INTRODUCTION

In the quiet recesses of my heart, I am fundamentally a clergyman, a Baptist preacher. This is my being and my heritage for I am also the son of a Baptist preacher, the grandson of a Baptist preacher and the great-grandson of a Baptist preacher.

Martin Luther King, Jr.,
August 1965

Martin Luther King, Jr., was born in Atlanta about noon on Tuesday, 15 January 1929. The difficult delivery occurred in the second-floor master bedroom of the Auburn Avenue home his parents shared with his maternal grandparents. From the moment of his birth, King's extended family connected him to African-American religious traditions. His grandparents A. D. Williams and Jennie Celeste Williams had transformed nearby Ebenezer Baptist Church from a struggling congregation in the 1890s into one of black Atlanta's most prominent institutions. Martin Luther King, Sr., would succeed his father-in-law as Ebenezer's pastor, and Alberta Williams King would follow her mother as a powerful presence in Ebenezer's affairs. Immersed in religion at home and in church, King, Jr., acquired skills and contacts that would serve him well once he accepted his calling as a minister. He saw his father and grandfather as appealing role models who combined pastoring with social activism. Although King's theological curiosity and public ministry would take him far from his Auburn Avenue origins, his basic identity remained rooted in Baptist church traditions that were intertwined with his family's history.

King, Jr.'s family ties to the Baptist church extended back to the slave era. His great-grandfather Willis Williams, "an old slavery time preacher" and an "exhorter," entered the Baptist church during the period of religious and moral fervor that swept the nation in the decades before the Civil War.[1] In 1846, when Willis joined Shiloh Baptist Church in the Penfield district of Greene County, Georgia (seventy miles east of Atlanta), its congregation num-

1. G. S. Ellington, "A Short Sketch of the Life and Work of Rev. A. D. Williams, D.D.," in *Programme of the Thirtieth Anniversary of the Pastorate of Rev. A. D. Williams of Ebenezer Baptist Church,* 16 March 1924, CKFC.

bered fifty white and twenty-eight black members.[2] His owner, a wealthy planter named William N. Williams, joined later.[3]

Although subordinate to whites in church governance, blacks actively participated in church affairs and served on church committees. In August 1848, members of such a committee investigated charges of theft against Willis. After listening to the committee's report the church expelled him, but two months later the church minutes reported that "Willis, servant to Bro. W. N. Williams, came forward and made himself confession of his guilt and said that the Lord had forgiven him for his error. He was therefore unanimously received into fellowship with us."[4]

Extant records provide no documentation of Willis's ministry, but he probably helped recruit some of the slaves who joined the church during a major revival in 1855. Between April and December of that year, nearly a hundred blacks, more than one-tenth of the slaves in the Penfield district, joined the congregation. Among them was a fifteen-year-old named Lucrecia (or Creecy) Daniel. Shiloh's minutes report that she "related an experience and was received" into church membership in April 1855.[5] She and Willis were married in the late 1850s or early 1860s, and she bore him five children—including

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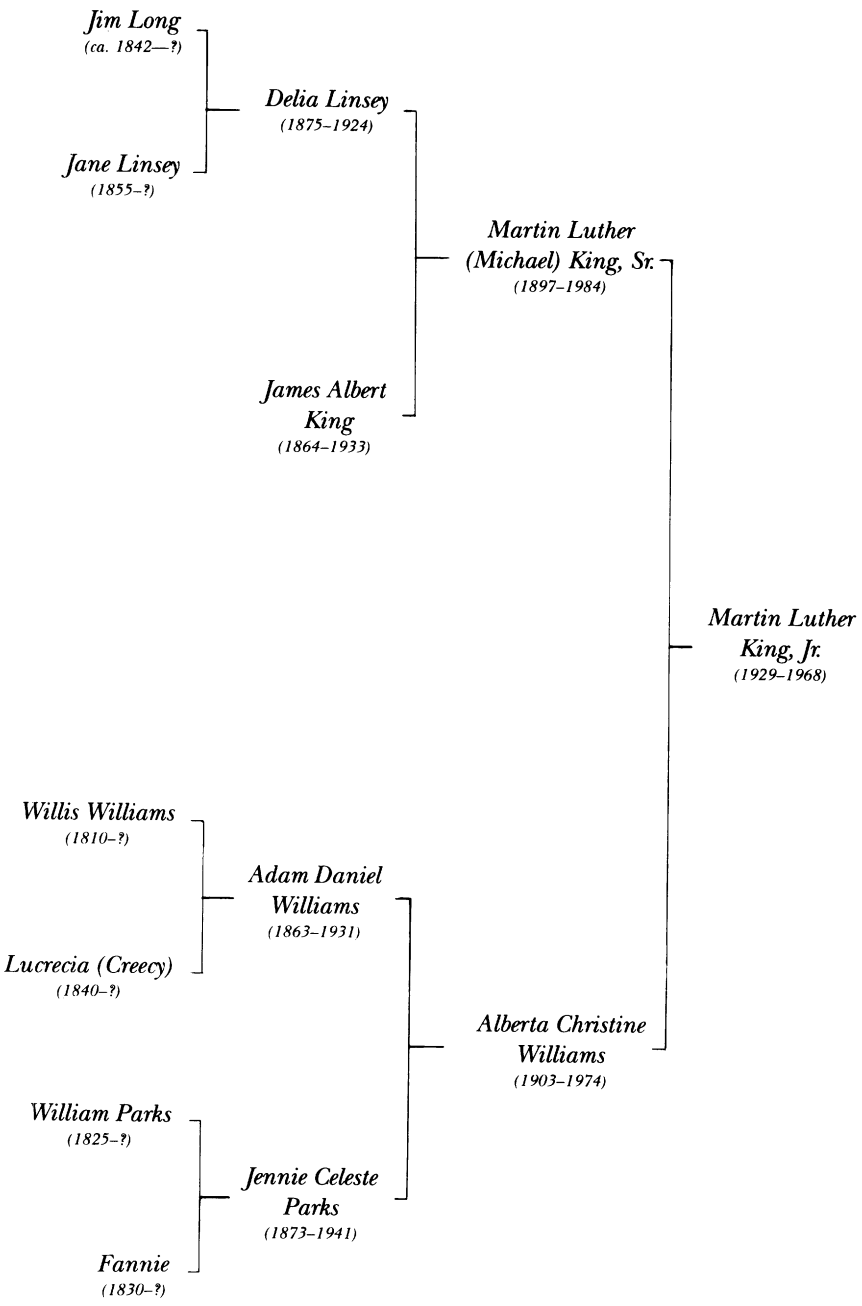
2. Records of Shiloh Baptist Church indicate that after several others joined the church on 1 November 1846, "Willis, servant boy of William N. Williams, came forward and was also received" by the pastor. One of the oldest Baptist congregations in the state, Shiloh was founded in 1795. Both enslaved and free African-Americans were admitted as full members, but only free black members were mentioned with last names in the church minutes. See Arthur F. Raper, *Preface to Peasantry: A Tale of Two Black Belt Counties* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1936), p. 356; James Porter, "Shiloh Baptist Church minutes," 1 November 1846, SBCM-G-Ar: Drawer 34, box 36; and Bruce A. Calhoun, "The Family Background of Martin Luther King, Jr.: 1810–1893," King Project seminar paper, 1987, Martin Luther King, Jr., Center for Nonviolent Social Change.

3. William Williams, one of the county's wealthiest slave owners, became a pillar of the church, serving as its clerk and as its delegate to meetings of the Georgia Baptist Association. His and his wife's combined holdings placed them in the top 15 percent of Greene County's landowners and in the top 20 percent of the county's slave owners. There is no documentation regarding Williams's treatment of Willis and his other slaves, but in 1859 Williams became patrol commissioner, supervising slave catchers in the Greene County militia district. See Thaddeus Brockett Rice and Carolyn White Williams, *History of Greene County, Georgia, 1786–1886* (Macon, Ga.: J. W. Burke Company, 1961), p. 628; Census entries for William Williams, 1850 and 1870, Greene Co., Ga.; Greene Co., Ga., "Tax Digest Record for William Williams," 1854 and 1859, G-Ar; Greene Co., Ga., "Slave Digest Record for William Williams," 1850, G-Ar; Arthur F. Raper, *Tenants of the Almighty* (New York: Macmillan, 1943), pp. 366, 372; "Shiloh Baptist Church minutes," 3 January 1852 and passim, SBCM-G-Ar: Drawer 34, box 36.

4. R. B. Edmonds, "Shiloh Baptist Church minutes," 15 October 1848, SBCM-G-Ar: Drawer 34, box 36. See also minutes for 16 July 1848 and 20 August 1848.

5. William Sanders, "Shiloh Baptist Church minutes," 15 April 1855, SBCM-G-Ar: Drawer 34, box 36. The identification of "Creecy, servant to Mrs. N. E. Daniel," as the wife of Willis can be inferred from the documentary evidence. The census of 1870 locates sixty-year-old Willis Williams living with thirty-year-old Creecy, thirteen-year-old Benjamin, and twelve-year-old Randal Williams on the plantation of his seventy-two-year-old former owner, William Williams (Census entry for Willis Williams, 22 June 1870, Greene Co., Ga.). Family tradition holds that Willis Williams's wife was "Lucrecia" or "Creecy" (Ellington, "Short Sketch"; and unsigned sketch, "Adam Daniel Williams," in *History of the American Negro and His Institutions: Georgia Edition*, ed. A. B. Caldwell [Atlanta: A. B. Caldwell, 1917], p. 210).


Jim Long
(ca. 1842—?)
Jane Linsey
(1855–?)
Delia Linsey
(1875–1924)
James Albert King
(1864–1933)
Martin Luther (Michael) King, Sr.
(1897–1984)
Martin Luther King, Jr.
(1929–1968)
Willis Williams
(1810–?)
Lucrecia (Creecy)
(1840–?)
Adam Daniel Williams
(1863–1931)
William Parks
(1825–?)
Fannie
(1830–?)
Jennie Celeste Parks
(1873–1941)
Alberta Christine Williams
(1903–1974)

Adam Daniel (A. D.), who celebrated 2 January 1863, the day after the effective date of the Emancipation Proclamation, as his birthday.[6]

The family left Shiloh Baptist Church when it, like other southern congregations, divided along racial lines at the end of the Civil War. At war's end, Shiloh's 144 black members outnumbered the 77 white members, but in the following years all the black members left. Willis Williams and his family may have joined other black members of Shiloh in organizing a large black-controlled Baptist church in Penfield.[7]

A. D.'s desire to follow his father's calling was evident even as a child, when "it was his greatest pleasure to preach the funeral of snakes, cats, dogs, horses or any thing that died. The children of the community would call him to preach the funeral and they would have a big shout."[8] Although he was unable to attend school because of the demands of sharecropping, the seven-year-old A. D. reportedly "attracted the people for miles around with his ability to count."[9]

A. D. Williams probably spent his childhood on the Williams plantation. After the death of his father in 1874, A. D. and his family moved from the Williams plantation to nearby Scull Shoals, a rural community on the Oconee River.[10] Several years later, in the early 1880s, A. D. and his family joined Bethabara Baptist Church in northern Greene County. With the help of his pastor, the Reverend Parker Poullain, A. D. worked through a blueback speller and the first, second, and third readers. Williams underwent a conversion experience that confirmed his religious commitment. Poullain baptized A. D. in August 1884, and tutored him in preparation for a preaching career. Finally, in April 1888, Williams earned his license to preach.[11]

The number of black Baptist churches, many of which were affiliated with Georgia's Missionary Baptist Convention, increased rapidly during the 1870s and 1880s, but general economic conditions in Greene County's Oconee

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6. Adam Daniel's and his twin sister Eve's actual birthdate was probably earlier in the 1860s. The census of 1870 lists Adam Daniel Williams as nine years old, suggesting that he was born in 1861; his twin sister, Eve, is listed as seven. The census of 1880 lists both him and Eve as eighteen, implying a birthdate of 1862 (Census entry for Willis Williams, 22 June 1870, Greene Co., Ga.; census entry for A. D. Williams, 1880, Greene Co., Ga.). For A. D. Williams's claim of 2 January 1863 as his birthdate, see "Rev. A. D. Williams," *Atlanta Independent,* 4 April 1904; Ellington, "Short Sketch"; and "Adam Daniel Williams," in Caldwell, ed., *History of the American Negro,* p. 212.

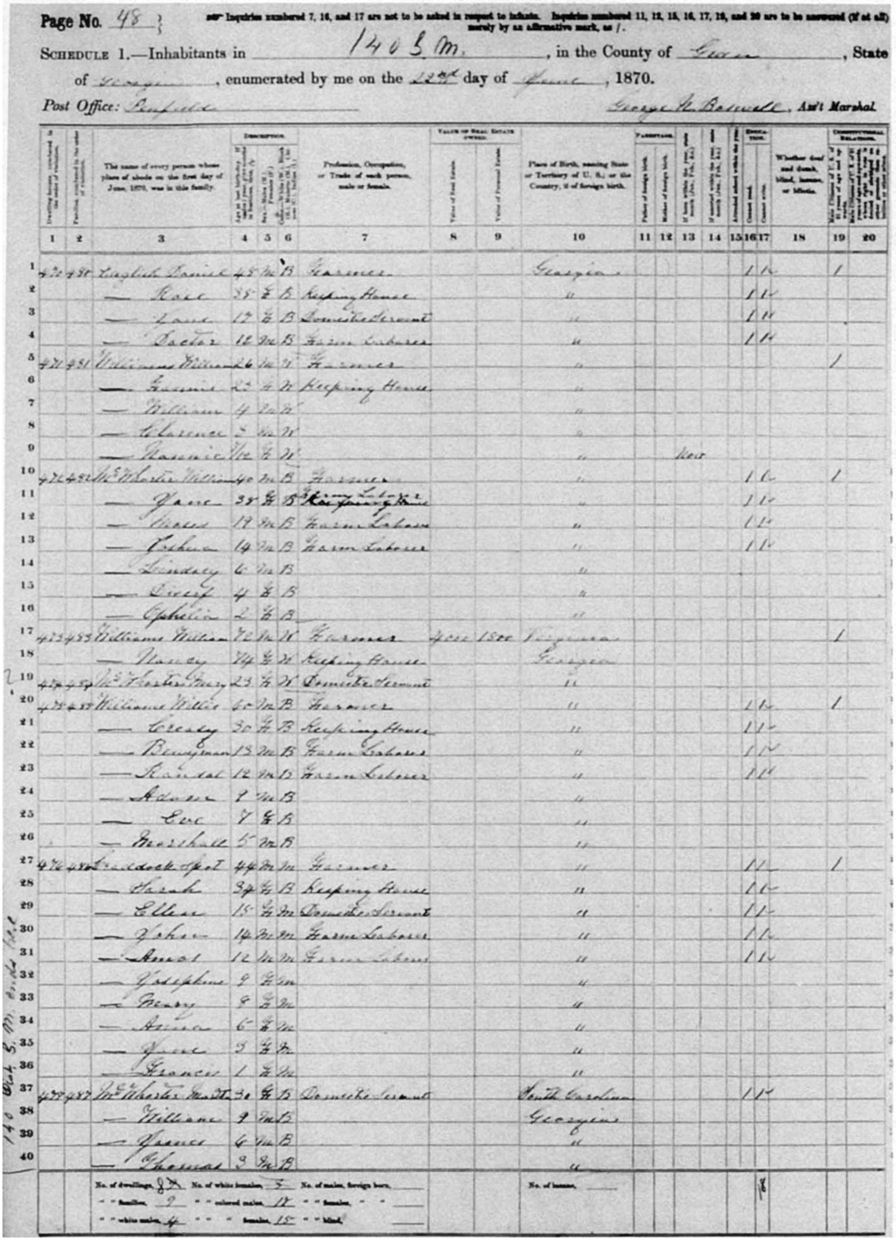
7. The fragmentary church records show no sign of the Williams family at Shiloh Baptist after Emancipation. See Bartow Davis Ragsdale, *Story of Georgia Baptists* (Atlanta: Foote and Davies, 1938), 3:65, 3:312; Raper, *Preface to Peasantry,* p. 356; and Clarence M. Wagner, *Profiles of Black Georgia Baptists* (Atlanta: Bennett Bros., 1980), p. 65.

8. Ellington, "Short Sketch." See also "Adam Daniel Williams," in Caldwell, ed., *History of the American Negro,* p. 212.

9. Ellington, "Short Sketch." Ellington noted that A. D. Williams had only three weeks of schooling during his youth.

10. See Ellington, "Short Sketch"; Census entry for A. D. Williams, 15 June 1880, Greene Co., Ga.; and Calhoun, "Family Background."

11. Ellington, "Short Sketch"; and "Adam Daniel Williams," in Caldwell, ed., *History of the American Negro,* p. 212. Williams also later studied with the Reverend Henry M. Smith of Crawford, clerk of the Jeruel Baptist Association which was composed of rural black congregations.



Page No. 48 — Inquiries numbered 7, 16, and 17 are not to be asked in respect to infants. Inquiries numbered 11, 12, 15, 16, 17, 18, and 20 are to be answered (if at all) merely by an affirmative mark, as /.

Schedule 1.—Inhabitants in 140 S. M., in the County of Greene, State of Georgia, enumerated by me on the 22nd day of June, 1870.

Post Office: Penfield. George H. Boswell, Ass't Marshal.

Line	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	13	16	17	19
1	470	480	English Daniel	45	M	B	Farmer			Georgia		/	/	/
2			— Rose	35	F	B	Keeping House			"		/	/	
3			— Jane	17	F	B	Domestic Servant			"		/	/	
4			— Doctor	12	M	B	Farm Laborer			"		/	/	
5	471	481	Williams William	26	M	W	Farmer			"				/
6			— Fannie	23	F	W	Keeping House			"				
7			— William	4	M	W				"				
8			— Clarence	3	M	W				"				
9			— Nannie	1/12	F	W				"	Nov			
10	472	482	McWhorter William	40	M	B	Farmer			"		/	/	/
11			— Jane	35	F	B	Keeping House			"		/	/	
12			— Moses	17	M	B	Farm Laborer			"		/	/	
13			— Joshua	14	M	B	Farm Laborer			"		/	/	
14			— Lindsey	6	M	B				"				
15			— Dicey	4	F	B				"				
16			— Ophelia	2	F	B				"				
17	473	483	Williams William	72	M	W	Farmer	4000	1500	Virginia				/
18			— Nancy	74	F	W	Keeping House			Georgia				
19	474	484	McWhorter Mary	23	F	W	Domestic Servant			"				
20	475	485	Williams Willis	60	M	B	Farmer			"		/	/	/
21			— Creasy	30	F	B	Keeping House			"		/	/	
22			— Benjamin	13	M	B	Farm Laborer			"		/	/	
23			— Randal	12	M	B	Farm Laborer			"		/	/	
24			— Adam	7	M	B				"				
25			— Eve	7	F	B				"				
26			— Marshall	5	M	B				"				
27	476	486	Craddock Spot	44	M	M	Farmer			"		/	/	/
28			— Sarah	34	F	B	Keeping House			"		/	/	
29			— Ellen	15	F	M	Domestic Servant			"		/	/	
30			— John	14	M	M	Farm Laborer			"		/	/	
31			— Amos	12	M	M	Farm Laborer			"		/	/	
32			— Josephine	9	F	M				"				
33			— Mary	8	F	M				"				
34			— Anna	6	F	M				"				
35			— Jane	3	F	M				"				
36			— Francis	1	F	M				"				
37	477	487	McWhorter Martha	30	F	B	Domestic Servant			South Carolina		/	/	
38			— William	9	M	B				Georgia				
39			— Jasper	6	M	B				"				
40			— Thomas	3	M	B				"				

No. of dwellings, 8; No. of white females, 3; No. of males, foreign born, —; families, 9; colored males, 17; females, —; white males, 4; colored females, 15; blind, —. No. of insane, —.

In 1870, Martin Luther King, Jr.'s maternal great-grandfather was recorded in the federal census of Greene County, Georgia. The entry listed his family members, including the twins, Adam and Eve.

River Valley declined during the latter decade. Surrounding farmlands were much less profitable than in the past, and many blacks migrated from the area.[12] During the late 1880s and early 1890s, A. D. Williams tried to make a living as an itinerant preacher, while supplementing his income with other work.[13] An injury in a sawmill accident left him with only the nub of a thumb on his right hand. Seeking better opportunities elsewhere, A. D. Williams joined the black exodus from Greene County. In January 1893 he left for Atlanta.[14]

Arriving in Atlanta "with one dime and a five dollar gold piece" during the unusually cold winter of 1893, Williams used the gold piece to secure treatment for a sore throat.[15] At the end of the summer after working in a machine shop, he accepted invitations to preach at Springfield Baptist Church in Atlanta and a Baptist church in nearby Kennesaw, Georgia.[16] Finally, on 14 March 1894, Williams was called to the pastorate of Atlanta's Ebenezer Baptist Church. One of many small Baptist congregations in the city, Ebenezer had recently lost its founding pastor, the Reverend John Andrew Parker, who had organized the church eight years earlier.[17] Williams took over a church with thirteen members and "no church house at all"—a challenging situation in which he quickly demonstrated his leadership abilities, adding some sixty-five members to the church his first year. His attempt in 1896 to leave for another pastorate was "frustrated by the providence of God"; yet at Ebenezer he was "an overwhelming success." Ebenezer, his biographer recounted, "continued to grow in strength and popularity and so did he."[18]

Williams supplemented his income by serving as minister of other congre-

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12. Powell Mills, a major employer, closed in 1884 and was destroyed in a devastating flood three years later. For more information on Greene County economic conditions, see E. Merton Coulter, "Scull Shoals: An Extinct Georgia Manufacturing and Farming Community," *Georgia Historical Quarterly* 48 (March 1964): 51–63; Raper, *Tenants of the Almighty*, pp. 111–112, 365; and Rice and Williams, *History of Greene County*, pp. 380–381.

13. "Adam Daniel Williams," in Caldwell, ed., *History of the American Negro*, p. 212; and Ellington, "Short Sketch." Although A. D. Williams's name does not appear on the extant rolls of ministers in the Jeruel Baptist Association minutes during these years, a transcriptionist's error may be at fault. The rolls list an "O. W. Williams" of Crawford, Georgia, in 1891, and an "E. D. Williams" in 1892. See *Minutes of Jeruel Baptist Association, Convened with Thankful Baptist Church, Days Station, Oglethorpe County, Georgia, September 24th, 25th, 26th, and 27th, 1891* (Augusta: Georgia Baptist Book Print, 1891); and *Minutes of Jeruel Baptist Association, Convened with Spring Creek Baptist Church, The Fork, Greene County, Georgia, September 21st, 22nd, 23rd, and 24th, 1892* (Augusta: Georgia Baptist Book Print, 1892).

14. [C. Shaw?], "Rev. John Parker," [1950?], EBCR; Christine King Farris, interview by Ralph E. Luker, 6 February 1989, MLKJrP-GAMK; and Ellington, "Short Sketch."

15. Ellington, "Short Sketch."

16. Ellington, "Short Sketch"; and "Adam Daniel Williams," in Caldwell, ed., *History of the American Negro*, p. 212.

17. Reverend Parker had studied at Atlanta Baptist Seminary and earned his living as a drayman. See [C. Shaw?], "Rev. John Parker"; and E. R. Carter, *The Black Side: A Partial History of the Business, Religious, and Educational Side of the Negro in Atlanta, Ga.* (Atlanta: N.p., 1894), pp. 243–250.

18. Ellington, "Short Sketch." Three biographical sketches of A. D. Williams published in his lifetime gave three different figures for Ebenezer's membership at the time Williams began his ministry: a newspaper's sketch reported seventeen members, Caldwell estimated seven members,

gations in the Atlanta area before deciding to focus his energies on building Ebenezer.[19] Recognizing that his long-term success as an urban minister required that he overcome academic shortcomings, Williams also enrolled at Atlanta Baptist College, taking both the elementary English and the ministers' courses of study. In May 1898 Williams received his certificate from the ministerial program.[20]

During the 1890s Williams also met his future wife, Jennie Celeste Parks. Born in Atlanta in April 1873, Jennie Parks was one of thirteen children. Her father, William Parks, supported his family through work as a carpenter. At age fifteen, Jennie Parks began taking classes at Spelman Seminary, becoming, according to one account, "one of Spelman's lovely girls"; her graces included "culture, unfeigned modesty, and [a] devotion to home life."[21] Parks left Spelman in 1892, however, without graduating. Married to A. D. Williams on 29 October 1899, she was a deeply pious woman who always kept a Bible nearby and was "a model wife for a minister." On 13 September 1903, she gave birth at home to their only surviving child, Alberta Christine Williams, the mother of Martin Luther King, Jr.[22] During the early years of the century, the family lived in several houses in the Auburn Avenue area, which was then home to both whites and blacks.[23]

Like many other contemporary black ministers from similar backgrounds, Williams built his congregation by means of forceful preaching that addressed the everyday concerns of poor and working-class residents. Despite his deficiencies "from a technical educational point of view," a biographer insisted

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and Ellington counted thirteen members in 1893; see "Rev. A. D. Williams," *Atlanta Independent,* 12 April 1904; and "Adam Daniel Williams," in Caldwell, ed., *History of the American Negro,* p. 213.

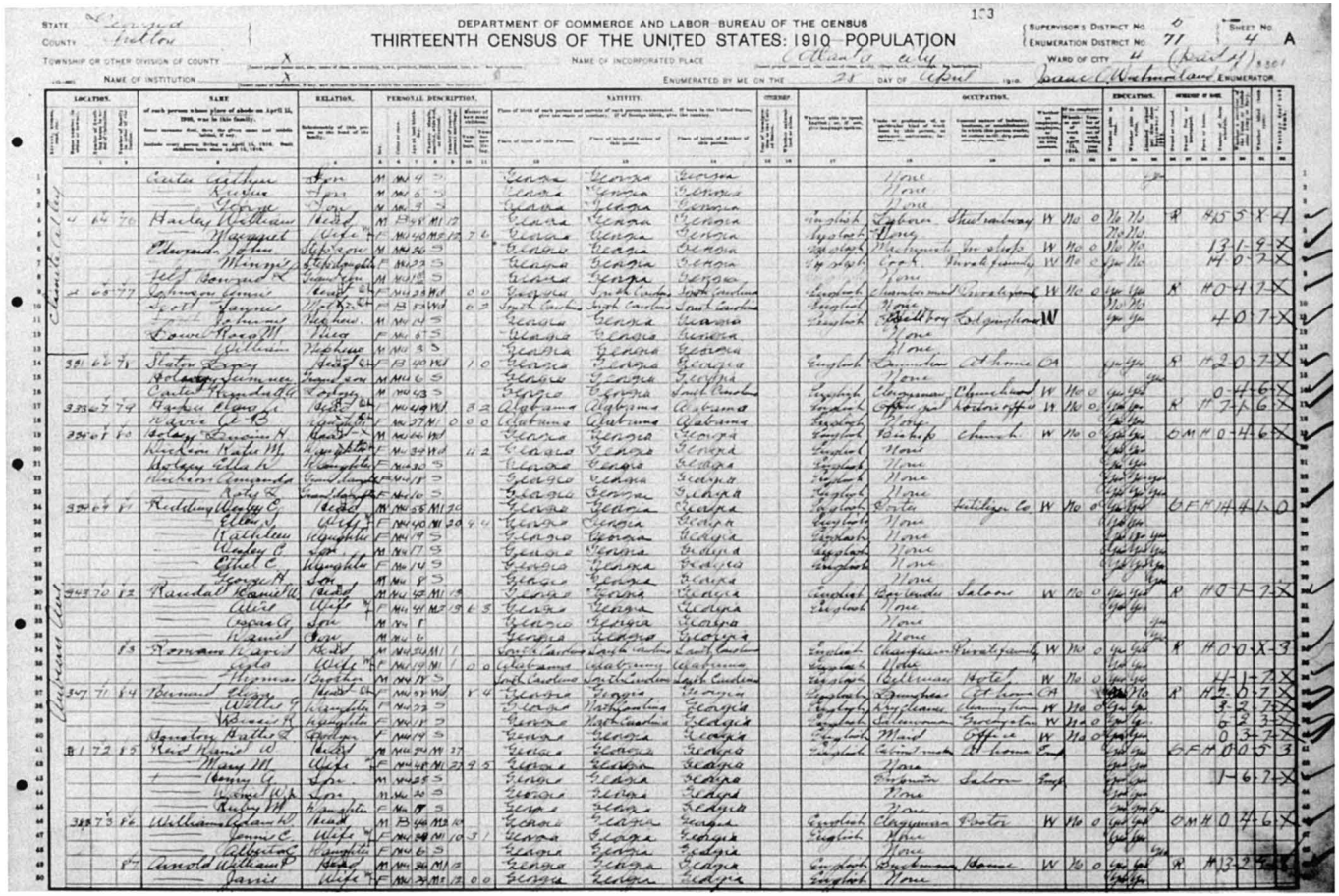
19. "Adam Daniel Williams," in Caldwell, ed., *History of the American Negro,* p. 213; and Ellington, "Short Sketch."

20. Ellington, "Short Sketch." Organized as the Augusta Baptist Institute by the black Baptist churches of Augusta in 1867, the school sought to prepare newly emancipated black men for teaching and preaching. In 1879 the Institute was relocated to Atlanta and renamed the Atlanta Baptist Seminary. Its name was later changed to Atlanta Baptist College and then to Morehouse College, in honor of Dr. Henry Morehouse, a white executive of the American Baptist Home Mission Society. Morehouse College operated under the sponsorship of the Society. See A. W. Pegues, *Our Baptist Ministers and Schools* (Springfield, Mass.: Willey, 1892), pp. 587–591, 609–617; Carter, *Black Side,* pp. 28–35, 52–55; *Catalogue of the Atlanta Baptist Seminary, 1895–1896* (Atlanta: Atlanta Seminary Press, 1896); *Catalogue of the Atlanta Baptist Seminary, 1897–1898* (Atlanta: Atlanta Seminary Press, 1898); *Georgia Baptist,* 2 June 1898; Edward A. Jones, *A Candle in the Dark: A History of Morehouse College* (Valley Forge, Pa.: Judson Press, 1967), pp. 17–47, 53–67; and Addie Louise Joyner Butler, *The Distinctive Black College: Talladega, Tuskegee, and Morehouse* (Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Press, 1977), pp. 102–103.

21. Ellington, "Short Sketch." In 1881 the Atlanta Baptist Female Seminary was founded in the basement of Friendship Baptist Church; subsequently it was renamed Spelman Seminary, in honor of the mother-in-law of John D. Rockefeller, a financial supporter.

22. Ellington, "Short Sketch"; Census entry for A. D. Williams and Jennie Celeste Parks Williams, 18 June 1900, Fulton County, Ga.; and Marriage license for A. D. Williams and Jennie Celeste Parks, 29 October 1899, Fulton County, Ga. See Loree Dionne Lynne Jones, "A Study of Spelman Seminary, Jennie Celeste Parks Williams, and Alberta Christine Williams King," King Project seminar paper, 1987, Martin Luther King, Jr., Center for Nonviolent Social Change.

23. Census entries for A. D. Williams and Jennie Celeste Parks Williams, 18 June 1900 and 28 April 1910, Fulton County, Ga.; and Atlanta City Directories, 1897–1905, 1907.



Page from the 1910 federal census with entries for A. D. Williams and his family.

that Williams's "experience and profound thought and his intensive practical ways in expounding the gospel, places him easily with the leading preachers of his day and generation."[24] In 1900 the Ebenezer congregation purchased a building at Bell and Gilmore streets that formerly housed the white Fifth Baptist Church, and there they remained for thirteen years. Thanks to Williams's efforts, the congregation experienced steady growth, attracting ninety-one new members in 1903 for a total membership of four hundred at year's end. Nevertheless, Ebenezer was still overshadowed by the much larger Big Bethel AME and Wheat Street Baptist churches on Auburn Avenue.[25]

In addition to building his own congregation, Williams participated in the establishment of new regional and national Baptist institutions. In September 1895, he joined two thousand other delegates and visitors at Friendship Baptist Church to organize the National Baptist Convention, the largest black organization in the United States. By 1904 Williams was president of the Atlanta Baptist Ministers Union, chairman of both the executive board and the finance committee of the General State Baptist Convention, and a member of the Convention's educational board and its Baptist Young Peoples Union and Sunday School board.[26]

Black-white relations in Atlanta were undergoing major changes during the early years of the twentieth century. Booker T. Washington's historic address delivered at Atlanta's Cotton States and International Exposition of 1895 had signaled the beginning of a period of rapid economic growth and intensified racial restrictions. Black migrants sought to participate in the city's economic growth, and by 1900 black Atlantans constituted nearly 40 percent of the city's population. In 1900, some black residents departed from Washington's accommodationist strategy by launching an unsuccessful streetcar boycott to protest new regulations requiring segregation on all public transportation. In the same year, the Georgia Democratic Party adopted rules that barred the participation of blacks in the party's primary.[27]

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24. Ellington, "Short Sketch."

25. Indenture between Oscar Davis and the Trustees of Ebenezer Baptist Church, 26 May 1899, Fulton County, Ga., G-Ar; Indenture between Mrs. D. C. Shaw and the Trustees of Ebenezer Baptist Church, 20 June 1900, Fulton County, Ga., G-Ar; Indenture between the Fifth Baptist Church and the Trustees of Ebenezer Baptist Church, 12 December 1900, Fulton County, Ga., G-Ar; and "Rev. A. D. Williams," *Atlanta Independent,* 2 April 1904.

26. For more information on the origin of the National Baptist Convention and Williams's involvement in denominational activities, see James Melvin Washington, *Frustrated Fellowship: The Black Baptist Quest for Social Power* (Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 1986), pp. 159–185; Porter, "Black Atlanta," pp. 71, 209–212; *Georgia Baptist,* 2 June, 21 July, and 27 October 1898; and *Atlanta Independent,* 12 April and 17 June 1904. The Atlanta Baptist Ministers Union, in which A. D. Williams and Martin Luther King, Sr., were prominent for six decades, was an organization of black Baptist ministers in the city. The General State Baptist Convention was one of two black Baptist conventions in Georgia from 1893 to 1915. In 1893, a dispute over leadership of the Missionary Baptist Convention of Georgia led to the establishment of the General State Baptist Convention. In 1915, the two conventions were reunited as the General Missionary Baptist Convention of Georgia. See Wagner, *Profiles of Black Georgia Baptists,* pp. 79–81.

27. For more information on these events, see *Georgia Baptist,* 17 May 1900; Walter White, *A Man Called White* (New York: Viking Press, 1948), pp. 20–21; Clarence A. Bacote, "The Negro

Williams, along with other black religious leaders, was a pioneering advocate of a distinctive African-American version of the social gospel, endorsing a strategy that combined elements of Washington's emphasis on black business development and W. E. B. Du Bois's call for civil rights activism. In mid-February 1906, A. D. Williams joined five hundred black Georgians in organizing the Georgia Equal Rights League to protest the white primary system. They elected William Jefferson White as president and AME Bishop Henry McNeal Turner and CME Bishop R. S. Williams as vice presidents. White urged the delegates to recognize the importance of both black economic development and civil protest. Turner, one of the most prominent black religious leaders of the period, was an outspoken advocate of racial pride and a caustic critic of prevailing racial policies. "To the Negro . . . the American flag is a dirty and contemptible rag," he cried. "Hell is an improvement upon the United States when the Negro is involved."[28] The convention's address to the public protested lynching, peonage, the convict lease system, inequitable treatment in the courts, inferior segregated public transportation, unequal distribution of funds for public education, and exclusion of black men from the electorate, juries, and the state militia. A. D. Williams and Turner signed the address along with sixteen other leaders including Atlanta University professor W. E. B. Du Bois; Atlanta Baptist College president-elect John Hope; J. Max Barber, editor of *The Voice of the Negro*; and Peter James Bryant, pastor of Wheat Street Baptist Church.[29]

Soon after this gathering, in September 1906, African-American advancement efforts received a serious setback when Atlanta experienced a major race riot. Newspaper reports and rumors of black assaults on white women had already inflamed the fears of whites. When white gangs assaulted iso-

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in Atlanta Politics," *Phylon* 16 (1955): 333–350; Bacote, "Negro Proscriptions, Protests, and Proposed Solutions in Georgia, 1880–1908," *Journal of Southern History* 25 (November 1959): 474; August Meier and Elliott Rudwick, "The Boycott Movement Against Jim Crow Streetcars in the South, 1900–1906," *Journal of American History* 55 (March 1969): 756–775; Jean Martin, "Mule to MARTA," *Atlanta Historical Bulletin* 20 (Winter 1976): 14–26; and John Dittmer, *Black Georgia in the Progressive Era* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1977), pp. 16–17, 94–97.

28. Edwin S. Redkey, ed., *Respect Black: The Writings and Speeches of Henry McNeal Turner* (New York: Arno, 1971), pp. 196–197.

29. Augusta's William Jefferson White issued the call for a convention of black Georgians to consider a wide range of grievances in December 1905. Founder of the Augusta Institute, trustee of Atlanta Baptist College, founder and editor of the *Georgia Baptist*, and pastor of Augusta's Harmony Baptist Church, White was the venerated patriarch of Georgia's black Baptists. See "A Call For a Conference," *Voice of the Negro* 3 (February 1906): 90; "The Macon Convention" and "The Leaders of the Convention," *Voice of the Negro* 3 (March 1906): 163–166; "Address of the First Annual Meeting of the Georgia Equal Rights Convention," *Voice of the Negro* 3 (March 1906): 175–177; "A Few Corrections," *Voice of the Negro* 3 (April 1906): 291; Redkey, ed., *Respect Black: The Writings and Speeches of Henry McNeal Turner*, pp. 196–199; Dittmer, *Black Georgia*, pp. 173–174; *Atlanta Independent*, 9 December 1905, 20 January 1906, 27 January 1906, and 24 February 1906; W. J. Simmons, "Rev. W. J. White: Editor of the *Georgia Baptist*," in *Men of Mark: Eminent, Progressive, and Rising* (Cleveland: George M. Rewell, 1887), pp. 791–792; and "Rev. William Jefferson White, D.D.," in Pegues, *Our Baptist Ministers and Schools*, pp. 526–539.

lated African Americans, they met little opposition from police. Larger mobs of whites, numbering in the thousands, then attacked and looted black businesses near Auburn Avenue. Rioters derailed trolley cars and beat to death blacks who happened to be on the streets. Commerce in the city almost ceased for three days as many Atlantans remained in their homes. After five days of violence, the city resumed a sullen peace. Official accounts listed one white and twenty-six black deaths and more than 150 blacks seriously wounded. The riot destroyed the illusion that Atlanta was a New South paradigm of racial harmony and reinforced the trend toward increased residential segregation in the Auburn Avenue neighborhood, which now became a center of African-American economic and social life in Atlanta.[30]

Williams and other black Atlanta residents faced new racial barriers in the years after the riot, but Auburn Avenue businesses thrived during the following two decades as the black community turned inward, supporting its own institutions. Although Williams continued to oppose racial discrimination, he benefited from the new realities of white flight from and black movement into the Auburn Avenue area. Several years after the riot, Williams purchased the two-story Queen Anne–style building on Auburn Avenue in which King, Jr., would be born.[31] An Odd Fellow, Williams also served on the order's Industrial Commission, which planned to develop Odd Fellow City, an African-American community near Elberton, Georgia. He joined Bishop Turner in a controversial business venture, the Silver Queen Mining Company, which sold stock in a silver mine in Mexico. Benjamin Davis, editor of the black newspaper the *Atlanta Independent,* criticized the venture as "a fake, pure and simple" and offered space in the newspaper to Turner and Williams "to explain their connection with this fraudulent scheme" to the "many thousands of poor Negroes that are being defrauded throughout the state."[32] Turner responded that stock was sold "to colored people only" because the corporation was a "colored organization" and "a stepping stone to teach our people how to do business, and put some money in their pockets." He said he had visited the mine with two reputable mining engineers. "The reports from these two gentlemen were good," he concluded, "and there is no fake about the Company, but a straight, fair, square proposition."[33] Although Turner's re-

30. For more information on the Atlanta race riot, see Charles Crowe, "Racial Violence and Social Reform—Origins of the Atlanta Riot of 1906," *Journal of Negro History* 53 (July 1968): 234–256; Charles Crowe, "Racial Massacre in Atlanta, September 22, 1906," *Journal of Negro History* 54 (April 1969): 150–169; Dittmer, *Black Georgia,* pp. 123–131; and Clarence A. Bacote, "Some Aspects of Negro Life in Georgia, 1880–1908," *Journal of Negro History* 43 (July 1958): 186.

31. For more information on the house, which was constructed in 1895, see U.S. Department of the Interior, "Historic Structure Report: The Martin Luther King Birth Home" (Denver: National Park Service, n.d.).

32. "Is It a Fraud?" *Atlanta Independent,* 25 September 1909.

33. "Judge for Yourself," *Atlanta Independent,* 2 October 1909. See also Dittmer, *Black Georgia,* pp. 13–14; Porter, "Black Atlanta," pp. 126–158; and Silver Queen Mining Company, Stock certificate for A. D. Williams, 28 January 1908, CKFC. On Davis and Turner, see Mungo Melanchthon Ponton, *The Life and Times of Bishop Henry M. Turner* (Atlanta: A. B. Caldwell, 1917);


INCORPORATED UNDER THE LAWS OF
THE TERRITORY OF
ARIZONA, U. S. A.
No. 403
SHARES
The Silver Queen Mining Company
OF PARRAL, MEXICO
CAPITAL STOCK $500,000
This Certifies that A. D. Williams is the owner of
Five Shares of One Dollar, U. S. C. each of the Capital Stock of
THE SILVER QUEEN MINING COMPANY
FULL PAID AND NON-ASSESSABLE
transferable only on the books of the Corporation by the holder
hereof in person or by Attorney upon surrender of this Certificate
properly endorsed.
In Witness Whereof, the said Corporation has caused this Certificate to be
signed by its duly authorized officers and to be sealed with the Seal of the Corporation
at City of Parral, Mexico, this 1st day of June A.D. 1905
A. D. Williams
Secty and Treas.
Y. & M. Turner.
President.
SHARES
$1.00
EACH

sponse did not satisfy Davis, the reputations of the two preacher-entrepreneurs suffered no permanent damage because of the controversy.

Williams continued to involve himself in business ventures that capitalized on and enhanced his success as Ebenezer's pastor. By the beginning of 1913 the growing congregation had 750 members and was planning further expansion. In January the church purchased a lot on the corner of Auburn Avenue and Jackson Street. Six months later it announced plans to raise $25,000 for a new church building, which would include an auditorium and gallery seating 1,250 people. "Few Churches in the city have made strides more rapidly," conceded the *Independent,* "nor have contributed more to the moral and intellectual growth of the city. Dr. Williams is an earnest, conscientious and well-informed minister whose influence in the city is acknowledged and appreciated."[34] In March 1914 Ebenezer celebrated the beginning of Williams's third decade as its pastor by breaking ground for the new building. While the basement was under construction, the congregation worshipped in a hall above a storefront on Edgewood Avenue. That spring many of the older children of the church, including ten-year-old Alberta Williams, were converted in a ten-day revival, baptized in a borrowed pool at Wheat Street Baptist Church, and formally admitted to church membership. When the basement was capped with a roof in the late spring of 1914, "there was a great march" as worshippers entered the basement to hold services for the first time. Ebenezer's building was finally completed in 1922.[35]

As he consolidated his institutional base at Ebenezer, A. D. Williams continued to expand his regional influence. In the fall of 1913 he was elected moderator of the Atlanta Missionary Baptist Association.[36] He played a role in power struggles among Baptist leaders, including a dispute within the National Baptist Convention over ownership of the National Baptist Publishing House.[37] He also served as treasurer of Atlanta's YMCA campaign and of the

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J. Minton Batten, "Henry M. Turner: Negro Bishop Extraordinary," *Church History,* 7 (September 1938): 231–246; E. Merton Coulter, "Henry M. Turner: Georgia Preacher-Politician During the Reconstruction Era," *Georgia Historical Quarterly* 48 (December 1964): 371–410; John Dittmer, "The Education of Henry McNeal Turner," in *Black Leaders of the Nineteenth Century,* ed. Leon Litwack and August Meier (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), pp. 253–272; "Benjamin Jefferson Davis," in *Who's Who in Colored America: A Biographical Dictionary of Notable Living Persons of Negro Descent in America,* ed. Joseph J. Boris (New York: Who's Who in Colored America Corp., 1927), 1:52–53; and Benjamin J. Davis, Jr., *Communist Councilman from Harlem: Autobiographical Notes Written in a Federal Penitentiary* (New York: International Publishers, 1969), pp. 21–39, 145–160.

34. "Ebenezer Baptist Church," *Atlanta Independent,* 12 July 1913.

35. *Atlanta Independent,* 14 March 1914. See also J. H. Edwards, "Ebenezer History," March 1976, EBCR; and Fulton County, Ga., Bond for Title between A. J. Delbridge and A. D. Williams, 10 January 1913.

36. A. D. Williams was moderator of the Atlanta Missionary Baptist Association from 1913 until 1920. Martin Luther King, Sr., was later moderator of the association for more than twenty years. See Atlanta Missionary Baptist Association, "Minutes of the Fifty-second Annual Session of the Atlanta Missionary Baptist Association, Inc.," Atlanta, 13 October 1955.

37. In 1915, the National Baptist Convention was incorporated in order to claim ownership of the National Baptist Publishing House in Nashville, Tennessee. Insisting that the publishing

Georgia State Baptist Convention, where he had fiduciary responsibility for a new youth reformatory established by the convention in Macon, Georgia. In 1914 Williams became chairman of the finance committee of the Morehouse College Alumni Association; that same year, the college honored him with a Doctor of Divinity degree.[38]

Early in 1917, A. D. Williams became involved in an effort, initiated by Atlanta University graduate Walter White, to organize a local branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP).[39] After the branch was chartered, he and other NAACP members, along with members of the Neighborhood Union, a black women's group, launched a prolonged campaign to improve conditions in black schools. The catalyst was the plan by the Board of Education to close seventh-grade classes in its black schools in order to pay for a new junior high school for white students. A committee, which included branch president Harry H. Pace, Lugenia Burns Hope of the Neighborhood Union, and her husband, Morehouse president John Hope, presented a petition protesting the plan to the all-white school board. A. D. Williams represented the black Baptist ministerial alliance at the meeting with the board. "You, with fifty schools, most of them ample, efficient

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house was his property, its director Richard H. Boyd led his followers out of the National Baptist Convention, Inc., to form the National Baptist Convention, Unincorporated. In November 1916, hoping to explain his position, Boyd appeared at a meeting of the General Missionary Baptist Convention of Georgia, where Benjamin Davis sought to introduce him. A. D. Williams and Peter James Bryant of Wheat Street Baptist Church seized the rostrum and declared that they would not allow Boyd to speak. See *Atlanta Independent,* 22 May 1915, 25 November 1916, and 15 September 1917; Wagner, *Profiles of Black Georgia Baptists,* pp. 79–81, 134; Lewis Garnett Jordan, *Negro Baptist History, U.S.A.* (Nashville, Tenn: Sunday School Publishing Board, [1930]), pp. 126–142, 247–255; Owen D. Pelt and Ralph Lee Smith, *The Story of the National Baptists* (New York: Vantage Press, 1960), pp. 97–109; and Joseph Harrison Jackson, *A Story of Christian Activism: The History of the National Baptist Convention, U.S.A., Inc.* (Nashville, Tenn.: Townsend Press, 1980), pp. 93–126.

38. For more details on Williams's activities during the period, see *Atlanta Independent,* 25 August 1911, 10 September 1911, 31 May 1913, 15 November 1913, 21 February 1914, 22 May 1915, and 14 August 1915; Morehouse College, *Annual Catalogue, 1917–1918,* p. 95; Dittmer, *Black Georgia,* p. 179; and Jones, *A Candle in the Dark,* pp. 91–92.

39. At the end of 1916, following several unsuccessful efforts, Walter White began to organize a local branch of the NAACP. At an organizing conference held in February 1917, Harry H. Pace, an executive of Standard Life Insurance Company, was elected president and Walter White, Standard Life's cashier, was elected secretary. NAACP national field secretary James Weldon Johnson addressed the conference in a crowded assembly room of Atlanta Life Insurance Company. Although police officers were stationed around the room, he noted, the crowd was not intimidated. "The organization conference which was held at Atlanta was unique," Johnson recalled years later; "it was the only one in which no woman was invited to take part. There were present fifty or so of the leading colored men of the city; lawyers, doctors, college professors, public school teachers, editors, bankers, insurance officials, and businessmen" (James Weldon Johnson, *Along This Way: The Autobiography of James Weldon Johnson* [New York: Viking Press, 1933], pp. 315–316). For further information on the creation of the Atlanta NAACP branch, see *Atlanta Independent,* 10 February 1917 and 24 February 1917; Minutes of the Board of Directors Meeting, 9 April 1917, NAACPP-DLC: Part I, Reel 1; Reports from the Annual Meetings of the NAACP, 7 January 1918, NAACPP-DLC: Part I, Reel 4; and White, *A Man Called White,* pp. 28–31.

and comfortable, for the education of your children," said the petitioners, "can square neither your conscience with your God nor your conduct with your oaths, and behold Negro children in fourteen unsanitary, dilapidated, unventilated school rooms, with double sessions in half of the grades, no industrial facilities, no preparation for high schools and no high schools for the blacks." In the end, the school board acceded to the petitioners' plea to reinstate the seventh grade for blacks.[40]

The issue of black schools spurred membership in the new NAACP branch, which climbed to four hundred by the end of March. Yet subsequent petitions to the school board—for better school buildings, a commercial and industrial junior high, a high school for black students, and the elimination of double sessions in all public schools—met with no success. Thereafter, wartime mobilization and rebuilding after a devastating fire in May 1917 caused popular commitment to the NAACP to wane.[41] By June 1918, membership had declined to forty-nine due to Walter White's departure for the NAACP's New York office and the resignation of the branch president. The enervated branch appealed to Atlanta's Baptist and Methodist ministerial associations for support. In response, A. D. Williams agreed to serve as branch president and was formally elected on 9 July.[42]

Williams—described in one account as "a forceful and impressive speaker, a good organizer and leader, a man of vision and brilliant imagination, which he sometimes finds it necessary to curb"—experienced initial success as an NAACP leader.[43] A month after his election, he announced an ambitious drive to attract five thousand new members. The *Atlanta Independent* illustrated its confidence in Williams's ability to revive the organization with a front page cartoon depicting a black gladiator, whose shield was the NAACP, slaying the hydra-headed monster of the grandfather clause, lynching, peonage, and segregation. The branch did grow: to 1,400 members within five months. During his tenure, the newly invigorated NAACP spearheaded a major effort to register black voters in anticipation of a local referendum on school taxes and bond issues for public works that would allocate a dispropor-

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40. *Atlanta Independent,* 24 February 1917. A Neighborhood Union investigation of black schools in 1913 found students studying in unsanitary, poorly equipped, crowded classrooms. The group protested these conditions to the school board, which took only token remedial action. See *Atlanta Independent,* 18 October 1913; and Jacqueline Anne Rouse, *Lugenia Burns Hope: Black Southern Reformer* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1989), pp. 74–79. For more information on the schools campaign see Edgar A. Toppin, "Walter White and the Atlanta NAACP's Fight for Equal Schools, 1916–1917," *History of Education Quarterly* 7 (Spring 1967): 8–10.

41. On 21 May, a fire fueled by a strong wind burned through the heart of Atlanta, gutting nearly two thousand buildings, including many churches. The "Great Conflagration" left ten thousand people homeless, most of them black. See *Atlanta Independent,* 26 May 1917; Garrett, *Atlanta and Its Environs* 2:700–706, 730; John Robert Smith, "The Day of Atlanta's Big Fire," *Atlanta Historical Journal* 24 (Fall 1980): 58–66; and Alan Patureau, "Atlanta's Other Great Fire," *Atlanta Journal and Constitution,* 17 May 1987.

42. Toppin, "Walter White and the Atlanta NAACP," pp. 12–15; Adam Daniel Williams, "Speech to the Tenth Annual Convention of the NAACP," 26 June 1919, NAACPP-DLC: Part I, Reel 8; and White, *A Man Called White,* pp. 32–37.

43. "Adam Daniel Williams," in Caldwell, ed., *History of the American Negro,* p. 214.