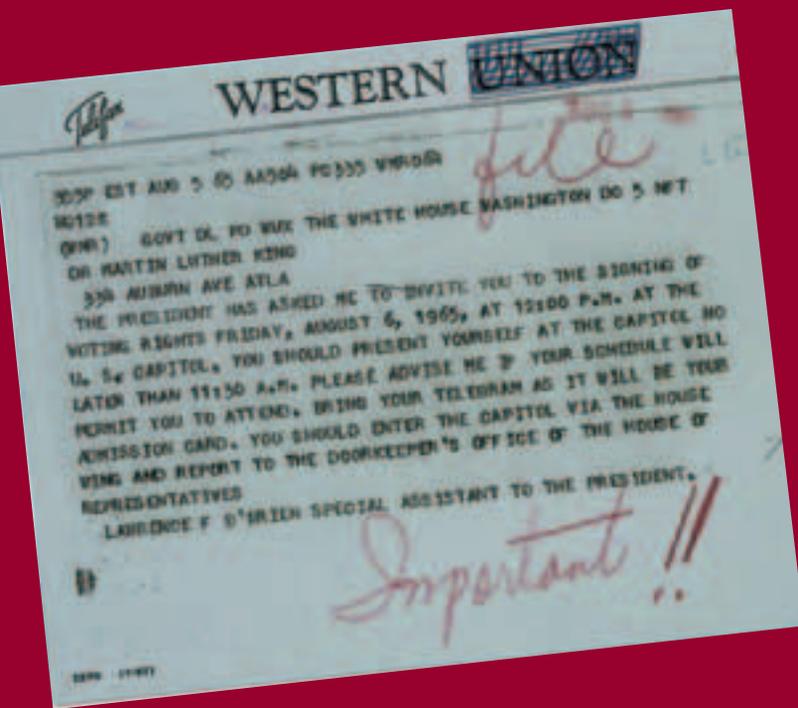




By Shaneesa N. Ashford

Saved, Sealed, Delivered



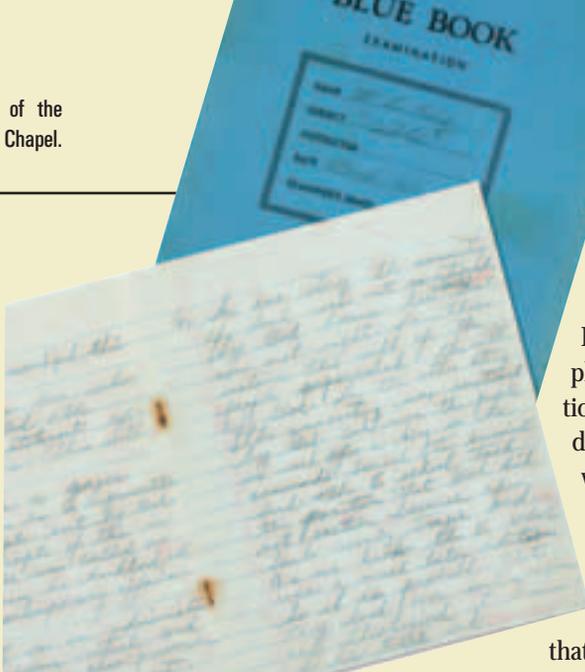
Literally hours before the gavel was to drop at Sotheby's Auction House in New York, a 10,000-piece collection of Martin Luther King Jr. '48 was saved in a deal sealed by a group of Atlantans who wanted to see it return to its rightful home. The Collection, which was delivered to Morehouse through an unprecedented act of partnership, offers the College a unique opportunity to bear witness to a remarkable time in U.S. history as its proud steward.

(Left) President Walter E. Massey '58 announces the arrival of the Morehouse College Martin Luther King Jr. Collection in the King Chapel.

It was 9:30 p.m. on June 23 when the call came in. After much wheeling and dealing, the personal papers of one of the greatest leaders of the 20th century would have a new home: Morehouse College.

Evidence of the importance of the Morehouse College Martin Luther King Jr. Collection can be found in the entities that wanted it, and the entities that ultimately got it. Scheduled to be auctioned by Sotheby's on June 30, the Collection was coveted by many institutions, including the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C., and Boston University, where King received his doctorate in systematic theology in 1955.

However, it was Mayor Shirley Franklin who, intent on keeping the collection in Atlanta, rallied several public and private entities to produce funding to purchase the Collection. In a deal sealed at the proverbial 11th hour, the papers were saved from the auction block. Morehouse became owner of the 10,000-piece col-



During his time at Morehouse, King became exposed to various philosophies on the human condition through sociology courses with department chair Walter Chivers and weekly chapel addresses by his mentor, Benjamin E. Mays, the sixth president of Morehouse.

"We know there was a mindset on the faculty at Morehouse that was determined to produce a generation of graduates who would become the still, small whisper of the mighty wind that would blow down the walls of segregation," Carter said.

Through his education at Morehouse, King was exposed to the teachings of Mahatma Gandhi and Henry David Thoreau, whose "essay on Civil Disobedience" helped to shape King's ideals. Carter said these ideals, as told through papers in the King Collection, provide a blueprint for a modern America.

"King offered a more noble vision of what is possible that will affirm the dignity of difference, demonstrate more diversity, maturity, more humanity, even for our oppressors," he said. "What makes these papers and Martin Luther King Jr. so signif-

icant is that he provides us the case for a more peaceful way to conflict resolution between groups, between individuals, between nations."

The collection of significant papers arrived on Sept. 14 amid very little fanfare. Representatives from Morehouse and Robert W. Woodruff watched as a delivery truck pulled up to the Woodruff Library and unloaded 71 boxes containing report cards,

MLK's Papers Are Home

lection. Since that day, the College prepared to house the Collection, deemed one of the most important in recent history.

From Average Man to Morehouse Man

King was one of many men in his family to attend Morehouse, including his grandfather, Adam Daniel Williams, class of 1898, father Martin Luther King Sr. '30, brother A.D. Williams King '60, son Martin Luther King III '79, and son Dexter Scott King, who attended 1979 to 1984.

At Morehouse, King was a normal student, graduating with a "C" average. He enjoyed singing, loved football and practiced chivalry at every turn. But perhaps what is more interesting is that the man who would come to be known as one of the greatest orators of the 20th century entered many speech contests on campus, but never won.

Yet, said Lawrence Carter, dean of King Chapel, his education and experiences at Morehouse provided King with the tools needed in other phases of his life.

"Those attempts at trying – he built on those and was quite successful, because he was the class speaker when he graduated from Crozier Theological Seminary," Carter said. "So you get the impression of how well he did after he left Morehouse—at Crozier and at Boston—that what he got at Morehouse was cumulative."



Atlanta Mayor Shirley Franklin, Xernona Clayton, corporate consultant and executive producer for Turner Broadcasting's Trumpet Awards, and former U.N. Ambassador Andrew Young, are among viewers of the King Collection at Sotheby's in New York.

telegrams, sermon notes, even a briefcase – all of which were unloaded and moved to the archiving area for processing. There, Brenda S. Banks, former deputy director of the Georgia Department of Archives and History and chief archivist for the papers, cataloged the boxes, arranging them for effective sorting.

“This, of course, is a very significant collection of a person who actually changed the way most of us see life, what we do, what we know in terms of our education, our lifestyles as African Americans,” Banks said. “It gives me a great deal of joy to even be associated with it.”

But what was actually in the boxes? Loretta Parham, Woodruff’s CEO and library director, opened the first box, discovering a typed copy of King’s “The Montgomery Story,” the speech he gave to more than 1,000 delegates at the 47th NAACP convention in San Francisco in 1956.

And then, the group realized what scholars for years to come will discover. This Collection, containing thousands of pieces of paper and books, offers insight into the thoughts of a man who would later lead a revolution of non-violence and command the attention and respect of the world.

Presenting to the World

Twenty-five days later, the Martin Luther King Jr. Collection was officially presented to the world. During a press conference on Oct. 9, representatives from the College, the City of Atlanta, Woodruff Library and the King family were on hand to celebrate the papers’ arrival.

President Walter E. Massey ’58 said the College was honored to serve as the home of the papers of one of the College’s most outstanding alumni.

“It was here that he was introduced to the ideals that would form the basis of his philosophy of non-violent social change – ideals that provided the energy and the inspiration for the civil rights movement in the United States and for similar movements for social justice and equality around the world,” Massey said. “Because of the pivotal role Morehouse played in Dr. King’s development, we believe there is no better place in the world for his papers to reside.”

Massey reiterated that Morehouse is committed to three values in regards to the College’s ownership of the Collection: stewardship and care of the papers; scholarly access for researchers; and partnerships with the City of Atlanta, various organizations and the public.

Mayor Franklin, who began her comments by quoting the civil rights leader, thanked the major players in the deal, including SunTrust, who agreed to provide the \$32 million loan to purchase the Collection, and the Community Foundation of Greater Atlanta, who created the company that purchased the papers and will transfer the title to Morehouse after the loan is paid off.

Franklin also acknowledged the 51 donors to the acquisition of the Collection.

Andrew Young, who worked directly with King during the civil

The Martin Luther King Jr. Collection logo is a flame made of paper, directly relating to the Collection itself. The symbolic essence of the paper torch is to guide, to lead the way and to enlighten. The paper torch also alludes to “carrying the torch” and “A Candle in the Dark.”



rights movement, said that Morehouse was always considered the home of the papers.

“This was truly one of Coretta’s initial visions – that the papers reside at Morehouse College,” Young said. “I think [Martin] knew, and she knew, what was happening at [each point] in history, and we needed to preserve it. This is our history, not black history. It’s history; it’s Atlanta’s history.”

Now the Work Begins

Now that the papers have arrived, Banks and the archivists at Woodruff have a large task at hand. The standard procedures for processing the Collection include receipt; accession; arrangement and description of the pieces; and re-housing of the Collection into standard archival folders and boxes. The archivists also will oversee the repair and conservation of the items, and digitize or copy each item to establish a long-term facsimile of the materials.

“To be involved in the care, preservation and provision of scholarly access to the manuscripts, writings and books of the Morehouse College Martin Luther King Jr. Collection is of historical significance and a privilege,” said Woodruff’s Parham during the press conference. “The City of Atlanta and the world can rest assured that this collection is in good hands.”

While the Collection is processed, a national advisory committee, chaired by Lonnie Bunch, director of the Smithsonian Institution’s Museum of African American History and Culture, will advise the College on ways to provide scholarly access to the papers. To ensure that the community is able to view the papers and benefit from the experience of seeing King’s works, Morehouse will partner with various groups and organizations, including the Atlanta History Center, to sponsor educational events and exhibits. The first exhibit is scheduled at the Atlanta History Center in January 2007, around the civil rights icon’s birthday and national King holiday.

But, according to Phillip Howard, Morehouse’s vice president for Institutional Advancement, the group who will truly benefit from the Collection is the students.

“[The Collection] allows us to provide another academic component to enhance courses and provide additional courses,” he said. “But it also gives a 3D view of who King was. You see King in a wholly different way, and the students will be able to have that kind of dimension during a time of their discovery and inquiry.” ■

