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Civil rights veteran visits Gardner-Webb



Dr. Albert Brinson speaks to students after his talk at Dimensions Tuesday, Jan. 19. Photo by Megan Hartman

By: Chelsea Sydnor

The week of Jan. 18 has been a week of celebration and remembrance of the life and work of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and the importance of the Civil Rights Movement. One class led by Dr. Sheryl Adams in the Divinity School will be studying the Civil Rights Movement with Dr. Albert Brinson as a visiting co-professor.

Brinson has lived a life directly involved with the King family and the fight for civil rights. In his childhood, Brinson spent great amounts of time in the King home and Ebenezer Baptist Church, led by Rev. King Sr. It was there that he learned about the concept of using his life to improve those of others.

“It’s about what you do for others, it’s about being selfless,” said Brinson.

At that time, being selfless didn’t come without risks. According to Brinson, those that fought for civil rights usually had to accept the idea that they could possibly lose their lives for the cause. Along with the resolve for non-violence came the chance of danger.

"We had to put aside the fear of being killed, because that was a given," Brinson said. He found hope in his faith that "there would be other life to come."

He applied this sentiment to his eventual involvement in local sit-ins for civil rights while he was a senior at Morehouse College in Atlanta, GA.

"We wanted to make a difference," said Brinson.

It is because of this desire that Brinson enjoys meeting and speaking with people and encouraging them to do what they can for others, and why he ultimately chose to answer the call to become a minister.



Brinson shows his badge from his time working with Eastern Airlines as a customer service agent. Photo by Megan Hartman

While Brinson was in seminary, he had the chance to become employed by Eastern Airlines as a customer service agent.

"It was a big breakthrough, because not a lot of Negroes had ever flown with white people," Brinson said.

He remained at his job with the airline once he became a church assistant for Rev. King and after he was ordained to ministry. It was during this time, in 1968, that Brinson learned about the assassination of King.

Due to his connection with both the family and the airline, Brinson was the one to receive King's body when it came off the

plane from Memphis.

"That was a very painful time, but I could not show that," he explained. "I had to be strong."

Brinson wanted to portray an image of strength in order to comfort the Black community, who had seen constant news coverage of King's assassination and did not know what to expect.

"We couldn't escape it," Brinson said.

Brinson continued to remain close to the King family, especially through the deaths of other members of the family such as the drowning of King's brother A.D. in 1969, and the death of his mother Alberta by a shooter at Ebenezer Baptist Church in 1974.

"His sister [Christine King Farris] is the only one that's left now," said Brinson. "We still go out to dinner and talk and laugh."

According to Brinson, Farris is still like his big sister.

"They were like family," he explained. "We'll always be that way."

Brinson believes that racism still exists in the world, and probably always will to some extent. He would like to see this continue to change through cooperation among the countries of the world.

"I like what Jesus said, 'Come let us reason together,'" Brinson said. "But we don't seem to want to reason together."

He hopes that that the trend will soon change for the good of everyone.

"We take two steps forward and one step back," he said. But the only way for us to grow past [racism] is to work together."

To view more photos from Brinson's talk with Gardner-Webb students at dimensions, [click here](#).