

# Prayers and provocation

## Burlington man heeded early call in civil rights struggle



**JOEL BANNER BAIRD**  
FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

Decades before Warner C. White moved to Vermont, he got the call to fly South.

He was 38, an Episcopal priest in Chicago, married and with five kids.

A day earlier, on June 12, 1962, in Jackson, Miss., civil rights leader Medgar Evers had been assassinated, shot by a white extremist.

White booked a ticket and packed his bags.

Now 88, the Burlington resident is among the ranks of unsung veterans of America's struggle for racial equality.

He was joined in Jackson by other northern ministers who were determined to march in Evers' funeral procession. He wanted to be counted, conspicuously, as sympathetic to the black cause.

It was White's first of three trips on behalf of his supportive, integrated Chicago congregation — and of his conscience.

"I would call it a moral mandate," he said last week from his Burlington home. "I really felt something needed to be done, and I was glad to do it."

### Rainbow Girls

Jackson was summer-steamy and tempers were high, White remembered.

Evers had been a rising star: He was the local secretary for the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. He organized boycotts of segregated businesses.

Not long before he was gunned down,



GLENN RUSSELL/FREE PRESS

Warner White of Burlington discusses his role in the Civil Rights struggle in the 1960's.

See **PRAYERS**, Page 2C



## COMING FRIDAY: Vermont's ski troopers — A salute to the fallen

History Space chronicles the creation of the 10th Mountain Division and tells the stories of six Vermonters who died in World War II combat in Italy.



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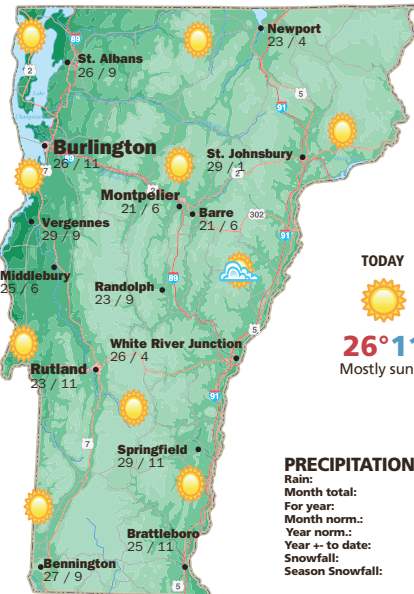


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# B weather

## 4-DAY FORECAST

TODAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
<b>26°11°</b> Mostly sunny	<b>37°28°</b> Slight chance of snow showers	<b>43°15°</b> Chance of snow showers	<b>24° 9°</b> Partly cloudy



## LAKE CHAMPLAIN/NORTHWEST

Lake Temp: 35°, Level: 94.71'  
**Today:** Mostly sunny. Highs in the mid 20s. Northwest winds 15 to 20 mph with gusts up to 30 mph.  
**Tonight:** Clear. Lows 6 to 12 above. North winds 10 to 15 mph with gusts up to 25 mph until midnight; becoming light and variable.  
**Friday:** Partly sunny. Highs in the mid 30s. South winds 10 to 15 mph.  
**NORTHEAST**  
**Today:** Partly sunny, blustery. Highs around 20. Northwest winds 15 to 25 mph with gusts up to 40 mph.  
**Tonight:** Mostly clear until midnight; then partly cloudy. Lows 2 below to 6 above zero. West winds 10 to 15 mph with gusts up to 30 mph until midnight; becoming light, variable.  
**Friday:** Mostly cloudy.

## CENTRAL/SOUTH

**Today:** Sunny. Cold with highs upper 20s. Northwest winds 5 to 10 mph. Wind chill values as low as 3 below morning.  
**Tonight:** Mostly clear. Cold with lows around 9 above. Northwest winds around 5 mph evening; light, variable.  
**Friday:** Partly sunny morning.

## THE MOUNTAINS

**Today:** Mostly sunny. Highs in the lower 20s. Northwest winds 15 to 20 mph with gusts up to 35 mph.  
**Tonight:** Mostly clear. Lows 2 to 8 above. Northwest winds 10 to 15 mph with gusts up to 25 mph until midnight; becoming light and variable.  
**Friday:** Mostly cloudy. Highs in the mid 30s. South winds around 10 mph.

## SUN AND MOON

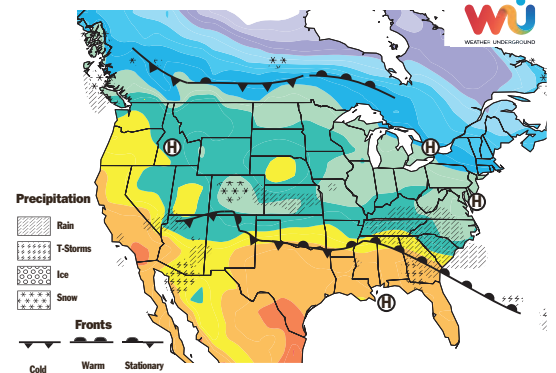
Today	Tomorrow
Sunrise: 6:58 a.m.	6:56 a.m.
Sunset: 7:03 p.m.	7:05 p.m.
Moonrise: 6:23 a.m.	6:58 a.m.
Moonset: 6:27 p.m.	7:43 p.m.

New Mar 20  
 First Quarter Mar 27  
 Full Apr 4  
 Last Quarter Apr 11

## YESTERDAY'S EXTREMES

High 26°	Bennington	Low 7°	Newport
Temperature over the past 24 hours	High: 24°, 3:23PM Low: 15°, 7:25AM Normal: 41°/23°	Last year: 35°/0° Rec. high: 76°, 2012 Rec. low: -7°, 1961	

Almanac data for Burlington is collected by the National Weather Service.



Yesterday extremes (48 contiguous) **Hi** 89° Cross City, FL **Lo** -16° Mount Washington

Low pressure and associated frontal boundaries will produce a good chance of rain and some thunderstorms from the Southeast to the southern Plains. Showers will be possible in the Southwest, as well.

## NATIONAL CITIES

City	Today			Tomorrow		
	Hi	Lo	W	Hi	Lo	W
Albuquerque	61	41	t	59	40	t
Anchorage	44	28	pc	36	29	pc
Atlanta	56	48	sh	63	48	sh
Atlanta City	43	26	s	39	30	sh
Boston	34	18	s	35	29	sn
Charleston, SC	58	53	sh	68	55	pc
Chicago	48	35	cd	55	29	pc
Concord	27	9	s	33	20	sn
Dallas-Ft. Worth	73	53	t	63	53	t
Denver	48	33	sn	65	42	s
Detroit	46	29	pc	50	24	pc
Hartford	36	16	s	34	26	sn
Honolulu	81	68	pc	81	69	pc
Indianapolis	50	38	r	54	33	pc
Jackson, Miss.	74	59	sh	77	55	sh
Kansas City	46	36	r	64	41	pc
Las Vegas	78	53	pc	80	55	pc
Los Angeles	75	58	f	76	59	f
Louisville	47	32	r	63	38	s
Louisville	85	68	pc	86	72	pc
Miami Beach	53	35	cd	57	26	pc
Minn. St. Paul	53	49	r	62	46	r
Nashville	78	63	pc	79	63	t
New Orleans	40	27	s	37	30	sn
New York City	59	43	t	63	49	cd
Oklahoma City	87	66	sh	85	65	pc
Orlando	81	62	t	81	62	pc
Phoenix						

City	Today			Tomorrow		
	Hi	Lo	W	Hi	Lo	W
Portland, ME	28	13	s	33	23	sn
Portland, OR	66	45	f	61	42	r
Providence, RI	34	17	s	34	27	sn
Richmond	52	35	pc	44	41	r
Salt Lake City	59	36	pc	67	37	pc
San Francisco	67	52	s	63	53	pc
Seattle	61	49	pc	60	43	r
St. Louis	51	40	f	62	42	pc
Washington, DC	51	34	cd	42	42	sn

## WORLD CITIES

City	Today			Tomorrow		
	Hi	Lo	W	Hi	Lo	W
Baghdad	82	55	s	84	51	s
Beijing	60	39	s	68	42	s
Cairo	71	53	s	71	53	s
Hong Kong	78	73	s	77	69	pc
London	53	37	pc	50	37	pc
Mogadishu	86	80	pc	86	78	s
Montreal	21	8	s	26	15	s
Moscow	50	26	pc	51	28	pc
Paris	60	41	pc	48	39	pc
Rio de Janeiro	86	71	t	86	71	t
Rome	62	46	s	64	48	s
Tokyo	64	48	f	67	48	s

sn=sunny, pc=partly cloudy, cd=cloudy, sh=showers, r=rain, t=thunderstorms, fl=flooding, sn=snow, i=ice, f=fog

# Prayers

Continued from Page 1C

Evers had applied to the then all-white University of Mississippi Law School, as a test case.

The funeral and march had struck some factions of blacks and whites as an opportunity for violent confrontation, White said.

For the most part, cooler heads prevailed.

White saw none of the minor outbreaks and arrests that took place further back in the procession, many blocks away.

Nearby, in an air-conditioned hotel, the atmosphere held a very different charge.

"We stayed where there was a convention of Rainbow Girls — some kind of upper-class, white-girl teenage thing," White said.

"They were having this party, running up and down the halls doing Rainbow Girl stuff, while out in the streets, the town was very close to having a riot, very close to real violence."

Over the next few days, White and his colleagues, wearing their black vestments and clerical collars, paid visits to the local, white Episcopal ministers.



One of Warner White's press clippings from Civil Rights marches: the Hattiesburg American on Jan. 22, 1964.

Those conversations, he remembers, were tense: parishioners in Jackson had conflicted,

even hostile reactions to church participation in civil rights issues. In subsequent trips to

Dixie, White witnessed — and sometimes prompted — other departures from the racial status quo.

In 1964, upon arrival in Hattiesburg, Miss., for a voter-registration drive, his group of ministers was

turned away from lodging by their ostensible host (a black man) because they were white: Their presence there would have served as a provocation to the white establishment.

"He took one look at us and refused," White said.

Caucasians, uneasy and wary of outsiders' interference, more typically glared.

"We had breakfast at a little diner — and the only friendly white face we saw, the whole time, was from the guy who ran the place."

Later, in Montgomery, Ala., White and other clergy staged a kneel-in on the steps of the capitol building, eyeball-to-eyeball with a phalanx of state troopers.

"I'm sure they were hostile," White said. "That was quite clear. But in one respect they were pretty disciplined, the ones we dealt with. It wasn't like the stuff you see about Selma. I never ran into that kind of violence."

"I'm sure it could have happened. I just never experienced it. I'm glad I didn't. I didn't want to get hit with a water hose or a club. I wasn't looking for that."



# Prayers

Continued from Page 2C

## Lessons in skin tone

White gained a first-hand appreciation for racial tension, growing up in St. Louis in the late 1930s.

A formative memory: "I must have been 12 or 13 at the time," he said. "There used to be a cartoon with black children in it. Our maid, Vallee, was working, and I was reading this cartoon."

"I thought it was funny," he continued. "I showed it to her and she bawled me out. She got very angry. I was laughing because it was funny—but she didn't see it that way."

"All of a sudden, a light bulb went off: 'Oh gee. There's something here that hurts her.' That's how it started."

The White family moved to Cleveland; the young Warner attended what he called "a very tough school" in the east side of the city.

"It was my first experience in going to school with black kids," he said. "It just seemed strange, that's all."

"But I remember on the streetcars being a little frightened. If I got on a streetcar that was mostly black, here I am: this little kid."

## How to provoke

White's familiarity with African American culture continued in Chicago, where he moved in 1948.



Warner White of Burlington discusses his trips to Mississippi and Alabama, as part of the Civil Rights struggle in the 1960's.

GLENN RUSSELL/FREE PRESS

Then, White said, in the early 1960s, civil rights organizations, sprang up, virtually overnight. They spanned a broad political spectrum, many of them seemingly at odds with one another.

He became a dues-paying member of the Episcopal Society for Cultural

and Racial Unity and "somewhere along the line" became the president of the Chicago chapter.

From University of Chicago students, White learned strategies and tactics of nonviolent resistance.

"They taught us what to do if we were attacked,

how to protect ourselves nonviolently; what to do if arrested."

Step one: "You don't resist arrest. What you do is go limp, then they haul you away."

Also: "If you're being attacked, you get in the fetal position to protect yourself down on the ground."

Even if someone is kicking you with their boots, that way, there is some protection.

"You see, you are trying to provoke," White continued. "There is no question about that. But you want to make sure the violence comes from them, not from you."

"So, you simply hold up the sign or march or whatever, and you can count on people to overreact to that," he said. "I saw it over and over again. We just march, and they overreact, and that wins the battle. It was a wonderful experience for us — and it worked."

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GLENN RUSSELL/FREE PRESS  
A moment from Warner White's work in the Civil Rights movement: the Hattiesburg American on Wednesday, January 22, 1964.

**North of the border**

White's band of clergy- men were never attacked. Did his skin color offer him protection?

"Oh no — I don't think so, at all," he said. "Lots of white people were attacked. Heavens: look at the number of murders there were back then."

Was he ever fearful for his safety?

"Yes, absolutely."

Where was that?

"Back in Chicago," White answered. "That's

where I met the real hostility from whites.

"I can't remember being frightened in the South. I'm not saying I shouldn't have been. And I'm not saying there wasn't tension: There was, plenty of it.

"But up North is where I was frightened that I'd get hurt.

"In this particular, white, working-class neighborhood: I'll tell you if I've ever seen hatred in anyone's eyes, it was there and then," White said.

Over the years, he and his parish kept pushing for racial equality.

"It was exciting, among other things," White said. "There were a lot of exciting things in those years, believe me — that wasn't the only one."

Protests, after all, were building against U.S. involvement in Vietnam.

Contact Joel Banner Baird at 802-660-1843 or joelbaird@Free-PressMedia.com. Follow him on Twitter at www.twitter.com/vtgoingup.

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