



58 Celebrating the th Anniversary of the MONTGOMERY BUS BOYCOTT

THE RALPH D. ABERNATHY CIVIL RIGHTS LECTURE SERIES

THEME: The Montgomery Bus Boycott: Creating a New Vision of America



GUEST SPEAKER

Rev. James Lawson

Nonviolence Philosopher,
Strategist and Civil Rights Activist

Nonviolent campaigns require
“fierce discipline and training,
and strategic planning and
recruiting, and doing the
kinds of things you do to
have a movement. That can’t
happen spontaneously. It has
to be done systematically.”

— *James Lawson*

Monday, December 2, 2013 ■ 7 p.m.

J. Garrick Hardy Student Services Center Ballroom



Sponsored by

***The National Center for the Study of Civil Rights and
African-American Culture at Alabama State University***

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Rev. James Lawson is one of the world's most profound and influential advocates of nonviolence as a moral and strategic response to social injustice. In fact, Lawson introduced the principles of Gandhian nonviolence to many future leaders of the modern Civil Rights Movement. Lawson's devotion to the nonviolent philosophy flowed from many different streams. Born in western Pennsylvania and raised in Ohio, he spent thirteen months in prison as a conscientious objector during the Korean War, as well as three years as a Methodist missionary in India, where he was deeply influenced by the philosophy and techniques of nonviolent resistance developed by Mohandas Gandhi and his followers.

While enrolled as a divinity student at Oberlin College in 1957, Lawson met Martin Luther King, Jr., who urged him to postpone his studies and take an active role in the Civil Rights Movement. Following King's advice, Lawson moved to the South and became a field secretary for the Fellowship of Reconciliation. He transferred to Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tenn., and organized workshops on nonviolence for community members and students at Vanderbilt and the city's four black colleges. These students, including Diane Nash, Marion Barry, John Lewis, Bernard Lafayette and James Bevel, planned nonviolent demonstrations in Nashville, conducting test sit-ins in late 1959. In February 1960, following lunch counter sit-ins initiated by students at a Woolworth's store in Greensboro, N.C., Lawson and several hundred local activists (mostly students) launched a similar protest in Nashville's downtown stores. More than 150 students were arrested before city leaders agreed to desegregate some lunch counters.

The Nashville students' disciplined approach became a model for sit-ins in other southern cities. Lawson was expelled from Vanderbilt as a result of his role in this civil rights episode that changed the course of the movement with its heavy emphasis on student participation in nonviolent civil disobedience. After a national uproar in the press and threats of mass faculty resignations, a compromise allowed Lawson to complete his graduate studies at Vanderbilt. He opted instead to complete his degree at Boston University — the graduate alma mater of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

Lawson was also instrumental in the 1961 Freedom Rides. When the original Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) Freedom Ride stalled in Birmingham, Lawson urged the Nashville Student Movement to continue the interstate protest against segregated public transportation. He conducted workshops on nonviolent resistance while the Freedom Riders spent several days holed up in the Alabama home of Dr. Richard Harris. During an impromptu press conference on the National Guard-escorted bus that traveled from Montgomery to Mississippi, he told reporters that the Freedom Riders "would rather risk violence and be able to travel like ordinary passengers" than rely on armed guards who did not understand their philosophy of combating "violence and hate" by "absorbing it without returning it in kind."

In 1968, Lawson chaired the strike committee for sanitation workers in Memphis. At Lawson's request, Martin Luther King, Jr. spoke to the striking workers on the day before his assassination. In 1974, Lawson moved to Los Angeles to lead Holman United Methodist Church where he served as pastor for 25 years before retiring in 1999 and becoming pastor emeritus of this church. Throughout his career and into retirement, he has remained active in various human rights advocacy campaigns, including immigrant rights and opposition to war and militarism. Reverend Lawson is currently the Distinguished University Professor at Vanderbilt University.

58th Anniversary of the MONTGOMERY BUS BOYCOTT

Dr. Dorothy Autrey, Presiding

Greetings

Sharod Campbell

SGA President

Alabama State University

Invocation

Rev. Robert Graetz

The National Center for the

Study of Civil Rights and

African-American Culture at

Alabama State University

The Montgomery
Improvement
Association and
the Bus Boycott

Willie Scott

“THERE LIVED A PEOPLE”: A TRIBUTE TO THE MONTGOMERY BUS BOYCOTT ACTIVISTS

Dr. Dorothy Autrey and Lawrence Jackson

Musical Selection

Kori Hedgeman

Music Student

Alabama State University

Introduction of Speaker

Dr. William H. Harris

Interim President

Alabama State University

Speaker

Rev. James Lawson

Pastor Emeritus, Holman

United Methodist Church

Questions & Answers

Dr. Howard Robinson

University Archivist/Assistant

Professor of History

Alabama State University

Special Recognitions

Dr. William H. Harris

Closing Remarks

“We Shall Overcome”

Audience

Ralph D. Abernathy

In 1946, Ralph D. Abernathy began a lifetime of activism as a student leader at Alabama State University, where he led protests against cafeteria food and inadequate housing for military veterans. After graduating from ASU in 1950 and receiving a Master's degree from Atlanta University, he returned to employment at his alma mater and to pastor the First Baptist Church in Montgomery. In 1955, Abernathy helped organize the Montgomery Improvement Association and worked with Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. as a key leader of the Montgomery Bus Boycott. The remainder of Abernathy's life was dedicated to the struggle for blacks' full constitutional rights through the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, an agency he also helped to organize in 1957. Abernathy served as president of the SCLC after King's assassination in 1968 until 1977. This civil rights stalwart is recognized internationally for his outstanding contributions to civil and human rights.

Mission of the National Center

To research and preserve African-American history and culture

To serve as a living museum and civil rights clearinghouse

To teach and empower future generations

~ The National Center Steering Committee ~

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