

Baptists; G. Hugh Wamble, "Baptists of the South," *Baptists and the American Experience*, ed. James E. Wood, Jr.

WALTER B. SHURDEN
MERCER UNIVERSITY

SOUTHERN CHRISTIAN LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE (SCLC). First organized early in 1957 by MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR., and other young Southern black ministers who had become active in local civil rights protest efforts throughout the South, the SCLC served as the primary organizational vehicle through which the Southern black church made its crucial contributions to the modern CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT.

Although viewed by many as simply a larger reflection of King's individual role as the symbolic leader of that movement, the SCLC actually served a much broader function. First, in the late 1950s it drew together ministers who believed the black church had a responsibility to act in the political arena and who sought a means for expressing that latent activism. Later, in the years from 1962 through 1968, the SCLC organized the protest campaigns in cities such as Birmingham and Selma AL, which brought the civil rights movement to the forefront of national attention and won the enactment of legislative milestones such as the Civil Rights Acts of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

Three major influences shaped SCLC's founding. The first was the Montgomery AL bus boycott of 1955-1956, a local protest effort that brought King to national attention and made him the symbol of the new black activism in the South. Second, young black ministers in other Southern cities sought to emulate the Montgomery example and bus protests patterned after the Montgomery one emerged in cities such as Birmingham, Tallahassee, New Orleans, and Atlanta. Many of these activists were seeking a forum for exchanging ideas and experiences. Third, a number of New York-based civil rights advocates, such as Bayard Rustin, Ella Baker, and Stanley Levison, who previously had helped raise funds and organize Northern publicity for the

Montgomery protest, were drawn in. They also advocated the formation of a regional organization in the South that could spread the influence of Montgomery's mass movement and provide King a larger platform.

Initially labeled the "Southern Negro Leaders Conference on Transportation and Nonviolent Integration" by King and Rustin, the conference met three times in 1957 before finally adopting the present name, with the word "Christian" added at the personal insistence of King. Seeking to avoid competition and conflict with the NAACP, SCLC chose to be composed not of individual members but of local organization "affiliates," usually civic leagues, ministerial alliances, or individual churches. Looking for a goal beyond that of desegregating city bus lines, King and the other young ministers leading the conference—C. K. Steele of Tallahassee, Fred L. Shuttlesworth of Birmingham, Joseph E. Lowery of Mobile, and Ralph D. Abernathy of Montgomery—focused on the right to vote and sought to develop a program, staff, and financial resources with which to pursue it. Until 1960, however, their efforts largely floundered, in part because of the many other demands upon King's time and energy, but also because of personnel problems on the small staff and relatively meager finances.

Transformation of SCLC into an aggressive, protest-oriented organization began in 1960 with King's own move from Montgomery to Atlanta and his appointment of a dynamic new executive director, the Rev. Wyatt T. Walker of Peterburg's Gillfield Baptist Church. Coupling his organizational skills with King's prowess as a speaker and inspirational leader, Walker soon brought about a seven-fold expansion of SCLC's staff, budget, and program. While some staff members concentrated on voter registration efforts and others on citizenship-training programs funded by Northern foundations, Walker and King set out to design a frontal assault on Southern segregation. Stymied initially in 1961-

1962 in the southwest Georgia city of Albany, Walker and King chose the notorious segregation stronghold of Birmingham as their next target. In a series of aggressive demonstrations throughout April and May of 1963, SCLC put the violent excesses of racist Southern lawmen on the front pages of newspapers throughout the world. Civil rights rose to the top of the national agenda and, within little more than a year's time, the Civil Rights Act of 1964 began altering Southern race relations.

Following King's much-heralded success at the March on Washington and his receipt of the Nobel Peace Prize, SCLC repeated the Birmingham scenario with an even more successful protest campaign in early 1965 in Selma, focusing upon the right to vote. Out of this effort emerged the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Subsequent SCLC efforts in Chicago, Louisville, and Cleveland in 1966-1967 involving issues of housing and jobs were judged far less successful. Late in 1967 the conference began planning a massive "Poor People's Campaign" to confront the issue of poverty in America, but after King's assassination in April 1968, the effort all but collapsed in confusion. Lacking King's renown, SCLC's resources and staff shrank precipitously in the years following his death. Internal tensions surrounding King's successor, Ralph D. Abernathy, and wider changes in the civil rights movement further contributed to the conference's decline. Only in the late 1970s, when another of the original founders, Joseph E. Lowery, assumed the SCLC presidency, did it appear at all possible that the organization might once again play the invaluable role that it had orchestrated between 1957 and 1968.

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DAVID J. GARROW
UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA
AT CHAPEL HILL

SOUTHERN PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH: See PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN THE UNITED STATES.

SOUTHERN SOCIOLOGICAL CONGRESS. This annual gathering of socially concerned Southerners that met between 1912 and 1920 marked the furthest advance of SOCIAL GOSPEL thinking in the South. The idea for a congress that would unite ministers, educators, and social workers originated with Kate Barnard, Oklahoma's Commissioner of Charities and Corrections. Barnard urged her idea on Ben W. Hooper, reform-oriented governor of Tennessee, who drew upon the intellectual resources of Vanderbilt University and the financial support of Mrs. E. W. Cole in convening the first meeting of the congress in Nashville in 1912. At Nashville and at Atlanta in 1913, outstanding Social Gospel leaders and sociologists, both Northern and Southern, addressed the membership, grown from 700 to over 1,200 in that single year.

Initially the SSC's organizers sought to bring research and motivation to bear upon a wide range of problems. Announced aims emphasized perceived Southern needs: prison reform, especially of the convict-lease system; improved care of "defectives"; remedying educational backwardness and racial injustice. Particularly at the 1913 Atlanta meeting, blacks participated as equals, members such as MARY MCLEOD BETHUNE demonstrated insight on interracial matters and on how the congress's concerns affected the South's black population.

Beginning in 1914, when the congress met at Memphis jointly with the National Conference of Charities and Correction, presentations became more inspirational