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## February 25, 1960: Stories of Inspiration, Risk, and the Fight for Freedom

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EDLR 687 History of Higher Education in the U.S.

February 25, 1960: Stories of Inspiration, Risk, and the Fight for Freedom

Laura Harlow

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### Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to explore the February 25, 1960 sit-in at the Montgomery Courthouse involving students from Alabama State College. Existing literature focuses on the outcome of the sit-in, most notably the *Dixon v. Alabama* (1960) case establishing due process rights for students in higher education. Research is limited charting the sit-in's inception, organization and execution from a student lens. Through primary source interviews, this paper tells the story of two crucial leaders involved with the sit-in. Further, it identifies how the climate of the institution and local community influenced the student experience. This paper invites higher education administrators and faculty to think critically about how they can create environments of inclusion for our underrepresented student populations when faced with political power and chaos.

### February 25, 1960: Stories of Inspiration, Risk, and the Fight for Freedom

The purpose of this paper is to explore the February 25, 1960 sit-in at the Montgomery, Alabama Courthouse initiated by Alabama State College students. This study was guided by the following research questions: Who led the sit-in? What support did the students have? What were their experiences at Alabama State University? Why was the sit-in initiated? What barriers were anticipated? and How did students prepare and execute the sit-in?

The paper will review the data collection, methodology, and existing literature. The findings of this paper will uncover the experiences of two students, St. John Dixon and Eleanor Moody-Shepherd, from Alabama State College. It will first describe their unique interests, motivations, and experiences regarding the choice to seek higher education and participate in student activism. The stories will converge as the paper explores collective experiences in Montgomery, Alabama and Alabama State College. It will summarize the planning and execution of the February 25, 1960 sit-in at the Montgomery Courthouse and its impact on the students' degree completion and activism. It will conclude with recommendations for further research to assist higher education administrators with developing a campus climate of inclusion and care on their campuses.

### **Methodology**

Initial research began with the National Center for the Study of Civil Rights and African-American Culture at Alabama State University. Dr. Howard Robinson, University Archivist, provided direction to accessing primary sources located on-campus and off-campus. The Executive Director of the Association for Student Conduct Administration recommended, Dr. Karen Boyd at University of Tennessee Knoxville, an avid researcher on the *Dixon v. Alabama* (1961) case. Research was restricted to off-campus primary source material collection. Both Dr.

Robinson and Dr. Boyd provided direction to digitized versions of newspaper clippings from the Montgomery Advertiser, photographs, and program information from the National Center for the Study of Civil Rights and African-American Culture.

Two students from Alabama State College provided the richest data collection through primary source interviews. First, the two students were contacted to request an interview. Both individuals agreed to a phone interview and were provided a summary of the research objectives. The individuals were sent preliminary questions in advance and a statement regarding informed consent (Appendix A). The first interview with St. John Dixon was a total of 36 minutes. The second interview with Eleanor Moody-Shepherd was a total of 51 minutes. Both interviews were audio recorded. Following the interviews, the responses were transcribed. The findings were categorized for unique and common experiences as they related to the research questions. Both interviewees were provided an opportunity to review the paper for accuracy and provide supplementary information.

### **Literature Review**

Now Alabama State University, the campus of Alabama State College in 1960 was a historically Black student serving institution supportive of student activism and the advancement of civil rights initiatives in the south. The University's website provides the following statement regarding their beginnings:

ASU's 148-year history is a legacy of perseverance, progress and promise. The ASU movement began with the impetus to establish a school for black Alabamians. The Civil War resulted not only in the end of slavery but also in the opportunity for blacks to have the right to education. With the Northern victory, black Southerners with the assistance of Northern white missionaries and the

leaders of African-American churches set out to establish educational institutions for the freedmen. ASU was born in that movement (The ASU Legacy).

On February 25, 1960, at the Montgomery State Courthouse, 35 students from Alabama State College were refused service at a segregated snack shop. This led to the student's passively protesting in the hallway of the Courthouse (Hines & Ingram, 1960). The Governor of Alabama, John Patterson, demanded disciplinary action be taken for students (Constitutional, 1962; JUSTIA, n.d.; Pollitt, 1960). Sources state that Governor Patterson threatened to withhold funding to Alabama State College if action was not taken to discipline the students (Voices of the Civil Rights Movement, 2017; Hines & Ingram, 1960). The Board of Education, chaired by the Governor, unanimously voted to expel nine students (Constitutional, 1962; JUSTIA, n.d.). Six of the nine expelled students sued the institution for reinstatement but were denied readmission (Constitutional, 1962; JUSTIA, n.d.). "This decision was overturned by the appellate court" and the students were eligible to be reinstated (K. Boyd, personal communication, November 28, 2018). The legal action stemming from February 25, 1960 was instrumental in developing due process for students in higher education by establishing a right to notification and the opportunity to respond to allegations.

The Governor contended students violated segregation laws and promoted a hostile and unsafe environment through their activism (Constitutional, 1962; JUSTIA, n.d.; Pollitt, 1960). During the civil rights era, student activists gained more influence through student engagement opportunities like government associations. University campuses gave students opportunities to make change; an excerpt from Joy Ann Williamson-Lott's book *Jim Crow Campus* (2018) shares the perspective below:

Movement activists and their enemies understood college and University campuses as battlegrounds. They recognized the unique opportunities offered by these residential institutions where hundreds and even thousands of impressionable youth coexisted in a self-contained space in which they regularly interacted, traded ideas and became adults (p. 46).

Following this sit-in, multiple sit-ins and protests occurred in Montgomery, Alabama and throughout the south (“City Saw Both Progress”, 1960). Approximately 1,000 students marched on the capitol, and other students threatened to withdraw from school during the state of unrest (Pollitt, 1960). The local city newspaper also chronicled the demonstrations in a December 30, 1960 article outlining each month’s tales of civil unrest (“City Saw Both Progress”, 1960).

Alabama State College underwent censure from the American Association of University Professors in the 1960s. The campus employed many activist faculty during the civil rights movement. Faculty held membership in the local Montgomery Improvement Association and Women’s Political Council, assisting in larger movements like the Montgomery bus boycotts. This included faculty member Jo Ann Gibson Robinson who later resigned from Alabama State College (Williamson-Lott, 2018). Olean Underwood, a faculty member who was present at the sit-in on February 25, 1960, was fired for her involvement in future sit-ins. A purge of faculty was occurring throughout the campus at this time in its history (Williamson-Lott, 2018; Biography of Harper Councill Trenholm Jr., n.d.).

### **Findings**

This section will discuss the findings as they relate to the research questions and the February 25, 1960 sit-in. The findings begin with the stories of two students from Alabama State College, Eleanor Moody-Shepherd and John Dixon. The stories focus on each student’s choice to

attend Alabama State College, and the influences of family, peers and mentors. Next, the paper will explore the climates of Alabama State College campus and the city of Montgomery, Alabama. Additionally, the students share their experiences from the February 25, 1960 and its impact on their degree completion and personal lives.

**Reverend Dr. Eleanor Moody-Shepherd (Eleanor)**

Eleanor Moody-Shepherd left Tuskegee Institute and entered Alabama State College in the fall of 1958. Eleanor was a legacy of Alabama State College and chose to be part of the thriving campus and student activism. Her family attended either Alabama State College or Tuskegee Institute as tradition. Eleanor's mother, an alum of Alabama State College when it was a Normal School for Colored Students, supported Eleanor's brother and sister to also attend Alabama State College. Eleanor explained Alabama State College was a better financial choice for students as a public institution, versus Tuskegee Institute that was a private institution.

Eleanor was a confident, competent and motivated teenager entering Alabama State College. Eleanor was an activist, from an activist family, and ready to take on leadership roles at the age of 17 when she arrived at college. Eleanor explained she surrounded herself with others who were intent to make change and progressive. The influence of Dr. Martin Luther King, Dr. Ralph Abernathy and Reverend Dr. Solomon Seay had a significant impact on her experience as a student. Strong leaders guided students in the Black churches of Montgomery at this time. Mass and house meetings were a common place for Eleanor to meet fellow activists in the area to plan activist programs. Local Black doctors and den mothers (Olean Underwood and Bernice Abernathy) opened their doors to Eleanor to nurture her and others in her time of activism and fear.



Eleanor understood the importance of passive protesting as she participated in demonstrations in Montgomery. Eleanor expressed what she called “justifiable rage” coming from historical Black oppression as a driving emotion through these times of activism; but it was important individuals like her use that rage in a passive way and represent those who could not (E. Moody-Shepherd, personal communication, November 8, 2018). Eleanor took the responsibility on herself to break the cycle of abuse and use this emotion in her passive participation.

One defining moment of Eleanor’s student experience came when she led a small group of students in the local basements of Montgomery to plan and implement protest plans. She and another woman were the key writers that sent the information to the Montgomery Advertiser. Eleanor described a group of night riders tried to locate planning groups for the sole purpose of harming local activists. Night riders were local groups of racists that sought to physically harm activists. She recalled one evening, at 18 years old, hiding in the basement of the locked sanctuary of Dr. Abernathy’s First Baptist Church when they received a discrete message the night riders were looking for them. Unsure if they knew their exact location, Eleanor became extremely frightened. At that time, Dr. Martin Luther King who was in the room, asked the individuals to join hands and recite the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm:

The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he refreshes my soul. He guides me along the right paths for his name's sake. Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely your goodness and love will

follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever  
(Psalm 23, King James Version).

Eleanor explained that, from this moment on, the fear that was once a part of her identity of a Black woman was no longer holding her back. She knew the rest of her life would be dedicated to justice. In future sections, this paper explores a second defining moment for Eleanor which was the February 25, 1960 sit-in and its impact on her educational path.

### **St. John Dixon (John)**

St. John Dixon was originally from Jackson, Alabama and one of nine children. His family worked hard to keep food on the table, and saw the value in a job directly after a high school degree. John was the valedictorian of his high school and an avid reader and researcher most of his life. High school friends encouraged John to attend Alabama State College and pursue his education further as a first generation college student.

Stepping foot onto campus was a culture shock for John, but he described his first year experience as smooth sailing. Although he felt the pressures of balancing work to pay for school, and time for schoolwork, it was a transformational experience. He explained there were many students, faculty, and leaders fighting for the rights of minority and Black populations. John heard of Dr. Martin Luther King before he came to Alabama State College. Soon after his time on campus, he went to the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church where Dr. King was pastor. Dr. King impressed John with his articulation and knowledge of the Bible, as well as, events occurring throughout the country. John later moved to a house four blocks south of Dr. King's residence on South Jackson Street. John was able to look to Dr. King and Dr. King's family for support, and assisted the family with ongoing community work. He holds great value in Dr. King becoming his mentor.

John enjoyed being an outgoing person. He did not consider himself a leader at the time, but he naturally became a leader and surrounded himself with likeminded students to participate in various movements on and off campus. After the bus boycotts in 1955 he was motivated to make a difference, and able to connect with influential leaders like Rosa Parks. Being away from home gave him the ability to find his passion and purpose in the civil rights movement.

His involvement in these demonstrations had a significant impact on John's family. They were not supportive of his leadership roles, but still loved him deeply and never interfered with his college work. Back home, his father lost his job after the employer became aware of John's activism on campus. They gave John's father an ultimatum; either tell John to stop causing problems at school (sit-ins, marches, etc.) or leave his job. John's father never told him about the ultimatum. His father never asked John to stop his activism. After his father lost his job, the community came together to help support the family thereafter. John continued to be vocal in his passion for equality even at the risk of "not making it through" (J. Dixon, personal communication, November 7, 2018).

### **Alabama State College Campus and the City of Montgomery**

The student experience was defined by the campus and city climates at this time. As John described, Alabama State College was one of the largest predominantly Black institutions of higher education in the south at the time, and known for their activism. Eleanor also shares this sentiment noting this activism rose from Black citizens who were continually in fear, and sick of the fear terrorizing them. They both described, following the Montgomery bus boycott, a state of unrest in Montgomery was present and students were confident it was the right time for a large demonstration.

Both students had access to a community of civil rights leaders in Montgomery, most notably Dr. Martin Luther King as a pastor at the Dexter Avenue King Baptist Memorial Baptist Church. As stated on the Dexter Avenue King Baptist Memorial Baptist Church website:

On October 3, 1887, the first registration of students for Alabama State University (then the Normal School for Colored Students) was held in the lower unit of the church. Over the years, it has served the community through the use of its facilities as meeting place for many civic, educational and religious groups, and through its human resources. Much of Montgomery's early civil rights activity – most famously the 1956 Bus Boycott – was directed by Dr. King from his office in the lower unit of the church (Dexter Avenue King Memorial Baptist Church History, n.d.).

Activism was a deeply regarded experience and passion of students at Alabama State College at this time. John mentions that they often held small-scale sit-ins at venues like the movie theatres in town, where Black patrons forcibly sat upstairs and White patrons sat downstairs. Additionally, five-and-dime stores saw sit-ins occurring throughout Montgomery. Eleanor recalled marches in Montgomery through White neighborhoods, and the White parents would keep their children at home. As the activists marched, the White children would violently kick the marchers, like Eleanor, and chant racist slurs.

Students experienced extreme risks in these demonstrations. John and Eleanor both described, with emotion, each time he or she went to a demonstration, it was possible White racists could fight, spit and retaliate. Eleanor received permanent scars from the abuse in marching through the White neighborhoods. John feared, every time, that he may not make it

back from a demonstration. Both students feared death but they looked to mentors like Dr. King and Dr. Abernathy who led them to remember peace and trust in God.

There were very clear expectations of students when participating in sit-ins and marches to mitigate these risks. Passive protesting was required. Both Eleanor and John learned (as children) not to look White people in the eye or speak to them in an inferior way for risk of retaliation. Now, as young adults, they had to ensure this practice was integrated into their work. As they prepared for various events, students trained each other how to resist retaliation against those who verbally or physically assaulted them. John stated this expectation also came from Dr. King after researching Mohandas Gandhi's practice of nonviolent civil disobedience. They often created captains or leaders within the student groups to ensure they were planning, training and executing the demonstrations as passive.

Students were not the only ones fearful for their livelihood. On campus, faculty supported the students, but they also feared their lives (work and personal) would be impacted if they showed support. They were dependent upon these jobs to keep their families alive.

### **The Sit-in: February 25, 1960**

The time had come for the students to now plan for a larger, more impactful, sit-in during this state of unrest. This is where the February 25, 1960 sit-in at the Montgomery Courthouse came into fruition. The choice to sit-in at the Montgomery Courthouse was purposeful. Following the various demonstrations around the local community, the Courthouse provided an opportunity to make a strong statement, and create more visibility with key decision makers within the state. John stated that Governor Patterson spoke about the students at Alabama State College in recent weeks, publicly announcing the students were not "smart or brave enough" to carry out something like a sit-in (J. Dixon, personal communication, November 7, 2018). The

students took this as an opportunity to show their dedication to justice. With the help of their advisors and network, they set a location and time to meet. The students could not meet on campus, so they looked to the local businesses and churches for support. Both Eleanor and John, along with others, would encourage each individual at the meeting to tell 10 others about the sit-in. Without the technology of today, they had to rely on word of mouth.

There was a large group of students who planned to attend the February 25, 1960 sit-in. Reverend Dr. Solomon Seay, a relative to Eleanor, advised the students planning to lead the event. John and others were up until 2am getting ready. John borrowed a suit and shined shoes from his friend to wear at the sit-in. The students understood this sit-in was different; they had to dress in business attire anticipating it would be publicized. Eleanor, John, and others gathered at the Log Cabin Inn on South Jackson that morning.

As the morning progressed, they expected more students to show, however it was a difficult day filled with fear. John explained the individuals who were present that morning committed to the sit-in and its purpose. The fear of others did not deter them from executing the sit-in. Eleanor and John both felt it was better for some individuals to not participate if they felt they could not use nonviolent civil disobedience.

When Eleanor, arrived that morning at approximately 6:00am, she was the only woman who had come prepared for the sit-in. As a family member, and a concerned activist, Reverend Dr. Solomon Seay would not let Eleanor participate. He and the students expected arrests would be made that day. If arrested, Eleanor would be separated from the men with no protection or witnesses. Eleanor understood, as she knew Black female activists risked rape and even death if taken in the custody of authorities or White racists without protection or witnesses. When told she could not participate, Eleanor was visibly upset, kicking and screaming. She had helped plan

this important moment in history. However, the group needed someone to document the events that day and she was able to follow the men to the Courthouse and track the names, and actions that occurred for reporting and historical purposes.

John and the others headed to Montgomery Courthouse. The men anticipated barriers that day like White racist community members, police presence, and arrests. They planned to move quickly, taking multiple routes to the Courthouse and multiple entrances into the basement lunch counter. John and others had mapped how to enter the Courthouse and enter the basement without interruption. They arrived shortly before the noon hour (Hines & Ingram, 1960).

Reverend Dr. Ralph Abernathy, President of the Montgomery Improvement Association, tipped reporters approximately 15 minutes prior to the demonstration. In his statement to reporters, Reverend Dr. Ralph Abernathy made it clear the Montgomery Improvement Association was not affiliated with the sit-in, but that “he and his staff were greatly encouraged by the courage displayed by the students in staging the demonstration” (Hines & Ingram, 1960, pp.2A).

The students arrived at the Courthouse and were successful in entering the basement lunch counter. The White individuals that were in the room jumped up from the counter and ran screaming, “The Niggers are here! The Niggers are here!” (J. Dixon, personal communication, November 7, 2018). Within moments, John recalls he felt as if every police officer in Montgomery had arrived. Officers told John and the students at the lunch counter they must leave and the students refused. Specifically, one (new and younger) officer asked John “Boy what are you doing here?” John stated, “I have a right to be here, my parents are tax paying people” (J. Dixon, personal communication, November 7, 2018). Further, the officer asked John to reveal his name, to which he refused. The officer hit John over the eye with a billy club,

causing physical impairment to his vision for months. John held to his training and beliefs on nonviolence. He did not want to do the same harm to the officers that they had done to him. If John had fought back, he and others would have run the risk of escalating violence to death.

The officers told John and the other male students they would be arrested, so they chose to leave the lunchroom area and head to the hallway before officers could take action. Coverage of the event in the Montgomery Advertiser also reported that staff were instructed to close the lunchroom and turn off the lights; they then permitted the men to line the hallway since that was public property (Hines & Ingram, 1960). After time in the hallway, students decided to leave, taking different routes exiting the Courthouse. John stated that upon exiting, some men were arrested, and some stopped in cars leaving the area. Theophilus Moody, Eleanor's fiancé, was one student stopped, but not arrested by Highway Patrol (Hines & Ingram, 1960). Other students who walked from the Courthouse were able to take back streets and avoid police presence that afternoon.

Although the students did successfully enter the Courthouse, some City officials discussed how they anticipated a sit-in as noted below in the local newspaper:

Rumors had been circulating for several days that demonstrations might take place in the city this week and such officials as State Atty. Gen, MacDonald Galtien and Police Commissioner I. B. Sullivan said Thursday's outbreak was not unexpected. However most officials expected the targets to be lunch counters of department stores instead of a public building (Hines & Ingram, 1960).

### **Beyond the Sit-in**

Eleanor recorded 35 men going to the courthouse that day. Of those individuals, nine men (St. John Dixon, Elroy Emory, Edward Jones, Bernard Lee, James, McFadden, Joseph



Peterson, Leon Rice Howard Shipman and Marzette Watts) were expelled from Alabama State College (“College Student Sit-in Movement”, 2010). Most men expelled were seniors at Alabama State College. Eleanor’s fiancé, Theophilus, was suspended from Alabama State College due to his involvement. He was on military deferment at the time, and his family was located in Connecticut. Theophilus returned to Connecticut for the draft. Eleanor and Theophilus decided to get married and leave for his home. Theophilus later did complete his degree at Alabama State and Eleanor completed her degrees at State University of New York (AAS), Vassar College (BS), Long Island University (MS), New York Theological Seminary (MDIV) and Columbia University (Ed.D).

John stated that Governor Patterson had called for the expulsions of John, and the remaining eight men, after seeing photographs of the students planning demonstrations prior to the sit-in. Upon viewing these photos, Governor Patterson designated these men as ringleaders and a nuisance. The local newspaper reported that Governor Patterson directed then President Dr. Harper Councill Trenholm to immediately expel all students, requiring investigation of the students or the State Board of Education would take action (Hines & Ingram, 1960). John did not know the decision of expulsion until he found out through the local newspapers. He did not receive notification of his alleged behavior or given the opportunity to respond to that alleged behavior. John quickly met with President Trenholm of Alabama State College. He sought answers to his expulsion and expressed confusion. John was clear that activism was supported and a part of his new identity as a college student on campus. President Trenholm responded to John: “Due to the circumstances that you are not obeying the rules and the regulations of the State of Alabama, I have no other alternative but to comply with the Governor” (J. Dixon, personal communication, November 7, 2018). This statement stayed with John for years.

John and Eleanor later discovered that the Governor and the Board of Education forced the President to expel the nine students or funding would be withheld from the state and the college would likely face closure. Thereafter, John was not as upset with President Trenholm. He understood the political pressures that led to the expulsions. With the encouragement of their mentors, to seek justice for their first amendment rights, John and others pursued a lawsuit against the Alabama State Board of Education with the assistance of legal counsel from Fred Gray.

Their experiences at Alabama State College left a lasting imprint and created a meaningful trajectory for Eleanor and John. Eleanor is still on the battlefield, encouraging others to turn to the voting box to make a difference. She devoted her life to seeking justice as a seminary instructor, and still hosts an educational tour from New York to the south where students learn the history of the sit-in movements and its influence on civil rights development. In her words:

Change takes place, and the Universe looks different at different times. My investment was not wasted. People had done stuff long before us. It was just this was our time, and this was our part of the story, of the necessary risk we had to take for freedom and for change in this country” “It is critical we continue to engage and tell the story (E. Moody-Shepherd, personal communication, November 8, 2018).

John Dixon left Montgomery following the sit-in after San Jose State University. San Jose State University offered him a scholarship to complete his degree. California gave him a culture shock once again, as he stepped foot onto a new campus. He later married, expressing that his wife kept him motivated during his times of post-traumatic

stress from his activist days. John grieved his experience in Montgomery and Alabama State College and not being able to obtain his degree from the institution. However, he remains proud of his activist work with no regrets. He was willing to endure the pain, and take the risks, for justice. In John's words:

The only way I really got over that, was that I was able to actually not hate the people that did this to me, but to hate the things that they did to me. Not the people. And I came to that conclusion. Once I got there, it was clear sailing (J. Dixon, personal communication, November 7, 2018).

Both students have been able to share their stories through various national programs to educate administrators and students on their experiences with the sit-in movement. A representative of the Association for Student Conduct Administration, Dr. Karen Boyd, coordinated John, James McFadden and Fred Gray, to attend the association's Annual Conference in February 2010. The men sat on a panel and shared experiences from the *Dixon vs. Alabama* (1960) case with administrators who oversee discipline of students on college campuses. Additionally, both John and Eleanor attended a one-day conference on February 25, 2010 at the National Center for the Study of Civil Rights and African-American Culture under the direction of Dr. Howard Robinson, University Archivist, at Alabama State University. The program recognized the sit-in movement and its influential leaders ("College Student Sit-in Movement", 2010). In 2018, 58 years later, the State of Alabama chose to expunge the expulsions of all nine students honoring their courage in activism (Willingham, 2018; Barfield Berry, 2018).

### **Conclusion and Recommendations for Further Research**

The February 25, 1960 sit-in led to a significant legal case for higher education in establishing due process, however that was not the initial intent of the students. Alabama State College, the City of Montgomery, and influential leaders like Dr. Martin Luther King created the right time, place and manner for students to speak out against segregation and its impact on their lives. These students leaned into exercising their rights as citizens, seeking the same freedoms as White college students. Their painful, yet powerful, experiences at Alabama State College significantly shifted how institutions respond to acts of student activism and disciplinary procedures despite the politically-charged racist landscape of Montgomery and the State of Alabama. Their actions on February 25, 1960 at the Montgomery Courthouse and thereafter established a student's right to receive notification of alleged behaviors that may violate their institutional code of conduct, and be given the opportunity to respond to those allegations. This was not a right provided to students in higher education prior.

This research shows a significant impact of mentors on student activism. Researching this type of mentorship further will help administrators understand how intellects and community leaders alike influence the student experience in higher education, most notably for minority students. This type of data can yield what characteristics of mentorship are successful, and what experiences are most meaningful. This benefits Universities in the recruitment of mentors, and curriculum design of student activism and civic engagement initiatives.

The findings of this paper pose two important questions for University administrators: 1) Do we create an environment that constrains or supports student expression for students who feel marginalized? and 2) How do we balance creating civically minded individuals when our environments are inherently inequitable? This data provides noteworthy insight to the barriers students faced as minorities and what motivated the students towards change. Higher education

institutions can solicit student stories, assess their campus and community climates, and use a social justice lens to make meaningful advancements towards equity. Further research can investigate characteristics of the student leaders and campus climates to organize that institutional change.

In conclusion, it is imperative administrators listen to our student stories in the past and present to better create an environment of inclusion on campus. Higher education is still a customary setting for expressing speech. In practice, administrators should look beyond our political influences or compliance requirements, and more towards a culture of care for our students.

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## Appendix A

### **Informed Consent Statement**

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Please know this initial paper does not require me to register my interviews with our Institutional Review Board. However, if we do find the material and stories are rich for publishing in the future we may request consent for the research to be approved. I will be audio or digital recording the phone discussion to ensure I do not miss any important information during the interview, and can ensure I document the information correctly for my research paper.

### **Sample Questions for Interview:**

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- Please tell me about your experience as a student at Alabama State College.
- What were some of the primary issues relevant to the University, Montgomery AL, and the State at this time?
- How did you engage with peers on this campus? Community?
- How were you viewed as a student during this period?
- Can you walk me through the day of February 25, 1960?
- What was the purpose of the sit in?
- What was your role during the sit in?
- How did you or others prepare for the sit in? What barriers did you face?
- What emotions did you feel that day?
- How did the University either taken action or inaction to help the students? To harm the students?