisher, however, brought Carey to C.O.R.E.

Fisher, a 'rock ribbed Baptist', was impressed with Carey as both a social activist and a skilled pulpiteer. Hence, she became Woodlawn's first white member. Her friend, Jane Douglas, the wife of a labor education professor, also accompanied her and they became active in the Woodlawn A.C.E. League fellowship.¹⁷

Fisher, a pacifist and a civil rights advocate, often sought Carey's guidance on both matters. Moreover, as she and her C.O.R.E. colleagues targeted discriminatory public and private facilities Carey cooperated with common projects. The inequitable treatment of blacks at Northwestern University, for example, engaged Carey and Fisher in debate on whether a lawsuit or some other means of public pressure was required. Because of the friendship between Carey and Fisher, C.O.R.E. held its first national conference in 1943 at Woodlawn Church. Additionally, Carey provided C.O.R.E. with its headquarters in the pastor's office. When the organization launched the Journey of Reconciliation in 1947, the initiative drew Carey's support. The journey aimed to assert the principle of interstate travel in the South on a nonsegregated basis. Carey was invited to speak to a national C.O.R.E. meeting. He also maintained contact with C.O.R.E. founders. Homer Jack, who became a Unitarian minister, served as head of the Chicago Council Against Racial and Religious Discrimination. Carey consented to join the advisory board. George Houser, another C.O.R.E. pioneer, became the executive director of the group in the late 1940s and solicited funds from Carey's church to fund scholarships for C.O.R.E. and to aid an interracial workshop.¹⁸

Carey's C.O.R.E. involvements represented a significant aspect of his wartime militancy. These pacifists and civil rights fighters identified Carey as on "the cutting edge" of Chicago activism. As committed practitioners of nonviolent direct action.

Fisher, Robinson, Houser, and Jack viewed Carey as the exemplar of what they wanted to achieve through own activist engagements. In this way Carey helped to nurture a new civil rights organization whose later impact upon the 1960s promoted black advancement. Moreover, these C.O.R.E contacts put Carey in early interaction with James Farmer and Bayard Rustin, movement strategists important to civil rights crusades in subsequent decades.

Ironically, Carey's extensive G.O.P. involvements laid foundations for his later involvement with Martin Luther King, Jr. The Republican National Convention met in 1952 in Chicago, and as a committed supporter of General Dwight D. Eisenhower for the presidency Carey was tapped to deliver a major speech at the convention. "The Republican Party" he said, "freed America of the blot of slavery." Then he asked, "what does the Negro-American want?" The answer was "nothing special." He declared "all we want is the right to live and work and play, to vote and be promoted, to fight for our country and hope to be President, like everyone else." Carey added "We, Negro-Americans, sing with other Americans:

My country, 'tis of thee
Sweet land of liberty
Of thee I sing
Land where my fathers died
Land of the Pilgrim's pride
From every mountain side
Let freedom ring!"

Then in a rhythmic refrain he proclaimed:

"From every mountain side, freedom ring.
Not only from the Green Mountains and
The White Mountains of Vermont and New Hampshire;
Not only from the Catskills of New York, but from
The Ozarks in Arkansas; from the Stone Mountain in
Georgia, from the Great Smokies of Tennessee and

From the Blue Ridge Mountains of Virginia----Not
Only for the minorities of the United States, but for the
Persecuted of Europe, for the rejected of Asia, for the
Disfranchised of South Africa and for the disinherited of
All earth-may the Republican Party, under God, from
Every mountain side, LET FREEDOM RING.”¹⁹

Martin Luther King, Jr. in his famous “I Have a Dream” speech borrowed liberally from Carey’s Republican rhetoric. But, it was fine with the Chicago pastor and politician. He had become a confidante to King while the young minister was initiating nonviolent civil rights campaigns from his pastorate in Montgomery, Alabama starting in 1955. Exactly when Carey and King met is unclear. Their initial encounter probably occurred in 1955 when Carey came to Montgomery to speak at an Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity program at Alabama State College. King who gave the benediction at the event also hosted the Chicago clergyman at his home. Soon after Carey’s visit to Montgomery the bus boycott commenced, and he immediately joined others in support of this major challenge to legalized segregation. Carey raised funds in Chicago to aid King and the Montgomery Improvement Association. He reported that his bishop, George W. Baber asked all A.M.E. churches in the Midwest to contribute to the M.I.A. Moreover, Carey testified that “I have watched with interest and admiration the performance of Negro-Americans in the Montgomery bus strike.” He told King that “I certainly want to salute your own magnificent leadership.” He added that King should be “comforted by knowing that there are tens of thousands who are giving you their support and their prayers.” Also, during the bus boycott, Carey spoke at the All-Chicago Hour of Prayer in behalf of the M.I.A. King’s associate, Reverend Ralph Abernathy, was present to hear Carey declare that:

Now it is most important to the success of this movement

that all of us grasp its spirit. The strength of the Montgomery movement is its maturity in its utter commitment to non-violent methods. However strong the urging rises in us to take some vengeance, we must resist it because they “that take the sword, shall perish by the sword” and this is not the way of God. If we war against evil ways, we must do it in a manner yet worthy to be called the sons of God.

Carey continued and said:

Our response to wrong may be indignant, but it must also be in dignity. In our press for justice we must be insistent but always intelligent. let us be firm but never furious. We must be better but not bitter. this effort to achieve the Kingdom of God must be determined but it must also be dedicated, for right is on our side but only as long as we are righteous.²⁰

As King and the M.I.A. maintained black community support of the bus boycott for 381 days, the N.A.A.C.P. won a crucial Supreme Court case that ended the demonstration and brought victory to Montgomery’s African American population. A year after these occurrences, King invited Carey back to Montgomery to speak at the 2nd Annual Institute on Nonviolence and Social Change. “Your dynamic and inspiring address”, said King to Carey, “will long be remembered.” Perhaps, during this interaction, Carey may have shared with King his G.O.P. speech that became the rhetorical foundation for his later “I Have a Dream” oration. In any case, Carey, even while he was present in Montgomery, sent a message to his Chicago congregation saying he was speaking for the “2nd anniversary of the Bus Strike.” He urged his parishioners “to be sure that they are members of the N.A.A.C.P.” and attend a forthcoming meeting to elect new officers for the Chicago Branch. Notwithstanding his ongoing involvement with the N.A.A.C.P., he continued to nurture his friendship with King. Carey invited him to preach on at Quinn Chapel more than once, and he like other Carey colleagues became familiar figures in the pulpit of this Chicago church.²¹

At the time that Carey interacted with King their respective clerical careers were ascendant. King's leadership in the Montgomery bus boycott propelled him to national notice and influence. Carey, a significant operative in the Republican Party, had served a term as an Eisenhower appointee as Alternate Delegate to the United Nations and then as vice chairman and later chairman of the President's Committee on Government Employment Policy. With wide investigatory authority Carey's committee monitored how African Americans fared in federal positions. Though each was an important preacher in the public square, Carey had greater access to establishment institutions than King. For example, Carey forged friendships with J. Edgar Hoover, Cartha De Loach, and other high F.B.I officials in connection with his federal government committee. For King, Carey's relationship with Hoover proved absolutely consequential!²²

The F.B.I. was a friendly venue for Carey. He had been investigated several times especially in connection with his two federal appointments. The latest file on him acknowledged that he "has long been a most vocal and aggressive champion of the cause of obtaining equal rights for the Negro" and that he had been known as someone who associated with "communist sympathizers." Carey's own record, however, was clean and showed him as completely loyal. His initial encounter with the F.B.I. probably occurred in 1957 when Carey and his committee colleagues visited the Bureau to discuss its employment policy. In 1958 a White House aide arranged for Carey and five family and friends to tour the Bureau's Washington, D.C. headquarters. Hoover, however, was out of the office. In 1959, on another tour, Carey met with Hoover and said "the Director was one of the outstanding figures in government and had been during his entire law enforcement career." Additionally, Carey had commended Hoover on the movie "The

F.B.I. Story.” In 1960 he invited Hoover to speak at a dinner for Quinn Church. Carey noted that his parishioners called the speech a “magnificent message” and Carey himself said it was “most inspiring.” When a congressman questioned the F.B.I. on its employment of African Americans, Carey was satisfied that the “Negro Special Agent” assigned to Hoover and other “Negro Agents” working in the Bureau showed the F.B.I. was in compliance with the expectations of the government employment committee. Carey, both within the F.B.I. and with J. Edgar Hoover himself, had created a large reservoir of goodwill. These relationships would prove important to Martin Luther King, Jr.²³

Perhaps, unknown to Carey, King had been a F.B.I. target since he catapulted to fame as a result of his leadership in the Montgomery bus boycott. From the 1950s until his assassination in 1968 the Bureau, because of Hoover’s obsessive disdain for King, invaded his privacy in search of suspected communist connections. When this suspicion proved groundless, Hoover ordered surveillance of King’s sex life. Purported evidence in this area circulated surreptitiously, but widely in government and civil rights circles. According to King biographer, David Garrow, it was broadly known that Hoover threatened to expose salacious information to the public in hopes of discrediting him. At this point, Carey contacted Hoover to prevent any further harm to King.²⁴

King, knowing of Carey’s F.B.I. contacts, informed him that the Bureau was set on ruining his reputation. Though King did not ask his friend to intervene in his behalf, Carey promised ‘to see what he could do.’ King agreed that Carey should try to help. Hence, he put in an immediate request to meet with Hoover, but to no avail. Instead, he received an appointment with Cartha De Loach, the Assistant F.B.I. Director. It seems

that Carey was the fourth person to speak with De Loach about this issue. Roy Wilkins, Executive Director of the N.A.A.C.P., James Farmer, Executive Director of C.O.R.E., and King's second in command in S.C.L.C., Reverend Ralph Abernathy, had spoken with De Loach urging the F.B.I. to cease its campaign to embarrass King.²⁵

De Loach told Carey that the Bureau's only grievance against King was his unwarranted criticism of the Bureau for failing fully to protect civil rights workers. The murder of some and the physical assaults hurled upon others drew scarce intervention and investigation from the Bureau. Though De Loach denied this charge, innumerable civil rights activists, aside from King, believed the Bureau to be derelict in bringing to justice perpetrators of violence against movement participants. In any case, Carey had not come to debate this important matter. He wanted the Bureau to end its hostility to King. Carey said King is a "good man", that he "stands as a 'symbol' to the Negro race today", and that he is a 'safety valve' and an "articulate voice" who was "preventing more of the militant and violent Negroes from committing serious acts in the United States." De Loach would not admit that the Bureau was trying to discredit King. He said that Hoover, in an earlier encounter with the S.C.L.C. leader, "had given King some very good advice insofar as his moral responsibilities were concerned." Carey, who never conceded to De Loach that such admonitions were either necessary or credible, returned to King and urged him to avoid further criticism of the F.B.I. because it "was not the best strategy for the civil rights movement." He also wanted King and Hoover 'to bury the hatchet' and "not to alienate each other." Hoover's F.B.I., however, continued its furtive circulation of rumors about King, and later hired an informant in S.C.L.C. to uncover financial misconduct within the organization. None was discovered. It seemed that Carey,

along with others may have defused the battle between King and Hoover's F.B.I. and that Carey's contacts within the Bureau may have ameliorated some hostilities toward the leader of S.C.L.C.²⁶

Carey counted as a significant clergy presence within the civil rights movement. Though less visible than many frontline leaders like King, Abernathy, Fred Shuttlesworth, Andrew Young, and James Lawson, Carey's church and civic activities played an equally important role in sustaining the civil rights struggle. As a founding father of C.O.R.E., a national voice within the N.A.A.C.P., and as troubleshooter for King and S.C.L.C., his role at the second tier of civil rights leadership proved indispensable to the movement's ultimate success. At a time of institutional inertia within African Methodism, the carriers of the Allen legacy were not to be found within the organizational structure of this major Methodist denomination. Though the leaders of this religious body remembered the rhetoric about their founder's activism, rank and file laypersons and clergy, willing to actualize their understanding of Allen, made real the mission and ministry that the bishop wanted for African Methodism.

NOTES

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