

Foreword

by David J. Garrow

PATRICK PARR'S *The Seminarian: Martin Luther King Jr. Comes of Age* is without question the most original and important book about King's life to appear in more than a quarter century, since Keith D. Miller's *Voice of Deliverance: The Language of Martin Luther King, Jr., and Its Sources* was published in 1992.

The depth and thoroughness of Parr's research is nothing short of astounding. To take the most striking example, over thirty years ago I discreetly published the name of King's Crozer Seminary girlfriend, Betty Moitz, in an endnote,¹ but the people-search technologies of the early 1980s afforded a young historian few options for finding someone whose marital surname was unknown, and King's life from 1955 onward, not his seminary experience, was my primary focus.

Three decades later, not only did Parr find his way to Moitz and coax her to talk frankly to him about her long-ago romance, but he also carried out the difficult legwork that is the real meat of historical research: carefully reviewing the seminary's local newspaper, the *Chester Times*, for all its stories about life at Crozer and its mentions of King, and mining the seminary's own old academic records for the light they could shed on the content and progression of King's coursework. In so doing, Parr has gone well beyond all prior scholars, and he offers what

without doubt will always remain the utterly definitive account of Martin Luther King Jr.'s life from 1948 to 1951.

Not only is this a book of exceptional and unparalleled historical richness, it is also most approachably and felicitously written. One need not be a King scholar, or a student of Protestant theology, to understand and appreciate the compelling and insightful narrative that Parr offers chapter after chapter. His detailed reconstruction of King's academic coursework will impress the most demanding of scholars, but his always empathetic and persuasive interpretations of King's development, personal as well as intellectual, will appeal to all interested readers of whatever background.

In addition to Betty Moitz, Parr also brings to the fore a half dozen or more other influential figures in King's early life whom history should remember better than it has to date. His portrayal of King's relationship with Martin Luther King Sr. is original and convincing. Chester's Rev. J. Pius Barbour stood second only to King's father in his paternal and pastoral influence on the young preacher, and King's fellow African American seminary classmates Walter McCall, Horace Whitaker, and Marcus Wood all receive their well-deserved due, too. Parr likewise offers the best portraits to date of King's faculty instructors, particularly Kenneth L. Smith, and he similarly provides the best existing account of King's intellectual forays at the nearby University of Pennsylvania.

Yet without question it is Parr's gentle, respectful, and pioneering analysis of King's intense youthful love for Betty Moitz that will draw the most attention to this book. Thirty years ago I offered only a one-paragraph account of that romance,² but, unable to find Moitz herself, I did not accord that indelible life experience more attention. Now Patrick Parr has done the seemingly impossible, reaching back across more than *sixty-five years* to record and recount Moitz's own memories of her relationship with King. It is a powerful and painful story, a deeply personal testament to how the racial—or *racist*—strictures that so severely limited Americans' lives in the mid-twentieth century fundamentally altered the life course of even so well-advantaged a young African American as Martin Luther King Jr.

In short, *The Seminarian* is a work of top-notch scholarship and insightful reflection. It makes a remarkable, landmark contribution to our understanding of Martin Luther King Jr.'s life, and it will forever remain on the very top shelf of all books that seek to illuminate how King's legacy should continue to inspire all of us.

Notes

Foreword by David J. Garrow

1. Garrow, *Bearing the Cross*, 638n26.
2. Ibid., 40–41.

Note to the Reader

1. Garrow, *Bearing the Cross*, 20.

Prologue: On a Bus in Georgia

1. King, interview by Haley.
2. Ibid.
3. Title of ML's speech confirmed by both King, *Papers*, 1:109; and Garrow, *Bearing the Cross*, 35. Hiram Kendall's involvement from "Savannah Girl Is Winner of Elks Oratorical Meet," *Atlanta Daily World*, April 22, 1944; Sarah Grace Bradley's from Reddick, *Crusader Without Violence*. See also "Contest Winner," *Atlanta Daily World*, April 16, 1944, which is the source of the photo reprinted in the text.
4. "Savannah Girl," *Atlanta Daily World*.
5. The first three chapters of Reddick, *Crusader Without Violence*, helped with roles of ML's parents, as did other biographies such as Lewis, *King*; and Garrow, *Bearing the Cross*; and early reports from New York Post journalist Ted Poston.
6. The official timekeeper, whose name was H. H. Dudley, was mentioned in "Savannah Girl," *Atlanta Daily World*.