

HOWARD ZINN

Introduction by CORNEL WEST

"Howard Zinn is a man that will inspire you among the best, respected, and most readable of teachers. His teaching has made me a better teacher and learner." —ALBERT EINSTEIN

OFF

voice

HOWARD
ZINN

on
race

Introduction by Cornel West

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I don't think it would be hard to imagine what King would be saying to us today. I think he would be protesting the war policies and militarism of this administration just as he protested the policies of the Johnson Administration. I think he would be demanding that the great wealth of this country not be used for war or militarism, but that the wealth of this country be used to give everybody, everybody, the things that they need to enjoy life including absolutely free healthcare for everybody. I think he would be demanding of the politicians and asking us to demand of the politicians not the puny reforms we see bandying about Congress, but fundamental change.

—Howard Zinn, January 21, 2010, upon receiving the New York University Martin Luther King, Jr. Humanitarian Award

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Introduction

by Cornel West

Howard Zinn was one of the greatest democratic intellectuals in the history of the U.S. Empire. He had a deep love for everyday people and a profound commitment to enhancing their plight. Hence, he looked at history and society through the lens of those Frantz Fanon called the wretched of the earth—poor and working people, women, gays and lesbians, indigenous people, Latinos, Asians, Jews, Arabs, and especially Black people. In fact, Howard Zinn was one of the few great non-black intellectuals to focus so intensely and insightfully on the suffering and resistance of Black people in the making of the U.S. experiment in democracy and imperial rule. Among his fellow historians, only Eric Foner and David Brion Davis—the two greatest living U.S. historians—share his focus. Yet beyond even Foner and Davis, Zinn was an activist intellectual who moved smoothly from the library to the street, from the office to the jail, from the lecture room to the political rally. Zinn had more influence and impact on the public than any other intellectual of his generation. The unique fusion of his committed scholarship, political courage, and charismatic personality left indelible impressions and unforgettable imprints on all of us. My love and respect for Brother Howard was immeasurable. And as a free Black man who tries to link the life of the mind to the struggle for freedom, I always knew that Brother Howard was there—trustworthy, dependable, and reliable in our uphill battle for justice.

Howard Zinn was our grand long-distance runner alongside the poor and working people of the world. How sweet it is to remember his tender smile, subtle mind, tough grit, and loving heart by keeping his precious legacy alive. These rich and powerful writings on race remind us that in the age of Obama the U.S. Empire still hides and conceals forms of institutional and structural racism that permeate our schools, prisons, workplace, films, TVs and iPods. Let us never allow the prophetic voice of Howard Zinn to be silenced—as the U.S. government and FBI preferred!

—Cornel West

Princeton, February 2011

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The Southern Mystique (1963)

*I did not deliberately seek employment in a black college. I was only vaguely aware that such an institution existed when, in 1956, about to get my doctorate at Columbia University, I was introduced to the president of Spelman College, a college for African-American women in Atlanta, Georgia. He offered me a tempting job—chair of Spelman’s department of history and social science. My wife and I, with our young son and daughter, spent the next seven years living in Atlanta’s black community, certainly the most interesting seven years of my life. I soon became involved, along with my students, in what came to be known affectionately as “the movement.” I did not see how I could teach about liberty and democracy in the classroom and remain silent about their absence outside the classroom. I became both participant in and chronicler of the growing conflict between the old Southern order of racial segregation, and the increasingly vocal demands for freedom and equality by Southern blacks. Some long-held notions about the South, white people and black people, were powerfully challenged by what I observed. I sent an article to Harper’s Magazine, and to my surprise they accepted it. It was my first published article, and later became the basis for an essay I wrote for *The American Scholar* in the winter issue, 1963-64, and as the introductory chapter in my book *The Southern Mystique* (Alfred Knopf, 1964).*

Do I stand by everything I wrote thirty years ago about the race question in the United States? That would mean I have learned nothing from all these years of turmoil. I undoubtedly would not write exactly the same way today. But I suppose I believe in the long-run validity of what I say in this essay, and so I unashamedly reproduce it here.

It has occurred to me only recently that perhaps the most striking development in the South is not that the process of desegregation is under way, but that the mystique with which Americans have always surrounded the South is beginning to vanish.

Driving into Atlanta in a heavy rain one hot August night six and a half years ago, my wife and two small children waking up to watch the shimmering wet

lights on Ponce de Leon Avenue, I was as immersed in this mystique as anyone else. For the last full day of driving, the talk and the look of people were different. The trees and fields seemed different. The air itself smelled different. This was the mysterious and terrible South, the Deep South, soaked in blood and history, of which Faulkner wrote—and Margaret Mitchell, and Wilbur J. Cash. White Atlanta had been ravaged and still knew it. Negroes had been slaves and still remembered it. Northerners were strangers, no matter how long they stayed, and would never forget it.

There was something about Atlanta, about Georgia, the Carolinas, that marked them off as with a giant cleaver from the rest of the nation: the sun was hotter, the soil was redder, the people blacker and whiter, the air sweeter, heavier. But beyond the physical, beyond the strange look and smell of this country, was something more that went back to cotton and slavery, stretching into history as far as anyone could remember—an invisible mist over the entire Deep South, distorting justice, blurring perspective, and, most of all, indissoluble by reason.

It is six and a half years later. I have lived these years inside what is often thought to be the womb of the South's mystery: the Negro community of the Deep South. My time has been spent mostly with the remarkable young women in my classes at Spelman; but also with the earnest young men across the street at Morehouse, with the strangely mixed faculties of the Negro colleges (the white and the dark, the silent and the angry, the conservative and the radical), with the black bourgeoisie of college presidents and business executives, with the poor Negro families in frame houses across the street and their children playing with ours on the campus grass. From this, I have been able to wander out into the glare of the white South, or cross into those tiny circles of shadow, out of sight, where people of several colors meet and touch as human beings, inside the tranquil eye of the hurricane.

The Southern mystique hovered nearby even on yellow spring afternoons when we talked quietly to one another in the classroom. At times it grew suddenly dense, fierce, asphyxiating. My students and I were ordered out of the gallery of the Georgia General Assembly, the Speaker of the House shouting hoarsely at us. One nightmarish winter evening, I was arrested and put behind bars. Hundreds of us marched one day toward the State Capitol where helmeted soldiers with rifles and gas masks waited. A dozen of us "sat in" at a department store cafeteria, silent as the manager dimmed the lights, closed the counter and ordered chairs piled on top of tables all around. I drove four hours south to the Black Belt country of Albany, Georgia, to call through a barbed wire fence surrounding the County Jail to a student of mine who was invisible beyond a wire mesh window. It was in Albany also that I sat in the office of the Sheriff of

Dougherty County who a month before had given a bloody beating with a cane to a young Negro lawyer. And nowhere was the mystique so real, so enveloping, as on a dirt road in the dusk, deep in the cotton and peanut land of Lee County, Georgia, where justice and reason had never been, and where the night before bullets had ripped into a farm house belonging to Negro farmer James Mays and exploded around the heads of sleeping children.

And yet, I can say now after living intensely in the deep South in exactly those six years when the South itself has lived most intensely, that the mystique is dissolving, for me, and for others. The South is still the most terrible place in America. Because it is, it is filled with heroes. The South is monstrous and marvelous at the same time. Every cliché ever uttered about the South, every stereotype attached to its people, white and Negro, is true; a thousand other characteristics, complex and subtle, are also true. The South has not lost its fascination. But it is no longer mysterious. And I want to explain this by talking about those two groups who have been at the center of this mystery, the whites and the Negroes of the Deep South.

Although the darkness of the Negro physically suggests mystery, it is the white Southerner, oddly enough, who has been presented as the great national enigma. This, despite the whiteness of his skin, against which flaws and blemishes show up more easily, a whiteness unsullied by that admixture of Slavic and Latin blood found in the North, and kept homogeneous by the simple expedient of tossing over the wall in the night all offspring from black-white sexual encounter. The mystery of the white Southerner comes from a trait that he is presumed to possess in quantity and quality sharply distinct from everyone else. That trait is race prejudice.

Other white people, it is acknowledged, are color-biased. There is considered to be, however, something special about the quality of the white Southerner's prejudice. The Yankee is rather businesslike in his matter-of-fact exclusion of the Negro from certain spheres of ordinary living. The British imperialist was haughty and sure of himself. But the violence, the passion, the murderous quality of the white Southerner's feeling against the Negro has become a canon of American thought deep in our consciousness and our literature (and of European literature; see Sartre's *La Putain respectueuse*). And what is more significant, while the outward signs of this prejudice are clear enough, at its core, at the *why* of this crazy feeling, is a mystery.

When reporter John Bartlow Martin wrote, right after the Supreme Court decision, *The Deep South Says "Never,"* central to the book's thesis was the implication of some ineradicable mystical hatred, so deep and so invisible in the white Southerner, that no blasts of social change could touch it. When I had

lived a year or so in the Deep South, talking to and living next door to the same white people described by the author of that book, I began to suspect he was wrong. Six years later, I knew he was. Prejudice, discrimination, race hatred are real problems, to the point of viciousness, even murder. But their mystery, for those who will look hard, is gone.

I will not tangle with *cause*, because once you acknowledge *cause* as the core of a problem, you have built something into it that not only baffles people, but, worse, immobilizes them. Causation is not merely complex—it may be impossible of solution (as some of the new philosophers say), one of those metaphysical conundrums created by our own disposition to set verbal obstacles between ourselves and reality. Why not ignore cause as a general philosophical problem and concentrate on *result*? The point is devilishly, irreverently simple: if you can get a desired result, the mystery is gone. Stop fumbling with the *cause* of prejudice except for those aspects on which we can operate. A physicist may still not know what really is behind the transformation of matter into energy, but if he has figured out how to release this energy, his achievement is stupendous.

Atlanta is in the Deep South. Atlanta has as many crackpots, KKK sympathizers, country wool-hats, white supremacists, barbershop lynchers, vicious policemen, as any Southern city. If the deep South said “Never,” Atlanta, too, said “Never.” In 1958 it was tightly segregated. By 1963: the buses had desegregated; so had the public libraries, the rail and bus terminals, a number of theaters and restaurants downtown, the department store cafeterias, the opera, the municipal auditorium, the legitimate theater, the public schools, the colleges (public and private), several hotels, the plainclothes squad of the Police Department, the Fire Department, the baseball team, the tennis courts, the parks, the golf courses, the Chamber of Commerce, several professional organizations, the county committee of the Democratic Party and even the Senate of the Georgia General Assembly!

Now that it is all done, there are obvious reasons, which can be advanced with great casualness: a flexible city administration, a layer of Negro intellectuals, a determined student movement, a band of white liberals giving cosmopolitan salting to the country-style Talmadge ham. But none of this takes account of the fact that all the above forces are a minority of the population, that most of Atlanta’s population, the overwhelming majority of its 350,000 white people, still consider Negroes inferior, and prefer a segregated society, and that these people were numerous enough to have prevented most of the change—by riot, by election, by boycott—if *they cared enough*. They stood by passively and

accepted, with the puniest of resistance, a series of fundamental changes in the sociolegal structure of the city.

There is, then, a key to the traditionally mysterious vault of prejudice locked inside the mind of the white Southerner. He cares, but not enough. Or, to put it another way, while he cares about segregation, there are things he cares about more. The white Southerner has a hierarchy of desires, in which many other things are rated higher than segregation: monetary profit, political power, staying out of jail, the approval of one's immediate peers, conforming to the dominant decision of the community. Desegregation has come in varying degrees, to Atlanta and a hundred other places in the Deep South, in the face of persistent anti-Negro feelings in the community, simply because one or another of these desires, which stand higher in the Southerner's value-scheme, was threatened if he did not surrender.

Except as an academic exercise, there is no need then to probe the fog that inescapably shrouds the philosophical question of causation in race prejudice. What needs to be done is to decide for each group of whites in the community which value is more important and to plan a web of multiple tactics—negotiation, boycott, lawsuit, voting, demonstration—that will effectively appeal to these priorities. In a rough semiconscious way, the actions of the federal courts and of Negro leaders in the South have aimed at this; a more deliberate use of the hierarchy-of-value concept would bring even more dramatic results.

The white man in the South is subject to the same simplicities and the same complexities that surround the human species of any color any place; he has certain biological needs, which he will try to satisfy whichever way he can; on top of this he has other wants which he has learned from his culture—and because these often conflict with one another he has an unconscious set of priorities that enables him to make choices. He is subject to economic pressure and ambition. Also, if Jungian theory is correct and the notions of modern role psychology valid (and I believe they are), he needs approval from certain people around him, and seeks to play out the role society has cast him in. Beyond all this, as beyond all the frontiers of human knowledge, there is mystery in the behavior of the human animal. But it's time to clear from our minds that artificial and special mystique, so firmly attached to the Southern white, that has too long served as a rationale for pessimism and inaction.

But what of the black man—or woman? There is a strange and damnable unanimity of segregationists, white liberals and Negroes on one fervent belief—the mystery of *négritude*—the irreducible kernel, after all sociological peelings, of race difference. The segregationist (White Citizen or Black Muslim) shouts this in all directions. The white liberal is subtle, sophisticated and ingenious in

the various ways he can express this—he sweetens it with sympathy or admiration or affection—he delights in the sheer thrill of a mystery. He cherishes it as a secret shared with his fellow liberals: “Yes, yes—we can never know what it is to be a Negro. No, no—they will never trust a white man, and we can’t blame them.” The Negro, robbed of other protection, clings to it, plays with it, turns it to his advantage when he can. Even the most perceptive of his literary leaders (Baldwin, Ellison) use it in cunning, or in pride. And all of them, white liberal and Negro intellectual, fondle it, nurture it as men, having subdued a forest fire, might play with the last flames, too fascinated when in the midst of peril, to put them out for good.

Physical difference is so gross a stimulus to human beings, cursed as they are by the gift of vision, that once it is latched onto as explanation for difference in personality, intelligence, demeanor, it is terribly difficult to put aside. It becomes an easy substitute for the immensely difficult job of explaining personal and social behavior. Conservatives use it openly; liberals secretly, even unknowingly. It seems to be the hardest thing in the world to convince ourselves that once we’ve noted skin color, facial features and hair texture, we have exhausted the subject of race—that everything beyond that is in our heads, put there by others and kept there by ourselves, and all the brutal material consequences of centuries, from lynching to patronizing friendship, were spun from an original thread of falsehood.

The most vicious thing about segregation—more deadly than its immediate denial of certain goods and services—is its perpetuation of the mystery of racial difference. Because there is a magical and omnipotent dispeller of the mystery; it is *contact*. Contact—but it must be massive, unlike those “integrated” situations in the North, and it must be equal, thus excluding maid-lady relationships of the South—destroys the man-made link between physical difference and behavior explanation. Race consciousness is hollow, its formidable-looking exterior is membrane-thin and is worn away by simple acts of touch, the touching of human beings in contact that is massive, equal and prolonged. The brightness of the physical difference impression is relative; it stands out in that darkness created by segregated living, and is quickly lost in the galaxy of sense impressions that come from being with a person day-in, day-out.

In our country, the kind of contact that rubs away race consciousness is possible only in rare places, and intermittently. But it exists, in scattered underground pockets of resistance to the norm. One of them is the Negro college, where white people can become so immersed in a Negro environment that they are oblivious, at least temporarily, of race. The fact that they live on an island, against which waves of prejudice roll from time to time, means that they

slide back and forth from over-consciousness on some days to a blissful racial amnesia on others.

A white student, after several months living, eating, studying, playing in a totally Negro college environment, visited a nearby white college and returned saying, "How pallid they all seemed—all those white faces and sharp noses!" This is a startling example of race consciousness in reverse, but it is encouraging to see how quickly one can change the temper of racial awareness by an inundation of sense experiences.

Once the superficiality of the physical is penetrated and seen for what it is, the puzzle of race loses itself in whatever puzzle there is to human behavior in general. Once you begin to look, in human clash, for explanations other than race, they suddenly become visible, and even where they remain out of sight, it is comforting to know that these nonracial explanations exist, as disease began to lose its eeriness with the discovery of bacteria, although the specific problem of identifying each bacterial group remained.

So long as evil exists—and it exists in poisonous heaps, South and North—the raw material for mystery is here. We can make the most—if we want to—of white mobs in Oxford, mass Negro indignation in Albany, blazing churches in Birmingham, gunfire on rural porches, and the sheer wonder of blackness and whiteness. But the specialness of the Southern mystique vanishes when one sees that whites and Negroes behave only like human beings, that the South is but a distorted mirror image of the North, and that we are powerful enough today, and free enough—to retain only as much of the past as we want. We are all magicians. We created the mystery of the South, and we can dissolve it.

A Quiet Case of Social Change (1959)

*The history of that time usually records the dramatic moments—the Montgomery bus boycott, the sit-ins, the Freedom Rides, the marches in Birmingham. What is often omitted is what happened more quietly in between the great events, and it is one of those historical moments I wanted to record in this piece, which appeared in the NAACP publication *The Crisis* in October of 1959. I was the faculty adviser to Spelman College’s Social Science Club, which undertook as a project the desegregation of the Atlanta public libraries. I appear in this piece anonymously as “a representative of Spelman’s Social Science Club.”*

On the afternoon of May 22, 1959, Dr. Irene Dobbs Jackson, a professor of French at Spelman College, accompanied by a young white faculty wife from Spelman, walked through the electrically operated door of the marbled and modern Carnegie Library in downtown Atlanta, went to the front desk, and filled out a membership application. She turned it in, and the slim girl behind the desk handed her a new membership card. The girl’s voice was calm, but her hand trembled slightly, perhaps because Dr. Jackson was the first Negro ever to receive a membership card at a “white” library in Atlanta.

At the same moment, on the second floor of the library, violinist and music professor Earl Sanders, a bespectacled, dark-skinned young man, whose outbursts of good humor were a counterpoint to a powerful indignation, was thumbing through stacks of records to find some chamber music he wanted. Exactly three weeks before, while looking at records in the same room, he had been asked to leave. Now, as he approached the check-out desk, the attractive girl sitting there noted his selections with a friendly smile, and he walked out.

The desegregation of the public library system in the city of Atlanta took place quietly. Not until after the fact did the newspapers announce to the community that the main library and its fourteen branches, formerly reserved for whites, were now open to all. Atlanta Negroes, as word spread slowly among them, were surprised and gratified. There had been no lawsuit, no headlines, no violence. To explain the event, we need to examine a number of intertwining threads which knotted together in May of 1959, and which when unraveled,

afford a glimpse into the subsurface mechanics of peaceful, purposeful social change.

A handful of Spelman students and faculty members, conscious of the unplanned and violent cataclysms that have shaken the world in this century, had been talking about the idea of deliberate social change. In a seminar on the philosophy of history, we explored two approaches which have dominated intellectual speculation: first, the notion that some great force, inscrutable like God, or ascertainable like economic necessity, is working behind the scenes of the human drama; and second, the more recent empiricist attempt to attack problems piecemeal by scientific scrutiny of individual phenomena rather than by insight into some universal explanation. We found ourselves critical of both these approaches, because they implied a passivity on the part of the intellectual, whose eye was at the telescope or the microscope but whose hands were rather idle.

More provocative than these ideas was one expressed by Charles Frankel in *The Case for Modern Man*: man is not a feeble creature pecking with a tackhammer at an impenetrable steel fence, but a free and mighty agent who, while studying the determinants of social change, can become a chief determinant himself. The potency of this idea actually has already affected some of the traditional schools of thought: the church fosters more and more activists for social reform; and the Marxists have shifted the emphasis from “inevitability” and the strength of “material forces” to the will and power of the Communist Party. Perhaps the atom-splitting of scientists has invested both communists and clerics with a new sense of command.

In our discussions at Spelman we played with the notion that man can coolly and deliberately locate a particular problem, survey the forces standing in the way of a solution, and either skillfully navigate around obstacles or, when the balance of power is just right, bowl them over. Translated into action and applied on a very modest scale, this kind of thinking played a part in the peaceful desegregation of the Atlanta public-library system, which opened to 150,000 Negroes of that city a wealth of books, paintings, and recorded music.

My students were at that time feeling uncomfortable about confining their studies to books while the South was being shaken by ideological and political upheaval. Why not select, out of the mass of events in the integration crisis, a limited field of combat where the enemy was weak and the possibility of gaining allies strong, and set out deliberately to occupy a tiny bit of territory? Why not plan and carry through to victory a minor skirmish in the big battle, through purposeful and rational action? The tactics, not quite customary for young women from a decorous and conservative Negro college, were to be those of

guerrilla warfare.

The library system was singled out for attention because it was a situation small enough to be handled by our little group, yet significant in its importance for the entire community. The relationship of forces seemed favorable. Atlanta's city administration, which supervised the libraries, had been showing more flexibility as it watched the growing Negro vote. The policy of separate libraries was not written into law; it was simply an administrative rule of the library's Board of Trustees, and it could be changed by action of the Board, on which the Mayor was an important influence. At that time, various groups, particularly the interracial American Veterans Committee, had tried to get the Mayor to act.

Not the least of the factors we considered was that action to desegregate the Atlanta library system represented a genuine need of students and faculty in the Atlanta University Center and of the city's Negro community. Of the three city libraries built especially for Negroes, one was a newly erected showplace, part of the postwar rash of attempts to introduce a bit more equality into the "separate-but-equal" premise of Southern life. But the Carnegie Library had no match in the Negro community. Built in downtown Atlanta some thirty years before, it housed an impressive collection of books in all categories, as well as paintings and recordings, which were available for loan. The "for whites only" label on the world's great literature was not only a moral challenge but a practical obstacle to learning.

As a first step, it was decided that students and Negro faculty, heretofore reluctant in the face of certain rejection, should begin visiting the Carnegie Library whenever they needed books unavailable elsewhere. They expected to be rebuffed. But the visits would continue. So, the advance guard of the gradually increasing stream of Negro visitors began passing through the electric-eye entrance to the Carnegie Library. It was accidental irony that the first book sought in this campaign was John Locke's *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. The Spelman student who requested this was given the same treatment that subsequent Negro visitors were to receive: a courteous query as to whether the Negro branch had been tried, and then assurance that the book would be sent to the Negro branch and made available there. When a student said the book was needed immediately, she was told it could be studied right there in the library, in a special room downstairs, or in the office behind the main desk—anywhere, so long as there would be no contact with the white patrons.

Here was a typical Southern paradox: across the street from the library, in one of Atlanta's leading department stores, Negroes and whites could brush by each other at the counters, try on the same clothes, and, thanks to the irresistible impetus of the profit motive, be treated as near-equals. But nonsense has been

uttered with aplomb for a long time in the South, and no one proved better at it than degree-encrusted library officials. Spelman and Morehouse College students visiting the Carnegie Library accepted whatever service was offered them, and left. Their purpose was simply to make the library aware that Negroes were in need of its facilities.

The Atlanta Council on Human Relations, meanwhile, had been working on the problem. This newly formed interracial group was headed by a white Unitarian minister, Edward Cahill, and the dynamic Whitney Young, then Dean of the Atlanta University School of Social Work. They began a sixteen-month campaign of persistent effort to convince the Library Board of Trustees, through detailed research and rational argument, that Atlanta libraries should be open to all. They collected statistics, made special maps, and referred the Library Director pointedly to the American Library Association's Bill of Rights, which says that "as a responsibility of Library service there should be no discrimination based on race or nationality." The Library Board remained unmoved, and the Council on Human Relations wearily announced this fact in February of 1959: "The Council urges all groups and individuals in the city to take such action as they deem appropriate to persuade the Library Board to desegregate the tax-supported facilities of the public library system."

With this, Spelman and Morehouse College students stepped up their visits to the Carnegie Library. In March, I paid a visit to the Director of the Atlanta Library systems, to probe the prospects for desegregation. He was discouraging. Of course, he assured me, the policy was not his desire, but a rule upheld by the Board which he was bound to enforce. No, he could not take the initiative in making a change. If Negroes began to use the library there would probably be violence. If this was his fear, I suggested, why not desegregate quietly, since there would otherwise be a lawsuit and the change would come anyway, with more publicity.

In the event of a court order to desegregate, the Director said matter-of-factly, he would close the libraries, as Governor Faubus had closed schools in Little Rock, to prevent violence. Surely, I said, white people who use your library would not riot over the use of the library by a few Negroes. You don't know these folks, he replied. The interview was over.

The library director's argument was the same one advanced so often in the South on the eve of change: there will be trouble. But in 90 percent of the cases where desegregation had already taken place in the South (though one would never know this from reading newspaper headlines), there had been no violent reaction at all, only quiet if grudging acceptance. And although there is never any way of guaranteeing an absence of trouble, the probabilities in a case like

this were on the side of peaceful change. We proceeded therefore to prepare a suit in federal court, and Whitney Young and I took the responsibility for getting plaintiffs, money, and legal help.

Just a few months earlier, the federal courts in Atlanta had given two favorable decisions, one desegregating the city's transit system, the other barring discrimination on grounds of race in the admissions policy of the University of Georgia. Several years before, a lawsuit had forced the municipal golf courses at Atlanta to admit Negroes. And in one Virginia county the mere threat of a lawsuit had opened up libraries to Negroes.

Our first job was to find plaintiffs, and this was not easy. A number of students were anxious to file suit, but they were discouraged by the complications of obtaining parental consent and of meeting other technical requirements, such as residence. Many Negroes were subject to economic reprisal if they dared participate in court action. I began to appreciate the work of the NAACP in handling lawsuits when I saw how difficult it was to get plaintiffs, something I had always assumed was no problem. But finally, two people came forward.

One was a young minister named Otis Moss, who was doing advanced study in theology and had often suffered from the inadequacy of the library facilities available to him. Moss's wife was a student in my American History course, articulate and intelligent. Moss himself, slim and very quiet, hardly seemed a social activist. (I began to make out the depth of the man only a year later at a mass protest meeting in Atlanta when the apparently shy Reverend Moss lifted the crowd to a state of high emotion with a magnificent speech.)

The other plaintiff was Irene Dobbs Jackson, Professor of French at Spelman College, a friend and colleague, who said quietly as we sat having coffee in the Snack Shop on the campus, "It's what my husband would be doing if he were alive." Irene Jackson's rock-like strength had been put to its most severe test when her husband, a prominent Atlanta minister, died, leaving her with six growing children. She continued their education somehow, took four of them to France with her, where she studied for several years and received her doctorate at the University of Toulouse. Dr. Jackson came from a well-known Atlanta family. Her sister, Mattiwilda Dobbs, a Spelman college graduate, became famous because she was the first Negro to sing a starring role with the Metropolitan Opera company. Her father, John Wesley Dobbs, was one of Atlanta's most distinguished citizens, a militant battler for equal rights and a great orator in the old Southern tradition. I heard him keep a crowd of thousands in an uproar one night at the Wheat Street Baptist Church. "My Mattiwilda was asked to sing here in Atlanta," he thundered at one point, "but she said, 'No sir!

Not while my daddy has to sit in the balcony!’ ” Irene Dobbs Jackson told me: “Why, I’ve passed by the Carnegie Library a hundred times, and always wanted to go in. I think it’s time.”

Student visits to the Carnegie Library were now stepped up. City officials were apparently becoming uneasy, because a high municipal officeholder telephoned an Atlanta University administrator to plead that legal action be held up until the adjournment of the state legislature, which was in constant battle with the city administration.

What happened shortly after this, on May 19, 1959, I will quote from the notes I made on that day:

TUESDAY, MAY 10TH: made an appointment to see Whitney Young at 2 p.m., to discuss with him next moves in suit to desegregate library system. Whitney told of an interesting development which might change things. A member of the Library Board had called him that morning, said he was disturbed at hearing that lawsuit was pending on library situation, wanted very much to avoid lawsuit. Whitney told him there was long history of conferences, requests, etc., and we were going ahead, and as a matter of fact had appointment at 2 p.m. with the parties involved in the suit to discuss pending action. The Board member said don't do anything, call me at 2 p.m. before talking to parties involved, and meanwhile will try to get lunch meeting of Board together.

We talked a few minutes, then the Board member called. Library Board had just met at Atlanta Athletic Club. Whole board was there. Mayor was there. Chief of Police, City Attorney there. Library Director was there. Decision was to change policy. Mayor told the Board they had been foolish long enough. The board member told Whitney hold off a few days, just long enough to allow Director to inform staff of change.

Whitney and I agreed that we would give them Wednesday and Thursday, test it out Friday and for a week thereafter. Agreed I would go with Mrs. Jackson to Carnegie Library Friday.

So it was that Friday, May 22, 1959, four of us rode downtown to the Carnegie Library: Dr. Irene Jackson, Professor Earl Sanders, myself, and Pat West, the charming and spirited Alabama-born wife of a Spelman philosophy professor. Irene Jackson joined the library, and Earl Sanders took out his long-sought records. Later that week two Spelman students and one Morehouse student walked into a “white” branch library on Peachtree Street and gave it its initiation.

As predicted by all groups who had asked integration, the desegregation decision caused no great commotion. Not until five days after the Board action did the newspapers carry the story, and by then it was an accomplished fact. The library director received a few angry letters, Dr. Jackson was kept wake one night by nasty telephone calls: “You that integratin’ nigger?” “This is the KKK.” And as she sat at the library table reading, that first day, a man came by and slammed his books down hard on the table in voiceless protest. But the general reaction was an enormous silence. One white Atlantan said in a letter he sent to the *Atlanta Constitution* that he had lived in Atlanta all his life and never knew the libraries were segregated, and he felt ashamed.

At a press conference a few days later, Georgia Governor Ernest Vandiver predicted that voluntary segregation would continue at the library because integration “does not represent the thinking or the wishes of the vast rank and file of colored citizens who would prefer to use their own library facilities.” He turned out to be wrong, for the Carnegie Library, in the several years since it was integrated, has been used constantly by Negroes, without any trouble from

whites. Mayor William Hartsfield turned out to be a better prophet than the Governor, when he told reporters: "A public library is a symbol of literacy, education, and cultural progress. It does not attract troublemakers."

In the library episode, a number of our hypotheses were underlined: Negroes acted and whites reacted. The reaction of the whites was consistent with their particular value-schemes. The Mayor, dependent on Negro votes for election, saw a gain in popularity among Negroes which would not be offset by white disaffection, for the library was not, by its nature, an emotional issue; its users were not likely to be rabid on the race issue. Even if the library users were not delighted at the idea of Negroes using "their" library, they were not so unhappy as to cramp their own needs by staying away or by creating a scene in the genteel atmosphere of the reading room. The library Board did not gain any political advantage by changing its policy; but it also would not have gained anything by battling with the Mayor, whose favor it wanted. And behind all this was the impending lawsuit, which would undoubtedly result in a court desegregation order, with attendant publicity. So the choice was not between segregation and desegregation but between quiet and noisy desegregation. As for the library employees, like most employees, their supreme value was keeping their jobs; so, they were likely to carry out policy as directed from above, no matter what it was, and whatever their personal wishes.

This analysis of the advantages that were weighed does not take account of the element of genuine idealism present in the Mayor, in some Library Board members, in some library employees. But such idealism unfortunately is rarely preponderant enough to change a situation where one value clearly outweighs another. It can be important in circumstances where the advantages are so evenly balanced that even the featherweight of social conviction may tip the decision-making scales. And for a small number of radical prime movers, idealism has become their greatest interest; it serves thus as an igniting spark for the self-interest of the mass.

Finishing School for Pickets (1960)

I was on the faculty of Spelman College in Atlanta, Georgia, for seven years, from 1956 to 1963, and was lucky enough to live in a black Southern community in the midst of the Civil Rights revolution. The sit-ins of February 1960, in Greensboro, North Carolina spread quickly through the South, and in May, the students of Spelman and Morehouse and other colleges in the Atlanta University Center quietly moved into ten public places downtown—historically segregated. They refused to leave, were arrested, and nothing was the same in Atlanta after that. The “young lady” who put up the dormitory notice was Marian Wright, later Marian Wright Edelman, founder of the Children’s Defense Fund in Washington, D. C. Another of my students at Spelman was Alice Walker, for whom even the changed Spelman did not change enough. She left a year after I was fired by the college president for “insubordination.” I had supported the Spelman students not only in their actions in the city, but in their rebellion against the old order on campus. In this article, which appeared in The Nation August 6, 1960, I try to convey what was happening to Spelman and that old order.

ATLANTA, GEORGIA.

One quiet afternoon some weeks ago, with the dogwood on the Spelman College campus newly bloomed and the grass close-cropped and fragrant, an attractive, tawny-skinned girl crossed the lawn to her dormitory to put a notice on the bulletin board. It read: Young Ladies Who Can Picket Please Sign Below.

The notice revealed, in its own quaint language, that within the dramatic revolt of Negro college students in the South today another phenomenon has been developing. This is the upsurge of the young, educated Negro woman against the generations-old advice of her elders: be nice, be well-mannered and ladylike, don’t speak loudly, and don’t get into trouble. On the campus of the nation’s leading college for Negro young women—pious, sedate, encrusted with the traditions of gentility and moderation—these exhortations, for the first time, are being firmly rejected.

Spelman College girls are still “nice,” but not enough to keep them from

walking up and down, carrying picket signs, in front of two supermarkets in the heart of Atlanta. They are well-mannered, but this is somewhat tempered by a recent declaration that they will use every method short of violence to end segregation. As for staying out of trouble, they were doing fine until this spring, when fourteen of them were arrested and jailed by Atlanta police. The staid New England women missionaries who helped found Spelman College back in the 1880s would probably be distressed at this turn of events, and present-day conservatives in the administration and faculty are rather upset. But respectability is no longer respectable among young Negro women attending college today.

“You can always tell a Spelman girl,” alumni and friends of the college have boasted for years. The “Spelman girl” walked gracefully, talked properly, went to church every Sunday, poured tea elegantly and, in general, had all the attributes of the product of a fine finishing school. If intellect and talent and social consciousness happened to develop also, they were, to an alarming extent, by-products.

This is changing. It would be an exaggeration to say: “You can always tell a Spelman girl—she’s under arrest.” But the statement has a measure of truth. Spelman girls have participated strongly in all of the major actions undertaken by students of the Atlanta University Center in recent months. They have also added a few touches of their own and made white Atlanta, long proud that its nice Negro college girls were staying “in their place,” take startled notice. A few weeks ago a Spelman student, riding downtown on the bus, took a seat up front. (This is still a daring maneuver, for in spite of a court decision desegregating the buses, most Negroes stay in the rear.) The bus driver muttered something unpleasant, and a white woman sitting nearby waved her hand and said, “Oh, she’s prob’ly goin’ downtown to start another one o’ them demonstrations.”

The reputedly sweet and gentle Spelman girls were causing trouble even before the recent wave of sit-ins cracked the wall of legalism in the structure of desegregation strategy. Three years ago, they aroused the somnolent Georgia Legislature into near-panic by attempting to sit in the white section of the gallery. They were finally shunted into the colored area, but returned for the next legislative session. This time they refused to sit segregated and remained on their feet, in a pioneering show of nonviolent resistance, until ordered out of the chamber.

The massive, twelve-foot stone wall, barbed-wire fence and magnolia trees that encircle the Spelman campus have always formed a kind of chastity belt around the student body, not only confining young women to a semi-monastic life in order to uphold the ruling matriarchs’ conception of Christian morality,

but “protecting” the students from contact with the cruel outside world of segregation. Inside the domain of the Atlanta University Center, with its interracial faculty, occasional white students and frequent white visitors, there flourished a microcosm of the future, where racial barriers did not exist and one could almost forget this was the deep South. But this insulation, while protecting the University Center’s island of integration, also kept the city of Atlanta for many years from feeling the barbed resentment of Negro students against segregation. Spelman girls, more sheltered than women at the other colleges, were among the first to leave the island and to begin causing little flurries of alarm in the segregated world outside.

Even before bus segregation in the city was declared illegal, some Spelman girls rode up front and withstood the glares and threats of fellow passengers and the abuse of the bus driver. Once, a white man pulled a knife from his pocket and waved it at a Spelman sophomore sitting opposite him in a front seat. She continued to sit there until she came to her stop, and then got off. Spelman students, along with others, showed up in the main Atlanta library in sufficient numbers last year to worry the city administration into a decision to admit Negroes there. The girls spent hours between classes at the county courthouse, urging Negroes to register for voting. They made a survey of the Atlanta airport in connection with a suit to desegregate the airport restaurant, and a Spelman student took the witness stand at the trial to help win the case.

Such activities may bring bewilderment to the conservative matriarchy which has played a dominant role in the college’s history, but they are nothing short of infuriating to the officialdom of the State of Georgia, ensconced inside the gold-domed Capitol just a few minutes’ drive from the Negro colleges of the Atlanta University Center. Georgia’s bespectacled but still near-sighted Governor Vandiver, who resembles a pleasant and studious junior executive until he begins to speak, began his current burst of hysteria when student leaders at the six Negro colleges put their heads together and produced a remarkable document which was placed as a full-page ad in the Atlanta newspapers on March 9 (and reprinted by *The Nation* on April 2). The document, entitled “An Appeal for Human Rights,” catalogued Negro grievances with irritating specificity and promised to “use every legal and nonviolent means at our disposal” to end segregation. Vandiver’s reaction was immediate: the appeal was “anti-American” and “obviously not written by students.” Furthermore, the Governor said: “It did not sound like it was prepared in any Georgia school or college; nor, in fact, did it read like it was written in this country.” Actually, a Spelman student had written the first rough draft, and student leaders from the other five colleges collaborated in preparing the finished product.

On the sixth day after publication of the appeal, at 11:30 on a Tuesday morning, several hundred students from the Atlanta University Center staged one of the South's most carefully planned and efficiently executed sit-in demonstrations at ten different eating places, including restaurants in the State Capitol, the county courthouse and City Hall. Among the demonstrators were several carloads of Spelman students, riding into town that morning without the knowledge of deans or presidents or faculty, to participate in the sit-ins, tangle with the police and end up in prison.

Of the seventy-seven students arrested, fourteen were Spelmanites; and all but one of the fourteen were girls from the deep South, from places like Bennettsville, South Carolina; Bain-bridge, Georgia; Ocala, Florida—the Faulknerian small towns of traditional Negro submissiveness.

The Atlanta *Constitution* and the *Journal* noted the remarkable discipline and orderliness of the demonstration. Perhaps their training came in handy; in prison, Spelman girls were perfect ladies. A Spelman honor student sat behind bars quietly reading C.S. Lewis' *The Screwtape Letters*, while flashbulbs popped around her.

The State of Georgia, however, reacted with a special vindictiveness. To the seventy-seven sit-inners, the Fulton County prosecutor has added the names of the six students who wrote and signed "An Appeal for Human Rights." All eighty-three are facing triple charges of breaching the peace, intimidating restaurant owners and refusing to leave the premises, the penalties for which add up to nine years in prison and \$6,000 in fines. The use of "conspiracy" charges to tie all eighty-three students to each of the ten eating places creates a theoretical possibility of ninety-year sentences. Nothing is fantastic in this state.

On May 17, to commemorate the 1954 Supreme Court decision, over a thousand students marched through downtown Atlanta to a mass meeting at the Wheat Street Baptist Church, while a hundred hastily summoned state troopers guarded the Capitol a few blocks away with guns, billy clubs and tear gas. The students were heavily armed with books and songs, and when they were assembled in the church sang, "That Old Ne-gro, He Ain't What He Used to Be!"

What is the source of this new spirit which has angered the state administration and unsettled the old guardians of genteel passivity? There is something fundamental at work which is setting free for the first time the anger pent up in generations of quiet, well-bred Negro college women, not only at Spelman College, but at Fisk, Bennett, Alabama State and other institutions throughout the South. The same warm currents which are loosening the ice-blocks of the *status quo* throughout the world are drifting into the South and

mingling with local eddies of discontent. What has been called a global “revolution in expectations” rises also in the hearts and minds of Southern Negroes.

Expanding international contacts are reaching even into small Southern colleges. The arrested Spelman girl from Bennettsville, South Carolina spent last year in Geneva studying international relations, and spent the summer in Soviet Russia. The Atlanta student who helped draft the Appeal had just returned from a year of studying music in Paris. Last September, two young African women, under the auspices of the militant Tom Mboya, flew in from Kenya to enroll at Spelman. The tame-sounding phrase “cultural exchange” may have revolutionary political implications.

Like many Negro campuses in the South, Spelman is losing its provincial air. This spring, the first white students came—five girls from Midwestern colleges who are the advance guard of a long-term exchange program. In the past few months there has been a sudden burgeoning of contact, both intellectual and social, with students from the half-dozen white colleges in Atlanta. Liberal Southern whites have joined the faculties of Spelman and Morehouse colleges. This growing interracial contact is helping to break down the mixture of awe-suspicion-hostility with which deep-South Negroes generally regard whites. And for Spelman, unexpressed but obvious pressure to adopt the manners and courtesies of white middle-class society breaks down as Spelman girls get a close look at how whites really behave.

The new Spelman girl is having an effect on faculty and administrators. Many who were distressed and critical when they first learned their sweet young things were sitting behind bars later joined in the applause of the Negro community and the nation at large. Spelman’s President Albert Manley, who inherited the traditions of conservatism and moderation when he took the helm seven years ago, has responded with cautious but increasing encouragement to the boldness of his young women. At the college commencement exercises this year, Manley startled the audience by departing from the printed program and the parade of parting platitudes with a vigorous statement of congratulations to the senior class for breaking the “docile generation” label with its sit-ins, demonstrations and picketing.

Four years ago, a girl in my Western Civilization course spoke candidly and bitterly about her situation and that of her classmates. “When I was little,” she said, “my mother told me: remember, you’ve got two strikes against you—you’re colored, and you’re a woman; one more strike and you’re out—so be careful.” The student continued: “That’s the trouble with all these Spelman girls. They’re careful. They hardly utter a peep. They do everything right, and obey

the rules, and they'll be fine ladies some day. But I don't want to be that kind of a lady. I'm leaving at the end of the semester and going back up North."

I don't know where that student is today. She would have graduated with this class on Commencement Day, with students who marched and picketed and sat-in and were arrested, and will soon come up for trial. I wish she had stayed to see.

Out of the Sit-ins (1968)

After a number of my articles on the Southern situation had appeared in Harper's, The Nation, and The New Republic, Beacon Press in Boston asked me to write a book on the NAACP. By this time I had been in various places in the South, participating and reporting on movement activity, and I responded to the editors at Beacon that the real story in the South was the work of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). They agreed that my book, entitled SNCC: The New Abolitionists, should be about this remarkable group of young black militants. This chapter describes the emergence of SNCC in the spring of 1960, out of some of the most dramatic moments in the history of the civil rights movement.

“My stomach always hurt a little on the way to a sit-in.... I guess it's the unexpected.” Candie Anderson, a white girl attending Fisk University as an exchange student from Pomona college in California, had joined her Negro classmates to demonstrate against segregation in Nashville, Tennessee. It was the explosion of sit-ins throughout the South in early 1960 that led to the formation of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating committee.

On February 1, 1960, four freshmen at A & T College in Greensboro, North Carolina, took seats at a lunch counter downtown, not knowing they were starting a movement that would soon take on the proportions of a revolution. “For about a week,” David Richmond recalled later, “we four fellows sat around at A & T campus, talking about the integration movement. And we decided we ought to go down to Woolworth's and see what would happen.” They spent an hour sitting at the Woolworth's counter, with no service. Then the counter was closed for the day, and they went home.

In a matter of days, the idea leaped to other cities in North Carolina. During the next two weeks, sit-ins spread to fifteen cities in five Southern states. Within the following year, over 50,000 people—most were Negroes, some were white—had participated in one kind of demonstration or another in a hundred cities, and over 3,600 demonstrators spent time in jail. But there were results to show: by the end of 1961, several hundred lunch counters had been desegregated in

scores of cities—in Texas, Oklahoma, the border states of the South, and even as far as Atlanta, Georgia. A wall of resistance, however, apparently impenetrable, faced the student in the rest of Georgia, South Carolina, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana—and the hard-core Deep South.

It is hard to overestimate the electrical effect of that first sit-in in Greensboro, as the news reached the nation on television screens, over radios, in newspapers. In his Harlem apartment in New York City, Bob Moses, a former Harvard graduate student and mathematics teacher, saw a picture of the Greensboro sit-inners. “The students in that picture had a certain look on their faces,” he later told writer Ben Bagdikian, “sort of sullen, angry, determined. Before, the Negro in the South had always looked on the defensive, cringing. This time they were taking the initiative. They were kids my age, and I knew this had something to do with my own life ...”

In Atlanta, Morehouse College student Julian Bond, who wrote poetry and thought about being a journalist, reacted quickly to the Greensboro sit-in. He and another student, discussing it in the Yates & Milton drug store across the street from the campus, decided to summon Morehouse men to a meeting. Out of that grew the Atlanta student movement, which six weeks later erupted in one of the largest and best organized sit-in demonstrations of all.

Also in Atlanta, seventeen-year-old Ruby Doris Smith, a sophomore at Spelman College, heard about the Greensboro sit-in and ran home that evening to see it on television:

I began to think right away about it happening in Atlanta, but I wasn't ready to act on my own. When the student committee was formed in the Atlanta University Center, I told my older sister, who was on the Student Council at Morris Brown College, to put me on the list. And when two hundred students were selected for the first demonstration, I was among them. I went through the food line in the restaurant at the State Capitol with six other students, but when we got to the cashier, she wouldn't take our money. She ran upstairs to get the Governor. The Lieutenant-Governor came down and told us to leave. We didn't, and went to the county jail.

Charles (“Chuck”) McDew, a husky former athlete from Massillon, Ohio, was studying at South Carolina State College in Orangeburg. McDew had never adjusted to South Carolina; he had been arrested three times in his first three months there, and was struck by a policeman for trying to enter the main YMCA. When, during Religious Emphasis Week at the College, some visiting white Protestant ministers had responded negatively to his question about attending their churches, and a rabbi invited him to the temple, he converted to Judaism. With the news of Greensboro being discussed all around him, McDew read in the Talmud: “If I am not for myself, then who is for me? If I am for myself alone, then what am I? If not now, when?” He became a leader of the local sit-in movement.

To these young people, the Supreme Court decision of 1954 was a childhood memory. The Montgomery bus boycott of 1955, the first mass action by

Southern Negroes, though also dimly remembered, was an inspiration. The trouble at Little Rock in 1957 was more vivid, with the unforgettable photos of the young Negro girl walking past screaming crowds towards Central High School. The Greensboro sit-ins struck a special chord of repressed emotion, and excitement raced across the Negro college campuses of the South.

Bob Moses, Julian Bond, Ruby Doris Smith, Chuck McDew: all were to become stalwarts in the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee. And for so many others in SNCC, the Greensboro sit-in—more than the Supreme Court decision, more than the Little Rock crisis, more than the Montgomery bus boycott, more than the recent declarations of independence by a host of African nations, and yet, perhaps, owing its galvanic force to the accumulation of all these events—was a turning point in their lives. James Forman, studying French in graduate school in the North, began turning his thoughts southward. Exactly what was going on in the minds of so many other students, soon to leave school for “The Movement,” remains unknown.

Out of the Nashville, Tennessee, sit-ins, a battalion of future SNCC people took shape. Tall, quiet, Marion Barry, a graduate student in chemistry at Fisk University, who would later become the first chairman of SNCC, took a leading part in the Nashville sit-ins from the beginning. His father, a Mississippi farmer, migrated to Memphis, Tennessee, and Barry went to school there. As an undergraduate at LeMoyne College in Memphis, he publicly protested an anti-Negro remark made by a prominent white trustee of the college, created an uproar in the city, and barely avoided being expelled.

I came to Fisk ... inquired about forming a college chapter of the NAACP.... But we didn't do much.... We had not at any time thought of direct action.... In the meantime in Greensboro, N.C., the student movement began February 1, 1960. So we in Nashville decided we wanted to do something about it.... I remember the first time I was arrested, about February 27 ... I took a chance on losing a scholarship or not receiving my Master's degree. But to me, if I had received my scholarship and Master's degree, and still was not a free man, I was not a man at all.

John Lewis, short, fiery, from a small town in Alabama, was also in Nashville as a seminary student when the sit-ins began. He immediately became involved and went to jail four times. “My mother wrote me a letter and said ‘Get out of the movement,’ but I couldn’t ... I wrote her and said, ‘I have acted according to my convictions and according to my Christian conscience.... My soul will not be satisfied until freedom, justice, and fair play become a reality for all people.’ ” Lewis later followed Marion Barry and Chuck McDew to become Chairman of SNCC.

“Do show yourself friendly at the counter at all times. Do sit straight and always face the counter. Don’t strike back, or curse back if attacked. Don’t laugh loud. Don’t hold conversations. Don’t block entrances.” These were the instructions to sit-in demonstrators in Nashville. They demanded a careful balance of quiet nonresistance and a determined militancy, and perhaps no one

better expressed this than Diane Nash, a tiny, slender, campus beauty queen at Fisk, one of the pillars of the Nashville student movement and later a founder of SNCC. When students were being cross-examined at the trials that followed the Nashville demonstrations one of the standard questions was: “Do you know Diane Nash?” Friendship with her was apparently full of perils.

Twelve days after the Greensboro incident, forty students sat in at Woolworth’s in Nashville. There was at first some discussion about whether the white exchange students should go along, but finally the prevailing opinion was in favor. Candie Anderson recalls:

That first sit-in was easy.... It was a Thursday afternoon and it was snowing. There were not many people downtown. Store personnel ran around nervously.... My friends were determined to be courteous and well-behaved.... Most of them read or studied while they stayed at the counters, for three or four hours. I heard them remind each other not to leave cigarette ashes on the counter, to take off their hats, etc.... When the sit-in was over we all met in church. There must have been five hundred kids there, and we all sang together ...

By the fourth sit-in, tension was mounting rapidly. There was violence that day. Lighted cigarettes were pushed against the backs of girls sitting at the counter. A white sit-inner, on a stool beside a Negro girl, became a special object of attention by the crowd nearby. Someone kept calling him a “nigger lover.” When he didn’t respond he was pulled off the stool, thrown to the floor, and kicked. At McClellan’s variety store, a white man kept blowing cigar smoke into the face of a Negro sitting at the counter, a Fisk University student named Paul LePrad, who made no move. This infuriated the man. He pulled the student from his stool and hit him. LePrad got back on the stool. He was pulled off again and hit. The police came and arrested LePrad and the seventeen students sitting in with him.

The group at Woolworth’s, where Candie Anderson was, heard about this incident. They decided to go McClellan’s to protest.

There was a rope around the stools, showing that the counter was closed. We climbed over the rope. A policeman stood there and said quite clearly, “do not sit down,” and we sat down.... I became suddenly aware of the crowd of people standing behind us.... Young kids threw french fried potatoes at us, and gum, and cigarette butts. I looked down the counter at Barbara Crosby in a straight pink skirt and nice white blouse, and at Stephen in a dark suit, with a calculus book.... The policemen simply lined up behind us and peeled us two by two off the stools.... The crowd in the store ... shouted out approval. They said about Barbara and me ... Oh, white ... WHITE, WHITE, WHITE! Three paddy wagons were blinking at us from the street. Once more we had to walk through those crowds. Someone spit right in front of me.... The TV cameras took lots of pictures, and we drove off to the Nashville city jail.

With seventy-six students in jail, a group of NAACP people in Nashville met the next day and pledged support. Fisk University President Stephen Wright said: “Students have been exposed all their lives to the teachings of the great American scriptures of democracy, freedom, and equality, and no literate person should be surprised that they reflect these teachings in their conduct.”

But at white Vanderbilt University in Nashville, where a thirty-one-year-old Negro named James Lawson was enrolled in the Divinity School, it was different. Lawson, a conscientious objector and a pacifist, believed in nonviolent resistance. When the first mass arrests took place, newspapermen quoted him as saying he would advise students to violate the law. *The Nashville Banner*

immediately called this “incitation to anarchy” and added: “There is no place in Nashville for flannel-mouthed agitators, white or colored—under whatever sponsorship, imported for preachment of mass disorder; self-supported vagrants, or paid agents of strife-breeding organizations.” The Vanderbilt trustees, one of whom was the publisher of the *Nashville Banner*, another of whom was president of one of the large department stores where sit-ins had taken place, voted the next day to give Lawson the choice of withdrawing from the movement or dismissal from the University.

Charging the press with distorting his statements, Lawson refused to leave the movement, and in early March he was expelled, three months before his scheduled graduation. Most of the sixteen faculty members of the divinity school, all white, protested. By May, eleven of them, as well as Dean J. Robert Nelson, had resigned over the refusal of the school to re-admit Lawson, leaving four persons on the divinity school faculty. *The Richmond News Leader* commented: “Good riddance ... Vanderbilt University will be better off ...”

The Nashville sit-ins continued, with arrests, trials, and students deciding to stay in jail in protest rather than pay fines or put up bond. Chief defense lawyer for the students was sixty-two-year-old Z. Alexander Looby, a distinguished Negro attorney, born in Trinidad, and a member of the Nashville City Council.

On April 19, at five o’clock in the morning, while Looby and his wife were asleep in the backroom of their home, one block away from Fisk University’s campus, a bomb exploded on his porch. In her dormitory room, Candie Anderson was awakened by the noise. “Only one time in my life have I heard a sound worse than the one when Mr. Looby’s house was bombed,” she wrote later. “That was when a girl fainted and I heard her head hit the floor: That’s the kind of feeling it left when we heard the explosion.... It would have seemed unreal, I think, if the sirens had not kept insistently coming ...”

One hundred and forty-seven windows were blown out in Meharry Medical School across the street, and the front part of the Looby’s house was demolished, but the attorney and his wife were not hurt. Perhaps, as James Bevel (who married Diane Nash) said, “The Devil has got to come out of these people.” For after the bombing, and after a protest march of 2000 Negroes on City Hall, negotiations for desegregation got under way in earnest. In early May, four theaters and six lunch counters downtown declared an end to the color line. In the meantime, the sit-ins had spread to Chattanooga, Knoxville, Memphis, and Oak Ridge. By late spring, seven Tennessee cities had desegregated some of their lunch counters.

CORE, with its long emphasis on nonviolent direct action, played an important part, once the sit-ins began, as an educational and organizing agent.

Tom Gaither, of Claflin College in Orangeburg, South Carolina, tells of CORE classes which started there, inspired by the Rock Hill sit-ins. (Those, the first in South Carolina, took place even before the first Nashville sit-ins, with one hundred students from two Negro junior colleges sitting in.)

The Orangeburg students held classes in nonviolence over a period of three or four days for students from Claflin College and South Carolina State, both Negro colleges, and then picked forty students who felt confident in the use of nonviolent techniques. Here is a sample of the instructions to people being schooled in nonviolence:

You may choose to face physical assault without protecting yourself, hands at the sides, unclenched; or you may choose to protect yourself, making plain you do not intend to hit back. If you choose to protect yourself, you practice positions such as these:

To protect the skull, fold the hands over the head.

To prevent disfigurement of the face, bring the elbows together in front of the eyes.

For girls, to prevent internal injury from kicks, lie on the side and bring the knees upward to the chin; for boys, kneel down and arch over, with skull and face protected.

The Kress five-and-dime store in Orangeburg became the object of careful plans. Students checked the store entrances, counted the number of stools at the lunch counter, calculated exactly the number of minutes it took to walk from a central point on campus to the Kress store. On February 25, tie sit-ins began, and lunch counters closed in downtown Orangeburg. A thousand students were being trained meanwhile, and a mass march through the streets of the city took place, with no violence, no arrests.

When lunch counters reopened on March 14, followed by another great march designed to support a new wave of sit-ins, the police moved in with tear gas bombs and water hoses. The weather was sub-freezing. Students were drenched and knocked off their feet by the water pressure. One of these was a blind girl. Over five hundred were arrested and, with the jails full, three hundred and fifty were jammed into a chicken coop and enclosed by a seven-foot wire fence. There was no shelter against the bitter cold.

Meanwhile, students crowded into the basement of the city jail were sweating in 90-degree temperatures from the nearby boiler room. One student, drenched from head to toe, was locked in solitary confinement with water three inches deep covering the cell floor. Requests for dry clothing were denied. A Claflin College nurse came to give first aid, and had to force her way inside. Two hundred students marched around the courthouse in protest. Tom Gaither, the movement's leader (and today a professional civil rights worker with CORE), was marching with them when he was seized and put into jail.

The sit-ins were spreading southward now. They were also becoming larger and better organized. In Atlanta, where they were preceded by many meetings and by a sensational full-page ad of eloquent protest in the *Atlanta Constitution*

addressed to a startled white community, the sit-ins were planned like a military operation. On March 15, at exactly 11:00 a.m., two hundred students moved into ten downtown restaurants which had been carefully selected because they were connected with city or county or federal government, and were therefore subject to the Fourteenth Amendment's requirement that *public* places may not discriminate. Seventy-six students were arrested, and the city of Atlanta was never the same again.

There was some violence in those first months of the sit-ins. In Jacksonville, Florida, the city was in turmoil for three days: a white sit-in student was attacked in jail and his jaw was broken; a sixteen-year-old Negro boy was pistol-whipped by the Ku Klux Klan; a Negro man unconnected with the demonstrations who went through a police roadblock was shot to death by a white service station attendant. In Atlanta, acid was thrown at sit-in leader Lonnie King. In Frankfort, Kentucky, the gymnasium of a Negro college was set afire. In Columbia, South Carolina, a Negro sit-in student was stabbed. In Houston, Texas, a twenty-seven-year-old Negro was kidnapped and flogged with a chain, and the symbol KKK was carved on his chest.

Mississippi responded with a special savagery. When students marched down the street in Jackson, police used clubs, tear gas, and police dogs. Women, children, and a photographer were beaten by police and bystanders, and some demonstrators were bitten by dogs. In Biloxi, Mississippi, Negroes trying to use a public beach were attacked with clubs and chains by crowds of whites, and ten were wounded by gunfire.

Yet, considering the number of people involved in demonstrations and the intense psychological tremors accompanying this sudden attack by long-quiescent Negroes on the old way of life, violence was minimal. The restraint of the demonstrators themselves was one factor; they gave the least possible excuse for club-happy and trigger-happy policemen, and the most the police could justify, in most cases, was carting them off to jail. The ratio of social change, both immediate and long-term, to the resulting violence, was extremely high.

The sit-ins marked a turning point for the Negro American, subordinate for three hundred years. He was rebelling now, not with the blind, terrible, understandable hatred of the slave revolts, but with skill in organization, sophistication in tactics, and an unassailable moral position. With these went a ferocious refusal to retreat. What had been an orderly, inch-by-inch advance via legal processes now became a revolution in which unarmed regiments marched from one objective to another with bewildering speed.

The idea so long cherished by Southern whites—and by many Northerners too—that the Southern Negro (whether through ignorance or intimidation or a

shrewd recognition of reality) was content with the way things were, that only a handful of agitators opposed the system of segregation, was swept aside by the mass marches, demonstration, meetings. Montgomery had been the first sign of this, and now it was made clear beyond argument that Negroes all across the South had only been waiting for an opportunity to end their long silence.

Impatience was the mood of the young sit-in demonstrators: impatience with the courts, with national and local governments, with negotiation and conciliation, with the traditional Negro organizations and the old Negro leadership, with the unbearably slow pace of desegregation in a century of accelerated social change.

A Negro never before seen by white Americans was brought into the national view. The young educated Negro was raised inside a ghetto, then went off to a Negro college, where he or she was kept behind the ivy-colored walls by conservative Negro college administrators. Ostensibly this was to protect the sensitive Negro student, but as a by-product, it protected white society from the possibility of rebellion. And in addition, the separation left unmarred the images in white American minds of the faithful, hard-working Negro maid or handyman or the lazy drunk. In early 1960, the Negro student climbed over the wall and into view on millions of television screens all over the country. The picture was impressive, even to those not really convinced these youngsters were doing the right thing. *The Richmond News Leader* (the same paper which had declared “Good riddance” to Lawson, *et al.*) said in an editorial on February 22, 1960:

Many a Virginian must have felt a tinge of wry regret at the state of things as they are, in reading of Saturday's "sit-downs" by Negro students in Richmond stores. Here were the colored students, in coats, white shirts, ties, and one of them was reading Goethe and one was taking notes from a biology text. And here, on the sidewalk outside, was a gang of white boys come to heckle, a rag-tail rabble, slack-jawed, black-jacketed, grinning fit to kill, and some of them, God save the mark, were waving the proud and honored flag of the Southern States in the last war fought by gentlemen. Eheu! It gives one pause.

Ralph McGill, long a believer—in the face of bitter attack by segregationists—in the deliberate processes of law to effect an equalitarian society, did not immediately endorse the sit-ins. But by the time he wrote his book, *The South and the Southerner*, he had come to a blunt conclusion:

The sit-ins were, without question, productive of the most change.... No argument in a court of law could have dramatized the immorality and irrationality of such a custom as did the sit-ins. ... The sit-ins reached far out into the back country. They inspired adult men and women, fathers, mothers, grandmothers, aunts and uncles, to support the young students in the cities. Not even the Supreme Court decision on the schools in 1954 had done this.... The central moral problem was enlarged.

Actually, the sit-ins represented an intricate union of economic and moral power. To the store owner, they meant a disruption of normal business; liberal and moderate people in the city and in the nation now, perhaps for the first time, faced their own status as a privileged group in American society.

The sit-ins were an important learning experience for white Southerners, and also for those Northerners who were convinced of some mystical irremovable

germ of prejudice in the Southern mind: when the first lunch-counters were desegregated, the world did not come to an end. Whites and Negroes could use public facilities together, it was shown, without violent repercussions, without white withdrawal. Southern whites, once a new pattern became accepted and established in the community, would conform to it as they conformed to the old. Men and women seeking a sandwich at a lunch counter, as young Negroes could see readily in many of the sit-ins, were more interested in satisfying their hunger or their thirst than in who sat next to them. After two months of desegregation in Winston Salem, North Carolina, the manager of a large store said: "You would think it had been going on for fifty years. I am tickled to death over the situation."

There were potential repercussions on the American social structure of enormous scope, far beyond the problem of race. For what happened in the sit-ins is that Americans were resorting to civil disobedience on a national scale, ignoring local statutes, applying the direct pressure of masses of aggrieved people to the nerve centers of the opposition, without using the intermediary of normal political channels. To move outside the American governmental structure in order to effectuate social change, to assert the power of the popular demonstration as superior to that of the parliamentary process, was dangerously suggestive. And, in fact, civil disobedience as a technique spread in a matter of weeks from sit-ins in restaurants to stand-ins at movies, kneel-ins at churches, wade-ins at beaches, and a dozen different kinds of extra-legal demonstrations against segregation.

The sit-ins took the established Negro organizations by surprise. The NAACP had a large membership in the Southern states, had handled thousands of legal cases there, and was a long-established center for Negroes wanting to share their dissatisfactions. But it had not carried on any widespread campaigns of direct protest in the South. The Congress of Racial Equality, or CORE, was a Northern-based organization, with just a few staff members below the Mason-Dixon line. The Southern Christian Leadership Conference, which grew out of the Montgomery boycott and was led by Martin Luther King, Jr., had an office in Atlanta, and was planning various actions in the South, but had engaged in no large-scale movement since Montgomery. Spontaneity and self-sufficiency were the hallmarks of the sit-ins; without adult advice or consent, the students planned and carried them through.

What happened then was that the student movement galvanized the older organizations into a new dynamism, won the support of some of the established Negro leaders who quickly sensed that a new wind was blowing, and left far behind those leaders who could not break either old habits of thinking, or old ties

with the white elite.

From the beginning, the students found strong backing in the generation just ahead of them—young Negro professionals in their thirties or early forties, who helped mobilize community support behind the young people. One thinks of Carl Holman, Dr. Clinton Warner, and Whitney Young in Atlanta; also of Dr. Anderson, Slater King and C.B. King in Albany; and of Martin Luther King himself.

On the other hand, the self-interest of some elements in the Negro community had long become enmeshed with that of the whites who held political and economic power, and even the explosive force of the sit-ins could not break that tie. Presidents of state-supported Negro colleges, with an eye on trustees, regents, and state legislatures, lashed out at their student rebels. Faculty members, fearful for their jobs, remained silent. At Southern University in Baton Rouge, whose 5,000 students made it the largest Negro institution in the nation, eighteen sit-in leaders were suspended. At Albany State College in Albany, Georgia, the president eventually got rid of forty student demonstrators. At Alabama State and Florida A & M, punishment was swift. Even at some private, church-supported institutions, like Benedict and Allen Colleges in South Carolina, college administrators threatened expulsion for students who joined the sit-in movement and fired the few faculty members who spoke their minds.

Between the unequivocal supporters and the conservative die-hards in the adult Negro community was a third group, whose response to the new militancy of the college generation was complex and curious. These were Negroes ranking high in the social structure of the community, who were beset by a number of conflicting pressures: that of the white side of town, where they had some useful relationships; that of the Negro community at large, which embraced the sit-ins, and on which they were dependent socially and politically; that of their own long resentment against segregation; of a conservatism fundamental to their lofty position; of an uncomfortable feeling of being left in the shadows by the immature upstarts of the student movement. In this confusion of interests, the reaction of such people was often to support the movement publicly, and try privately to keep it within respectable limits.

Atlanta is a case in point. Here, a number of the college presidents in the Atlanta University Center, while publicly expressing their support, tried to discourage their students from direct action activities. Some ministers and businessmen reacted similarly. Jeremy Lerner, writing in the *New Leader* at the time of the sit-ins, reports a meeting that spring of five student leaders summoned to a conference with the Negro old guard of Atlanta.

While the students wore slacks and sport shirts, their elders were dressed like New York bankers. Their faces were somber and the atmosphere was somewhat like that of an emergency meeting of the General Motors board of directors. From a high table in front, the meeting was presided over by a man with a pleasant face and remarkably light skin who spoke and looked like President Eisenhower. He was flanked by an Episcopalian minister, a banker, a realtor, and a lawyer. One by one they rose and delivered sober, articulate speeches. I was impressed by the absence of Southern accents, and later discovered that they sent their own children to Northern universities.

Whether Larner's report of what these "elders" said to the sit-in leaders is an exact quote, or a paraphrase, it catches the spirit of what so many of the students heard from well-placed adults in those hectic days:

So you see, kids, we've been in this a long time. We want the same things you do, but we know by now they can't be gotten overnight. It's our experience that you have to work slowly to get lasting results. We'd hate to see your movement backfire and spoil the things we've worked so hard for. You need guidance, and we hope you'll have the vision to accept it.

The response of the students was brief, unpolished, to the point. "We are continuing the movement as best we know how. We hope you will join us."

They did continue the movement, and the important men of the Negro community, whatever qualms they had, let it be known to the public that they had joined.

As pointed out earlier, there was no central direction to the sit-ins. The sparks from that first almost-innocent sit-in of four college freshmen in Greensboro showered the South and caught fire in a hundred localities. But hardly a month had passed before Ella Baker, in charge of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference office in Atlanta and observing the wild spread of the sit-ins, decided that something should be done to coordinate them.

Ella Baker, middle-aged, dark-skinned, beautiful, with a deep-throated voice that seemed suited for the stage, had grown up in a little town in North Carolina. As a girl, she had listened to stories of slave revolts told by her ninety-year-old grandmother, who as a slave had been whipped for refusing to marry the man picked out for her by her master. Miss Baker was a champion debater in high school and valedictorian of her graduating class at Shaw University in Raleigh. She wanted to go to medical school and become a medical missionary, then dreamed of teaching sociology at the University of Chicago. But family difficulties intervened. Instead, she went to New York.

There, she found that despite her college education, jobs were closed to her because of her color; she worked as a waitress, or found a job in a factory. She lived in Harlem in the 1930s worked for the WPA on consumer education, started consumers' cooperatives in Philadelphia and Chicago, and then in 1940 turned to the NAACP, spending six years with them as a field secretary. Then she worked for the Urban League and other groups.

When the Southern Christian Leadership Conference was organized by Martin Luther King, Bayard Rustin, and Stanley Levison in 1957, Ella Baker came South to organize a series of mass meetings for them. In early 1958, she set up the SCLC office in Atlanta and was its first full-time executive-secretary.

Deciding, in late February of 1960, that the sit-in leaders should be brought together, she asked the SCLC to underwrite it financially. With \$800 of SCLC money, the prestige of Martin Luther King, the organizing wisdom of Ella Baker, and the enthusiasm of the rare young people who were leading the new student movement, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee was born.

Ella Baker went to Raleigh and got her Alma Mater, Shaw University, to provide facilities for a meeting of about a hundred students. But by the time of the conference on Easter weekend, April 15-17, 1960, demonstrations had spread so fast that there were sixty centers of sit-in activity. Also, nineteen northern colleges were interested enough to send delegates. The result was that over two hundred people came to the conference, one hundred twenty-six of them student delegates from fifty-eight different Southern communities in twelve states.

Jane Stenbridge, from Virginia, later described her feelings that first night in Raleigh:

The most inspiring moment for me was the first time I heard the students sing "We Shall Overcome".... It was hot that night upstairs in the auditorium. Students had just come in from all over the South, meeting for the first time. February 1 was not long past. There was no SNCC, no *ad hoc* committees, no funds, just people who did not know what to expect but who came and released the common vision in that song. I had just driven down from Union Seminary in New York—out of it, except that I cared, and that I was a Southerner.... It was inspiring because it was the beginning, and because, in a sense, it was the purest moment. I am a romantic. But I call this moment the one ...

James Lawson, the divinity school student just expelled from Vanderbilt University, gave the keynote address. At the organizing sessions, there was some tension over whether to have an official connection with SCLC. It was finally decided to maintain a friendly relationship with SCLC and other organizations but to remain independent. This urge for freedom from adult fetters and formal ties had marked the student movement from the beginning, so the decision was important, reflecting a mood which has continued in SNCC to this day. The conference set up a temporary committee, which would meet monthly through the spring and summer, and would coordinate the various student movements around the South. Ed King, who had been a leader in the Frankfort, Kentucky sit-ins, was asked to serve, at least temporarily, as administrative secretary.

The first meeting after the Raleigh Conference was held in May, 1960, on the campus of Atlanta University. About fifteen of the student leaders were there, as were Martin Luther King, Jr., James Lawson, Ella Baker, Len Holt (a CORE lawyer from Norfolk, Virginia), and observers from the National Student Association, the YWCA, the American Friends Service Committee, and other groups. They now called themselves the Temporary Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, and elected Marion Barry, at this time doing graduate work at Fisk, as chairman. A statement of purpose was adopted, of which the first paragraph states the theme:

We affirm the philosophical or religious ideal of nonviolence as the foundation of our purpose, the presupposition of our faith, and the manner of our action. Nonviolence as it grows from Judaic-Christian traditions seeks a social order of justice permeated by love. Integration of human endeavor represents the first step towards such a society ...

It was decided to set up an office, hire a secretary to man it over the summer months, begin to raise money, plan nonviolence institutes for the summer, print a newsletter, and try to coordinate the various student activities throughout the South. Marion Barry told reporters that the sit-in movement “demonstrates the rapidity with which mass action can bring about social change. This is only the beginning.”

They called Jane Stenbridge at Union Theological Seminary in New York and asked her if she would serve as SNCC’s first office secretary. In early June, 1960, she arrived in Atlanta. Bob Moses, recalling his first trip South that summer of 1960, described later how “SNCC and Jane Stenbridge were squeezed in one corner of the SCLC office.... I was licking envelopes, one at a time, and talking—Niebuhr, Tillich and Theos—with Jane, who was fresh from a year at Union.... Miss Ella Baker was in another corner of the office.”

In June, the first issue of *The Student Voice* appeared. Three years later it would be beautifully printed and designed (though still small, direct, terse) and illustrated by remarkable photos of SNCC in action. At this time it was crudely mimeographed, carrying news of the Raleigh Conference and the May meeting. It was not so intensely organizational that it could not find room for a poem, written by one of the founders of SNCC, later to be its chief writer of press releases and editor of *The Student Voice*, Julian Bond:

I too, hear America singing
But from where I stand
I can only hear Little Richard
And Fats Domino
But sometimes,
I hear Ray Charles
Drowning in his own tears
or Bird
Relaxing at Camarillo
or Horace Silver doodling,
Then I don't mind standing
a little longer.

The new SNCC organization, that summer and early fall of 1960, found that “coordinating” was not easy. Jane Stenbridge later recalled:

A great deal of time was spent trying to find out exactly what was going on in the protest centers.... Response was next to nil.... This was because the students were too busy protesting and because they did not understand the weight of the press release (thank God some still don't)... No one really needed “organization” because we then had a movement.... Members of the first SNCC were vague simply because they were right damn in the middle of directing sit-ins, being in jail, etc., and they did not know what was going on anywhere outside of their immediate downtown.... We had no one “in the field” either. SNCC called for demonstrations once or twice. The response was extremely spotty and then the news was not sent in. We could not afford phone calls and so it went. SNCC was not coordinating the movement.... I would say the main thing done then was to let people know we existed.... We were not sure, and still aren't, “what SNCC is” ...

In July, in Los Angeles, where the National Democratic Convention was

about to nominate John F. Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson, Marion Barry appeared for SNCC before the Platform Committee of the Convention, recommending strong federal action: to speed school desegregation, to enact a fair employment law, to assure the right to vote against Southern economic reprisal and violence, to protect demonstrators against false arrest and police repression by invoking that clause of the Fourteenth Amendment which says: "No state shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges and immunities of citizens of the United States."

The sit-ins, Barry told the platform Committee, "in truth were peaceful petitions to the conscience of our fellow citizens for redress of the old grievances that stem from racial segregation and discrimination." Characteristically, the statement was not coldly organizational, but carried some of the poetic freshness of the new student movement:

... The ache of every man to touch his potential is the throb that beats out the truth of the American Declaration of Independence and the Constitution. America was founded because men were seeking room to become.... We are again seeking that room.... We want to walk into the sun and through the front door. For three hundred and fifty years, the American Negro has been sent to the back door.... We grow weary ...

Barry spoke directly to the charge made by ex-President Harry Truman during the sit-ins, that the student movement was somehow connected with communism. He said:

To label our goals, methods, and presuppositions "communistic" is to credit Communism with an attempt to remove tyranny and to create an atmosphere where genuine communication can occur. Communism seeks power, ignores people, and thrives on social conflict. We seek a community in which man can realize the full meaning of the self which demands open relationship with others.

In October of 1960, at a conference of several hundred delegates in Atlanta, SNCC was put on a permanent basis. It was not (and never has become) a membership organization. This left the adhesion of individuals to the group fluid and functional, based simply on who was carrying on activity. The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee consisted of a delegate from each of sixteen Southern states and the District of Columbia, plus a few voting members and many observers from various national student and race relations organizations, such as CORE, SCLC, the YWCA, the National Student Association, the NAACP, and the Southern Conference Educational Fund.

Again, the purpose was to coordinate the student movement. But the movement, still with a quality of abandon, still spontaneous and unstructured, refused to be put into a bureaucratic box. The twig was bent, and the tree grew that way. For SNCC, even after it had a large staff, its own office, and money for long-distance phone calls, managed to maintain an autonomy in the field, an unpredictability of action, a lack of overall planning which brought exasperation to some of its most ardent supporters, bewilderment to outside observers, and bemusement to the students themselves.

Throughout the winter of 1960-1961, sit-ins continued, linked only vaguely by SNCC, but creating a warmth of commitment, a solidarity of purpose which spurred awareness of SNCC by students all over the South. They also sustained a vision—or perhaps, knowing SNCC, a set of various visions, which kept Marion Barry, Jane Stenbridge, Julian Bond, Diane Nash, Charles Sherrod, Charles Jones, and others, going.

When ten students were arrested in Rock Hill, South Carolina, in February, 1961, the SNCC steering committee, meeting in Atlanta, made its boldest organizational decision up to that date. Four people, it was agreed, would go to Rock Hill to sit in, would be arrested, and would refuse bail, as the first ten students had done, in order to dramatize the injustice to the nation. The Rock Hill action was the start of the jail-no bail policy.

Sit-in veterans Charles Sherrod (Petersburg, Virginia), Charles Jones (Charlotte, North Carolina) and Diane Nash were to go. The fourth person was a relative novice in the movement, Spelman College student Ruby Doris Smith, who talked her older sister out of the trip so she could go instead. “I went home that night to explain to my mother. She couldn’t understand why I had to go away—why I had to go to Rock Hill.”

Ruby Doris and the others spent thirty days in prison, the first time anyone had served full sentences in the sit-in movement. “I read a lot there: *The Ugly American*, *The Life of Mahatma Gandhi*, *Exodus*, *The Wall Between*.... Every day at noon we sang ‘We Shall Overcome’ ...” The fellows had been put on a road gang: Tom Gaither of CORE, Charles Sherrod and Charles Jones of SNCC, and nine others. The captain of the guards took their textbooks away, saying: “This is a prison—not a damned school.” He turned out to be wrong.

“Jail—no bail” spread. In Atlanta, in February, 1961, eighty students from the Negro colleges went to jail and refused to come out. I knew some, but not all, of the participants from Spelman, where I taught history and political science. That fall, when a very bright student named Lana Taylor, fair-skinned, rather delicate looking, joined my course on Chinese Civilization, I learned she had been in jail. In early 1964 I came across a reminiscence of Jane Stenbridge:

... the most honest moment—the one in which I saw the guts-type truth—stripped of anything but total fear and total courage ... was one day during 1961 in Atlanta.... Hundreds went out that day and filled every lunch counter.... There was much humor—like A.D. King coordinating the whole damn thing with a walkie-talkie.... The moment: Lana Taylor from Spelman was sitting next to me. The manager walked up behind her, said something obscene, and grabbed her by the shoulders. “Get the hell out of here, nigger.” Lana was not going. I do not know whether she should have collapsed in nonviolent manner. She probably did not know. She put her hands under the counter and held. He was rough and strong. She just held and I looked down at that moment at her hands ... brown, strained ... every muscle holding.... All of a sudden he let go and left. As though he knew he could not move that girl—ever ...”

The sit-ins of 1960 were the beginning. They left not only excitement, but a taste of victory. The spring and summer of 1961 brought, for the youngsters in SNCC and for many others, an experience of a different kind: an ordeal by fire and club. These were the Freedom Rides.

Kennedy: The Reluctant Emancipator (1962)

This article, which appeared in The Nation on December 1, 1962, came out of an investigation I did for the Southern Regional Council in Atlanta of the mass demonstrations of that year in Albany, Georgia. My report focused on the failure of the federal government to enforce constitutional rights in Albany. It made national news, and when Martin Luther King, Jr. told reporters he agreed with my criticism of the FBI, he aroused the special anger of J. Edgar Hoover. My critique went beyond the FBI to the national administration, whose collaboration with the racist South—by inaction—was to become a persistent issue throughout the struggles of the movement for equal rights.

The dispatch of federal troops to Oxford, Mississippi, tends to obscure the true cautiousness of John F. Kennedy in the movement for Negro rights. Oxford diverted attention from Albany, Georgia. In the former, the national government moved boldly and with overwhelming force. In the latter, which twice this past year has been the scene of Negro demonstrations, mass arrests and official violence, the federal government showed cautiousness to the point of timidity. The two situations, occurring in comparable Black Belt areas, point up the ambiguous, uncomfortable role of the Administration in civil rights. Oxford is fresh in the memory today and was the object of an international uproar. Albany, now in the backwash of national attention, deserves to be brought forward for a good look.

I had the benefit of two such looks: last December, when that Black Belt city erupted with racial demonstrations for the first time in a long history going back to slavery days; and again last summer, when trouble burst out once more. Both times, the Southern Regional Council, which studies race matters throughout the South from its headquarters in Atlanta, had asked me to investigate and report. What I saw convinced me that the national government has an undeserved reputation, both among Southern opponents and Northern supporters, as a vigorous combatant for Negro rights.

To be fair, this much should be said at the outset in behalf of the Administration: fundamentally, it is behaving no differently from any of its

predecessors. We have always lived in a white society, where even liberalism is tinged with whiteness. I am measuring the actions of the Kennedys not against past performances, but against the needs of our time. My object is not to denounce, but to clarify. It is important for American citizens to know exactly how far they can depend on the national government, and how much remains for them to do. In the field of racial equality, this government simply cannot be depended upon for vigorous initiatives. It will, however respond to popular indignation and pressure. When I say that it often responds slowly and reluctantly, my intention is not to vilify John F. Kennedy, but to light a flame under the rest of us.

The Kennedy Administration has set limits, never publicized but nevertheless implicit in its actions, to its own power in the field of desegregation. It will act to keep law and order in cases of extreme and admitted defiance of federal authority, as in Oxford. But it will not act against violation of federal law in other cases—in Albany, Georgia, for instance—where the circumstances are less stark.

There is a rough analogy between Lincoln's insistence (in that famous letter to Horace Greeley) that he was more concerned with *union* than with slavery, and Kennedy's unspoken but obvious preoccupation with *law and order* above either desegregation or the right of free assembly. This explains why the Justice Department, while over a period of nine months 1,000 Negroes were being jailed in Albany for peaceful demonstrations against racial discrimination, gave tacit support to the chief of police for maintaining "law and order." Only after eight months of pressure and complaint did it enter the picture as "friend of the court" in a defensive suit. But it never took the initiative in behalf of Albany Negroes.

The analogy with Lincoln is only a rough one because even the "law and order" principle is applied by Kennedy rather narrowly, with shadowy situations interpreted against the Negro rather than for him. In the case of Ole Miss, the law was unquestionably clear and the imminence of disorder equally clear. But in Albany, there was legal doubt. True, there was an Interstate Commerce Commission ruling and explicit court decisions calling for desegregation of the bus and train terminals. But did not the chief of police say on three successive occasions, when arresting young people who had used the "white" section of the terminal, that it was not a matter of race, but of keeping "order"? A forthright national government might have dismissed this argument as easily as it did Barnett's contention that race was not the basic reason for barring James Meredith from Ole Miss. But the Kennedy Administration chose not to challenge Albany's Chief Pritchett.

And when, last December, more than 700 Negro men, women and children

were packed into jails in the Albany area for protesting segregation by marching through downtown streets and holding prayer meetings in front of City Hall, the government might have gone to court, on the basis of the First Amendment, to defend the right of free assembly. It might be contended, however, that with Negroes in jail, Albany had more “order.” Also, constitutional lawyers disagree over the right of the government to take the initiative in enforcing the First Amendment. The Kennedy Administration has talked of the New Frontier, but perhaps this frontier does not extend into the South or into the field of constitutional law.

Albany is a quiet commercial town in southwest Georgia surrounded by farm land that, in pre-Civil War days, was slave plantation country. Negroes, once a majority in the community, now make up 40 percent of its population of 56,000. Interestingly enough, like many Southern cities just beginning the process of desegregation, Albany has been free of white mob violence of the kind that made headlines at Oxford, Little Rock, and a few other places. When, last December, Negroes marched downtown in large but peaceful groups to sing and pray in front of City Hall, whites stood by and watched with curiosity—resentful, perhaps, but quiet. It was the city and county officials who, by jailing the peaceful demonstrators, repeatedly violated the Fourteenth Amendment, which not only prohibits the application of local law on the basis of color, but also—according to constitutional doctrine accepted since the 1920s—bars deprivation by local officials of the rights of free speech, assembly, and petition.

The fact that it was local police who violated constitutional doctrine is important because it is against local governments, rather than private persons, that the federal government has the clearest right to act in defense of the rights of citizens.

A shaky truce ended the December demonstrations, which had been provoked by arrests at the train terminal, but were rooted, of course, in the total segregation and white domination that make Albany, Georgia, such a hard place for Negroes to live in. By January, the truce began to fall apart. That month, an eighteen-year-old Negro girl named Ola Mae Quarterman sat in the front seat of an Albany bus, refused to move on the command of the driver, was arrested by a policeman and convicted in city court for using “obscene” language. The driver testified that she had told him: “I paid my damn twenty-cents, and I can sit where I want.” Subsequently Miss Quarterman told a federal court, to which her case had gone on appeal, that she had used the word “damn” in relation to her twenty cents, not in relation to the driver. (Anywhere but the Deep South a judge might have thought it incredible that she should be forced to defend her words by making such a distinction.) The city’s counsel insisted her race had nothing to

do with her arrest, and in cross-examination asked if it were not true that the cause of her arrest was her “vulgar language.” She replied softly, “That’s what they said.”

There followed several hundred arrests as the city police moved promptly against every Negro who in any way and under any circumstances, challenged segregation patterns: two young men who sat in the Trailways terminal restaurant; four men picketing a store downtown; thirty youngsters asking service at a lunch counter; twenty-nine people praying in front of City Hall; 150 more on the way to City Hall; seven praying in front of City Hall; ten more; eighteen more; sixteen more; all praying in front of City Hall; fourteen praying at the Carnegie Library—all thrown into jail.

After a thousand arrests, Police Chief Laurie Pritchett emerged into national prominence as some sort of hero. He had kept the peace. Somehow, the standard for American democracy accepted by the Administration became the standard for the nation: the sole criterion was the prevention of violence. The fact that violence had at no time been imminent in the demonstrations was overlooked.

There is a statute in the U.S. Criminal Code, Section 242, going back to 1866, which makes it a crime for a local law-enforcement officer deliberately to subject “any inhabitant of any State ... to the deprivation of any rights, privileges, or immunities secured or protected by the Constitution and laws of the United States ...” Under any reasonable interpretation, this law was broken in Albany at least thirty times from November 1, 1961, when police for the first time ignored the ICC ruling desegregating the bus terminal, to the middle of August 1962, when three youngsters trying to attend services at a white church were arrested. To select one instance with at least fifty witnesses; a county judge watched quietly from his bench as deputy sheriffs dragged and pushed out of his courtroom five young people—one Negro and four whites—who had taken seats in the “wrong” section (by race). One was a young woman whom a deputy dragged over a row of seats and pushed through a revolving door.

The U.S. Department of Justice maintains an FBI office in Albany. Affidavits have flowed into that FBI office in a steady stream, attesting to violations by local officials of the constitutional rights of Negroes. But nothing was done. As recently as last week, the Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. publicly charged that the FBI agents in Albany have been favoring the segregationists. [As to the role of the FBI in the investigation of complaints by Negroes in the South charging violations of civil rights, and of the attitude of Negroes toward the bureau, see Volume V of the 1961 *Report of the Civil Rights Commission*, particularly the notes on pages 211 and 219.—Ed]

The Department of Justice, citing a 1943 case in which the conviction of a

Georgia sheriff in the brutal killing of a Negro named Bobby Hall was overturned by a narrow Supreme Court interpretation of Section 242, takes the position that it should prosecute only in extreme cases of police brutality. This policy allows transgressors of Negro rights who stop short of premeditated murder to act with reasonable assurance that the federal government will not move. Last summer, as least three acts of brutality occurred in the Albany area, were duly reported to the FBI, and thus far have resulted in no federal action. I will describe these three in some detail as told to me by the principals.

On July 23, 1962, about 5:30 p.m., Mrs. Slater King, wife of a Negro leader in the Albany Movement, drove from Albany to the Camilla jail in neighboring Mitchell County, carrying food to a girl who had been arrested with a hundred other Negroes while on a march to City Hall. Mrs. King was in her sixth month of pregnancy, and had her three children along. "All you niggers get away from the fence," one of the deputies standing nearby called out as a group of visiting women approached the jailhouse. Mrs. King walked slowly towards her car. A deputy pointed her out, cursed her, threatened to arrest her if she didn't hurry. She turned and said, "If you want to arrest me, go ahead." She was then kicked, hit twice on the side of the head and was knocked unconscious.

Several days later, William Hansen, a twenty-year-old white field worker for the Student NonViolent Coordinating Committee, and a veteran of jails in Mississippi and Maryland for participating in desegregation actions, was put in the Dougherty County jail in Albany after a prayer session in front of City Hall. A prison trusty, to whom the jailer had earlier suggested that Hansen needed to be "straightened out," beat the Cincinnati youth into senselessness as he sat on the floor reading. His jaw and several ribs were broken. Bleeding profusely from the mouth, he asked the jailer for medical aid, and was told that was not within the jailer's jurisdiction. Finally, a message shouted through the cell window brought about his transfer to the city jail, where he was hospitalized.

That same Saturday afternoon, C. D. King, thirty-six, the first and only Negro attorney in the city of Albany and the legal backbone of the Albany Movement, heard of Hansen's beating. He visited Sheriff Cull Campbell of Dougherty County to check on Hansen's condition. A Negro minister who was waiting to meet King in the Sheriff's office at the time later described what happened. Sheriff Campbell, seeing King in his office, said, "Nigger, haven't I told you to wait outside?" As King turned to reply, the Sheriff picked up a walking stick and hit him viciously on the head, breaking the cane. King staggered from the office, blood streaming from his head and crossed the street to City Hall, where Chief Pritchett had him taken to a hospital. Pritchett, who had just arrested twenty-eight Negroes for praying and singing in front of City Hall called the beating of

King “very regrettable.” The *New York Times* reporter, Claude Sitton, noted that “Chief Pritchett had more than 160 city, county and state law-enforcement officers standing by to prevent violence.” Sheriff Campbell readily admitted the beating when I questioned him a month after the incident: “Yeah, I knocked hell out of him, and I’ll do it again. I let him know I’m a white man and he’s a damn nigger.”

All of the above three incidents were reported to the FBI, which dutifully recorded them. Thus far, the federal government has taken no action.

The few things that the national government *did* do in Albany give a clue to the boundaries it has drawn for itself in the field of civil rights. It went into a frantic day of telephone calls when Martin Luther King, Jr., was jailed in Albany; King, of course, is a politically important symbol. President Kennedy, in answer to questions on Albany at two different press conferences, made two statements. In one, he criticized Albany officials for refusing to negotiate with Negroes; in the other, he denounced the burning of Negro churches that had been used for voter-registration activities in the Albany area. The President’s plea for negotiation, like his careful speech on the eve of Meredith’s registration at Ole Miss, carefully skirted the moral issue of racial equality and stuck to procedural questions: the law, negotiation. The President has still not followed the advice of his own Civil Rights Commission to give “moral leadership” and to use “education and persuasion.” His statement on church-burning covered two points on which the Administration is especially sensitive: its antipathy to nationally publicized violence and its careful defense of voter-registration activity.

There is a plausible legal argument to the effect that voting rights are protected by specific legislation (the Civil Rights Acts of 1957 and 1960), while the First Amendment rights of free speech, assembly, etc., and the Fourteenth Amendment right to color-blind treatment by local officials, are not. However, a national administration less timorous than the present one could find solid legal sanction for the widespread use of injunctions to protect free assembly and to attack legal segregation. In the *Debs* case of 1895, the Supreme Court supported the issuance of injunctions without specific statutory basis, saying: “Every government has a right to apply to its own courts in matters which the Constitution has entrusted to the care of the national government.” This ruling has never been overturned.

A truly bold national administration might do the following: (1) prosecute vigorously, under Sec. 242, violations of Negro rights by local officers; (2) create a corps of special agents—not encumbered, as is the FBI, by intimate relations with local police officers—to prevent, as well as to investigate, violations of constitutional rights; (3) use the power of injunction freely, both to

prevent policemen from curtailing the right of assembly and petition and to break down legal enforcement of segregation; (4) tell the South and the nation frankly that racial discrimination is morally wrong as well as illegal, and that the nation intends to wipe it out.

At this moment, because of the limitations that the Administration has imposed upon itself, there is a vast no-man's-land for American Negroes into which they are invited by the Constitution, but where federal authority will not protect them. It was into this no-man's-land that the Negro population of Albany ventured, and found itself deserted. The future may bring one or two more Oxfords, but there are a hundred potential Albanys. Throughout the Deep South, Negroes are on the move towards dangerous territory. And so far, though these men, women and children live in a nation whose power encircles the globe and reaches into space, they are very much on their own.

Alabama: Freedom Day in Selma (1968)

The black young men and women who staged the sit-ins all over the South in early 1960 got together that spring to form the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC—to be known as Snick). Their spiritual and intellectual guide in this was an extraordinary black woman named Ella Baker, who had been a long-time activist in Harlem, an organizer for the NAACP, and aide to Martin Luther King. I was asked to join her in being an “adult advisor” to SNCC, serving on its executive committee. In October of 1963, SNCC decided to tackle one of the most dangerous of jobs, to register black voters in Dallas County, Alabama, by bringing hundreds of them into the county seat, the small city of Selma, for “Freedom Day.” I went along as participant-writer, and then wrote an angry article for The New Republic (later enlarged as a chapter in my book SNCC: The New Abolitionists), and what follows this introduction is that chapter. I pointed to the failure of federal officials on the scene to prevent police brutality against SNCC workers helping people with voter registration. My article led to a sharp exchange with Burke Marshall, head of the Civil Rights Division of the Department of Justice, who insisted the federal government did not have the power to intercede. Shortly after this, he wrote a small book defending his thesis, and when I read a review of it in a major law journal I was happy to see his ideas demolished by Richard Wasserstrom, one of the Department of Justice lawyers who had been on the scene in Selma that day. Wasserstrom corroborated what I had found: that statutes going far back in the history of the nation gave the federal government clear power to enforce constitutional rights when local officials failed to do so.

On the night of June 11, 1963, the Rev. Bernard Lafayette, ready to park at his home, was approached by a man who told him that his car had stalled across the street and he needed a push. “How much will you charge me for a push?” the man asked. “Nothing,” replied Lafayette, and lined up his car behind the other one. It was a scene that has taken place a thousand times in a thousand American towns. But this was different: the town was Selma, Alabama; Bernard Lafayette was a former Freedom Rider and a field secretary for SNCC; the man asking for

help was white. When Lafayette bent to see if the bumpers matched, he was clubbed on the head, and he fell to the pavement, blood spurting over his clothes. Then he was hit twice more on the head, and the man drove off. He got to a doctor, who sewed up his wound with six stitches, and the next day he was back at his job, registering voters in Selma.

Selma has an unreal air about it. It is as if a movie producer had reconstructed a pre-Civil War Southern town—decaying buildings, the muddy streets, the little cafes, and the huge red brick Hotel Albert, modelled after a medieval Venetian palace. A mule draws a wagonload of cotton down the street. But cotton is just hanging on. At one time, 627,000 acres in the area grew cotton. Now it's down to 27,000 acres.

You walk into the Silver Moon Cafe. On the shelves facing you there are bottles of whiskey and boxes of corn flakes. At your feet, running the length of the counter, is a tin channel spittoon. Past a swinging door you can make out the murky interior of the Negro section of the cafe. In the white section, in a booth, sits a Mexican family, eating in silence (eighty-five Mexicans were brought in this year to pick cotton; they pick more cotton for less money than Negroes do, say the local whites). Two women sit at a table, drinking beer, looking up to curse the strangers sitting at the counter. You recall what *Newsweek* writer Karl Fleming was told in another Alabama city: "We killed two-year-old Indian babes to get this country, and you want to give it to the niggers."

Selma was a slave market before the Civil War. In one three-story house, still standing, four or five hundred Negroes were kept at one time to be exhibited and sold. The town became a military depot for the Confederacy. At the turn of the century, it was a lynching town. By the 1950s the lynching had stopped, but the threat of it remained. Selma became the birthplace of the Citizens Council in Alabama, wrapped tight in the rules of race.

A little south of the geographic center of Alabama, Selma is about fifty miles due west of Montgomery, and downstream from it on the Alabama River. It is the seat of Dallas County, where, in 1961, 57 percent of the population was Negro, but only about 1 percent of the eligible Negroes were registered to vote, while 64 percent of the eligible whites were registered. The median income for Negroes is about \$28 a week. With several new government buildings in the center of town, Selma has a trace of the twentieth century; but beyond it the Alabama countryside is an unpenetrated social jungle. In neighboring Wilcox County, for instance, where Negroes are 78 percent of the population, not one of them is registered to vote; their median income is about \$20 a week.

Bruce Boynton is a Negro attorney, now in Chattanooga, who grew up in

Selma. (His mother, Mrs. Amelia Boynton, still lives there, a rock to whom the new freedom movement is anchored, a 1964 candidate for the U.S. Senate.) Mr. Boynton says:

A Negro boy growing up in Selma lives a life that other Americans cannot easily understand. When he wakes up in the morning he looks outside the window and it is dusty, hot, wet, the street mired in mud. He is aware that his mother is away all the time, at work. He is aware of the jobs his mother and father have, how little they make, how much more the white folks make. Coming home from school he sees the sign on the bus directing him to the back. One of his first ideas is: I must get out of this town.

In February of 1963, Bernard Lafayette and his wife Colia came to Selma to begin a voter registration drive for SNCC. It was slow, hard going. One of the first consequences was that thirty-two schoolteachers who tried to register to vote were fired. Arrests mounted, for minor or imaginary traffic offenses, for picketing at the county courthouse, for simply being seen downtown or riding in an automobile. Worth Long, a SNCC man, was beaten by a deputy sheriff in the county jail. John Lewis was arrested for leading a picket line at the courthouse. A nineteen-year old girl was knocked off a stool in a store and prodded with a electric pole as she lay on the floor unconscious.

Between September 15 and October 2, 1963, over three hundred people were arrested in Selma in connection with voter registration activities. The Federal government filed suit, but its mild efforts left the constitutional liberties of Selma citizens in the hands of Sheriff Jim Clark. Clark augmented his regular force of deputies with several hundred ordinary citizens, armed them with clubs and cattle prods, and stated that he was convinced that all this voting activity was part of a world communist conspiracy. In May, when Jim Forman came to Selma to address the first mass meeting at the Tabernacle Baptist Church, the posse surrounded the church. Those inside waited, long after the meeting was over, until they felt it safe to go home.

“Do you know any white man in Selma—just one even—who is sympathetic with your cause?” I asked three young Selma fellows as we talked in Mrs. Boynton’s home. “Not one,” they said. “Well, maybe one,” one of them added. There was a Jewish storekeeper for whom his mother worked, and the man would sit and talk with the boy in the back of the store, telling him, “Keep up the good work.” Later that night, I saw a list of Citizens Council members who signed a proclamation in the local paper; the storekeeper’s name was near the top of the list. There are over a hundred Jews in Selma, many of them businessmen, many of them—through conviction or through fear—members of the Citizens Council.

The only white man who openly helped the Negro movement was Father Maurice Ouillet, a thirty-seven-year old Catholic priest in charge of St. Edmonds Mission in Selma. Father Ouillet was called in once by a group of white leaders of the city and advised to leave town for his own protection, told he might be

killed. He received abusive phone calls. Once, he told *Texas Observer* editor Ronnie Dugger, as he visited demonstrators at the jail, someone called him an “adjective, adjective nigger-lover.”

With John Lewis and seven others still in jail in October, 1963, with Sheriff Clark’s posse armed and on the prowl, with people afraid to go down to the courthouse, SNCC decided on a large-scale offensive. They had discovered elsewhere that fear decreased with numbers. It was decided to set October 7 as the day to bring hundreds to the county courthouse to register. As Freedom Day approached, mass meetings were held every night, and the churches were packed.

On October 5, Dick Gregory came to Selma. His wife, Lillian, had been jailed in Selma while demonstrating. He spoke to a crowded church meeting that evening. It was an incredible performance. With armed deputies ringing the church outside, and three local officials sitting in the audience taking notes, Gregory lashed out at white Southern society with a steely wit and a passion that sent his Negro listeners into delighted applause again and again. Never in the history of this area had a black man stood like this on a public platform, ridiculing and denouncing white officials to their faces. It was a historic coming of age for Selma, Alabama. It was also something of a miracle that Gregory was able to leave town alive. The local newspaper said that a “wildly applauding crowd” listened that night to “the most scathing attack unleashed here in current racial demonstrations.”

Gregory told the audience that the Southern white man had nothing he could call his own, no real identity, except “segregated drinking fountains, segregated toilets, and the right to call me nigger.” He added, “And when the white man is threatened with losing his *toilet*, he’s ready to kill!” He wished, Gregory said, that the whole Negro race would disappear overnight. “They would go crazy looking for us!” The crowd roared and applauded. Gregory lowered his voice, and he was suddenly serious: “But it looks like we got to do it the hard way, and stay down here, and educate them.”

He called the Southern police officials “peons, the idiots who do all the dirty work, the dogs who do all the biting.” He went on for over two hours in that vein; essentially it was a lesson in economics and sociology, streaked with humor. “The white man starts all the wars, then he talks about you cuttin’ somebody.... They talk about our education. But the most important thing is to teach people how to live ...”

Later, Jim Forman spoke to the crowd, making the last preparations for Freedom Day. “All right, let’s go through the phone book. You’ll know who’s Negro, because they won’t have Mr. or Mrs. in front of their names! You got to

get on the phone tonight and call these people and tell them to come down to the courthouse tomorrow, that it's Freedom Day. You take a boloney sandwich and a glass of cool water and go down there and stay all day. Now get on that phone tonight. Who'll take the letter 'A'? ..."

The Selma Freedom Chorus sang, the most beautiful singing I had heard since the mass meetings in Albany; among them there were some really small children, some teenagers, a boy at the piano. There was a big sign up on the platform, "DO YOU WANT TO BE FREE." After the singing, everyone went home, through the doors out into the street, where two cars with white men inside had been parked all evening in the darkness outside the church.

Some of us waited that night at Mrs. Boynton's for James Baldwin to arrive. He was flying into Birmingham; some SNCC fellows would pick him up there and drive him to Selma. He was coming to observe Freedom Day. While waiting, we sat around in the kitchen and talked. Jim Forman expertly scrambled eggs in a frying pan with one hand, gesturing with the other to make a point. It was after midnight when Baldwin came in, his brother David with him. Everyone sat in the livingroom and waited for him to say something. He smiled broadly: "You fellows talk. I'm new here. I'm trying to find out what's happening." Forman started off; there was a fast exchange of information and opinions, then everyone said goodnight. It was getting close to Freedom Day.

I made notes, almost minute by minute, that October 7, 1963:

9:30 A.M. It was sunny and pleasant in downtown Selma. I asked a Negro man on the corner the way to the county courthouse. He told me, looking at me just a little longer than a Negro looks at a white man in the South. The courthouse is green stone, quite modern looking compared to the rest of Selma. There was already a line of Negroes outside the door, on the steps of the courthouse, then running alongside the building, broken briefly to make room for people going in and out of an alley which ran along the courthouse, then continuing for another seventy-five feet. I counted over a hundred people on line. On the steps of the courthouse and down in the street stood a dozen or so deputy sheriffs and members of Sheriff Clark's special posse. They wore green helmets or white helmets, guns at their hips, long clubs. One young deputy, black-haired, with very long sideburns, swung a club as long as a baseball bat. A few newspapermen were already on the scene. The editor of the *Selma Times-Journal*, Arthur Capell, quiet, thin, dark-haired, said: "Those people on line will never get registered. There are three members of the Board inside, and they spend quite some time on each registrant. There's never been more than thirty or forty registered in one day." The office would close at 4:30 p.m., and I realized now those people were going to wait on line eight hours, knowing they would

not get inside the courthouse. I looked down the line. Middle-aged Negro men and women, some old folks, a few young ones, dressed not in their Sunday best, but neatly, standing close together in line.

In Alabama, as in Mississippi, one doesn't simply register to vote; one applies to register. This meant filling out a long form with twenty-one questions. Question 15: "Name some of the duties and obligations of citizenship." Question 15A: "Do you regard those duties and obligations as having priority over the duties and obligations you owe to any other secular organization when they are in conflict?" Then the registrar would ask oral questions, such as, "Summarize the Constitution of the United States." Three weeks later there would be a postcard: passed or failed. Another quaint thing about registration procedure in Dallas County was that applications were accepted only on the first and third Mondays of each month. Registering at the rate of thirty a day, even if all were passed, it would take ten years for Negroes to make up the 7,000 plurality held by white registrants in Dallas County.

9:45 A.M. The line now extended around the corner. I saw Sheriff Jim Clark for the first time, a six-footer with a big stomach, on his green helmet a gold medallion with an eagle, a big gold star on his shirt, the Confederate flag stamped on his helmet, an open collar, epaulets on his shoulders. Gun at his hip.

10:00 a.m. More posse members were arriving and taking up positions near the line. It was clear they hadn't expected so many Negroes to show up, so that they had to keep calling for reinforcements. I walked down the line counting—about twenty-five inside the door and on the steps, then one hundred down to the corner, then fifty around the corner—total, 175. It was clear and sunny. Cameramen from NBC and CBS were arriving. I noticed a scaffold up one story on the county courthouse; two young white men in painter's overalls were on the scaffold, putting windows, suspended eerily over the events below.

10:45 A.M. The line of Negroes growing. Never in the history of Selma had so many Negroes showed up to register to vote. More members of the posse took up positions near the line; now there was an unbroken line of helmeted men in khakis or fatigues, carrying guns at their hips, clubs in their hands.

I wondered if Patti Hall would show up at the courthouse. She was a field secretary for SNCC, a pleasant, very intelligent young woman from Philadelphia, with a reputation for fervent oratory at mass meetings. She had gained her experience in the movement the preceding year in Terrae County, Georgia. Now she was directing the voter registration campaign in Selma. She'd been absent from the mass meeting Saturday night: word was out that a warrant had been issued for her arrest. Yesterday, Sunday, I had spoken to her at Mrs. Boynton's house and was going to interview her at length, but we delayed it so

she could get some rest (our talk was not to take place, for she was arrested the next day).

10:25 A.M. Jim Forman was coming down the street. Walking alongside him was James Baldwin, in an open collar sportshirt and tan windbreaker, and next to him his brother David. I talked with one of the two Justice Department lawyers here to observe Freedom Day. I looked up and saw the American flag waving overhead; now I realized the new stone building directly across the street from the county courthouse was the federal building. Inside was the federal court; also, the social security office, the draft board, and the local offices of the FBI. I asked the Justice Department man, “How many lawyers are there now with the Civil Rights Division of the Justice Department?” “About forty,” he said.

I went down the line again, counting, walking between the members of the posse and the Negroes on line. I counted over two hundred. Among them were about ten white people. It was voter registration day for everyone, and the line was integrated. Someone told me that the Citizens Council had put on a special drive to get white people to register today.

The Baldwin brothers walked with Jim Forman as he went down the line, saying hello, encouraging people to stay. “Now you just sit here,” Forman said as he walked along, “just sit here and get some sunshine.” Two posse men followed him. When Forman stopped, one of them said: “Get goin’! You’re blockin’ the sidewalk.”

10:40 A.M. More posse arriving. Two posse members stood near me, munching peanuts. There were enough now to have them a few feet apart all along the line and around the corner. Nothing in the Deep South was more dangerous to public order, it seemed, than a line of Negro citizens trying to register to vote. Across the street was a police car with two loudspeakers on top. Two young police officers in white helmets were near it. Aside from the dozen or so news photographers and reporters, there were very few white people around—just a handful of onlookers standing at the corner.

11:00 A.M. More people joining the line. I counted again, thinking once more that these people coming on to the line knew they would never enter the courthouse that day. There were twenty on the steps and inside, fifty in the first section up to the alley, one hundred twenty in the second section down to the corner, one hundred around the corner—290 people altogether.

11:15 A.M. Jim Forman spoke to Bruce Gordon about its getting near lunch time, Bruce is a SNCC field secretary, originally from New York. I had talked with him when I arrived in Selma Saturday afternoon, at the First Baptist Church, and he was dressed now as then—he wore jeans and a T-shirt; a pack of cigarettes was stuck inside the shoulder of the T-shirt. He is slim, very dark, with

a big head of curly hair, very articulate—a former actor and set man. “My father never taught hate ... He encouraged me to go into the movement, said it’s better to fail grandly than to succeed at piddling little things ... I got out of the Army in March ’62, got to Atlanta in June, got with SNCC ... Julian said to me, ‘how would you like a job with SNCC for ten dollars a week?’ I said, ‘Yes ...’ I haven’t seen that money yet.” He laughed. “I had a scholarship at Clark College for this fall, a job with Lockheed for \$110 a week, and a chance to play a good role with an overseas troupe which is doing *Jamaica* in Europe in November. But I threw it all over for the movement. I was in Savannah for a while. Now I’m here.” (The next day someone told me that Bruce had led a demonstration against police headquarters in Savannah, and had spent fifty-five days in jail.)

Forman told Bruce to get three big slabs of boloney and about ten to twelve loaves of bread, to feed the people on line.

11:20 A.M. Forman, Gordon, and I were talking near the side entrance of the County Courthouse, around the corner—no line there. Sheriff Clark came over, his eyes vacant, his voice rising: “All right, clear out of here, you’re blocking the sidewalk!”

11:30 A.M. On the corner, in front of the courthouse door, a man with sound equipment spoke to James Baldwin. Baldwin’s eyes looked enormous, fiery. He waved towards the line of helmeted troopers: “The federal government is not doing what it is supposed to do ...”

11:40 A.M. Nobody up to this point could find a Negro who had come out of the courthouse who had actually gone through the registration procedure. But now a small group gathered around a Negro woman on the corner. “Yes, I went through, just finished. I believe twelve have gone through.” Twelve, in three hours. And over three hundred people on line.

11:45 A.M. The two white men were still on the scaffold above the scene, calmly puttying windows.

11:50 A.M. Jim Forman told us Sheriff Clark and two deputies had just been to Mrs. Boynton’s and arrested Prathia Hall. The charge was “contributing to the delinquency of a minor.” Clark had just returned from this little mission, for he now appeared behind Forman. His mood was ugly. He poked his club again and again into Forman’s side. “Get on! Get on!” Forman moved down the line towards the end. Ten Negro men were joining the line. We kept going, completely around the corner, Clark now far behind.

11:55 A.M. Forman mused about the problem of getting water to the people on line. The sun was beating down, I was in front of the courthouse door, the posse thicker now. I looked across the street to the federal building and saw there on the steps—standing so still that for a weird moment they looked like statues—

two SNCC fellows, holding signs that faced the registration line. One, in overalls and a fedora, had a sign saying, REGISTER TO VOTE.

I moved across the street to get a better look. As I did so, Sheriff Clark and three helmeted deputies came walking fast across the street. They went past two Justice Department attorneys and two FBI men up the steps of the federal building and grabbed hold of the two SNCC fellows. Clark called out: "You're under arrest for unlawful assembly!" A small knot of white men on the corner were yelling: "Get 'em, Big Jim! Get 'em!" The deputies pulled the two fellows down the steps of the federal building and pushed them into a police car. One of the white men on the corner yelled, "You forgot one, Big Jim!" I looked around and saw a lone SNCC man around the corner, on the steps to the other entrance into the federal building, holding a Voter Registration sign. Clark mounted the steps, and reached the lone sign-carrier: "You're under arrest for unlawful assembly!" He too was pulled into the police car.

I had seen other instances of federal invisibility in Deep South crises, but this was too much. I turned to the Justice Department man near me. "Is that a *federal* building?" I asked. "Yes," he said, and turned away. The police car with the three SNCC men sped off.

12:10 P.M. Jim Forman walked over to Mrs. Boynton's office three blocks away to phone the Atlanta SNCC office about the arrests, and I walked with him. On the way, we intercepted six young SNCC fellows on the way to the county courthouse. Forman waved them back. "We need all of you today. We can't afford to have any of you arrested." In the office, before phoning, he sat down for a moment, reached into his overalls and pulled out his ulcer pills. In January, he had had to have surgery on a badly bleeding ulcer, requiring five blood transfusions. "How often do you take those?" I asked. He smiled. "Every two hours. But now, with what we have here, every twenty minutes." He told me that last night he had wired the Justice Department for federal marshals, sure there would be trouble. The Justice Department had not replied.

12:15 P.M. J. L. Chestnut, the one Negro lawyer in town, a slim, youthful man, came by. Forman said to him: "We've got to get Prathia out of jail *today*. We need her, man."

In the little room behind Mrs. Boynton's front office, James Baldwin sat with his brother David. A bottle of Ballantine Scotch was on the table in front of him and a few paper cups of water. He was writing in his notebook. Forman and the fellows in the office began discussing how to get the people on line fed. Many of them had been there since early in the morning with no food, no water. Someone suggested that there was a Community Center two blocks from the courthouse where food might be set up. People could leave the line in groups, get fed at the

center, then return. They considered this idea for a while until someone said that it would be bad psychologically for people to leave the line; some might not return. Jim agreed. Food would either have to be brought to the line, or people would come across the street to a food station and then return.

In the front office, a young Negro woman, fair-skinned, her hair tinted lightly with red, was sitting at a desk going over the registration form with an old bent Negro woman who might have been seventy. She read off the questions, and with each one, asked, "Do you understand, mother?" The woman nodded her head calmly each time.

Word came back that the registrars had stopped registering for the lunch period. They would start again at two. Forman said, "We've got to keep those people in line." Again, the question of food and drink was discussed. More word from the courthouse: a caravan of automobiles with state troopers had arrived at the county courthouse. People counted 350 Negroes on the registration line.

I walked back alone to the courthouse. The state troopers' autos were lined up along the curb from one end of the street to the other—eleven long automobiles, searchlights mounted on top. The troopers themselves had now taken posts all along the registration line—about forty of them—with blue helmets, clubs, guns. A few of them, apparently in command, were bunched near the courthouse entrance. Their commander, Colonel Al Lingo, the veteran bully of Birmingham and the Freedom Walk, the man who had made infamous the use of electric prods in civil rights demonstrations, was not around. Taking his place was a hefty trooper with gold leaf insignia on his shoulders, Major Joe Smelley. I got up close to the troopers near the door. Several of them were holding cattle prods, squarish sticks with prongs at the end, the juice supplied by a battery and activated by a touch of the finger, burning the skin wherever it touched.

1:40 P.M. Jim Forman conferred briefly with a representative of the Department of Justice. The problem was the same: how to get the people fed. The word had gotten through the line that the troopers would not let anyone leave and return to the line. Joe Smelley stood there, near the head of the line, surrounded by a coterie of blue helmets, a cigar in his mouth. The sun was warmer; the hunger on the line was greater; Jim Forman's anger was increasing; the Justice Department lawyers were more nervous. Tension was building up on that normally quiet corner, now a blur of painted helmets and armed men. A SNCC car was parked in front of the federal building and in it were the sandwiches. The only problem was: how to get them to the people on line without breaking up the line.

1:45 P.M. A Negro lawyer, visiting Selma this day from Detroit, made no effort to contain his fury, as he spoke to me about the impotence of the federal government on that corner in Selma, Alabama: four FBI men ten feet away. He

shook his head. “He’s a real hot number, isn’t he! Boy, whenever anyone tells me about the FBI ...” His own words seemed to build his anger, because he suddenly walked over to the FBI man and said, “No comment,” and walked away.

1:50 P.M. It was fairly clear by now that the sheriff, his posse, and the state troopers were determined that the people on line would not be fed or approached in any way. At this moment, a little old white man walked down the line of Negroes, unconcerned, and immune. He was selling newspapers, and doing very well; after all, he was the line’s only direct contact with the outside world.

1:55 P.M. Word kept coming to Jim Forman, “People won’t leave the line to get something to eat. They’re afraid they won’t be able to get back!”

Forman and Mrs. Boynton walked across the street from the federal building to the courthouse entrance to talk to Sheriff Jim Clark. The Sheriff seemed to be in a rage. The conversation went something like this (I was a few feet away and scribbled as fast as I could):

Forman: We’d like to bring food to these people on line. They’ve been waiting all day.

Clark: They will not be molested in any way.

Mrs. Boynton: Does giving them food mean molesting them?

Clark: They will not be molested in any way. If you do, you’ll be arrested.

Forman: We’d like to talk to them; they’re standing on line to register to vote, and we’d like to explain registration procedure to them.

Clark: They will not be molested in any way, and that includes talking to them.

2:00 P.M. A fragile thread was stretched taut, and everyone watched. Forman and Mrs. Boynton went back across the street. As they did, I heard a loud, creaking noise and looked up; it was the scaffold that had been suspended above the scene with the two window puttiers; it was coming down now. I looked closer at the windows of the courthouse and saw the faces of county employees jammed up against them.

I spoke briefly with Danny Lyon, the photographer who had been following “the movement” all over the South and taking pictures of it, a curly-haired fellow with a thick mustache, high-spirited, unafraid. We mused over the emblem on the door of the county courthouse. It said, “Dallas County, Alabama,” and showed what looked like a figure bearing a set of scales. The scales were tipped sharply. “Justice?” Danny asked, smiling. A posse man near us was showing his electric cattle prod to a companion.

2:05 P.M. I spoke to the senior Justice Department attorney: “Is there any reason why a representative of the Justice Department can’t go over and talk to the state troopers and say these people are entitled to food and water?” He was perturbed by the question. There was a long pause. Then he said, “I won’t do it.” He paused again. “I believe they do have the right to receive food and water. But I

won't do it."

2:10 P.M. Forman was calling newsmen and photographers together to witness the next scene. All were gathered in the alley alongside the Federal Building, around a shopping cart which contained the uneaten sandwiches and the keg of water. Mrs. Boynton said: "We're determined to reach these people on line with food." Two SNCC field secretaries stood before the shopping cart and filled their arms with food. One of them was Avery Williams, Alabama-born. Another was Chico Neblett from Carbondale, Illinois. Both had left college to work for SNCC.

Chico gave his wallet to Forman, a final small gesture of acceptance of going to jail. He said to Avery, "Let's go, man." They walked down to the corner (a SNCC man never jaywalks in the South!) with all eyes on the street focused on them. They crossed at the corner. A group of us—photographers, newsmen, others—crossed the street at the same time. It was 2:20 p.m. As Chico and Avery came close to the line, the fat trooper with the cigar and the blue helmet, Major Smelley, barked at them, "Move on!" They kept going towards the line of registrants. He called out, "Get 'em!" The next thing I saw was Chico Neblett on the ground, troopers all around him. They poked at him with clubs and sticks. I heard him cry out and saw his body jump convulsively again and again; they were jabbing him with the cattle prods. Photographers were taking pictures, and the Major yelled, "Get in front of those cameramen!" Four troopers lifted Chico by his arms and legs, carried him to the corner, threw him into the green arrest truck that stood at the curb.

Now the troopers and posse men turned on the group of us who had followed all this; they pushed and shoved, ripped a photographer's shirt. A young reporter for the *Montgomery Advertiser*, himself a native of Selma, had his camera smacked by a state trooper using his billyclub. Then the trooper pinned the reporter against a parked truck and ripped his shirt. When he walked to the sidewalk, a posse man back-handed him across the mouth.

We moved back across the street to the federal building. The Justice Department attorney was at the public telephone on the corner, making a call. He looked troubled. The green arrest truck pulled away. Chico and Avery waved. The Justice Department attorney took the name of the photographer who had been hit; several of us went into the FBI office and swore out statements on what had happened.

3:30 P.M. Four of us sat on the steps of the federal building and talked: the young Negro attorney from Detroit, James Baldwin, the white attorney from the Justice Department, and myself. The Detroit attorney said, "Those cops could have massacred all those three hundred Negroes on line, and still nothing would

have been done.” Baldwin was angry, upset. The Justice Department man was defensive. He asked Baldwin what he was working on now. Answer: a play. What was the title? *Blues for Mister Charlie*, Baldwin replied.

3:40 P.M. Still no food and no water for the people waiting. I walked down the street, checking the number of people, to see if the arrests and the excitement had diminished the line. It was longer than before.

3:55 P.M. Baldwin was talking to a newspaperman, “It cannot be true, it is impossible that the federal government cannot do anything.”

A police loudspeaker boomed out into the street: “All you people who don’t have business here get on. White and colored folks, move on.” We gathered on the steps of the federal building, not sure it would prove a refuge. Jim Forman joined us.

4:30 P.M. The courthouse closed its doors. The line was breaking up. The Detroit lawyer watched men and women walk slowly away. His voice trembled, “Those people should be given medals.” We made our way back to SNCC headquarters.

That night, there was a mass meeting at the church called for 8:00 p.m. At 7:00 p.m. fifteen people were there. I spoke to an old man. He was a veteran of World War I, seventy-three years old, had lived in Selma all his life. I asked him if, in his recollection, there had ever been any activity by Selma Negroes like this. He shook his head. “Nothing like this ever happened to Selma. Nothing, until SNCC came here.”

At five minutes of eight, the church was packed, every seat taken, people standing along the walls. Father Ouillet and another Catholic priest sat in the audience. The Negro attorney from the Justice Department sat there also. The kids in the chorus were up front, singing: “Oh, that light of free-ee-dom, I’m gonna let it shine!” A chandelier hung way up in the domed ceiling, a circle of twenty-five bare light bulbs glowing. A Negro minister started the meeting with prayer, the local newspaper editor, a white man, bowing his head as the minister intoned: “Bless this wicked city in which we live, oh Lord, have mercy on us!”

Forman spoke. The emotion of the day was still inside him: part of it triumph because 350 Negroes had stood on line from morning to evening in full view of the armed men who ruled Dallas County; part of it bitterness that those people, defending the United States Constitution against Sheriff Jim Clark and his posse, had to do it alone. “We ought to be happy today,” Forman told the crowd, “because we did something great ...” Everyone applauded. Forman went on: “Jim Clark never saw that many niggers down there!” The audience laughed with him. “Yeah, there was Jim Clark, rubbin’ his head and his big fat belly; he was shuffling today like we used to!” The crowd roared, needing release. When

Forman finished, the Freedom Chorus sang: “If you miss me, can’t find me nowhere, just come on over to the county jail, I’ll be sittin’ over there.”

David Baldwin spoke, his voice choked: “Until you come down here, you don’t believe it ... I’m not going to lie and say I wish I was going to stay longer ... It’s an evil town.” Just before he spoke, the Freedom Chorus sang the African folk song “Kumbaya,” with their own words. One of the stanzas was: “Selma needs you, Lord, Kumbaya! Selma needs you, Lord, Kumbaya! Selma needs you, Lord, Kumbaya! Oh Lord, Kumbaya!”

Then James Baldwin stood at the rostrum, his huge eyes burning into the crowd: “The sheriff and his deputies ... these ignorant people ... were created by the good white people on the hill—and in Washington—and they’ve created a monster they can’t control ... It’s not an act of God. It is deliberately done, deliberately created by the American Republic.”

The meeting closed as always, with everyone linking arms and singing “We Shall Overcome,” youngsters and old people and young women with babies in their arms, the SNCC people, the Catholic priests, the speakers on the platform. Over on the other side of the church I could see the young Negro attorney for the Justice Department, his arms crossed like everyone else, singing.

Mississippi: Hattiesburg (1968)

Hattiesburg is a town in southern Mississippi, and this account of Freedom Day in January, 1964 appeared in my book SNCC: The New Abolitionists. The part of the story that deals with the jailhouse beating of Oscar Chase appeared in The Nation as "Incident in Hattiesburg." Mrs. Fannie Lou Hamer, a sharecropper from Sunflower County, who was evicted from her plantation, shot at, and beaten by police after she joined the Movement, would soon become nationally known. She led a delegation of black Mississippians to the Atlantic City convention of the Democratic Party that summer and the television cameras focused on her anguished plea for justice. "I'm sick an' tired o' bein' sick an' tired," she said.

It was a bumpy air ride going west out of Atlanta on the twin-engined Southern Airways DC-3. The tall, very friendly air stewardess was surprised to see the airplane crowded with clergymen from the North on their way to Hattiesburg, and joked with them all the way in her deep drawl. I was the only one in the group not a member of the clergy, but when they found that I was also going to Hattiesburg to be with SNCC for Freedom Day, I was almost ordained.

Driving from the airport to SNCC headquarters, we passed a huge sign: "In the Beginning, God Made Us Holy." Some months before, a SNCC Field secretary had written from Hattiesburg to the Atlanta office:

We plan to let Guyot speak.... We are going to announce an interdenominational Bible study course that will be dedicated to the proposition that religion doesn't have to be bullshit. We hope to tie in an active image of the Christ, and what would he have done had he been here, now ... you see?

The ministers probably would have approved.

Hattiesburg, a short drive from the Gulf in Southern Mississippi, had been looked on by SNCC workers with some hope, ever since Curtis Hayes and Hollis Watkins left school in the spring of 1962 to start a voter registration campaign there, at the request of their McComb cellmate, Bob Moses. CORE man Dave Dennis had done some crucial ground-breaking work there. "Hattiesburg," one of the reports to Atlanta read, "is fantastic material for a beautifully organized shift from the old to the new ... they are ready now ..." Hattiesburg Negroes

were not quite as poor as those in the Delta; police brutality seemed not quite as harsh there. As we drove into town, we passed the mansion of Paul Johnson, whose father had been governor himself. The radio was reporting Governor Johnson's inaugural address; it had a distinctly more moderate tone than his fierce campaign pronouncements on race.

In the rundown Negro section of Hattiesburg, on a cracked and crooked street filled with little cafes, was SNCC's Freedom House, owned by Mrs. Wood, a widow and a member of a prominent Negro family in Hattiesburg. (When John O'Neal, a SNCC worker from Southern Illinois University, arrived to work in Hattiesburg in the summer of 1963, he wrote to Moses: "Mrs. Wood received us late Wednesday night, and put a room open for us. She's a fine old warrior...." Outside the headquarters, a crowd of Negro youngsters milled around in the street, talking excitedly. Snatches of freedom songs rose here and there. This was Tuesday, January 21, 1964, and tomorrow was Freedom Day in Hattiesburg.

Inside the Freedom House, which was cluttered with typewriters, mimeograph machines, charts, photos, and notices, and was filled with people and incessant noise, the first person I saw was Mrs. Hamer sitting near the doorway. Upstairs, Bob Moses greeted me and took me past the big open parlor area where a meeting was going on planning strategy for the next day. He showed me into the room where he and his wife Dona were staying; only a few weeks before he had married Dona Richards, a diminutive, attractive University of Chicago graduate with a tough, quick mind, who had come to Mississippi to work with SNCC on a special education project. It was a combination bedroom and SNCC office, with a huge mirrored closet, carved mahogany bedstead, four typewriters, a gas heater, a suitcase, a wash basin, a map of Hattiesburg, and a vase of flowers.

Other SNCC people drifted into the room, and a session on Freedom Day strategy began. It was assumed that, as in every case where a picket line was set up in Mississippi, the pickets would be arrested. So a number of decisions had to be made. Some SNCC staff people would have to go to prison to keep up the morale of those who were not so experienced in Mississippi jails—Lawrence Guyot, Dona Moses, and five or six more; others would have to stay out to run the voter registration campaign after the jailings—Jesse Harris, MacArthur Cotton, Mrs. Hamer. Bob Moses, it was decided, would join the picket line, would go to jail, and would stay there, to dramatize to the nation that the basic right of protest did not exist in Mississippi.

The meeting moved outside into the hall, so that Dona Moses could begin packing the few little things they would need in jail. A wire was sent to Attorney General Robert Kennedy:

Tomorrow morning, hundreds of Hattiesburg's citizens will attempt to register to vote. We request the presence of federal marshals to protect them. We also request that local police interfering with constitutional rights be arrested and prosecuted. Signed, Bob Moses.

The meeting was interrupted briefly as Ella Baker and John Lewis walked in, having just arrived from Atlanta after a long and wearing train ride. Plans for the summer of '64 were put forth. A thousand or two thousand people would be brought from all over the country to work in Mississippi during the summer months, to man newly set-up community centers, to teach in "freedom schools" for Mississippi youngsters, and to work on voter registration. The National Council of Churches was going to give massive help. Both CORE and SCLC would send more people in. As the group talked, you could hear the young kids outside singing: "We will go-o-o to jail ... Don't need no bail ... No, no, no ... we won't come out ... until our people vo-o-o-te!"

That night there was a mass meeting in a church, with every seat filled, every aisle packed, the doorways jammed; it was almost impossible to get in. The lights went out, and a buzz of excitement ran through the audience; there were a thousand people, massed tight in the blackness. Then, out of the dark, one person began singing, "We shall not, we shall not be moved ..." and everyone took it up. Someone put a flashlight up on the speakers' stand, and the meeting began that way until after a while the lights came on.

Aaron Henry, for whom Hattiesburg Negroes had turned out en masse to vote in the Freedom Ballot (3,500 Negroes out of 7,400 of voting age in Forrest County cast Freedom Ballots) told the crowd that it was back in 1949 that the first affidavit had been filed in Hattiesburg with the Justice Department citing discrimination against Negroes trying to register, and here it was fifteen years later and the Federal government had not been able to make good. "We don't plan to leave Hattiesburg," Henry said, "until the Justice Department takes Registrar Lynd in hand. That's why we're here."

Henry introduced John Lewis, saying about SNCC: "If there is any group that has borne more the burden of the struggle, none of us know about it." After Lewis spoke, Annelle Ponder spoke for the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, and Dave Dennis for CORE. A lawyer from the National Council of Churches, John Pratt, pointed out that the Justice Department had just secured a final decision from the Supreme Court ordering Registrar Theron Lynd to stop discriminating and to stop picking out of the 285 sections of the Mississippi constitution different ones for Negroes to interpret than were given to whites: "We're here to prod the Justice Department a bit." A rabbi spoke, one of two in the delegation of fifty ministers who were ready to picket and go to jail the next day.

Then Ella Baker spoke, holding before the crowd, as she did so often, a vision

beyond the immediate: “Even if segregation is gone, we will still need to be free; we will still have to see that everyone has a job. Even if we can all vote, but if people are still hungry, we will not be free.... Singing alone is not enough; we need schools and learning.... Remember, we are not fighting for the freedom of the Negro alone, but for the freedom of the human spirit, a larger freedom that encompasses all mankind.”

Lawrence Guyot, who had come after his beating in Winona and his long prison term in Parchman to direct the operation in Hattiesburg, was introduced, and a great roar went up. Everyone in the church stood and applauded as he came down the aisle; it was a spontaneous expression of the kind of love SNCC organizers receive when they have become part of a community in the Deep South. Guyot combines a pensive intellectualism with a fierce and radical activism. He stood before the audience, his large frame trembling, raised a fist high over his head, and shouted, pronouncing slowly and carefully: “Immanuel Kant ...” The church was hushed. “Immanuel Kant asks—Do you exist?” In the front row, teenage boys and girls stared at Guyot; a young woman was holding two babies. Guyot paused. “Kant says, every speck of earth must be treated as important!” His audience waited, somewhat awed, and he went on to get very specific about instructions for Freedom Day at the county courthouse.

When Guyot finished, someone cried out: “Freedom!” And the audience responded: “Now!” Again and again: “Freedom! ... Now!” The meeting was over, and everyone linked hands and sang “We Shall Overcome,” then poured out into the darkness outside the church, still singing. It was almost midnight.

At the Freedom House, on Mobile Street, some people prepared to go to sleep; others stood around, talking. Mrs. Wood came down to the big cluttered open area where we were, anxious that we should all have a place to stay for the night. She took Mendy Samstein and me to a little room in the back and pointed out the cot she had just set up for both of us. We returned to the front and continued talking. The place began to empty as youngsters drifted out, or lay down to sleep on tables, benches, chairs, the floor. It was one in the morning; over on a long counter a half-dozen people, including Dona Moses, were lettering the picket signs to be carried seven hours later.

Lawrence Guyot sat wearily on a chair against the wall and we talked. He was born in a tiny coastal town in Mississippi, on the Gulf, named Pass Christian (“That town is the most complete mechanism of destruction I have seen”), the eldest of five brothers. His father was a cement finisher, now unemployed, his mother a housewife and a maid. When he graduated from Tougaloo College in 1963 he had already been a SNCC staff member for many months.

Why did I join the movement? I was rebelling against everything. I still am. I think we need to change every institution we know. I came to that conclusion when I was seventeen years old. At first I thought of being a teacher, or a doctor; now I would like to get married, and do just what I'm doing now ... I'm not satisfied with any condition that I'm aware of in America.

Mendy and I decided to hit the sack for the night, but when we went back we found a body snoring on our cot; it looked like Norris MacNamara, freelance photographer and audio man who decided some time in 1963 to give his talents to SNCC. We decided to let him be, and went back into the front room. At 2:00 a.m. there were still a dozen people around; the signs were still being made; we talked some more. Guyot said someone was trying to find a place for us to stay; there were four of us now looking for a place to sleep. Besides me, there were Mendy Samstein, Brandeis graduate and University of Chicago doctoral candidate in history, a faculty member at Morehouse College, now a SNCC field man in Mississippi; Oscar Chase, Yale Law school graduate, now with SNCC; and Avery Williams, a cheerful SNCC man from Alabama State College. At 3:00 a.m. we began looking for a good spot on the floor, since all the benches and tables were taken, but then someone came along with a slip of paper and an address.

A cab let us out in front of a small frame house in the Negro part of town. It was about 3:30 a.m. The street was dark, and the house was dark inside. We hesitated, then Oscar approached and knocked cautiously on the front door. A Negro man opened the door and looked at us; he was in his pajamas. Here we were, three whites and a Negro, none of whom he had ever seen. Oscar said hesitantly, "They told us at headquarters ..." The man smiled broadly, "Come on in!" He shouted through the darkness back into his bedroom, "Hey, honey, look who's here!" The lights were on now and his wife came out: "Can I fix something for you fellows?" We said no, and apologized for getting them up. The man waved his hand: "Oh, I was going to get up soon anyway."

The man disappeared and came back in a moment dragging a mattress onto the floor near the couch. "Here, two of you can sleep on the mattress, one on the couch, and we have a little cot inside." The lights went out soon after. There was a brief murmured conversation in the dark among us, and then we were asleep.

I awoke just as dawn was filtering through the windows, and in the semi-darkness I could see the forms of the other fellows near me, still asleep. I became aware of the sound that had awakened me; at first I had thought it part of a dream, but I heard it now still, a woman's voice pure and poignant. She was chanting softly. At first I thought it came from outside, then I realized it was coming from the bedroom of the Negro couple, that the man was gone from the house, and it was his wife, praying, intoning ... "Oh, Lord, Jesus, Oh, let things go well today, Jesus ... Oh, make them see, Jesus ... Show your love today, Jesus ... Oh, it's been a long, long time, oh, Jesus ... Oh, Lord, Oh, Jesus ..."

The chanting stopped. I heard Avery call from the next room: "Wake up, fellow, it's Freedom Day." A radio was turned on with dance music played loud. A light went on in the kitchen. As we dressed I looked through the open doorway into the Negro couple's bedroom and saw there was no mattress on their bed. They had led us to believe that they had brought out a spare mattress for us, but had given us theirs.

The woman came out of the kitchen and turned on the gas heater in the living room for us: "Come and get your breakfast, fellows." It was a feast—eggs and grits and bacon and hot biscuits and coffee. Her husband drove down to the Gulf every day to work on the fishing docks, and the woman was soon to be picked up in a truck and taken off to work as a maid; her daughter was a senior in high school. Her young son said: "Yesterday morning, when I woke up, the light from a police car was shining in the windows. Guess they know us." The woman, waiting outside for her ride, came in for a second to report to us what a neighbor had just told her. Downtown the streets were full of police, carrying clubs and sticks and guns, wearing helmets. She went off in the truck. We prepared to leave, and Avery Williams looked outside: "It's raining!"

At the headquarters were noise and confusion and great crowds of people—ministers, carrying signs, walking back and forth in front of the concrete steps leading up to the Forrest County Courthouse, employees staring out of the windows of the courthouse, a camera in a second story window focused on the scene.

About 9:30 a.m., there was the sound of marching feet on the wet pavement and two lines of policemen came down the street, heading for the courthouse, all traffic cleared in front of them. A police car swung to the curb, a loudspeaker on its roof, and then the announcement blared out into the street, harsh, hurting the ears: "This is the Hattiesburg Police Department. We're asking you to disperse. Clear the sidewalk!" There were thirty-two pickets on the line. John Lewis and I stood across the street in front of Sears Roebuck, on the sidewalk. No one made a move to leave. The marching policemen came up even with the county courthouse, in four squads, wearing yellow rain slickers, and blue or white or red helmets, carrying clubs. "First squad! Forward march!" The first line peeled off and came up on the sidewalk parallel to the picket line. "Squad halt!"

The loudspeaker rasped again: "People who wish to register, line up four at a time, and they will be accepted. All those not registering to vote move off. This is the Hattiesburg Police Department!" Fifty Negro youngsters came out of nowhere and formed a second picket line in front of the courthouse, near the line of ministers. All four squads of police had peeled off now and were facing the picket line, clubs in hand. It looked as if everything would go as predicted: an

order to disperse, no one moving, everyone put under arrest. I could see Moses across the street, peering at the scene, hunched a little under the falling rain.

It was 9:40 a.m. Ten minutes had elapsed since the police had come marching in formation down the street. They were lined up now opposite the two picket lines, twenty-five helmets a few feet from the line and twenty-five more across the street. For the third time, from the police loudspeaker: "All those not registering to vote move off."

The line of black youngsters merged with the line of white ministers to form one long picket line in front of the courthouse, the messages on their signs clear even in the grayness of the day: ONE MAN, ONE VOTE; FREEDOM DAY IN HATTIESBURG. No one moved off the line. Police began clearing off the sidewalk across the street from the courthouse and we moved across to the steps of the courthouse. The picket line remained undisturbed. The scene was peaceful. There were virtually no white observers. If our senses did not deceive us, something unprecedented was taking place in the state of Mississippi: a black and white line of demonstrators was picketing a public building, allowed to do so by the police. In all of the demonstrations of the past two and one-half years, this had never happened.

Over a hundred pickets were walking now, the rain still coming down. A blond Episcopalian minister was carrying a picket sign with an inscription in Hebrew. A Negro schoolboy carried a sign: LET MY PARENTS VOTE. Jim Forman escorted a Negro woman across the street, through the rain, up the stairs. But they wouldn't let her in the courthouse. Voter registrants were lined up on the steps outside the glass door, which was guarded on the inside by the sheriff. Only four people were being allowed inside at a time, and it took about an hour for another four to be admitted, so the rest of the people formed a line down the steps, exposed to the rain. At ten o'clock what had been a medium drizzle became a downpour. No one left the line. Bob Moses escorted a Negro man across the street and up the steps.

I walked around the back, got inside the courthouse, and made my way to the registrar's office, just inside the glass door. Television cameras were focused on Theron Lynd, the three-hundred-pound Forrest County Registrar, who was now under final injunction by the Supreme Court to stop discriminating against Negroes under penalty of going to jail. Lynd was dressed in a black suit, his grey hair cut short, a stub of a cigar in his mouth, his manner affable. At a federal court hearing in March, 1962, the Justice Department pointed out that Lynd, who had never registered a single Negro, had allowed 1,836 whites to register without filling out the application form or interpreting a section of the Constitution. Until January 30, 1961, no Negro had even been permitted to fill out a form. In early January, 1964, the Supreme Court had affirmed a Fifth Circuit Court decision

that Lynd was guilty of civil contempt unless he complied with court orders not to discriminate.

Two Negro women were filling out blanks at the counter, and one Negro man was there, with a big SNCC button on his overalls. Lynd ambled around, apparently trying to be helpful, as newspapermen and photographers stood nearby. I spoke to him: "Mr. Lynd, is it to be assumed that all orders of the court are being followed now?" He turned to me: "Yes, indeed. I will treat all applicants alike, just as I have always done. To us this is no special day."

I went outside. It was still raining, coming down hard. Someone said that Bob Moses had just been taken off to jail. He'd been arrested for standing on the sidewalk opposite the courthouse and refusing to move on.

Jim Forman stood just outside the glass door of the courthouse, shirt collar open under his raincoat, pipe in his right hand, gesticulating with his left hand, Negro men and women bunched around him. He was calling to the sheriff and two well-dressed official-looking men who were holding the door shut from the inside: "Sheriff, it's raining out here, and these people would like to come into the courthouse. You seem to have plenty of room inside." No reply. Forman held the arm of an old Negro woman and called again through the glass door: "Sheriff, will you be a Christian and let this old lady inside, a lady who has toiled in the fields of Forrest County many years, an old lady who now must stand out in the rain because she wants to register to vote? Is there no compassion in Forrest County for a woman seventy-one years old, whose feet are wet as she waits, who has nursed white children in her time, who can't even get a chair so she can sit down, for whom there is no room in the county courthouse?" No reply. A newspaperman gestured to me: "Forman is really putting it on, isn't he?"

It was 11:15 a.m. and still raining. Forman motioned to the people standing in line on the steps. "Maybe if we get down on our knees and pray, someone will hear us." Twenty people knelt in the rain on the courthouse steps and an old Negro man prayed aloud. Below, in the long line of people with signs moving in front of the courthouse, someone was handing out little boxes of raisins and crackerjacks to sustain the energy of those who had been marching for three hours.

At noon the courthouse closed for lunch. Through the morning twelve people had gotten inside to fill out applications. I walked back with Forman to SNCC headquarters. He said: "Maybe it seems strange to make a fuss over standing in the rain, but it's exactly in all these little things that the Negro has been made to feel inferior over the centuries. And it's important educationally. To show the Negroes in Hattiesburg that it is possible to speak up loudly and firmly to a

white sheriff as an equal—something they're not accustomed to doing.”

The picket line continued all afternoon. Two white girls from Mississippi Southern University in Hattiesburg stood on the courthouse steps, watching, taking notes. They were from the University radio station. They would not oppose a Negro's admission to the University, they said. Lafayette Surney, a nineteen-year-old SNCC staff member from Ruleville, Mississippi, came over, and the three of them chatted amiably, about Mississippi, civil rights, voter registration, and college.

Down on the picket line, I could see the familiar form of Mrs. Hamer, moving along with her characteristic limp, holding a sign, her face wet with the rain and turned upwards, crying out her song against the sky: “Which Side Are You On?” A little later I took her picket sign from her and walked while she rested on the steps. At five the line disbanded, gathered briefly on the courthouse steps to bow in prayer, and marched back to headquarters. The policemen ended their vigil.

There was one more piece of news: Oscar Chase had been taken off to jail. His car had bumped a parked truck that morning, doing no damage, but a policeman had noted what happened, and about 4:00 p.m. he had been hustled into a police car and carted away. The charge: “Leaving the scene of an accident.”

It had been a day of surprises. The picketing went on all day with no mass arrests. Perhaps this was due to the desire of the newly-elected Governor Paul Johnson to play the race issue slow; perhaps it was due to the presence of clergymen, TV cameras, newspapermen; or perhaps it was simply a tribute to the tirelessness of SNCC in putting people out in the streets again and again, until police and politicians got weary of trundling them off to jail. At any rate, over a hundred Negro men and women had come to register, though few got through the courthouse door, and only a handful were eventually declared to have passed the test

So, Freedom Day passed as a kind of quiet victory and everyone was commenting on how well things had gone. Nobody was aware, of course, that about six o'clock that evening, in his cell downtown, Oscar Chase, the SNCC man fresh out of Yale Law School, was being beaten bloody and unconscious by a fellow prisoner while policemen stood by watching.

No one knew until the next morning. I awoke at six on the narrow cot in the back of the Freedom House. Everyone around me was still asleep. Through the wall I could hear the faint sound of a typewriter and wondered who the heck was typing at six in the morning. I dressed and went into the next room. A Negro kid, about fifteen years old, was sitting at a typewriter, pecking slowly at the keys. He looked at me apologetically, seeing he had roused me: “Writing a letter to my

sister.”

I walked into the big front room, where in the darkness I could make out the forms of sleeping youngsters. One fellow was stretched out on a wooden table, one on the counter where the signs had been lettered, one on three chairs, using his jacket as a pillow, one leaning back in a chair, his head against the wall. Around a desk sat three teenagers, as if holding a conference sound asleep in their chairs. The first rays of sunlight were coming in through the windows.

I walked outside to get some breakfast, and SNCC field secretary Milton Hancock joined me at a little cafe across the street. We sat at a table, ate and talked, and watched through a window as a man on the sidewalk unloaded a batch of fresh-caught sheepshead fish from a truck, just up from the gulf. Then someone came along to say that Oscar Chase had phoned in to headquarters that he had been beaten the night before, and he wanted to be bonded out. Two of the visiting ministers were going down to fetch him, and I went along.

The police dogs in their kennels were growling and barking as we entered the jailhouse. It was a few minutes before 8:00 a.m. The bond money was turned over. A moment later, Oscar came down the corridor, unescorted, not a soul around. A few moments before, the corridor had been full of policemen; it seemed now as if no one wanted to be around to look at him. Even the dogs had stopped growling. He was still wearing his badly worn corduroy pants, and his old boots, caked with mud. His blue workshirt was splattered with blood, and under it his T-shirt was very bloody. The right side of his face—his lips, his nose, his cheek—was swollen. His nose looked as if it were broken. Blood was caked over his eye.

We called for the police chief: “We want you to look at this man as he comes out of your jail, chief.” The chief looked surprised, even concerned. He turned to Oscar, put his face close to his, “Tell them, tell them, didn’t I take that fellow out of your cell when he was threatening you?” Oscar nodded. He told us the story.

The chief had removed one of the three prisoners in the cell early in the evening, when Oscar complained that he was being threatened. But shortly afterward they put in another prisoner, of even uglier disposition. And this was the one who a few hours later kicked and beat Oscar into insensibility in the presence of several policemen. He was not as drunk as the man who’d been taken out. But he was in a state of great agitation. He announced, first, that he could lick any man in the cell; there were Oscar and another prisoner. “He was very upset about the demonstration—wanted to know why the jail wasn’t ‘full of niggers.’ ” He had been a paratrooper in World War II, and told Oscar he “would rather kill a nigger lover than a Nazi or a Jap.”

The third man in the cell proceeded to tell the former paratrooper that Oscar

was an integrationist. Now he began a series of threatening moves. He pushed a cigarette near Oscar's face and said he would burn his eyes out. He said that first he would knock him unconscious and while he was out he would use a lighted cigarette on his eyes. Oscar called for the jailer. The jailer came. Oscar asked to be removed from the cell. The jailer didn't respond. The ex-paratrooper asked the jailer if Oscar was "one of them nigger-lovers." The jailer nodded.

What Oscar Chase remembers after that is that the prisoner said something close to "Now I know why I'm in this jail." Then:

The next thing I can remember was lying on the floor, looking up. I could see the jailer and some other policemen looking at me and smiling. I could also see the other prisoner standing over me, kicking me. I began to get up, was knocked down again, and then heard the door of the cell open. The cops pulled me out and brought me into another cell, where I remained by myself for the rest of the night ... I was still bleeding a couple of hours after the incident. Watching from the door of my new cell, I saw the trusty put a pack of cigarettes and some matches under the door of my attacker's cell. Later I heard the police come in and let him out. I could hear them laughing ...

We went from the jailhouse to the home of one of the two Negro doctors in town and agreed to meet him at his clinic in a little while. Then we took Oscar to SNCC headquarters. Mrs. Wood kept pressing her hands together, in great distress. "Oh, my poor boy!" Jim Forman came out of his room sleepily, waking up quickly as he saw Oscar. He shook his head: "Jesus Christ!" The lawyers were summoned, and we prepared to go to the FBI.

There was one moment of sick humor as the incident came to a close. Four of us waited in the FBI office in Hattiesburg for the interrogating agent to come in to get the facts from Oscar Chase about his beating. John Pratt, attorney with the National Council of Churches, tall, blond, slender, was impeccably dressed in a dark suit with faint stripes. Robert Lunney, of the Lawyer's Committee on Civil Rights (set up as a volunteer group to aid in civil rights cases), dark-haired and clean-cut, was attired as befit an attorney with a leading Wall Street firm. I did not quite come up to their Standards because I had left without my coat and tie, and my pants had lost their press from the rain the day before; but I was cleanshaven, and not too disreputable looking. Oscar sat in a corner, looking exactly as he had a few hours before when I saw him come down the corridor from his cell, his face swollen, his clothes bloody. The FBI agent came out from the inner office and closed the door behind him. He surveyed the four of us with a quick professional eye and then asked, "Who was it got the beating?"

At four that afternoon, the Hattiesburg Municipal Court convened to hear the case of Robert Moses, on trial for obstructing traffic by standing on the sidewalk and refusing to move on when ordered to by a policeman. Many of the white ministers went to the trial, and we had agreed that we would sit in the Negro section; so far, any attempt made in Mississippi to sit integrated in a local courtroom had ended in arrest. I entered the courtroom, sat down on the 'colored' side of the aisle, and noted that there were about ten white people on

that side, and an equal number of Negroes on the “white” side. Nine marshals stood against the wall. The judge entered the chamber and everyone rose. To our surprise, it was a woman, Judge Mildred W. Norris, an attractive, gracious lady who smiled and posed for the photographers as she approached the bench, then nodded for everyone to be seated. She smiled pleasantly at the spectators, paused a moment, then said sweetly, “Will the marshals please segregate the courtroom?” Everything was quiet.

The marshals moved towards us. The lady judge said: “I will ask you to please move to the side of the courtroom where you belong, or leave. If you do not, you will be held in contempt of court and placed under arrest.” No one moved. The marshals came up closer. As one approached me, I raised my hand. He stopped, and said, rather uncertainly, “Do you wish to make a statement?” I replied, “Yes.” The judge said, “You may make a statement.” I got to my feet and said, “Your Honor, the Supreme Court of the United States has ruled that segregated seating in a courtroom is unconstitutional. Will you please abide by that ruling?” The courtroom buzzed. The judge hesitated. John Pratt, who with Bob Lunney was acting as counsel for Moses, spoke up and asked for a recess of a few minutes, and the judge granted it. The courtroom became alive with conversation again.

During the recess, no one changed seats. The judge reconvened the court, and the room was absolutely silent. She said: “We here in Mississippi have had our way of life for hundreds of years, and I obey the laws of Mississippi. I have asked that you sit segregated or leave, or be placed under arrest. We would have appreciated your complying.” She paused. “But since you do not, we will allow you to remain as you are, provided you do not create a disturbance.” We sat there, astonished, but silent. And the court session began.

“Defendant Robert Moses, come right up.” Bob Moses stood before the bench, in his blue overall jacket, corduroy pants, white shirt with open collar, while the charge was read: “... with intent to provoke a breach of peace, did congregate on the sidewalk and did interfere with the passage of pedestrians and refused to move on when ordered to do so ...” He pleaded not guilty.

Three policemen took the stand, the first one named John Quincy Adams. He testified that Moses had obstructed pedestrian traffic by standing on the sidewalk. The courtroom was hot, and the judge, smiling slightly, picked up a cardboard sign near her and began fanning herself with it. It was one of the exhibits, a picket sign with large letters: “FREEDOM NOW!” It showed a picture of two small Negro boys, and said “GIVE THEM A FUTURE IN MISSISSIPPI.” The judge continued to fan herself with the sign.

Cross-examined by Bob Lunney, Patrolman John Quincy Adams admitted no

other pedestrians had complained about the sidewalk being obstructed, and that he did not see anyone who did not have free access. The second policeman was shown a picket sign by the city attorney which said, “JOIN THE FREEDOM FITE.” The attorney asked, “Do you understand what a fight is?” “Yes,” the patrolman replied.

At about 7:00 p.m. Bob Moses took the stand, the only witness in his defense. After a series of questions by Robert Lunney, he was turned over for cross-examination to the attorney for the city, Francis Zachary, a large man with iron grey hair, a black suit, and horn-rimmed glasses. Zachary kept Moses on the stand for over an hour in the most fierce, pounding cross-examination I had ever seen. Zachary’s voice was filled alternately with anger, contempt, disgust. He walked back and forth in front of the witness, using his voice like a whip, shaking papers in front of Moses’ face, and moving up close and pointing his finger, the combination of voice and gestures and incessant pointless questions adding up to an assault on the senses, an attempt to break down the witness through emotional exhaustion. Through it all, Moses, a little tired from his day in jail, sat there on the witness stand, answering in the same quiet, even voice, pointing out patiently again and again where the prosecutor had misunderstood his reply, occasionally blinking his eyes under the glare of the lights in the courtroom, looking steadily, seriously at his questioner.

Zachary: Let me ask you this: You knew there were 150 of you outsiders in this community demonstrating, didn't you?

Moses: No, that is not true.

Zachary: That is not true?

Moses: That is not true.

Zachary: (angrily): At the time you were arrested, there wasn't 150 of you walking around in front of the Court House?

Moses: You said “outsiders.” There were not 150 outsiders walking around the Court House.

Or again:

Zachary: Where would this democracy be if everybody obeyed officers like you did?

Moses: I think that it would be in very good shape. I ...

Zachary: Good, now, you've answered it, now let's move on ...

Zachary held up a list of the ministers who had come down for Freedom Day and waved it in Moses’ face. He went down the list, asking about the ministers and the organizations on it.

Zachary: The (he paused, and stumbled over the word “Rabbinical”) Rabbin-in-ical Assembly of America. Are you a member of that organization?

Moses: (gently correcting him): Rabbinical Assembly. No. I am not.

At one point, the prosecutor, trying to hold in his rage against the quiet calm of the witness, broke out: “Moses! Let me tell you something ...”

Again:

Zachary: Why didn't you mind this officer when he gave you an order?

Moses: I had a right to be there ...

Zachary: What law school did you graduate from?

Lunney: Objection.

The Court: I will have to overrule you.

Zachary: (again to Moses): I want to know what you base this right on. Are you a legal student?

Moses: I base the right on the fact of the First Amendment.... That is the whole point of democracy, that the citizens know what their rights are, and they don't have to go to law school to know what their rights are.

About 9:15 p.m., with the attorney's closing remarks over, the judge denied Lunney's motion to dismiss, and declared that the court found Robert Moses guilty, sentencing him to a fine of \$200 and sixty days in jail. We all filed out of the courtroom into the night, and Patrolman John Quincy Adams took Bob Moses back to his cell.

A few days later Bob Moses was out on bail, once again directing the Mississippi voter registration drive for SNCC. Plans were being made for a big summer, with a thousand students coming into Mississippi for July and August of 1964. And, for the first time since Reconstruction, a group of Mississippi Negroes announced their candidacy for the U.S. Congress: Mrs. Fannie Hamer of Ruleville; Mrs. Victoria Gray of Hattiesburg; the Rev. John Cameron of Hattiesburg. Thus, a new native leadership was taking form, already beginning to unsettle the official hierarchy of the state by its challenge.

SNCC came out of McComb after the summer of 1961 battered and uncertain. It moved on to Greenwood and other towns in the Delta, grew in numbers, gathered thousands of supporters throughout the state. In places like Hattiesburg it took blows, but it left the town transformed, its black people—and possibly some white people—awakened. Most of all, for the Negroes of Mississippi, in the summer of 1964, as college students from all over America began to join them to help bring democracy to Mississippi and the nation, the long silence was over.

The Selma to Montgomery March (1965)

The summer of 1964 saw a massive effort against racial segregation in Mississippi, when a thousand people from all over the country, mostly white college students, joined local black Mississippians in Freedom Summer. Those weeks were filled with courageous attempts to break down racial barriers in what black people considered the most murderous of states. There were repeated acts of violence against the civil rights workers, culminating in the murder of one black and two white civil rights workers: James Chaney, Andrew Goodman, Michael Shwerner. Throughout, the federal government played its usual role of observing, but not acting, in effect abnegating its responsibility to enforce constitutional rights everywhere in the nation.

In early 1965, attempts at voter registration in Alabama resulted in repeated acts of violence by local officials against black people who dared to protest. A young black man named Jimmy Lee Jackson was beaten and shot to death by a state trooper. A column of black people, beginning to march from Selma to the state capital in Montgomery, were clubbed and gassed by state troopers. A white minister from Boston, who had come to Selma to protest police brutality, was clubbed on a street and died. Now there were protests and demonstrations world-wide. The federal government, speaking through the Voice of America in thirty-eight languages, broadcast an outrageous falsehood: that “under the United States Constitution the police powers belong to the states, not to the Federal Government.’ ” In fact, a federal law gave the national government absolute police powers to protect the constitutional rights of citizens whenever a state failed to do so. But the wave of protests had an effect. President Lyndon Johnson now asked for a law to guarantee black people the right to vote, which became the Voting Rights Act of 1965. And when a new march from Selma to Montgomery was organized, Johnson ordered several thousand National Guardsmen and U.S. Army troops to protect the marchers. I was traveling through the South to do an article for The Nation called “The South Revisited,” and joined the march eighteen miles out of Montgomery; what follows is an excerpt from that article.

MONTGOMERY, ALABAMA, MARCH 20-25, 1965

The march from Selma, a little over halfway along, turned into a field a hundred yards off the main highway to Montgomery, deep in Lowndes County (“a bad county”) and settled down for the night. The field was pure mud, so deep one’s shoes went into it to the ankles, and to pull out after each step was an effort. A chunk of moon shone, the sky was crowded with stars, and yet the field was enveloped in blackness. Two huge tents went up, one for men, one for women, and inside people spread plastic sheets over the mud, unrolled their sleeping bags, lay down, weary.

There were three hundred of them, the “core” of the Long March, mostly black people from Selma, Marion and other little towns in central Alabama, but also young Negroes from the Southern Christian Leadership Conference and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, and some white people, young and old, from all over the nation. Space under the tents was soon gone, so people sprawled outside along the mired road that cut through the field.

At the edge of the field were gathered the jeeps and trucks of the U.S. Army, soldiers in full battle dress, called out finally by Presidential order after thirty days of murder and violence in Alabama and cries of protest through the country.

Moving through the darkness in and out of sleeping forms on the ground were men with white ragged emblems marked “Security.” They carried walkie-talkies, the aerials glinting, and communicated with one another across the encampment. There was a central transmitter in a parked truck. People coming in off the main highway were checked at the end of the mud road by two husky “Security” men, young Episcopalian priests with turned-around collars. One of them said: “I don’t really know who to let in. If he’s black I let him through.”

Lying down in the darkness near the road, I could hear the hum of the portable generators and an occasional burst of sound on a walkie-talkie. The plastic sheet under me was soaked in mud and slime, but the inside of the sleeping bag was dry. Two hundred feet away, in a great arc around the field, were fires lit by soldiers on guard through the night.

I awoke just before dawn, with a half-moon pushing, flat side first, through the clouds. The soldiers’ fires at the perimeter were low now, but still burning. Nearby, the forms of perhaps twenty people wrapped in sleeping bags or blankets. The generator still whirred. Other clusters of sleepers were now visible, beginning to awaken.

A line formed for oatmeal, hard-boiled eggs, coffee. Then everyone gathered

to resume the march. A Negro girl washed her bare feet, then her sneakers, in a stream alongside the road. Near her was a minister, his black coat streaked with mud. A Negro woman without shoes had her feet wrapped in plastic. Andy Young was calling over the main transmitter to Montgomery: "Get us some shoes; we need forty pairs of shoes, all sizes, for women and kids who have been walking barefoot the past 24 hours."

An old Negro man took his place beside me for the march. He wore a shirt and tie under his overalls, also an overcoat and a fedora hat, and used a walking stick to help him along. "Yes, I was in Marion the night Jimmy Jackson was shot by the policeman. They got bullwhips and sticks and shotguns, and they jab us with the electric poles."

At exactly 7 a.m. an Army helicopter fluttered overhead and the march began, behind an American flag, down to the main highway and on to Montgomery. The marchers sang: "FreeDOM! Freedom's Coming and It Won't Be Long!"

It was seventeen miles to the edge of Montgomery, the original straggling line of three hundred thickening by the hour as thousands joined, whites and Negroes who had come from all over the country. There was sunshine most of the way, then three or four bursts of drenching rain. On the porch of a cabin set way back from the road, eight tiny Negro children stood in a line and waved, an old hobby horse in the front yard. A red-faced, portly Irishman, newly-arrived from Dublin, wearing a trench coat, held the hand of a little Negro boy who walked barefoot next to him. A Greyhound bus rode past with Negro kids on the way to school. They leaned out the window, shouting "Freedom!" A one-legged young white man on crutches, a black skullcap over red hair, marched along quickly with the rest. Two Negro boys with milky sun lotion smeared on their faces looked as if they had stepped off the stage in Genet's *The Blacks*. A group of white workingmen along the road watched silently. On the outskirts of Montgomery, students poured out of a Negro high school, lined the streets, waved and sang as the marchers went by. A jet plane zoomed close overhead and everyone stretched arms to the sky, shouting, "FREEDOM! FREEDOM!"

Abolitionists, Freedom Riders and the Tactics of Agitation (1965)

*As I studied the antislavery movement before the Civil War, and the freedom movement of the Sixties, I saw common issues, and I explore one of them in this essay. I wrote it for the collection of essays edited by Martin Duberman, called *The AntiSlavery Vanguard* and published in 1965 by Princeton University Press. It also appeared in the Columbia University Forum as “Abolitionists and Freedom Riders.”*

Few groups in American history have taken as much abuse from professional historians as that mixed crew of editors, orators, run-away slaves, free Negro militants, and gun-toting preachers known as the abolitionists. Many laymen sympathetic to the Negro have been inspired by Garrison, Phillips, Douglass, and the rest. Scholars, on the other hand (with a few exceptions), have scolded the abolitionists for their immoderation, berated them for their emotionalism, denounced them for bringing on the Civil War, or psychoanalyzed them as emotional deviates in need of recognition.

It is tempting to join the psychological game and try to understand what it is about the lives of academic scholars which keeps them at arm’s length from the moral fervor of one of history’s most magnificent crusades. Instead, I want to examine in fact the actions of the abolitionists, to connect them with later agitators against racial exclusiveness and try to assess the value of “extremists,” “radicals,” and “agitators” in the bringing of desired social change.

At issue are a number of claims advanced by liberal-minded people who profess purposes similar to the radical reformers, but urge more moderate methods. To argue a case too heatedly, they point out, provokes the opponent to retaliation. To urge measures too extreme alienates possible allies. To ask for too much too soon results in getting nothing. To use vituperative language arouses emotions to a pitch which precludes rational consideration. To be dogmatic and inflexible prevents adjustment to rapidly changing situations. To set up a clash of extremes precipitates sharp conflict and violence.

All of these tactical sins, adding up to immoderation, extremism, impracticality, have been charged, at different times, by different people, to the

American abolitionists. But the charges have not been carefully weighed or closely scrutinized as part of a discussion of preferable tactics of reform. I am claiming here only to initiate such a discussion.

Twentieth century man is marking the transition from chaotic and quite spontaneous renovation of the social fabric to purposeful and planned social change. In this transition, the tactics of such change need much more careful consideration than they have been given.

THE ABOLITIONISTS

There is no denying the anger, the bitterness, the irascibility of the abolitionists. William Lloyd Garrison, dean of them all, wrote in blood in the columns of the *Liberator* and breathed fire from speakers' platforms all over New England. He shocked people: "I am ashamed of my country." He spoke abroad in brutal criticism of America: "I accuse the land of my nativity of insulting the majesty of Heaven with the greatest mockery that was ever exhibited to man." He burned the Constitution before several thousand witnesses on the lawn at Framingham, calling it "source and parent of all other atrocities—a covenant with death and an agreement with hell" and spurred the crowd to echo "Amen!"

He provoked his opponents outrageously, and the South became apoplectic at the mention of his name.

South Carolina offered \$1,500 for conviction of any white person circulating the *Liberator*, and the Georgia legislature offered \$500 for the arrest and conviction of Garrison. Garrison's wife feared constantly that reward-seekers would lie in wait for her husband on his way back from a meeting and snatch him off to Georgia.

Wendell Phillips, richer, and from a distinguished Boston family, was no softer. "Don't shilly-shally, Wendell," his wife whispered to him as he mounted the speakers' platform, and he never did. The anger that rose in him one day in 1835 as he watched Boston bluebloods drag Garrison through the streets never left him, and it remained focused on what he considered America's unbearable evil—slavery. "The South is one great brothel," he proclaimed.

Gradualism was not for Phillips. "No sir, we may not trifle or dally ... Revolution is the only thing, the only power, that ever worked out freedom for any people." The piety of New England did not intimidate him: "The American church—what is it? A synagogue of Satan." He scorned patriotic pride: "They sell a little image of us in the markets of Mexico, with a bowie knife in one side of the girdle, and a Colt's revolver in the other, a huge loaf of bread in the left hand, and a slave whip in the right. That is America!"

Phillips did not use the language of nonresistance as did Garrison. On that same green where Garrison burned the Constitution, Phillips said: "We are very small in numbers; we have got no wealth; we have got no public opinion behind us; the only thing that we can do is, like the eagle, simply to fly at our enemy, and pick out his eyes." And: "I want no man for President of these States ... who has not got his hand half clenched, and means to close it on the jugular vein of

the slave system the moment he reaches it, and has a double-edged dagger in the other hand, in case there is any missing in the strangulation.”

But even Garrison and Phillips seem moderate against the figure of John Brown, lean and lusty, with two wives and twenty children, filled with enough anger for a regiment of agitators, declaring personal war on the institution of slavery. Speeches and articles were for others. The old man studied military strategy, pored over maps of the Southern terrain, raised money for arms and planned the forcible liberation of slaves through rebellion and guerrilla warfare. On Pottowattomie Creek in the bleeding Kansas of 1856, on the Sabbath, he had struck one night at an encampment of proslavery men, killing five with a cold ferocity. On his way to the gallows, after the raid on the Harpers Ferry arsenal in Virginia in the fall of 1859, he wrote: “I John Brown am now quite certain that the crimes of this guilty land will never be purged away; but with Blood.”

The Negro abolitionist, Frederick Douglass, newly freed from slavery himself, and long a believer in “moral suasion” to free others, talked with John Brown at his home in 1847 and came away impressed by his arguments. Two years later, Douglass told a Boston audience, “I should welcome the intelligence tomorrow, should it come, that the slaves had risen in the South, and that the sable arms which had been engaged in beautifying and adorning the South, were engaged in spreading death and devastation.” He thought the Harpers Ferry plan wild, and would not go along; yet, to the end, he maintained that John Brown at Harpers Ferry began the war that ended slavery. “Until this blow was struck, the prospect for freedom was dim, shadowy, and uncertain ... When John Brown stretched forth his arm the sky was cleared.”

These are the extremists. Did they hurt or help the cause of freedom? Or did they, if helping this cause, destroy some other value, like human life, lost in huge numbers in the Civil War? To put it another way, were they a hindrance rather than a help in abolishing slavery? Did their activities bring a solution at too great a cost? If we answer these questions, and others, we may throw light on the uses or disuses of modern-day agitators and immoderates, whose cries, if not as shrill as Garrison’s are as unpleasant to some ears, and whose actions, if not as violent as John Brown’s are just as distasteful to those who urge caution and moderation.

WHAT IS EXTREMISM?

The first four pages of a well-known book on Civil War politics (T. Harry Williams’s *Lincoln and the Radicals*) refers to abolitionists, individually and

collectively, in the following terms: “radical ... zealous ... fiery ... scornful ... revolutionary ... spirit of fanaticism ... hasty ... Jacobins ... aggressive ... vindictive ... narrowly sectional ... bitter ... sputtering ... fanatical ... impractical ... extreme.”

Such words, in different degrees of concentration, are used by many historians in describing the abolitionists. Like other words of judgment frequently used in historical accounts, they have not been carefully dissected and analyzed, so that while they serve as useful approximations of a general attitude held by the writer (and transferred without question to the reader) they fail to make the kinds of distinctions necessary to move historical narrative closer to the area of social science. The word “extremist,” used perhaps more often than any other in connection with the abolitionists, might serve as subject for inspection.

“Extremist” carries a psychological burden when attached to political movements, which it does not bear in other situations. A woman who is extremely beautiful, a man who is extremely kind, a mechanic who is extremely skillful, a child who is extremely healthy—these represent laudable ideals. In politics, however, the label “extremist” carries unfavorable implications. It may mean that the person desires a change in the status quo which is more sweeping than that requested by most people. For instance, in a period when most people are willing to free the slaves, but not to enfranchise them, one wanting to give them equal rights would be considered an extremist. Or it may mean someone who urges a more drastic action to attain a goal shared by most people; that is, someone who advocates slave revolts (like John Brown) rather than compensated emancipation followed by colonization abroad (like Lincoln).

Yet, in any given political situation, there is a very large number of possible alternatives, both in desired goals and in the means of achieving them. The actual alternatives put forward in any one situation are usually much fewer than the total range of possibilities. And the most extreme suggestion put forward at the time will be labeled “extremist” even though it may be far less sweeping than other possible courses of action.

For instance, William Lloyd Garrison, looked upon both by his antagonists and by modern historians as an “extremist,” did not seek goals as far-reaching as he might have. He explained, around 1830, his stand for “immediate abolition” as follows: “Immediate abolition does not mean that the slaves shall immediately exercise the right of suffrage, or be eligible to any office, or be emancipated from law, or be free from the benevolent restraints of guardianship.” Yet the ideas of suffrage and officeholding were not too much for Thaddeus Stevens and Charles Sumner—nor for Garrison—in 1865, when actual freedom had come for the slaves.

Wendell Phillips, another “extremist,” opposed the use of violence to free the slaves. He said, in 1852: “On that point, I am willing to wait. I can be patient ... The cause of three millions of slaves, the destruction of a great national institution, must proceed slowly, and like every other change in public sentiment, we must wait patiently for it.” John Brown was not as patient.

Charles Sumner, the “radical” Republican in the Senate, did not urge going beyond the Constitution, which gave Southern states the right to maintain slavery if they chose. Garrison, burning the Constitution, was less restrained. The AntiSlavery Society announced that “we will not operate on the existing relations of society by other than peaceful and lawful means, and that we will give no countenance to violence or insurrection.” Yet, the Society was denounced as a hotbed of extremism, the public memory of Nat Turner’s violent insurrection having been dimmed by just a few years of time.

The point is that we are not precise in our standards for measuring “extremism.” We do not take into account all possible alternatives, in either goal or method, which may be more extreme than the one we are so labeling. This leads writers to call “extreme” any proposal more drastic than that favored by the majority of articulate people at the time (or by the writer). In a society where the word “extreme” has a bad connotation, in a literate community enamored of the Aristotelian golden mean, we often hurl that word unjustifiably at some proposal which is extreme only in a context of limited alternatives.

Consider how movements denounced all over the South as virtually Communist, began to look respectable and legalistic when the sit-inners and Freedom Riders moved into mass, extra-legal action in 1960 and 1961. And the White Citizens Councils of the South could lay claim to being “moderate” segregationists so long as the KKK was around. (The *deliberate* creation of a new extremist group to make an old one more palatable is not yet a major tactic by either right or left; McCarthyism could have been, though it probably was not, the clever offspring of someone who wanted to make “normal” Communist-hunting in this country seem mild.)

With the criterion for extremism so flexible, with the limits constantly shifting, how can we decide the value or wrongness of a position by whether it is “extreme” or “moderate”? We accept these labels because they afford us a test simple enough to avoid mental strain. Also, it is easy and comfortable—especially for intellectuals who do not share the piercing problems of the hungry or helplessly diseased of the world (who, in other words, face no extreme problems)—to presume always that the “moderate” solution is the best.

To jump to the cry “extremism” at the first glimpse of the unfamiliar is like a boy with his little telescope peering into the heavens and announcing that the

star he dimly perceives at his edge of vision is the farthest object in the universe. It was James Russell Lowell who said: "... there is no cant more foolish or more common than theirs who under the mask of discretion, moderation, statesmanship, and what not, would fain convict of fanaticism all that transcends their own limits ... From the zoophyte upward everything is *ultra* to something else ..."

If the notion of "extremism" is too nebulous to sustain a firm judgment on a goal or a tactic, how do we judge? One point of reference might be the nature and severity of the problem. Even that moderate, Lao Tzu, said you use a boat for a stream and a litter for a mountain path; you adapt your means to your problem. While more modest evils might be dislodged by a few sharp words, the elimination of slavery clearly required more drastic action. The abolitionists did not deceive themselves that they were gentle and temperate; they quite consciously measured their words to the enormity of the evil.

Garrison said in 1833: "How, then, ought I to feel and speak and write, in view of a system which is red with innocent blood drawn from the bodies of millions of my countrymen by the scourge of brutal drivers ... My soul should be, as it is, on fire. I should thunder, I should lighten, I should blow the trumpet of alarm long and loud. I should use just such language as is most descriptive of the crime."

How evil was slavery? It was a complex phenomenon, different in every individual instance, with the treatment of slaves varying widely. But the whole range of variation was in a general framework of unspeakable inhumanity. Even at its "best," slavery was a ferocious attack on man's dignity. It was described matter-of-factly by a supporter of the system, Judge Edmund Ruffin of North Carolina: "Such services can only be expected from one who has no will of his own; who surrenders his will in implicit obedience to another. Such obedience is the consequence only of uncontrolled authority over the body. There is no remedy. This discipline belongs to the state of slavery ... It constitutes the curse of slavery to both the bond and the free portion of our population. But it is inherent in the relation of master and slave."

And at its worst, slavery was, as Allan Nevins has said: "... the greatest misery, the greatest wrong, the greatest curse to white and black alike that America has ever known."

Ads for fugitive slaves in the Southern press (5,400 advertisements a year) contained descriptions like the following to aid apprehension: "... Stamped N.E. on the breast and having both small toes cut off ... Has some scars on his back that show above the skin, caused by the whip ... Has an iron band around his neck ... Has a ring of iron on his left leg ... Branded on the left cheek, thus 'R,'

and a piece is taken off her left ear on the same side; the same letter is branded on the inside of both legs.” One plantation diary read: “... whipped every field hand this evening.”

A Natchez slave who attacked a white man was chained to a tree and burned alive.

Against this, how mild Garrison’s words seem.

EMOTIONALISM AND IRRATIONALITY

In the 1820s, G. F. Milton wrote, in *The Eve of Conflict*, “a new and rival spirit welled up from the West ... an emotional democracy, bottoming itself on Rousseau’s mystic claims of innate rights, looking on Liberty as a spontaneous creation and asserting rights unconnected with responsibilities, among these the universal manhood competence for self-government ... The Abolition movement ... was a manifestation of emotional democracy.” Milton talks further of “deep-seated passions” and “the emotional flood ... psychic forces clamoring for expression ... a drive for reform, change, agitation, which boded ill for any arbitrament of intelligence.” Thoreau, Parker, and other reformers, he says, “showed a remarkably keen insight into latent mass emotions and did not hesitate to employ appropriate devices to mobilize the mob mind.”

Fanaticism, irrationality, emotionalism—these are the qualities attributed again and again, in a mood of sharp criticism, to the abolitionists; and, indeed, to radical reformers in general. How valid is the criticism?

If being “emotional” means creating a state of excitement, both for oneself and for others, which intensifies the forms of already existent behavior, or creates new, more energetic behavior patterns, then we need not argue. The abolitionists were all, in varying degrees, emotional in their response to situations and in the stimuli they projected into the atmosphere. What is arguable is the notion that this “emotionalism” is to be deplored.

The intellectual is taken aback by emotional display. It appears to him an attack on that which he most reveres—reason. One of his favorite terms of praise is “dis-passionate.” The words “calm ... judicious ... reasonable” seem to belong together. He points to evil rousers of emotion: the Hitlers, the Southern demagogues of racism, the religious charlatans, and faith healers. And yet, sitting in a Negro Baptist Church in the deep South listening to the crowd sing “We shall overcome ... we shall overcome ...” and hearing it cry “Freedom! Freedom!” the intellectual may well feel a surge of joy and love, damped only slightly by a twinge of uneasiness at his spontaneous display of feeling.

He is uneasy, I would suggest, because of a failure to recognize several things: that emotion is a *morally neutral* instrument for a wide variety of ends; that it serves a positive purpose when linked to laudable goals; that it is not “irrational” but “nonrational” because, being merely an instrument, its rationality is derived only from the value with which it is linked.

When, at a high moment of tension in the battle over slavery, William Lloyd

Garrison first heard the freed Negro Frederick Douglass speak, at a crowded meeting in Nantucket, he rose and cried out: "Have we been listening to a man—or a thing?" The audience stirred. In this flash of words and transferred emotion, a group of New England men and women, far removed from the plantation and its daily reminders of human debasement, were confronted with an experience from which they were normally separated by space and social status. By this confrontation, they became more ready to act against an evil which existed just as crassly before Garrison's words were spoken, but whose meaning now flooded in on them for the first time.

The Horst Wessel Song drove Nazi myrmidons forward, but the Battle Hymn of the Republic inspired antislavery fighters. Like music and poetry, whose essence is the enlargement of sensuous experience, and whose potency can be focused in any ethical direction—or in none—the agitation of emotions by words or actions is an art. And as such, it is an instrument of whatever moral camp employs it.

What needs to be said, finally, to assuage the embarrassment of the emotionally aroused intellectual, is that there is no necessary connection between emotionalism and irrationality. A lie may be calmly uttered, and a truth may be charged with emotion. Emotion can be used to make more rational decisions, if by that we mean decisions based on greater knowledge, for greater knowledge involves not only extension but intensity. Who "knows" more about slavery—the man who has in his head all the available information (how many Negroes are enslaved, how much money is spent by the plantation for their upkeep, how many run away, how many revolt, how many are whipped and how many are given special privileges) and calmly goes about his business, or the man who has less data, but is moved by the book (Harriet Beecher Stowe's) or by an orator (Wendell Phillips) to *feel* the reality of slavery so intensely that he will set up a station on the underground railroad? Rationality is limited by time, space, and status, which intervene between the individual and the truth. Emotion can liberate it.

DOES THE AGITATOR DISTORT THE FACTS?

Abolitionist reformers, and those who supported them, historian Avery Craven wrote in *The Coming of the Civil War*, spread thousands of distortions about the South. The American people, he said, "permitted their shortsighted politicians, their overzealous editors, and their pious reformers to emotionalize real and potential differences and to conjure up distorted impressions of those who dwelt

in other parts of the nation. For more than two decades, these molders of public opinion steadily created the fiction of two distinct peoples contending for the right to preserve and expand their sacred cultures ... In time, a people came to believe ... that the issues were between right and wrong; good and evil.”

Craven’s thesis is that the war was repressible, but abolitionist (and slaveholder) exaggerations brought it about.

A similar charge is made by T. Harry Williams in *Lincoln and the Radicals*: “Thirty years of abolitionist preachings had instilled in the popular mind definite thought patterns and reactions regarding the Southern people and their social system. It was widely believed that slavery had brutalized the Southern character, that the owner of human chattels was a dour, repulsive fiend, animated by feelings of savage hatred toward Negroes and Northern whites.”

Because the reformist agitator is so often charged with distortion and exaggeration, and because thinkers with an abiding concern for the truth are often led by such charges to keep a safe distance from such agitators, it is essential to discuss this point.

Distinctions ought first to be made between outright misstatements of fact and personal slander on the one hand, and on the other, exaggerations of the truth, and the singling out of those aspects of a complex truth which support the viewpoint of the reformer. It needs to be acknowledged that false statements have at times been made by radical reformers, and this is unpardonable, for if the reformer speaks the truth, then material exists on all hands to support him, and he needs no falsification of the evidence to back his case. As for character-denigration, it is not only repugnant to truth-seekers, but makes explanation embarrassing when the attacked person is revealed as something different. Witness Phillips’ angry assault on Lincoln: “Who is this huckster in politics? Who is this county court advocate?” And during the war: “... if he had been a traitor, he could not have worked better to strengthen one side, and hazard the success of the other.” And again, in a *Liberator* article, Phillips’ headline: “Abraham Lincoln, the Slave-Hound of Illinois.”

More serious, and more frequent, however, are charges of exaggeration and distortion, leveled at the radicals. At the root of this problem is that once we get past simple factual statements (“On March 3, 1851, field hand was whipped by his master.”) we are in a realm where words like “true” and “false” cannot be applied so simply. Slavery was a complex institution, and no one statement can describe it fully. Slave-master relationships varied from kindness to cruelty and also defy generalization. We are here in that philosophical realm dealing with the theory of knowledge, a field in which historians play all the time, without paying any attention to the rules,

while the philosophers sit in their studies discussing the rules and rarely look out the window to see how the game is played.

There is an answer to the problem of how to state simply a complex truth—but this requires an activist outlook rare among scholars. It means deciding from a particular ethical base what is the action-need of the moment, and to concentrate on that aspect of the truth-complex which fulfills that need. If we start from the ethical assumption that it is fundamentally wrong to hold in bondage—whether kindly or cruelly—another human being, and that the freeing of such persons requires penetrating the moral sensibilities of a nation, then it is justifiable to focus on those aspects of the complexity which support this goal. When you teach a child to be careful crossing the street, and say, “You can be killed by an automobile,” you are singling out of the totality of automobile behaviors that small percentage of incidents in which people are killed. You are not telling the whole truth about automobiles and traffic. But you are emphasizing that portion of the truth which supports a morally desirable action.

The complaint by T. Harry Williams that is a result of abolitionist agitation, “It was widely believed that slavery had brutalized the Southern character ...” takes note of an abolitionist emphasis which does not photographically depict total reality. Not every white Southerner was brutalized by slavery. And yet, some were, and many others were affected—by the simple fact of learning to accept such a system without protest. These effects are so various and complicated that the word “brutalized” does not exactly fit, nor does any other word. But the focusing on this fact of brutalization points to a crucial aspect of slavery, and the recognition of that aspect may be decisive in overthrowing a terrible system. The scholar who accepts no harsh judgment because it does not do justice to the entire complex truth, can really accept no judgment about society, because all are simplifications of the complex. The result is scholarly detachment from the profound ethical conflicts of society, and from that human concern without which scholarship becomes a pretentious game.

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE AND THE RADICAL

It is paradoxical that the historian, who is presumably blessed with historical perspective, should judge the radical from within the narrow moral base of the radical's period of activity, while the radical assesses his immediate society from the vantage point of some future, better era. If progress is desirable, and if escape from the bonds of the immediate is healthy, whose perspective is more accurate—that of the agitator, or that of the scolding historian?

James Russell Lowell wrote in 1849: "... the simple fact undoubtedly is that were the Abolitionists to go back to the position from which they started, they would find themselves less fanatical than a very respectable minority of the people. The public follows them step by step, occupying the positions they have successively fortified and quitted, and it is necessary that they should keep in advance in order that people may not be shocked by waking up and finding themselves Abolitionists."

Garrison himself took note of the profound change in the nation by 1860, thirty years from the time he had started his tiny, maligned newspaper. He spoke to the Massachusetts AntiSlavery Society, shortly after John Brown's execution, which had brought shock and indignation throughout the North: "Whereas, ten years since, there were thousands who could not endure my lightest rebuke of the South, they can now swallow John Brown whole, and his rifle into the bargain."

The historian too often moves back a hundred years into a moral framework barbarian by modern standards and thinks inside it, while the radical shakes the rafters of this framework at the risk of his life. Wendell Phillips, speaking affectionately of the abolitionist leader Angelina Grimke, said: "Were I to single out the moral and intellectual trait which most won me, it was her serene indifference to the judgment of those about her." That kind of indifference (David Riesman calls it inner directedness) is hard to find in contemporary scholarship.

COMPROMISE

The argument over the wisdom of radical agitation in the tactics of social reform was aptly expressed in Boston in pre-Civil War years by two leading figures. Samuel May, speaking of Garrison, said: "... he will shake our nation to its center, but he will shake slavery out of it." Reverend Lyman Beecher said: "True wisdom consists in advocating a cause only so far as the community will sustain the reformer." The agitator, declare the moderate reformers, shakes so hard that he makes compromise impossible, alienates friends, and delays rather than speeds the coming of reform.

Compromise was not disdained by the abolitionists, they were fully conscious of the fact that the outcome of any social struggle is almost always some form of compromise. But they were also aware of that which every intelligent radical knows: that to compromise in advance is to vitiate at the outset that power for progress which only the radical propels into the debate. Lowell put this most vividly, declaring that the abolitionists "are looked upon as peculiarly ungrateful and impracticable if they do not devote their entire energies to soliciting nothing, and express a thankfulness amounting almost to rapture when they get it."

The abolitionist took an advanced position so that even if pushed back by compromise, substantial progress would result. Garrison wrote: "Urge immediate abolition as earnestly as we may, it will be gradual abolition in the end." And Phillips said: "If we would get half a loaf, we must demand the whole of it." The Emancipation Proclamation itself was a compromise, the tortured product of a long battle between radicals and moderates in and out of the Lincoln administration, and only the compelling force of the abolitionist intransigents made it come as soon as it did.

Two factors demand recognition by moderates who disdain "extreme" positions on the ground that compromise is necessary. One is the above-mentioned point that the early projection of an advanced position ensures a compromise on more favorable terms than would be the case where the timorous reformer compromises at the start (in which case the result is a compromise upon a compromise, since he will be forced to retreat even from his retreat after all the forces are calculated at the social weighing-in). The other is that there is a huge difference between the passive wisher-for-change who quietly adds up the vectors and makes a decision as to which is the composite of all existing forces, and the active reformer who pushes so hard *in the course of adding-up* that the composite itself is changed. The latter—the radical—is viewing compromise as

a dynamic process, in which his own actions are part of the total force being calculated. He bases his estimate of what is possible on a graph in which his own action and its consequences are calculated from the first.

MODERATION AS A TACTIC

Does the agitator alienate potential allies by the extremism of his demands, or the harshness of his language? Lewis Tappan, the wealthy New Yorker who financed many abolitionist activities, wrote anxiously to George Thompson, the British abolitionist: "The fact need not be concealed from you that several emancipationists so disapprove of the harsh, and, as they think, the unchristian language of the *Liberator*, that they do not feel justified in upholding it." This, in general, was the feeling of the Executive Committee of the American AntiSlavery Society in the early years of the movement. Undoubtedly, the Society itself was not diverted from its aim of abolishing slavery because of Garrison's immoderation; they were concerned lest others be alienated.

But who? The slaveholder? The slave? The moderate reformer? The open-minded conservative? It needs to be acknowledged that different sections of the population will respond differently to the same appeal, and in judging the effect of bold words upon the population, this population must be broken up into parts, based on the varying degrees of receptivity to the ideas of the reformer. Why should the radical soften his language or his program to please that element of the population which cannot possibly be pleased by anything short of total surrender of principle, whose self-interest in fact dictates rejection of any reform? Lowell wrote: "The slaveholder, when Mr. Greeley would politely request him to state what method would be most consonant to his feelings, would answer, as did the ... boy whose mother asked him what he would like for breakfast, 'Just what you ain't gut!'"

Only the hypothesis of common interest for the entire population can justify an appeal to the opponent on the basis of reason, asking him to perceive his interest more accurately. But if in fact there is a diversity of interest, then the lighting up of the truth can only bring out more sharply that conflict which stands in the way of agreement. The slaveholders themselves pointed to the impossibility of their being won over by moderate overtures. In 1854, the editor of the *Richmond Enquirer* wrote: "That man must be a veritable verdigreen who dreams of pleasing slaveholders, either in church or state, by any method but that of letting slavery alone."

William Ellery Channing tried such appeal and failed. One of his brochures against slavery was so mild that some described it as putting people to sleep, but he was abused so harshly it might as well have been one of Garrison's flame-breathing *Liberator* editorials.

With a population of diversified interests, tactics must be adapted and focused specially for each group, and for the group most inimical to reform, it is doubtful that moderation is effective. With the intransigents, it may be only the most powerful action that impels change. It was Nat Turner's violent slave revolt in Virginia in 1831 that led the Virginia legislature into its famous series of discussions about the abolition of slavery. "For a while indeed," Ralph Korngold writes, "it seemed that what years of propaganda by the Quakers had failed to accomplish would come as a result of Turner's blood-letting."

When friends of the reformers rail against harsh words or strong action (as the American AntiSlavery Society did against Garrison) it is clear that they themselves will not be put off from reform because of it, but fear the effects on others. And if neither extreme opposition nor hard-and-fast friends can be moved by tactics of moderation, this leaves, as a decisive group, that large part of the population which is at neither end of the ideological spectrum, which moves back and forth across the center line, depending on circumstances.

Garrison was quite aware that most of the American population to which he was appealing was not sympathetic with his views, and he was completely conscious of how distant were his own fiery convictions from those of the average American. But he was persuaded, as were Phillips and other leading abolitionists (John Brown felt it, and acted it, if he did not express it intellectually) that only powerful surges of words and feelings could move white people from their complacency about the slave question. He said once in Philadelphia: "Sir, slavery will not be overthrown without excitement, a most tremendous excitement." He must lash with words, he felt, those Americans who had never felt the whip of a slaveowner. To his friend Samuel May, who urged him to keep more cool, saying: "Why, you are all on fire," Garrison replied: "Brother May, I have need to be all on fire, for I have mountains of ice about me to melt."

We have the historical record as a check on whether the vituperative language of Garrison, the intemperate appeals of Wendell Phillips, hurt or advanced the popular sentiment against slavery. In the 1830s a handful of men cried out against slavery and were beaten, stoned, and shot to death by their Northern compatriots. By 1849, antislavery sentiment was clearly increasing, and some of the greatest minds and voices in America were speaking out for abolition. Lowell asked curtly of those who charged the abolitionists with retarding the movement: "... has there really been a change of public opinion for the worse, either at the North or the South, since the *Liberator* came into existence eighteen years ago?"

And by 1860, with millions of Americans convinced that slavery was an evil,

open insurrection by John Brown brought more public support than had the mere words of Garrison thirty years before.

This is not to say that extremists may not drive possible allies from their movement. But this is generally not because of the ferocity of their attack on an institution which is the object of general dislike, but because of their insertion of other issues which do not touch public sensibilities as much. Theodore Weld, an effective Midwestern abolitionist, who was marvelous at organizing abolitionist societies in Ohio, criticized Garrison for his violent attacks on the clergy, for his anarchist utterances against government in general, and for his insistence on bringing many other issues—women's rights, pacifism, etc.—into the antislavery fight. For marginal supporters, such side issues may bring alienation. Whether such estrangement would be significant enough to offset the general social value of having one important issue ride on the back of another, is another question.

THE AGITATOR AND THE POLITICIAN

The politician is annoyed and angry at the pushing of the radical reformer, and the moderate observer thinks the radical unfair and injudicious in making extreme demands of the man in office, but both critics fail to distinguish between the social role of the politician and that of the agitator. In general, this distinction is perceived more clearly by reformers than by officeholders. Wendell Phillips put it neatly: "The reformer is careless of numbers, disregards popularity, and deals only with ideas, conscience, and common sense.... He neither expects nor is overanxious for immediate success. The politician dwells in an everlasting now ... His office is not to instruct public opinion but to represent it."

James Russell Lowell expressed the idea in another way: "The Reformer must expect comparative isolation, and he must be strong enough to bear it. He cannot look for the sympathy and cooperation of popular majorities. Yet these are the tools of the politician.... All true Reformers are incendiaries. But it is the hearts, brains and souls of their fellow-men which they set on fire, and in so doing they perform the function appropriated to them in the wise order of Providence."

The observer who is critical of the radical may be subconsciously conjuring the picture of a world peopled only with radicals, a world of incessant shouting, lamenting, and denunciation. But it would be good for him to also imagine a world without any radicals—a placid, static, and evil-ridden world with victims of injustice left to their own devices, a world with the downtrodden friendless. In all ages, it has been first the radical, and only later the moderate, who has held out a hand to men knocked to the ground by the social order.

The moderate, whose sensitive ears are offended by the wild language of the radical, needs to consider the necessary division of labor in a world full of evil, a division in which agitators for reform play an indispensable role. When Horace Greeley charged Garrison with fanaticism, Lowell retorted: "Why God sent him into the world with that special mission and none other.... It is that which will make his name a part of our American history. He would not have all men fanatics, but let us be devoutly thankful for as many of that kind as we can get. They are by no means too common as yet."

In Abraham Lincoln we have the prototype of the political man in power, with views so moderate as to require the pressure of radicals to stimulate action. The politician, by the very nature of the electoral process, is a compromiser and a trimmer, who sets his sails by the prevailing breezes, and without the hard blowing of the radical reformer would either drift actionless or sail along with

existing injustice. It is hard to find a set of statements more clearly expressive of the politician's ambivalence than those which Lincoln made during his 1858 race for the Senate against Douglass. At that time he told a Chicago audience in July: "Let us discard this quibbling about this man and the other man, this race and the other race being inferior, and therefore they must be placed in an inferior position." But in September he told an audience in southern Illinois:

I am not, nor ever have been, in favor of bringing about in any way the social or political equality of the white and black races. I am not nor ever have been in favor of making voters of the free negroes, or jurors, or qualifying them to hold office, or having them marry with white people. I will say in addition that there is a physical difference between the white and black races which, I suppose, will forever forbid the two races living together upon terms of social and political equality; and in as much as they cannot so live, that while they do remain together, there must be the position of the superiors and the inferiors; and that I, as much as any other man, am in favor of the superior being assigned to the white man.

The most shocking statement about Lincoln—and all the more shocking when we realize its essential truth—was made by Frederick Douglass in 1876 at the unveiling of the Freedmen's Monument in Washington:

To protect, defend, and perpetuate slavery in the United States where it existed Abraham Lincoln was not less ready than any other President to draw the sword of the nation. He was ready to execute all the supposed constitutional guarantees of the United States Constitution in favor of the slave system anywhere inside the slave states. He was willing to pursue, recapture, and send back the fugitive slave to his master, and to suppress a slave rising for liberty, though his guilty master were already in arms against the Government. The race to which we belong were not the special objects of his consideration. Knowing this, I concede to you, my white fellow citizens, a pre-eminence in his worship at once full and supreme. First, midst, and last, you and yours were the objects of his deepest affection and his most earnest solicitude. You are the children of Abraham Lincoln. We are at best only his stepchildren, children by adoption, children by force of circumstances and necessity.

In the fascinating dialogue—sometimes articulated, sometimes unspoken—between Abraham Lincoln and the abolitionists, we have the classic situation of the politician vis-à-vis the radical reformer. It would be wrong to say that Lincoln was completely a politician—his fundamental humanitarianism did not allow that—and wrong to say that some of the abolitionists did not occasionally play politics—but on both sides the aberrations were slight, and they played their respective roles to perfection.

Albert Beveridge, in his biography of Lincoln, emphasized the fact that despite the influence of Herndon, his abolitionist law partner, Lincoln's early environment was powerfully affected by the Southern viewpoint. This accounted for "his speeches, his letters, his silence, his patience and mildness, his seeming hesitations, his immortal inaugural, his plans for reconstruction."

Beveridge saw Lincoln as a man who "almost perfectly reflected public opinion" in his stands. Lincoln opposed repeal of the Fugitive Slave Law, was silent on the violence in Kansas and the beating of Sumner, and followed the tactic of saying nothing except on issues most people agreed on—like stopping the extension of slavery.

During the secession crisis, and through most of the war, Lincoln's stand on slavery was so ambiguous and cautious as to make the British abolitionist George Thompson tell Garrison: "You know how impossible it is at this moment to vindicate, as one would wish, the course of Mr. Lincoln. In no one of his utterances is there an assertion of a great principle—no appeal to right or justice.

In everything he does and says, affecting the slave, there is the alloy of expediency.”

Lincoln made no move against slavery in those border states siding with the Union, except to offer them money as an inducement for gradual abolition, and when Generals David Hunter and John Fremont acted to free slaves under their command Lincoln revoked their orders. His position was quite clear (as both abolitionist-minded Ralph Korngold and conservative-minded Harry Williams agree in their historical studies); Lincoln’s first desire was to save the Union; abolition was secondary and he would sacrifice it, if necessary, to maintain Republican rule over the entire nation.

While Lincoln kept reading the meter of public opinion, the abolitionists assaulted in massive ideological waves both the public and the meter-reader. In the winter of 1861-62, fifty thousand persons heard Wendell Phillips speak. Millions read his speeches. Petitions and delegations besieged Lincoln at the White House. Garrison went easy on Lincoln, but his own writings had created an army of impatient. Samuel Bowles, editor of the *Springfield Republican*, wrote that “a new crop of Radicals has sprung up, who are resisting the President and making mischief.”

Evidence is that Lincoln, who had reflected public opinion well enough in 1860 to win the election, was not abreast of it in 1861 and 1862, on the issue of slavery. And this points to something with huge significance: that while both the politician and the agitator have their own specific roles to play in that fitful march toward utopia, which involves both surge and consolidation, the politician meter-reader is plagued by an inherent defect. His reading is a static one, not taking into account the going and imminent actions of the reformers, which change the balance of forces even while he is making the decision. The tendency, therefore, is for all political decisions to be conservative. Most of all, the politician is so preoccupied with evaluation of the existing forces that he leaves out of the account his own power, which is expended on *reading* public opinion rather than on *changing* it.

Where presidents have been more than reflectors of a static consensus, the exertion of their force into the balance of power has usually been in pursuit of nationalistic goals rather than reformist ones. The carrying out of any war requires the conscious shifting of the balance of public sentiment in support of the war, which is not likely to have enthusiastic and overwhelming support before its inception. (Even the supposed mass clamor for war in 1898 was an exaggerated image created in a rather placid pond by the heavy stones of Hearst and Pulitzer.) Lincoln, Wilson, Roosevelt, and Truman worked hard to create popular support for the wars they administered.

Andrew Jackson's dynamic action on the bank was a creator rather than a reflector of public opinion; but historians and economists are still puzzled over whether his policy was designed genuinely to broaden economic democracy to reach the lowest societal levels, or was on behalf of disgruntled small bankers and entrepreneurs hearkening for a laissez-faire which would increase their own share of national profit-taking. The reforms of Teddy Roosevelt and Wilson were largely diluted toasts to Populist and Progressive protest. Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal comes closest to a dynamic effort to push through a reform program while creating the sentiment to support it. Since Roosevelt, we have had no such phenomenon.

In the area of racial equality, from Lincoln to Kennedy, the man at the pinnacle of national political power has chosen to play the cautious game of responding, inch by inch, to the powerful push of "extremists," "troublemakers," and "radicals." For Lincoln it was the abolitionists; for Kennedy the sit-inners and Freedom Riders. The man sitting in the White House has the inner mechanism of the public opinion meter in his lap; he can, by a direct manipulation of its gears, bring a transformation that otherwise requires a thousand times more energy directed from the outside by protest and outcry. So far, no one with presidential power has played such a dynamic role in the area of racial exclusiveness.

AGITATORS AND WAR

A Tulane University professor of history wrote in the May 1962 issue of the *Journal of Southern History*:

Eventually, however, the abolitionists reached a large Northern audience and thus brought on the bloodiest war in American history. Convinced that they had an exclusive line to God they determined to force their brand of morality on their Southern brethren. It is not surprising that many Southerners still regard this assumption of moral superiority by the New England Puritans—and by their pharisaical heirs the latter-day abolitionists—as obnoxious.

One of the standard arguments against the agitator is that his proddings and shoutings, his emotional denunciations, lead to violent conflict—that, in the case of the Civil War, it was the abolitionists who played a crucial role in bringing about the terrible bloodbath. Avery Craven, in *The Coming of the Civil War*, blames “shortsighted politicians ... overzealous editors ... pious reformers” for emotionalizing and exaggerating sectional differences, for bringing people to believe the issue was between good and evil, thus creating mythical devils to be fought. It was, Craven says, a repressible conflict, made irrepressible by these forces.

It is clear that we cannot ascribe to the abolitionists the power to push moderates into action and at the same time deny that their words and actions have the effect of sharpening conflict over the social issue which concerns them. But the distinction between social conflict and war is overwhelmingly important. Agitators had the power to heighten feelings and tensions, but they are outside of the decision-making machinery which produces a war. It is strange that a society and a culture which are so resentful of “determinist” theories gave great credence to the idea that the Civil War was irrepressible, once given the conflict of ideas represented by slaveholders and abolitionists. This clash, however, existed in sharp form for thirty years without producing war. War became inevitable only with the simultaneous emergence of two factors: the determination of leading Southerners, holding state power, to create a separate nation; and the insistence of the Republicans, in possession of the national government, that no such separate nation must be permitted to exist. It was this issue which brought war, because only this, the issue of national sovereignty, constituted a direct attack on that group which ran the country and had the power to make war.

The institution of slavery did lie at the root of the economic and social schism between the sections. However, it was not the antihuman, immoral aspect of the institution which brought all the weight of national power against it; it was the antitariff, antibank, anticapitalist, antinational aspect of slavery which aroused

the united opposition of the only groups in the country with the power to make war—the national political leaders and controllers of the national economy. Jefferson Davis’ speech, April 29, 1861, before a special session of the Confederate Congress, saw the Northern motives not as humanitarian, but as based on a desire to control the Union.

The conflict between the slave states and the Northern politicians existed independently of the battle between slaveholders and abolitionists. The latter by itself could not lead to war because the abolitionists were not in charge of war-making machinery (and in fact, did not advocate war as a method of solving their problem). The former conflict by itself could have brought war and did bring it precisely because it brought into collision two forces in both sections of the country with the power to make war. What the abolitionists contributed to this conflict was that they gave Lincoln and the North a moral issue to sanctify and ennoble what was for many Republican leaders a struggle for national power and economic control. They could have waged war without such a moral issue, for politicians have shown the ability to create moral issues on the flimsiest of bases—witness Woodrow Wilson in 1917—but it was helpful to have one at hand.

What the abolitionists did was not to precipitate the war, nor even to cause the basic conflict, which led to war—but to ensure, by their kind of agitation, that in the course of the war, some social reform would take place. That this reform was drastically limited is shown by the feeble character of the Emancipation Proclamation (of which Richard Hofstadter has said: “It had all the moral grandeur of a bill of lading”).

The Radical Reconstruction period rode along on a zooming moral momentum created by the Civil War, but crass political desires were in control; when these desires could no longer be filled by Negro suffrage, the Negro was sacrificed and Radical Reconstruction consigned to the ash heap. The abolitionists were not responsible for the war—they were responsible for sowing the seeds—with the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth amendments—of an equalitarian society, seeds which their generation was unwilling to nurture, but which were to come to life after a century.

AGITATORS TODAY: THE SIT-INNERS OF THE SOUTH

There is no point—except for that abstract delight which accompanies historical study—in probing the role of the agitator in the historical process, unless we can learn something from it which is of use today. We have, after a hundred years, a

successor to the abolitionist: the sit-in agitator, the boycotter, the Freedom Rider of the 1960s. Every objection—and every defense—applicable to the abolitionist is pertinent to his modern-day counterpart.

When the sit-in movement erupted through the South in the spring of 1960, it seemed a radical, extreme departure from the slow, law-court tactics of the NAACP, which had produced favorable court decisions but few real changes in the deep South. And it upset Southern white liberals sympathetic to the Negro and friendly to the 1954 Supreme Court school decision. This, they felt, was going too far. But the fact that “extremism” is a relative term, and the additional fact that the passage of time and the advance of social change make a formerly radical step seem less radical, became clear within a year.

For one thing, the increased frequency and widespread character of the sit-ins got people accustomed to them and they began to look less outrageously revolutionary. But more important, the advent of the Freedom Rides in 1961—busloads of integrated Northerners riding through the most backward areas of the deep South in direct and shocking violation of local law and custom—made the sit-ins seem a rather moderate affair. And, at the same time, the emergence of the Black Muslims as anti-white militants, with their claim of black superiority, put the integrationist advocates of nonviolence in the position of being more radical than the NAACP, but less so than the Black Muslims. Nonviolence itself, the accepted tactic of the sit-in and Freedom Ride people, was a rather moderate tactic in a century of violent upheaval throughout the world.

The old argument of Garrison that his racialism was pitched to the level of the evil he was fighting is directly applicable to the new young radicals of the American South. Is sitting at a lunch counter in a white restaurant, and refusing to leave, really a very extreme measure in relation to the evil of segregation? Is insisting on the right to sit side by side, regardless of race, in a bus or train or waiting room, a terribly radical move—in the face of a century of deep humiliation for one-tenth of a nation? By 1960 the NAACP, denounced in 1954 and 1955 as radical and Communistic, seemed remarkably mild next to the sit-in students. By 1961, the sit-in students seemed moderate against the Freedom Riders, and the Riders themselves even timid compared to the Muslims.

The element of emotionalism, present in any mass movement, has a special place in the movement for racial equality in the 1960s. Every important demonstration and action has been accompanied by church-meetings, singing, fiery oratory. But all of this has been an instrument designed to heighten a most rational objective: securing in fact as well as in theory the basic principles of the Declaration of Independence and the Fourteenth Amendment to the Constitution.

The leadership of Martin Luther King, Jr. represents that new blending of emotional religion and intellectual sophistication which marks the current equal rights campaign. King plays upon the emotions and religious feelings of his people, but contains this within a controlled rationality which drives towards carefully defined goals.

Does the race agitator in the South today exaggerate the truth about conditions in that part of the country? "Don't believe all those stories you hear about us," a soft-voiced woman from South Carolina told me once. "We're not all that bad to our colored people." She was right, and wrong. The South is far better than most agitated Northerners imagine; and much worse than any white Northerner believes. It is a complexity of swift progress and deep-rooted evil. Dramatic and publicized progress in race relations is still only a thin veneer on a deep crust of degradation. To be a Negro in the South has, for most Negroes, most of the time, no drastic consequences like beatings or lynchings. But it has, for all Negroes in the South, all of the time, a fundamental hurt which cannot be put into words or statistics. No Negro, even in that minority of wealth and position, can escape the fact that he is a special person, that wherever he goes, whatever he does, he must be conscious of this fact, that his children will bear a special burden on their emotions from the moment they begin to make contact with the outside world. For the majority, their entire way of life is conditioned by it, the fact that the women must be office cleaners rather than stenographers, that the men must be porters rather than foremen; their children may have it better, but their own generation, their own lives, constitute a sacrifice offered to the future.

And for a certain minority of Negroes, there is police brutality, courtroom injustice, horrible conditions in Southern jails and work-gangs, the simple fact that capital punishment is much more likely to be invoked for a Negro criminal than for a white. The South is not one mad orgy of lynchings and brutality, as Communist propaganda might have it. But there is a kind of permanent brutality in the atmosphere, which nobody's propaganda has quite accurately described. Because of this, no accusation directed against the South is much of an exaggeration. Any emphasis upon the evil aspects of Southern life is a valuable prod to the movement for equality.

As for the moderate exhortation to compromise, the angry but cool Negro students in the South have learned that this is best left as the very last act in the succession of moves toward settlement of any issue. Department stores, before the sit-ins, were willing to compromise by adding more segregated eating facilities for Negroes. After the sit-ins, the only compromise which the students had to accept was to wait a few months in some cases, or to leave some restaurants out of the settlement, or to put up with inaction on connected issues

like employment rights; but the lunch counters were fully integrated. The lesson has been well learned by now; throw the full weight of attack into the fray despite demands for prior concessions; then the final compromise will be at the highest possible level.

“You’ll alienate the merchants if you sit-in, and they’ll never agree to integrate,” the students were told when they began their movement. But they know, through some semiconscious perception rather than by complex rational analysis, that certain antagonists in a social struggle cannot be won over by gentleness, only by pressure. The merchants were alienated, not only from the students, but from their customers. It was the latter effect which was most striking, and it led to their capitulation and the integration of lunch counters in leading Southern cities. On the other hand, students were careful to try not to alienate the ordinary Southern white, the customer, the observer. They were scrupulously polite, nonviolent, and impressive in their intelligence and deportment. With a precise instinct, they singled out of the complex of opponents which ones would have to be irritated, and which would need to be cajoled.

In spite of some fearful murmurs immediately after the 1954 Supreme Court Decision, there is no prospect of civil war in the United States over desegregation. And this points up the fact that the total collision between two power groups which is called war cannot come about through the action of radical reformers, who stand outside these power groupings. The movement for desegregation today has all the elements of the abolition movement: its moral fervor and excitement, its small group of martyrs and mass of passive supporters, its occasional explosions of mob scenes and violence. But there will be no war because there are no issues between the real power groups in society serious enough, deep enough, to necessitate war as a solution. War remains the instrument of the state. All that reformers can do is put some moral baggage on its train.

The role of the politicians vis-à-vis the agitator was revealed as clearly in the Kennedy Administration as it was under Lincoln. Like Lincoln, Kennedy read the meter of public concern and reacted to it, but never exerted the full force of his office to change the reading drastically. He too had a deeply ingrained humanitarianism, but it took the shock of Birmingham to bring from him his first clear moral appeal against segregation and his first move for civil rights legislation (the Civil Rights Act of 1964). Lyndon Johnson holding to the level created by the agitation of that Birmingham summer, still hesitated—even while modern-day abolitionists were being murdered in Mississippi—to revoke the Compromise of 1877 and decisively enforce federal law in that state.

Behind every one of the national government's moves toward racial equality lies the sweat and effort of boycotts, picketing, beatings, sit-ins, and mass demonstrations. All of our recent administrations have constituted a funnel into which gargantuan human effort—organized by radical agitators like Martin Luther King, Jr. and the young professional militants of the Student NonViolent Coordinating Committee—is poured, only to emerge at the other end in slow dribbles of social progress. No American President, from Lincoln to Johnson, was able to see the immense possibilities for social change that lie in a *dynamic* reading of public opinion. Progress toward racial equality in the United States is certain, but this is because agitators, radicals and “extremists”—black and white together—are giving the United States its only living reminder that it was once a revolutionary nation.

Solving the Race Problem (1973)

Taken from a larger collection of writings on America after World War II that was published in 1973, this piece gives us Howard Zinn's historical approach to the struggle for racial equality in the '60s. If liberals in America were committed to ending racism as they claimed they were, why did it take so long for actual reform to take place? Howard answers this question by studying the legal and social frameworks of reform to fight discrimination during the twentieth century that all served as a catalyst for change in the '60s, when blacks in America had simply had enough. Acts of civil disobedience in the 1960s—sit-ins, urban riots, the 1963 March on Washington—were what ultimately changed the status quo. —Eds.

American liberalism was presented with a puzzle in the postwar period. For years the liberal argument had been to the effect that yes, the United States had a race problem, but it also had enough democracy, enough goodwill to solve it, and Americans were going about the job of doing so. Why, then, suddenly in the mid-Sixties, after twenty years of reform in race relations, including Supreme Court decisions, congressional legislation, and presidential position papers and executive orders, did the black population erupt in a series of riots and rebellions to the twin cries of “Freedom Now” and “Black Power”? A look at those years of reform might be helpful.

With the first postwar president, Harry Truman, there began the long chain of pronouncements that would make the promise of racial equality a national priority. The war itself, in mobilizing the nation to defeat the Nazi spokesmen for racial superiority, had produced much eloquent talk about freedom. But it was tacitly agreed that domestic racial problems would have to be postponed while the war was being waged. The prevailing sentiment was expressed by Negro Heavyweight Champion Joe Louis when he said: “America's got lots of problems, but Hitler won't fix them.”

Truman took several steps toward solving these racial problems once the war was over. In December 1946, he appointed a Committee on Civil Rights “to inquire into and to determine whether and in what respect current law

enforcement measures and the authority and means possessed by Federal, State, and local governments may be strengthened and improved to safeguard the civil rights of the people.” A year later the committee issued its report, and it was quite blunt in ascribing the motives behind its recommendations. They were made, explained the committee, partly for moral reasons but mainly for political and economic reasons. “The Time Is Now,” the committee said in urging immediate action on civil rights legislation. The “moral reason” spoke of conscience. The “economic reason” spoke of the financial costs of discrimination to the country and said: “The United States can no longer afford this heavy drain upon its human wealth, its national competence.” As for the “international reason,” the committee declared:

Our position in the postwar world is so vital to the future that our smallest actions have far-reaching effects.... We cannot escape the fact that our civil rights record has been an issue in world politics. The world's press and radio are full of it.... Those with competing philosophies have stressed—and are shamelessly distorting—our shortcomings.... They have tried to prove our democracy an empty fraud, and our nation a consistent oppressor of underprivileged people. This may seem ludicrous to Americans, but it is sufficiently important to worry our friends.... The United States is not so strong, the final triumph of the democratic ideal is not so inevitable that we can ignore what the world thinks of us or our record.

The committee recommended the expansion of the civil rights section of the Department of Justice and the establishment of a permanent Commission on Civil Rights. It also proposed congressional legislation against lynching and voting discrimination, and recommended new laws on fair-employment practices and on the equitable administration of justice. Truman then asked Congress to act on the committee's report.

Congress did nothing. The whole sequence of events—from Truman's declamations, to the report of the Committee on Civil Rights, to the death of the program in Congress—illustrated the limits of the orthodox American approach to social reform within the confines of the liberal tradition. Perhaps the most important fact about this customary approach to reform was that the impetus for change from the aggrieved—in this case, the black population—was present but not sufficiently strong to ensure firm action. Whatever pressure there was from the blacks—such as the scattered discontent among black war veterans and the legal arguments of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People—dissipated itself by aligning with the political self-interest of the American government. Speeches, investigatory committees, and promises surged forth, but not much more.

The self-interest of dominant groups in society never has had the motivating force sufficient to revolutionize social relations, especially when change might rebound against that self-interest. Such self-interest does generate speeches, promises, and token action; these do not bring about radical changes, only sufficient reforms to forestall rebellion. In July 1948, stimulated in part by the pressure of potential black voters in key urban areas in a presidential election

year, and by the expectation of the first peacetime conscription act, Truman issued an executive order asking that a policy of racial equality in the armed forces “be put into effect as rapidly as possible.” He created a committee to implement this program, and gradual desegregation of the armed forces began. How gradual is suggested by the fact that twelve years later the armed forces had not been entirely desegregated, and certain reserve units and the National Guard were still segregated.

Was it an accident or was it legal propriety that for armed forces desegregation Truman issued an executive order, thereby skirting the necessity for congressional approval of such action, while for other forms of discrimination—in voting, in housing, in employment, in education—he merely appealed to Congress for legislation? Or was it that the most urgent of practical reasons—mainly, the need to build up the armed forces in the chilly atmosphere of a growing cold war, and to maintain black morale in these forces—operated here? Executive orders could have been issued just as well in the other areas of discrimination where Truman was asking Congress to act; the required legislation was already on the books, having been passed by Congress in the Reconstruction era following the Civil War. The Fourteenth and Fifteenth amendments, plus the civil rights laws passed in 1866, 1870, and 1871, gave the president sufficient authority to begin doing away with discrimination in all areas of civil life. Neither Truman nor any president since the days of Ulysses S. Grant chose to do so. They preferred, when they gave any thought at all to discrimination, to seek specific congressional legislation, knowing well that Congress rarely acts swiftly on social injustices. Truman’s message to Congress asked for legislation “prohibiting discrimination in interstate transportation facilities”; not only was this subject to executive action under the Fourteenth Amendment’s prohibition against the denial of “equal protection of the laws,” but specific legislation in 1887 already barred discrimination in interstate transportation.

The pattern for federal action in the postwar years was now set. The Supreme Court would make unprecedented decisions for racial equality. Congress would pass civil rights laws in formidable number. The total effect was to give the impression abroad, and to whites at home unaware of the day-to-day lives of black people, that tumultuous changes were taking place in America’s race relations. The reality, however, as the history of federal action through Presidents Eisenhower, Kennedy, Johnson, and Nixon testifies, was different.

The Fourteenth Amendment to the Constitution, adopted in 1868, seemed, on its face, to guarantee equal treatment to all citizens. It declared all persons born in the United States to be citizens; it then said that no state shall abridge the

“privileges and immunities of citizens of the United States” or “deprive any person of life, liberty, or property without due process of law,” and that all citizens are entitled to “equal protection of the laws.” Nevertheless, in 1896, in *Plessy v. Ferguson*, the Supreme Court ruled that racial separation did not contravene the Fourteenth Amendment if public facilities for the races were “equal.” The *Plessy* case, which established the “separate but equal” principle, was a southern transportation case in which Homer Adolph Plessy, a light-skinned Negro, was arrested after entering a railroad car reserved for whites. The Supreme Court, in a seven-to-one decision, upheld the Louisiana law requiring blacks and whites to ride separately; it was a decision that resulted in new Jim Crow laws throughout the South, and it was one which was not reversed for sixty years—until the Court ordered the Montgomery, Alabama, bus company to stop separating black and white passengers. The Montgomery bus decision overturned the doctrine of “separate but equal” transportation facilities for the races.

In the 1940s and early 1950s, the Supreme Court merely insisted that the “separate but equal” doctrine be enforced in graduate-school education for Negroes. For instance, where a state did not have a law school for blacks, the Court ruled it must admit a black applicant to a white law school. Not until 1954 did the Court tackle directly and comprehensively the principle of segregation in the public schools. That year a series of cases, brought by the NAACP and headed by *Brown v. Board of Education*, challenged the “separate but equal” doctrine as it applied to public educational facilities.

In the *Brown* case, ninety years after the war to end slavery and nine years after the war to end Hitlerism, the United States Supreme Court unanimously declared racial segregation in the public schools to be unconstitutional. The Court said that the separation of black schoolchildren “generates a feeling of inferiority as to their status in the community that may affect their hearts and minds in away unlikely ever to be undone.” It went on:

We conclude that in the field of public education the doctrine of “separate but equal” has no place. Separate educational facilities are inherently unequal. Therefore, we hold that the plaintiffs and others similarly situated for whom the actions have been brought are, by reason of the segregation complained of, deprived of the equal protection of the laws guaranteed by the Fourteenth Amendment.

Supreme Court decisions, however, are not self-enforcing. Moreover, the year after the *Brown* decision, the Court retreated on the question of how soon segregation must end. It said that once school districts had made “a prompt and reasonable start toward full compliance” with the 1954 decision, the lower courts, which it charged with the responsibility of applying the desegregation decision, might “find that additional time is necessary.” It urged lower courts to enter “such orders and decrees ... as are necessary and proper to admit to public

schools on a racially non-discriminatory basis with all deliberate speed the parties to these cases.”

The Court’s approach to the enforcement of the Constitution on the issue of segregation was unusual. It could hardly be imagined that the discovery of slavery in, say, a town in Nevada in 1954 would lead it to decide that though the Thirteenth Amendment outlawed slavery the town should be allowed to make a “prompt and reasonable start” toward its gradual elimination. Or that any violation of federal law by, say, a national syndicate for fraud through the mails would lead it to decide that the guilty parties must gradually desist from their activities. As black constitutional lawyer Loren Miller wrote with some bitterness in *The Petitioners*: “No American lawyer anywhere had ever supposed that the Supreme Court or any other organ of government could suspend the exercise of a peacetime constitutional right for a single day.” By 1965, ten years after the “all deliberate speed” guideline of the Court, more than 75 percent of the school districts in the South were still segregated.

The Supreme Court’s decision on school desegregation met its first serious challenge in 1957 in Arkansas. Some progress toward desegregation had been made in the North and in the border states, but the South remained defiant. This defiance crystallized when Arkansas Governor Orville Faubus challenged a court order to begin gradual desegregation at Little Rock’s Central High School by stationing the National Guard around the school to prevent nine Negro children from entering. The Courts forced him to remove the guard, but a mob of whites then gathered to take their place and stop the black children. A fifteen-year-old girl later told of her experience:

Before I left home Mother called us into the living room. She said we should have a word of prayer. Then I caught the bus and got off a block from the school. I saw a large crowd of people standing across the street from the soldiers guarding Central. As I walked on, the crowd suddenly got very quiet. For a moment all I could hear was the shuffling of their feet. Then someone shouted, “Here she comes, get ready!” The crowd moved in closer and then began to follow me, calling me names. I still wasn’t afraid. Just a little bit nervous. Then my knees started to shake all of a sudden and I wondered whether I could make it to the center entrance a block away. It was the longest block I ever walked in my whole life...

They moved closer and closer. Somebody started yelling, “Lynch her! Lynch her!” I tried to see a friendly face somewhere in the mob—someone who maybe would help. I looked into the face of an old woman, it seemed a kind face, but when I looked at her again, she spat on me.

Then I looked down the block and saw a bench at the bus stop. I thought, “If I can only get there I will be safe...” When I finally got there, I don’t think I could have gone another step. I sat down and the mob crowded up and began shouting all over again. Someone hollered, “Drag her over to this tree! Let’s take care of the nigger.” Just then a white man sat down beside me, put his arm around me and patted my shoulder.

A handful of black students were finally admitted to Central High School, with soldiers, dispatched to Little Rock by President Eisenhower, protecting them for the rest of the year.

The general impression left on the world and on the nation by the Supreme Court decision in the *Brown* case, and by the use of federal troops to help enforce it, was that segregation was on its way out. The United States government had spoken through the Court, and resistance, such as that at Little Rock, could always be broken by firm presidential action. Eisenhower himself had enhanced the impression by stating, after sending troops to Little Rock:

“Thus will be restored the image of America and of all its parts as one nation, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.” The general impression, however, was misleading. In some states—Virginia, North Carolina, Florida, and Tennessee, for example—there was only token integration. In 1961 not one school in South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, or Louisiana had yet been integrated.

A similar sense of “progress” and optimism followed federal action on the voting rights of blacks. In 1944 the Supreme Court knocked out one of the obstacles to Negro voting in the South by declaring the “white primary” illegal. Until this decision, Democratic primary elections in the South, the important elections there since the Republican party was virtually nonexistent, were considered private activities restricted to whites. The Court ruled the primary election was really part of the state electoral machinery and therefore subject to the Fourteenth Amendment, which had been long interpreted to apply only to “public” discriminatory action and not to “private” discriminatory action.

Although the Court decision led to an increase in Negro voters in some southern urban areas, like Atlanta, in most of the South, especially in the rural Deep South, formidable obstacles to Negro voting remained. One was the poll tax, declared legal by the Supreme Court in the early twentieth century because it restricted voting for both whites and blacks who did not pay it; in practice, of course, blacks found it far more difficult to pay the penalty. Another obstacle was the literacy test, also constitutionally safe because it applied to both whites and blacks, though the test was administered exclusively by white registrars. In Mississippi the state constitution required that a prospective voter interpret a section of the constitution picked by the registrar. A favorite section given to Negroes to interpret was:

All lands comprising a single tract sold in pursuance of decree of court, or execution, shall be first offered in subdivisions not exceeding one hundred and sixty acres, or one quarter section, and then offered as an entirety, and the price bid for the latter shall control only when it shall exceed the aggregate of the bids for the same in subdivisions as aforesaid; but the chancery court, in cases before it, may decree otherwise if deemed advisable to do so.

A favorite section given to white applicants was No. 30: “There shall be no imprisonment for debt.” When, on July 12, 1961, a white man named John McMillan went to register, and was asked to interpret that section, he wrote: “I think that a Neorger should have 2 years in collage before voting because he don’t understand.” McMillan passed and was registered. In New Orleans, according to Justice Department records, one registrar wrote on a Negro’s voting application, as the reason for rejecting it: “Error in Spilling.”

The poll tax and literacy tests were not the only means employed by the white supremacists to disfranchise the Negro. Economic pressure by employers against their black workers, tenant farmers, and maids also kept blacks out of the voting

booth. And finally, there was always the persuasiveness of intimidation—violence and the threat of violence against Negroes daring to register to vote. Thus, in Mississippi at the height of Reconstruction, when federal troops enforced Negro rights in the South, 67 percent of the Negro population were registered to vote, as compared with 55 percent of the white population; by 1955, the registration figure for Negroes was down to 4 percent while that of whites was 59 percent.

A series of civil rights laws was passed by Congress in the 1950s and 1960s, spurred, it appeared, by the intense black protest of those years: the Montgomery bus boycott, the sit-in movement, the Freedom Rides, the mass demonstrations in many southern cities. These laws forbade voting discrimination against blacks, banned literacy tests where a voter had a sixth-grade education, and enabled the registering of voters by special federal officials where a pattern of discrimination existed. In this same period, Congress and the states passed the Twenty-fourth Amendment to the Constitution outlawing the poll tax in federal elections, and the Supreme Court eliminated the poll tax in state elections on the ground that wealth as a criterion for voting denied the “equal protection of the laws” clause of the Fourteenth Amendment.

The result of this legislative and judicial action was a dramatic increase in southern black voter registration, from one million (20 percent of all eligible blacks) in 1952 to two million in 1964 (40 percent) and three million in 1968 (60 percent)—matching the 60 percent registration figure for white voters. Further, more black legislators took office in the South—in state legislatures and in city councils. Also, a few blacks were elected sheriff and mayor of southern towns.

As late as January 1966, however—half a year after Congress passed its strongest voting legislation to date, the Voting Rights Act of 1965—the following incident was reported in Tuskegee, Alabama, by black civil rights worker Eldridge Burns:

Wendy [Paris, a co-worker] and I said to the registrar, “Listen here, Doc. You got to register more people than one man every twenty minutes, you know. These people have been up here since eight o’clock, and you didn’t start until ten-thirty.” Then the registrar pulled out his little knife, which was red and yellow. “I’ll take this knife,” he said, “and cut your guts out. Spill your guts on this floor.” Old Sammy came up and asked the man’s name. The man said he gonna cut his guts out and call the sheriff on us.

Sammy was Sammy Younge, a worker for the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, who later that night, at a Texaco station where he argued over his right to use the “white” rest room, was shot to death by the attendant.

In housing, too, legislation, executive orders, and court decisions in the 1960s slowly created a legal basis for nondiscrimination. President Kennedy, who had criticized Eisenhower for failing to wipe out discrimination in housing, saying the president could do so with “a stroke of the pen,” himself delayed using his

pen for two years. When he at last did sign an order barring discrimination in housing, he exempted owner-occupants of one-and two-family houses, including those financed by the Federal Housing Authority and the Veterans Administration. He also failed to extend the order to all housing for which funds were provided by financial institutions under federal supervision—as suggested by the Civil Rights Commission several years earlier; only a fourth of new housing starts were therefore covered. In 1968 additional legislation on equal housing was passed, and the Supreme Court finally brought all housing sales and rentals under the protection of the Constitution. It ruled that all private transactions in housing which were discriminatory against Negroes violated the Thirteenth Amendment; such discrimination, said the Court, constituted “a relic of slavery.” The decision brought back into use a statute made in 1866, and never enforced, giving all citizens “the same right ... to make and enforce contracts ... to inherit, purchase, lease, sell, hold, and convey real and personal property....”

Conspicuously unprotected by Supreme Court action until 1964 was the right of blacks to use public facilities, such as hotels, restaurants, and theaters, that were exclusively available to whites. Back in 1883, the Supreme Court had ruled that the Fourteenth Amendment provision for “equal protection of the laws” applied only to the state governments’ discrimination and not to that of private parties (innkeepers, restaurant owners). The 1964 Civil Rights Act forbade discrimination in “any place of public accommodation,” not only where state action was involved, but where interstate commerce was affected, thus utilizing the commerce clause of the Constitution to bring virtually all places of public accommodation within the scope of the act. Almost immediately, the legislation was challenged by a motel owner in Atlanta, and the Supreme Court upheld the act’s use of the interstate-commerce clause to bar discrimination.

Yet the new laws, the new court decisions, the new speeches delivered by the national political leaders on behalf of equal rights for the black man failed to solve the race problem, failed to still the growing anger in the nation’s black community. How long could black forbearance last? In August 1963, two hundred thousand black and white Americans gathered in Washington in an unprecedented outpouring of support for racial equality. The March on Washington was a protest against federal indifference to the black man’s plight, and it was quickly and astutely embraced by President Kennedy and other national leaders; anger turned into amicability. Martin Luther King, Jr.’s speech at that gathering, “I have a dream”—a magnificent oratorio—had just the right combination of poignancy, protest, and goodwill. When John Lewis, a much-arrested, much-beaten leader of SNCC, tried to introduce a stronger note of

outrage, he was censored by the leaders of the march, who insisted he omit the sentence: “I want to know: which side is the federal government on?” Would rationality and peaceful protest be sufficient? The March on Washington came only three months after the nation had been treated to the spectacle of Birmingham police using clubs, fire hose, and police dogs on black demonstrators. And just eighteen days after the march, on September 15, a bomb exploded in the basement of a black church in Birmingham; four black girls attending a Sunday school class were killed.

Kennedy had praised the “deep fervor and quiet dignity” of the march, but in the light of events both before and after the march, the estimate of black militant Malcolm X was probably much closer to the Negro mood. Speaking in Detroit two months after the Birmingham bombing, Malcolm X said:

The Negroes were out there in the streets. They were talking about how they were going to march on Washington ... That they were going to march on Washington, march on the Senate, march on the White House, march on the Congress, and tie it up, bring it to a halt, not let the government proceed. They even said they were going out to the airport and lay down on the runway and not let any airplanes land. I'm telling you what they said. That was revolution. That was revolution. That was the black revolution.

It was the grass roots out there in the street. It scared the white man to death, scared the white power structure in Washington, D.C. to death; I was there. When they found out that this black steamroller was going to come down on the capital, they called in [Roy] Wilkins [NAACP leader], they called in Randolph, they called in these national Negro leaders that you respect and told them, “Call it off.” Kennedy said, “Look you all are letting this thing go too far.” And Old Tom said, “Boss, I can't stop it because I didn't start it.” I'm telling you what they said. They said, “I'm not even in it, much less at the head of it.” They said, “These Negroes are doing things on their own. They're running ahead of us.” And that old shrewd fox, he said, “If you all aren't in it, I'll put you in it. I'll put you at the head of it. I'll endorse it. I'll welcome it. I'll help it. I'll join it.”

This is what they did with the March on Washington. They joined it. They didn't integrate it, they infiltrated it. They joined it, became a part of it, took it over. And as they took it over, it lost its militancy. It ceased to be angry, it ceased to be hot, it ceased to be uncompromising. Why, it even ceased to be a march. It became a picnic, a circus. Nothing but a circus, with clowns and all...

No, it was a sellout. It was a takeover. When James Baldwin came in from Paris, they wouldn't let him talk, because they couldn't make him go by the script.... They controlled it so tight, they told those Negroes what time to hit town, how to come, where to stop, what signs to carry, what song to sing, what speech they could make, and what speech they couldn't make, and then told them to get out of town by sundown. And everyone of those Toms was out of town by sundown. Now I know you don't like my saying this. But I can back it up. It was a circus, a performance that beat anything Hollywood could ever do, the performance of the year....

One year after the march, black anger simmered and boiled over in a number of cities. In precisely those years in which legislative activity on civil rights reached its peak—in 1964 and 1965—a series of urban riots and rebellions by blacks broke out in every sector of the country. They shook the nation so convulsively that it has still not settled down. In Jacksonville, the killing of a Negro woman and a bomb threat against a Negro high school led to students using rocks and Molotov cocktails. In Cleveland, the accidental crushing of a white minister sitting in the path of a bulldozer to protest discrimination against blacks in construction work produced violent reactions among blacks. In New York, the fatal shooting of a fifteen-year-old boy embroiled in a fight with an off-duty policeman led to days of looting and violence. Blacks also rioted in Rochester, in Jersey City, in Chicago, in Philadelphia. Still, these were small-scale disturbances. Lyndon Johnson was president, promising action for racial equality and intoning the black rallying cry “We Shall Overcome!” In August 1965, as Johnson signed into law the strong Voting Rights Act, and as if in direct comment on the faith of liberals in civil rights legislation, the black population of Watts, a Los Angeles ghetto, rose up in the bloodiest urban violence since the Detroit race riot of 1943.

In almost all the urban riots, the precipitating incident was police action against a black man, woman, or child. In Watts, where relief rolls were growing, housing remained shoddy, and the police were never known for their neighborliness, it was the forcible arrest of a young Negro driver, the clubbing of a bystander, and the seizure of a young black woman erroneously accused of spitting on the police that touched off the uprising. National Guardsmen were called to quell the looting and the fire-bombing, and they and the police used firearms extensively. By the time it was over, thirty-four people had been killed, most of them black, hundreds had been injured, and nearly four thousand arrested. Some forty million dollars in property was destroyed. Robert Conot, a West Coast journalist, summed up the significance of the Watts riot in his book *Rivers of Blood, Years of Darkness*:

The Los Angeles riot symbolized the end of the era of Negro passivity—passivity that took the form of the doctrine of nonviolence, and the acceptance of white leadership in the civil rights struggle. In Los Angeles the Negro was going on record that he would no longer turn the other cheek. That, frustrated and goaded, he would strike back, whether the response of violence was an appropriate one or no.

More outbreaks occurred in the summer of 1966. In Chicago, rock-throwing, looting, and fire-bombing brought out the National Guard, and three Negroes were killed by stray bullets, one a thirteen year-old boy, another a fourteen-year-old pregnant girl. In Cleveland, the National Guard was summoned, too; four Negroes were shot to death, two by law enforcement officers, one by a white man firing from a car, the fourth by a group of whites.

In 1967, however, came the greatest wave of urban violence the nation had ever seen, with the worst riots ravaging Detroit and Newark. The National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, named later by Johnson to investigate the causes of the trouble and make recommendations, reported disorders that year in 128 cities; it described disorders in 39 of them as “major or serious.”

All these disorders had a common history: long-standing grievances in the black ghetto based on poverty, unemployment, dilapidated housing; recurring instances of police brutality. In Newark two years earlier, for instance, a policeman had shot and killed an eighteen-year-old Negro boy, claiming the boy had assaulted another officer and was running away; after a hearing in which it was found that the policeman had not used excessive force, he remained on duty. In April 1967, fifteen Negroes were arrested while picketing a grocery store that they claimed sold bad meat. In July, according to the report of the advisory commission, “a Negro cab driver was injured” during or after a traffic arrest; a crowd of blacks gathered, windows were broken, and looting began.

The language of the advisory commission’s report in stating that “a Negro cab driver was injured” contrasted with the driver’s own story. The driver, John Smith, had been stopped by two uniformed patrolmen, charged with tailgating

and driving the wrong way on a one-way street. The police later claimed that Smith had used abusive language and punched them, and that they had to use “necessary force” to subdue him. Smith, at his bail hearing, put it this way:

There was no resistance on my part. That was a cover story by the police. They caved in my ribs, busted a hernia, and put a hole in my head.... After I got into the precinct six or seven other officers along with the two who arrested me kicked and stomped me in the ribs and back. They then took me to a cell and put my head over the toilet bowl. While my head was over the toilet bowl, I was struck on the back of the head with a revolver. I was also being cursed while they were beating me. An arresting officer in the cell block said, “This baby is mine.”

Before the Newark violence was over—and the National Guard was again sent to the scene—twenty-three persons were dead, twenty-one of them blacks. Before the Detroit riot was over, forty-three persons were dead, all but ten of them blacks. Most of the people killed in the nationwide disorders in 1967 were blacks, shot by police or National Guardsmen. A Senate committee which studied disturbances in sixty-seven cities reported eighty-three deaths and 1,897 injuries. About 10 percent of those injured or killed were public officials, according to the advisory commission, and an “overwhelming majority of the civilians killed and injured were Negroes.”

By 1965 the mood of bitterness and anger among blacks, always latent beneath the surface optimism of those in the civil rights movement, was manifest. That was the year of the assassination of Malcolm X, just as he was emerging as a spokesman of the new militant nationalism. Shortly after Malcolm’s death, a young black writer, Julius Lester, expressed the blacks’ widespread disillusionment with liberalism in an essay entitled “The Angry Children of Malcolm X”:

Now it is over. America has had chance after chance to show that it really meant “that all men are endowed with certain inalienable rights.” America has had precious chances in this decade to make it come true. Now it is over. The days of singing freedom songs and the days of combating bullets and billy clubs with Love. We Shall Overcome (and we have overcome our blindness) sounds old, out-dated, and can enter the pantheon of the greats along with the IWW songs and the union songs.... And as for Love? That’s always been better done in bed than on the picket line and marches. Love is fragile and gentle and seeks a like response. They used to sing “I Love Everybody” as they ducked bricks and bottles. Now they sing

Too much love,
Too much love,
Nothing kills a nigger like
Too much love.

By 1965 not only was the mood of bitterness and anger among blacks apparent, it was also becoming clear that the conventional liberal response to racism was inadequate. When Lester declared an end to “the days of combating bullets and billy clubs with Love,” he was referring to one element in the reality of race relations in the United States: that the black person could not depend on the government—whether liberal or conservative, Republican or Democrat—to protect him from physical assault or murder. The Supreme Court might make equalitarian rulings, the Congress might pass civil rights laws, the president might make stirring speeches about the dignity of man, but the black man on the ghetto street or on the country road was still at the mercy of the white man—in

uniform or out—and the power of the government was not available to protect him. The situation that obtained during slavery—the physical helplessness of the black before the white—was still being maintained in the post-slavery world. In the twentieth century—the “age of reform”—it had become an American tradition for “liberal reform” to mean meat-inspection laws, antitrust acts, and social security bills, but not to have reference to the situation of the black man and black woman.

The civil rights movement illuminated the hypocrisy of the liberal promise. It made overt, and recorded on television for the world to see, an old daily fact of American life: that a black person who protested his condition, or moved one step out of line, would be arrested, or beaten, or inundated with water hoses, or killed, and the national government of the United States—the most powerful government in the world—would not act to save him.

In the sit-ins of 1960 and the Freedom Rides of 1961, hundreds of persons were arrested, most of them black students, for asserting their constitutional rights; yet the federal government did not interfere with those arrests. Indeed, in the Freedom Ride of May 1961, Attorney General Robert Kennedy, instead of using the power of the federal government to protect the riders, asked the riders to desist in a “cooling-off period”—an executive branch version of the Supreme Court’s suggestion that blacks’ constitutional rights be granted “with all deliberate speed.” Kennedy did send marshals into Alabama *after* riders had been beaten in Anniston and Birmingham. As for those who rode into Mississippi, the attorney general entrusted their safety to state officials in a compromise agreement under which they would be protected from beatings, but would be arrested on arriving at Jackson. That the federal government had the constitutional power to prevent those arrests was admitted by the man who was Kennedy’s assistant in charge of civil rights at that time, Burke Marshall. Marshall argued, however, that this power should not be exercised because “the result would have been chaotic and more destructive of the federal system than what happened in Mississippi.” He wrote later: “It would be possible to devise authority for the federal courts to enjoin such arrests. There is no constitutional or doctrinal difficulty involved. But the consequences would be to destroy the means by which Mississippi maintained order.”

Marshall put it well. The federal government under the Kennedys, as before them and after them, refused to use its full constitutional power to protect blacks from official and unofficial beatings or arrest, in order not to detract from the ability of local police to maintain “order.” That “order” has always been maintained at the expense of the black population in the South—and in the North, too, where local police have also been permitted to violate constitutional

rights without federal interference. The refusal to invoke federal law and federal power to protect the rights of blacks has been the historic presidential liberal position on race in America since the compromise of 1877. In that year it was decided, in a deal between northern Republicans and southern Democrats, that the status quo (the subordinate position of the black man before the law—the wooing of white political power in the South) was to be maintained even at the cost of ignoring the Constitution, even at the cost of life and limb for the black.

Vigorous presidential gestures to enforce the Constitution with regard to blacks were made on occasion, such as Eisenhower’s use of troops in Little Rock in 1957 and Kennedy’s use of troops in 1962 to compel the registration of James Meredith at the University of Mississippi, the first black to enroll at “Ole Miss.” But, in general, federal power was not available to stand between southern law and lawlessness and the black person. In Albany, Georgia, for instance, the constitutional rights of hundreds of black citizens were violated again and again in 1961 and 1962—a black lawyer was beaten by a sheriff, a pregnant black woman was kicked by a deputy sheriff and lost her child, a white civil rights worker was beaten in jail—but the national government remained aloof. The only federal prosecution in Albany during the attorney generalship of Robert Kennedy was *against* civil rights workers who had picketed a segregationist grocer.

The federal government ignored thousands of violations of civil rights by local law enforcement officials in the early 1960s, despite the existence in the statute books of post-Civil War laws giving the national government the power to intercede, either by punitive action, or in a forceful preventive way, whenever the constitutional rights of citizens were violated. Among its legal recourses, the federal government could have made extensive use of Section 242, Title 18, of the U.S. Code, permitting criminal prosecution of any official who “willfully subjects any inhabitant of any State ... to the deprivation of any rights, privileges, or immunities secured or protected by the Constitution or laws of the United States.” In Selma, Alabama, in 1963, agents of the Federal Bureau of Investigation stood by and took notes as they watched black civil rights workers beaten and unlawfully arrested. One Justice Department lawyer on the scene, Richard Wasserstrom, frustrated over the FBI’s (and his own) inaction at the time, later left the department to return to teaching the philosophy of law. In reviewing a book written by his former chief, Burke Marshall, in which Marshall defended the inaction of the federal government as necessary to maintain “the federal system,” Wasserstrom suggested that the federal government’s failure to act was not the result of the federal system, “but rather of a series of conscious decisions to reinterpret, redefine, and reconstruct the limits of justifiable federal

action.” Given the national government’s long and persistent history of neglect in using its powers to protect the black person, that neglect could hardly be regarded as some temporary aberration from the real system, but rather as the system itself, the operating reality of liberal government in contradistinction to its rhetorical claims.

In 1964 there was further proof of this thesis. SNCC and other civil rights groups planned a “Mississippi Summer,” with a thousand young people, black and white, entering Mississippi to register black voters and run “Freedom Schools.” It was clear, from the record, that they would be in danger of arrest, beatings, even murder—and that local law enforcement officials would not protect them, and might even participate in the action against them. To impress the administration with this prospect of danger, and to request that the president send federal marshals into Mississippi to protect the civil rights workers, a public hearing was held in Washington in early June 1964. At that hearing, dozens of black Mississippians testified about police brutality as well as the lack of protection for life and limb; constitutional lawyers testified as to the statutory authority possessed by the federal government to respond to this request. Transcripts of the hearing were sent to President Johnson and Attorney General Kennedy. There was no response. Thirteen days later, three civil rights workers—James Chaney, Michael Schwerner, and Andrew Goodman—were arrested in Philadelphia, Mississippi, released from jail late at night, and followed down the road by a group of men, including the deputy sheriff who had arrested them. The three youths were then taken into the woods and shot to death. The black youngster Chaney was beaten so ferociously with chains that a pathologist who later examined the body said he had seen such damage to a human body only in high-velocity airplane crashes.

Even after the murder of the three youths the federal government still refused to send men into Mississippi to protect the civil rights workers from further harm. During the rest of the summer, unlawful arrests and beatings occurred repeatedly in Mississippi. J. Edgar Hoover, head of the FBI, claimed lack of jurisdiction. Robert Kennedy claimed there was no constitutional sanction for federal action—and was then soundly rebuked by a group of law school professors who pointed, chapter and verse, to the statute books. Among the statutes they cited was Section 333, Title 10, which dates back to the administration of George Washington and which was strengthened after the Civil War. It reads:

The President, by using the militia or the armed forces, or both, or by any other means, shall take such measures as he considers necessary to suppress, in a state, any insurrection, domestic violence, unlawful combination, or conspiracy, if it so hinders the execution of the laws of that State, and of the United States within the State, that any part or class of its people is deprived of a right, privilege, immunity, or protection named in the Constitution and secured by law, and the constituted authorities of that State are unable, or fail, or refuse to protect that right, privilege or immunity, or to give that protection....

This statute, together with the Fourteenth Amendment, which prohibits the denial to any citizen of the “equal protection of the laws” and any state from depriving him of “life, liberty, or property without due process of law,” has always provided the national government with ample power to uphold the rights of its citizens; it is a power, however, that it has rarely used.

When, in 1968, the President signed still another civil rights act, questions arose concerning the reasons for its passage. Was it in response to the protests of those in the civil rights movement against federal inaction in instances of violence against blacks? Or was it in response to the ghetto uprisings of blacks in the summer of 1967? The official description of the new law’s purpose was: “To prescribe penalties for certain acts of violence or intimidation, and for other purposes.”

Liberals had been complaining that the old Section 242, Title 18, of the U.S. Code was too weak to permit adequate federal action, though the real trouble was the lack of political will, not statutory inadequacies. Now a Section 245 was added to the code, applying criminal penalties to persons, “whether or not acting under color of law” (Section 242 specified “under color of law”), who interfered with the constitutional rights of others. It specifically listed the kinds of activities that could not be interfered with under this law: voting, participating in any federal or state program, going to public school, applying for employment, traveling on interstate transportation facilities, using public accommodations. It increased the penalties for such interference from the one-year imprisonment under Section 242 to ten years for bodily injury and life imprisonment for injury resulting in death. However, it also added the following:

The provisions of this section shall not apply to acts or omissions on the part of law enforcement officers, members of the National Guard ... or members of the Armed Forces of the United States, who are engaged in suppressing a riot or civil disturbance or restoring law and order during a riot or civil disturbance.

Thus, what Congress gave with one hand it took away with the other. Black people whose constitutional rights were being violated in the course of some “civil disturbance”—which might mean any demonstration or protest action—would still have no protection. More important, however, was the Section 2101, added to the act by Senator Strom Thurmond of South Carolina, and acceded to by virtually all the liberal members of Congress in order to increase the chances for passage of the bill. It was a typical maneuver in liberal politics: a bad provision is joined to a good provision as a “compromise”; the good provision then lies dormant while the bad provision is quickly enforced. Thurmond’s Section 2101 said:

Whoever travels in interstate or foreign commerce or uses any facility of interstate or foreign commerce, including, but not limited to, the mail, telegraph, telephone, radio, or television, with intent to incite a riot; or to organize, promote, encourage, participate in, or carry on a riot; or to commit any act of violence in furtherance of a riot; or to aid or abet any person in inciting or participating in or carrying on a riot or committing any act of violence in furtherance of a riot ... shall be fined not more than \$10,000 or imprisoned not more than five years or both.

The act also defined a “riot” as meaning a public disturbance involving threats of violence or acts of violence by any person part of a group of three or more. The first person to be prosecuted under the new law was a young leader of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, H. Rap Brown, who had made a militant, angry speech in Maryland, just before a racial disturbance there, and was therefore indicted for violating the Civil Rights Act of 1968.

Passage of the act came six days after the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. and two months after another instance in which blacks failed to get “equal protection of the laws.” In Orangeburg, South Carolina, students at South Carolina State College, a black college, had been turned away again and again by police from the only bowling alley in town; black co-eds had also been beaten by the police. In early February 1968, a noisy night-time protest demonstration on the campus brought some 150 police and National Guardsmen to the scene. One policeman was struck by a flying object. Curse words also flew. As about 150 students moved along the campus in the direction of the police, the police opened fire. As reported by Jack Nelson and Jack Bass, two southern newspapermen, in their book *The Orangeburg Massacre*:

The patrolmen’s shotguns were loaded with deadly buckshot used to kill deer and other heavy game....

Although some patrolmen later claimed the students were charging at them like a thundering herd, throwing bottles and bricks and other objects, the evidence was overwhelming that few objects were being thrown, that there was no shooting, and that the students were not running....

Suddenly a carbine fired.... Other witnesses later told of hearing ... several shots fired into the air in rapid succession by a patrolman, apparently as an intended warning.

Most of the students ... turned to run. Some held up their hands and others dropped to the ground. Almost simultaneously a volley of shotgun blasts and the crack-crack-crack of a .38 caliber pistol caught them in a cross fire.

[Policemen] Spell, Addy, and Taylor blasted away with shotguns from the students’ left side. [Guardman] Corporal Lanier opened up with a shotgun from the bushes on their right-side.... All of the patrolmen were to later say they had not fired at any particular target, but had just shot into the crowd of students....

Henry Smith was in the first wave.... Smith caught the brunt of several shots from both sides, was spun around by the force, then shot again in the back.

Samuel Hammond, eighteen, a stocky football player, was shot in the back. Delano Herman Middleton, seventeen, a high school student whose mother worked as a maid at the college, suffered seven wounds—three in the forearm, one in the hip, one in the thigh, one in the side of the chest, and one in the heart....

Smith, Hammond, and Middleton died that night. Twenty-seven other students were wounded, most of them shot in the back or side. But the immediate message conveyed to the nation by the mass media blurred what had happened. As Nelson and Bass wrote in their study:

No one had seen any students armed with guns, no firearms or spent cartridges were found on the campus after the shootings, and a bannister—not a bullet—had felled the only injured officer. A great preponderance of witnesses were to testify later that they heard no shooting from the campus for fifteen to thirty minutes prior to the time the patrolmen opened fire. Yet, on-the-scene press coverage, as well as the official version of what had happened, led the nation to believe that a gun battle had taken place.

This time, the civil rights division of the Justice Department, supported vigorously by Attorney General Ramsey Clark, moved to prosecute the policemen who had done the shooting. When a federal grand jury failed to bring an indictment, the government initiated a trial through the information procedure. A local jury of ten whites and two blacks, however, exonerated the policemen.

What the Orangeburg affair seemed to show was that the labyrinths of racism

in the United States are so complex that even if blacks manage to make their way through one obstacle, or two or three obstacles, more always await them on the path to justice. Even on those rare occasions when one sector of government acts on behalf of the black, other sectors move to thwart the action. In the Orangeburg case, not only the system of local justice, but the friendliness of the FBI toward the local police acted to protect the killers. Three FBI agents were eyewitnesses to the shootings that night, as they later admitted, but they did not inform the Justice Department of this fact, and an FBI report written two months later did not mention that FBI men were on the scene. Nelson and Bass concluded that “Orangeburg was an example of cases where aspects of the FBI’s performance were little short of disgraceful.”

In the two years following passage of the 1968 act, designed supposedly to protect blacks against “violence or intimidation,” the press reported enough incidents of police action against blacks to indicate that the promise of the Fourteenth Amendment to protect the “life, liberty, or property” of the black citizen was still unmet. Either the federal government did not intercede when local police violated constitutional rights, or the judicial system failed to produce justice. For instance:

- Three Detroit policemen and a black private guard, charged with killing three black teenagers at the Algiers Motel in Detroit during the 1967 riots in that city, were exonerated by juries of conspiring to violate the civil rights of citizens. A UPI dispatch noted that the defense conceded that the four men “separately made racial slurs, ripped the clothes off the prostitutes, beat the blacks, played ‘death games’ to frighten motel occupants to extract confessions about alleged snipers, and finally shot two youths—Fred Temple, 18, and Aubrey Pollard, 19.”

- In Jackson, Mississippi, a local grand jury found “justified” an attack on the campus of Jackson State College, in May 1970, in which the police laid down a 28-second barrage of gunfire that included shotguns, rifles, and a sub-machine gun. Four hundred bullets or pieces of buckshot struck the girls’ dormitory, and two black students were killed. U.S. District Court Judge Harold Cox declared that students who engage in civil disorders “must expect to be injured or killed.”

- In Boston, in April 1970, a policeman shot and killed an unarmed black hospital patient in the Boston City Hospital, firing five shots after the black man snapped a towel at him. The chief judge of the municipal court of Boston exonerated the policeman.

■ In Augusta, Georgia, in May 1970, six Negroes were shot to death during looting and disorder in the city. *The New York Times* reported:

A confidential police report indicates that at least five of the victims were killed by the police, reliable sources reported. An eyewitness to one of the deaths said he had watched a Negro policeman and his white partner fire nine shots into the back of a man suspected of looting. They did not fire warning shots or ask him to stop running, said Charles A. Reid, a thirty-eight-year-old businessman ...

■ In the urban disorders of spring, 1968, that followed the assassination of King, thirty-five of the thirty-nine killed were black.

■ In April 1970, when a twelve-man federal jury in Boston, trying a civil suit for one hundred thousand dollars damages against a policeman, found the policeman guilty of using “excessive force” against two black soldiers from Fort Devens—one of them, hit with the policeman’s club, required twelve stitches in his scalp—the judge awarded the servicemen three dollars.

The continued physical helplessness of the black in the face of either official brutality in violating the Constitution or official laxness in enforcing it was only the most obvious fact about a larger truth. That truth was the general failure of the whole liberal parade of court decisions, laws, and presidential declarations in affecting the basic subordinate position of the black in the United States. It was this failure that perhaps best explains the burst of black militancy after 1965.

The black voter learned, even as registration figures went up in the South, even as Julian Bond, a SNCC leader, was elected to the Georgia legislature, and Charles Evers, a local black NAACP official, was elected mayor of a small town in Mississippi, that such victories did not change his basic subordination. Indeed, the experience of the North was being repeated; blacks had long voted in Harlem and in the South Side of Chicago, and they still lived in ghettos, they were still poor, still plagued by rats and disease, still without power, still looked upon as inferior by the rest of the nation.

The black political leader learned, soon enough, that real power in national politics remained in the hands of a small number of powerful white politicians, North and South, and that at critical points, the white liberal politicians, who made the greatest promises, betrayed the black voter. In 1964, for example, when blacks from Mississippi showed up at the Democratic National Convention in Atlantic City and demanded proportional representation in their state’s delegation, “liberal” Democratic leaders, like Hubert Humphrey, stood firm to keep the Mississippi delegation all white. In 1965, when blacks from Mississippi challenged the right of the five white representatives from that state to be admitted to the new Congress in view of the disfranchisement of the state’s black population, which made up 45 percent of the total, the Johnson

administration and its congressional leaders once again used their parliamentary leadership to keep the Mississippi segregationist congressmen in their seats. In 1968 Negroes were 11 percent of the national population; at the Democratic National Convention, the proportion of black delegates was 4 percent; at the Republican National Convention, 2 percent.

With the world hailing the Supreme Court's 1954 decision calling for school desegregation, the South followed to the letter the Court's 1955 ruling permitting "all deliberate speed." Leading white liberals were not forceful in demanding enforcement of the Constitution. Two years after the Supreme Court decision, Democrat Adlai Stevenson, a presidential candidate, told a Negro audience in Los Angeles that he would not use federal money or federal troops to enforce integration. "I think," he said, "that would be a great mistake. That is exactly what brought on the Civil War. It can't be done by troops, or bayonets. We must proceed gradually, not upsetting habits or traditions that are older than the Republic." *The New York Times* reported this speech, and the reaction of Stevenson's audience: "There was a murmur of protest in the crowd, and one tall Negro was heard to say: 'I think he is a phony.' "

Black youngsters knew, of course, that school segregation was not practiced in the South alone. Schools were also segregated by poverty and ghettoization in the North. As school desegregation in the South slowly increased toward 1970, it began to surpass in the degree of racial integration the racially distinct black ghetto schools and white suburban schools in the North. There was, to be sure, a problem beyond integration: if schools in general were inadequate, if they were bureaucratic, authoritarian, intellectually arid, a mechanical prototype of a larger culture of violence and competition, then blacks entering white schools were only gaining access to a sinking ship. Racial "progress" in school desegregation thus matched "progress" in voting, where blacks could now be admitted to all the inadequacies of the society at large.

Whatever the progress made in law by the passage of statutes calling for equality in housing and employment, the reality was different. The housing market was controlled by white real-estate men; decent housing depended on wealth; and the two dominant facts about blacks in America were that they were discriminated against and that they were poor. The job market was dependent on the vagaries of the American capitalist system, in which millions of Americans were always unemployed—with blacks, as always, disproportionately jobless. Those blacks who sought good-paying jobs as skilled workers faced the tight, white control of the craft unions. The 1964 Civil Rights Act might contain a fair-employment provision, but not one government contract was terminated with a company that discriminated against blacks.

In short, the liberal response to the “race problem” in the United States—that is, to the black uprisings, for black subordination was not a “problem” until blacks went wild in the streets—did not touch the heart of the matter. The heart of the matter was not the lack of laws, or lack of words, or lack of promises. It was insufficient economic resources, the absence of real, direct political power, and, surrounding those hard needs—something more subtle and yet enormous—the psychology of racism that inhabited the minds of whites, the acceptance of white superiority so deeply in every aspect of American society that black children might grow up believing it.

The convulsions of the 1967 urban upheavals led the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders to lay bare some of these realities. The commission concluded:

White racism is essentially responsible for the explosive mixture which has been accumulating in our cities since the end of World War II. Among the ingredients of this mixture are:

Pervasive discrimination and segregation in employment, education, and housing ... growing concentrations of impoverished Negroes in our major cities, creating a growing crisis of deteriorating facilities and services and unmet human needs.

The black ghettos where segregation and poverty converge on the young to destroy opportunity and enforce failure.

The report also said:

The frustrations of powerlessness have led some Negroes to the conviction that there is no effective alternative to violence as a means of achieving redress of grievances, and of “moving the system.” These frustrations are reflected in alienation and hostility toward the institutions of law and government and the white society which controls them, and in the reach toward racial consciousness and solidarity reflected in the slogan “Black Power.”

A new mood has sprung up among Negroes, particularly the young, in which self-esteem and enhanced racial pride are replacing apathy and submission to the “system.”

The failure of the American political system and the failure of its economic system for the black person can only be described in the most personal terms by the victims themselves. Kenneth Clark, in his book *Dark Ghetto*, recorded the statements of people in Harlem:

A thirty-year-old male drug addict:

You know the average young person out here don't have a job, man, they don't have anything to do. They don't have any alternative, you know, but to go out there and try to make a living for themselves. Like when you come down to the Tombs down there, they're down there for robbing and breaking in. They want to know why you did it and where you live, but you have to live. You go down to the employment agency, and you can't get a job. They have you waiting all day, but you can't get a job. They don't have a job for you. Yet you have to live. I'm ready to do anything anyone else is ready to do because I want to live.

A thirty-eight-year-old man:

No one with a mop can expect respect from a banker, or an attorney, or men who create jobs, and all you have is a mop. Are you crazy? Whoever heard of integration between a mop and a banker?

A thirty-three-year-old man:

The white cops, they have a damn sadistic nature. They are really a sadistic type of people and we, I mean me, myself, we don't need them here in Harlem. We don't need them! They don't do the neighborhood any good. They deteriorate the neighborhood. They start violence, that's right. A bunch of us could be playing some music, or dancing, which we have as an outlet for ourselves. We can't dance in the house, we don't have clubs or things like that. So we're out on the sidewalk, right on the sidewalk; we might feel like dancing, or one might want to play something on his horn. Right away here come a cop. “You're disturbing the peace!”

A woman:

I have been uncomfortable being a Negro. I came from the South—Kentucky, on the Ohio River line—and I have had white people spit on me in my Sunday suit.

In the 1960s, the anger of the black not only exploded in the streets; it also expressed itself in art and literature—in the furious poetry of LeRoi Jones; in the prose of Eldridge Cleaver, writing in *Soul on Ice*; in the speeches of Malcolm X;

in the new open, defiant talk of blacks to one another all over the nation. James Baldwin said it in 1962 in *The Fire Next Time*:

This past, the Negro's past, of rope, fire, torture, castration, infanticide, rape; death and humiliation; fear by day and night, fear as deep as the marrow of the bone; doubt that he was worthy of life, since everyone around him denied it; sorrow for his women, for his kinfolk, for his children, who needed his protection, and whom he could not protect; rage, hatred, and murder, hatred for white men so deep that it often turned against him and his own, and made all love, all trust, all joy impossible—this past, this endless struggle to achieve and reveal and confirm a human identity, human authority, yet contains, for all its horror, something very beautiful. I do not mean to be sentimental about suffering—enough is certainly as good as a feast—but people who cannot suffer can never grow up, can never discover who they are. That man who is forced each day to snatch his manhood, his identity, out of the fire of human cruelty that rages to destroy it knows, if he survives his effort, and even if he does not survive it, something about himself and human life that no school on earth—and indeed, no church—can teach. He achieves his own authority, and that is unshakable.

As the seventies began, it was plain that the working creed of liberalism, like its rhetoric, was inadequate to deal with the depth of black-white relations in the United States. That working creed emphasized the “progress” represented by formal laws, token gifts and appointments, procedural rituals such as voting. It ignored the root problem of poverty, the layer upon layer of racism in the psychology of the American people, the impassable void that separated the black man and black woman from political power. The liberal system's defense of this “progress” was elaborate. Was it not true that the black was overcoming one obstacle after another—chattel slavery, legal segregation, voting restrictions of a dozen kinds?

Yet, was not the goal of real equality, of stature as a human being, always so far away as to be barely visible? By 1970 this was just beginning to be understood, and with it one great lesson: that the premise of liberal reform, that “someone,” the white reformer, would solve the problems of the black man, was false. Now, especially among the young black people, the most essential element of a real democracy had begun to take hold—that an oppressed people can depend on no one but themselves to move that long distance, past all defenses, to genuine dignity.

When Will the Long Feud End? (1975)

I had argued in The Southern Mystique in 1964 that the South was not radically different than the North, that racism was a national phenomenon, not just a Southern one. In the Seventies, in northern cities, including my city of Boston, whites, usually in working-class districts, gathered in mobs to protest the busing of black children into their neighborhood schools. What follows is one of the bi-weekly columns I was writing in 1975 for the Boston Globe. It appeared in the September 19, 1975 issue.

“Despite considerable apprehension, violence failed to materialize. In September ... Negro children entered Boston’s white schools with little difficulty ... Although a few white parents withdrew their children and some Negroes suffered insults, integrated schools resulted in neither race violence nor amalgamation.”

The year was 1855. The description is from Leon Litwack’s book “North of Slavery.” He tells about Sarah Roberts, who passed five white elementary schools on the way to hers. Her father sued for her right to go to a neighborhood school, and her lawyer, Charles Sumner, argued before the Supreme Court of Massachusetts against the segregation rule of the Primary School Committee: “On the one side is the city of Boston ... on the other side is a little child.... This little child asks, at your hands, her personal rights.”

The court upheld the School Committee, but the Legislature then passed a law to integrate Boston schools. A pessimist, reviewing this history, might say: We see now how far we have come in 120 years: three inches. An optimist might point to how much has changed since then. But it is hard to ignore the persistence, through three centuries, of race hostility to the point of recurring violence.

Another fact is hard to ignore: it is the economically harassed white people who have turned repeatedly in anger against blacks, thinking, “There is the cause of our misery, there is the threat to our jobs, our safety, our children.” My father was a slum-dwelling immigrant, and prejudiced against Negroes. I had an aunt who kept warning us kids not to go under the El, where blacks lived in even

more rundown tenements than ours.

We need to pay attention to these people with lives of frustration and unfulfilled dreams. Not to dismiss them if they are full of racial epithets. Not to doubt them if they say: "I am not a racist, all I want is ..." I recall some lines from a book about street orphans in postwar Naples, which apply to whites and blacks alike: "The cry of the poor is not always just, but if you do not listen to it, you will never know what justice is."

It started early in our history. The first whites in Virginia were stricken with hunger and sickness. In the heat of the first summer, every other man died. They called it "The Starving Time." In 1618, they begged King James for vagabonds and criminals to work in servitude. The following year, came a solution: the first shipload of blacks. When it docked, race prejudice began.

In the pre-Civil War South, there were 300,000 slave plantations, but most of the five million whites were poor, and not slaveowners. They were described by a Southern historian: "Uninspired, physically deficient, occupying the pine barrens or the infertile back country, they lived a hand-to-mouth existence, mere hangers-on of a regime in which they had no determining part."

In New York, in the midst of the Civil War, during four hot days in July, poor Irish rioted against the draft. They were being sent to die for the freedom of black slaves they did not know, while the rich, making fortunes out of the war, could escape the draft by paying \$300. Here is an account: "... another mob was sacking houses in Lexington avenue. Elegant furniture and silver plate were borne away by the crowd ... and the whole block on Broadway, between 28th and 29th streets, was burned down..." Then they set out to destroy the Colored Orphan Asylum on Fifth Avenue and 44th street, which contained 200 children, from infants up to 12 years of age.

And so it continues. Hassled whites turn on blacks. Angry blacks retaliate.

Will this hostility ever end? Not until black and white people discover together, the source of their long feud—an economic system which has deprived them and their children for centuries, to the benefit of, first, the Founding Fathers, and lately, the hundred or so giant corporations that hog the resources of this bountiful country.

Academic Freedom: Collaboration and Resistance (1982)

At the height of the nuclear arms race in 1982, Howard Zinn was invited to give the University of Cape Town's annual lecture on the topic of academic freedom. There is an elephant in the room: Apartheid is still strong and academic freedom is well under siege. The university's decision to offer the lecture was itself an act of protest. Howard presents the ugly history of his own country, while interweaving stories of his experience teaching at an all-black women's college during the Civil Rights Movement. He explores the limits of what we mean by "academic freedom" and urges the university and its students not to be neutral in the face of adversity. Instead, he argues, let us stand up and fight—against nuclear war, against racism, against censorship—together. Howard delivered this speech on July 23, 1982.—Eds.

All of you assembled here understand, I am sure, that an invitation to lecture in South Africa cannot be received casually. You know—and there is no point in my summoning up a spurious courtesy to ignore this—that the name South Africa immediately arouses powerful emotions among all people concerned with human liberty.

I remember, twenty-five years ago, when I was finishing my PhD at Columbia University, and I was offered my first full-time teaching job, a post as chairman of the history department at a small college for black women in Atlanta, Georgia. My father said: "Don't go." I was going into the Deep South of the United States, the mysterious, threatening South of William Faulkner's novels and Richard Wright's memoir of childhood. To my father, a working man who had never finished primary school, survival required caution, and that phrase, "the South," brought immediate foreboding.

However, in August of 1956, my wife and I packed all our possessions into a 1947 Chevrolet, leaving barely enough room for two small children—and drove South. Living for seven years inside a black community in the racially-segregated South of the late 1950s and early 1960s, we did indeed find that which troubled my father: an atmosphere of fear and hate built on a premise of racial inferiority. But we found other things too, omitted from those crude

general epithets used to describe and dismiss whole societies: we found black people with high intelligence and indescribable courage, determined to struggle for an equal share of the fruits of the earth, the light of the sun, the living space, that freedom which the great philosophers, poets, and prophets of world history had declared to be the right of all human beings. And we found white people, not many, but enough to suggest the possibility of more, brave men and women ready to support that struggle.

As I contemplated your invitation, that memory reinforced what I had already come to believe very strongly—something put into words by a character in Lillian Hellman's anti-Fascist play, *Watch On The Rhine*: "Remember, everywhere in the world there are people who love children, and who will fight to make a world in which they can live." I have lived in many parts of the United States. I have been to Canada and Mexico and Cuba, to Western Europe and Yugoslavia, to Japan and Laos and Vietnam, and wherever I have been, whatever the nature of the government, that statement of faith in *Watch On The Rhine* was corroborated. I have never before been to South Africa. I am sure that South Africa embodies the most stark truths that have been uttered about it. But I am equally sure that inside those truths are infinite complexities and surprises. I wanted very much to come here to discover some of these for myself.

Indeed, the terms of your invitation gave me an immediate good feeling: that this lecture itself would be an occasion for protest against a governmental edict which is such a violation of democracy, such an infringement of liberty, that men and women of good will everywhere must condemn it. I feel honored to be part of such an occasion. I admire you for your refusal to remain silent.

It must be said that attacks on human rights, while more flagrant and more frequent in some places than others, are to be found all over the world. One reads with horror the story of Steve Biko, and knows at the same time that in police stations everywhere, not only in right-wing dictatorships, but also in countries that dare to call themselves socialist, and yes, in countries that are considered liberal democracies like the United States, people are taken into custody, beaten, and killed. The reasons given by the South African Security Police for the deaths of forty-five Africans in detention between 1963 and 1977 could come from the same handbook used by police authorities almost everywhere: "suicide by hanging ... slipped in shower ... fell down stairs ... fell against chair ... leaped from 10th floor window during interrogation ... (and, as with Steve Biko) died in scuffle."¹

There are place-names in every country that immediately evoke dread. In your country: Queensboro, 1921; Sharpeville, 1960; Soweto, 1976. In my country, in the 1960s and 1970s: Kent State, Ohio; Jackson State, Mississippi; Attica, New

York—white students shot and killed by National Guardsmen for protesting the Vietnam War, black students shot and killed by police for protesting segregation; black and white prisoners shot to death by state troopers for taking over their prison in protest against intolerable conditions.² All these victims were in the classic military position in which Natives, historically, have fought Europeans: sticks, stones, and bare hands against modern firearms.

So I have not come here to talk to you about the sins of South Africa. I cannot forget that my country was a slave society for two-thirds of its history—from 1619 to 1865—that is 246 years. It is only 117 years since the Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution was passed, abolishing slavery, only 28 years since school segregation was declared unconstitutional in 1954, only 17 years since Southern blacks could vote without fear because of the Voting Rights Act of 1965. And it is zero years since blacks received equal rights to work and wages, which is my way of saying that, while overall unemployment in the United States today is 10 percent of the labor force, for young black people the unemployment rate is 40 to 50 percent. With that past, with that present, no American can lecture South Africans about ‘your race problem.’

Because injustice is universal, indeed among people of all colors, and because the longing for justice is also universal, we may be able to learn from one another, to keep in touch, to give support. I hope that my visit here is such an exchange.

I do know that there is a standard warning issued to foreign travelers everywhere, written in invisible ink on our passports: you must not criticize your own government while abroad; to do so is unpatriotic. I must say, however, that I have never considered my criticism of the United States government as unpatriotic. If patriotism has any valid meaning, surely it means love and respect for the people of your country, indeed for human beings everywhere, and this may require honest criticism of your government, which is something quite different than your country.

Similarly, I have never thought that, as a matter of etiquette, people visiting another country should remain silent about injustices there. Should freedom of speech have geographical boundaries? How odd that governments find it proper to send armies across borders to kill, but think it improper that people should cross borders to speak.

So, I will speak freely here today, as honestly as I can, as candidly as I dare. I confess that I do not know much about South Africa. I have read a few histories. I have read the novels and stories of Nadine Gordimer. I have seen the plays of Athol Fugard. I have also read some documents; one of them moved me deeply: the Freedom Charter that was adopted by three thousand delegates at the

Congress of the People of Kliptown on June 26, 1955. That was four years after a one-day strike called by the African National Congress and the Indian National Congress to protest discriminatory laws. During that strike eighteen people were killed by police and June 26 became a memorial day.

That Freedom Charter I found a remarkable document, a powerful statement for both political and economic democracy, as if the American Declaration of Independence had been brought up to date and made concrete. I am quoting from it:³

"The national wealth of our country ... shall be restored to the people.... No one shall be imprisoned, deported or restricted without a fair trial.... Imprisonment shall be only for serious crimes against the people and shall aim at re-education and not vengeance.... The law shall guarantee to all their right to speak, to organize, to meet together ... to educate their children.... All shall be free to travel without restriction.... Men and women of all races shall receive equal pay for equal work ... rents and prices shall be lowered, food shall be plentiful, and no one shall go hungry ... Free medical care and hospitalization ... with special care for mothers and young children ... Slums shall be abolished.... The aged, the orphans, the disabled and the sick shall be cared for by the state. Leisure and recreation shall be the right for all...."

It shocked me to learn that this charter was later used by the government as proof of communism in treason trials. It seems to me unwise for the government to label as communist a statement so profoundly democratic, so concerned with freedom of expression, with sexual and racial equality, with the goal of plentiful food, land, medical care for everyone. The democracy asked in the Freedom Charter surely does not describe the Soviet Union. It is a description of a society which does not yet exist anywhere on earth, but one eminently desirable by any rational and humane person.

Another document I have read: the speech of Nelson Mandela to the court in 1963 before he was sentenced to life in prison, for sabotage and conspiracy to overthrow the government. He admitted to planning sabotage, as a desperate measure, wanting to avoid rebellion, terrorism, and bloodshed, preferring to use violence against property rather than against people, in order to call the attention of the world to the situation of black people in South Africa. He admitted to being influenced by Marxian thought, but also by Gandhi, Nehru, and others. He advocated some form of socialism, but also admired western parliamentary democracy. He said:⁴

I have fought against white domination and I have fought against black domination. I have cherished the ideal of a democratic and free society in which all persons live together in harmony and with equal opportunities. It is an ideal which I hope to live for and to achieve. But if needs be, it is an ideal for which I am prepared to die.

I cannot see how any decent person can help but admire that aspiration, that spirit. Surely, a person of such sensibility, such idealism, such courage, should not be in prison, but in the leadership of a society reconstructing itself as a democracy.

So, a bit of reading is all I can claim about South Africa. But I do know something about what that remarkable black American, Dr. W. E. B. DuBois, called "the problem of the twentieth century, the problem of the color line."

Living and teaching in a black community in the Deep South of the United States in a period of transition and turmoil was an education. Also, having taught history and politics for more than twenty-five years, first in a small Southern college, then in a large Northern university, I have had to do some thinking about the question of academic freedom.

I am encouraged by the third paragraph in your admirable Dedication, which says: “We believe further that academic freedom is essential to the pursuit of truth and is best assured in a free society which recognizes fundamental human rights.” To me, academic freedom has always meant the right to insist that freedom be more than academic—that the university, because of its special claim to be a place for the pursuit of truth, be a place where we can challenge not only the ideas but the institutions, the practices of society, measuring them against millenia-old ideals of equality and justice.

My own background led me to such a definition. I was brought up in a working-class family, worked in a shipyard for three years from the age of eighteen, then enlisted in the U.S. Air Force and saw combat duty as a bombardier in the second World War, all this before I became a student of history and political science at New York University, then Columbia University, later Harvard University.

From the start, I was skeptical of the academy’s claim to objectivity. The world I had known was one of hard class war, of holocaust and atrocity (I had participated in at least one totally senseless bombing of a village of civilians), of injustice and unremitting conflict. It was a world, as Albert Camus wrote, divided between pestilences and victims, and it was our responsibility as human beings not to be on the side of pestilences.⁵ In a world so divided, no institution can claim neutrality, not even an institution as clever as a university, so righteous in its claims to objectivity, and so wrong in that righteousness.

Even before I set foot in my first university classroom, I suspected this, and yet in the years that followed, as a student, then as a member of various faculties, my recurring naiveté—assiduously fostered by the academy—had to be again and again overturned by reality. The reality is that I live in a country where 1 percent of the population owns 33 percent of the wealth, where one hundred giant corporations control half of the economy, where cabinet members, presidential advisors, and top military men move back and forth from government to high corporate posts like shuttles on a loom, weaving a giant web of influence from which no institution can remain free.

When I was at Spelman College in Atlanta, one could easily conclude that here was an autonomous institution, free from outside control, a private university with private funds, a lovely campus fragrant with magnolias and

honeysuckle, where a minority of white faculty could live and work among black students and black colleagues, where the racial separation laws that operate in the city outside the campus walls could be forgotten, and where learning could go on, untrammelled and free. Indeed, as if to emphasize the independence of this enclave from the harsh racial division of the world outside, a stone wall and a barbed wire fence enclosed the campus.⁶

My family and I lived on campus and it was our eight-year-old son who one day pointed out that the strands of barbed wire on top of the fence were angled in such a way as to make it harder for students to get out of campus than for intruders to get in. He was an expert on barbed wire, and it was left to me to put together the evidence and draw the political conclusions.

The college now had its first black president, but was ultimately ruled by its Board of Trustees, almost all white, and had been financed from its beginnings by the Rockefeller family; two Rockefellers were still on the Board. Far from being independent of the outside world, the college, I began to understand, was fulfilling the historical pact between Northern and Southern capital, which marked their reconciliation about thirty years after the Civil War.⁷ Another party to that pact was Booker T. Washington, the black leader, who offered the white South black labor, in return for industrial training and some education, offering blacks a measure of economic integration if they would quietly accept social and political segregation.

In this agreement, Northern philanthropist-industrialists—finding economic allies among rich white Southerners, would subsidize black education. Southern politicians would let the black colleges do as they liked inside their protected enclaves, so long as they turned out the black teachers, social workers, ministers, even a few doctors and lawyers, to serve a segregated community of black men and women who crossed the border twice—morning and evening—to do menial work in the white part of town. And so long as the black students stayed inside the fence, and did not interfere with the patterns of segregation in the city outside, the pact was sealed. There was academic freedom inside the walls, and economic enslavement outside, to the satisfaction of Northern millionaires and Southern white politicians. There was the cooperation of a few black administrators, and the compliance, for a long time, of young black students, promised careers and a measure of American success, along with that long-withheld pride of accomplishment.

My wife and children and I, by chance, came on the scene when the students at Spelman and other black colleges in the South were getting ready to withdraw that compliance. It was 1956.

Two years earlier, the Supreme Court of the United States had ruled that the

Fourteenth Amendment to the Constitution, which declares that no state can deny to any person “the equal protection of the laws” means you cannot have segregation in state-supported schools. That amendment had been passed in 1868, so it had taken eighty-six years for the Supreme Court to come to this conclusion. There were many reasons for the court decision, but one of them is rarely mentioned in American history textbooks: Africa. It was the time of cold war. The United States was vying with the Soviet Union for standing among the new colored nations of the world and, continually embarrassed by those who pointed to racial segregation, needed to say something dramatic on this issue. The Supreme Court decision allowed the United States to speak out grandiloquently. The government could then sit back while the praise rolled in from all sides, and do nothing to enforce the decision.

Other people, however, black Americans, would not let the words rest on the printed page. It was, indeed, their long persistence that had led to the court decision. In late 1955, black people began their first mass action in the Deep South: the boycott of buses in Montgomery, Alabama, to protest segregation. Maids, laundry workers, and handymen were walking three, four, five miles every morning, and again every evening, for a year, until that day when the news came: they had won, and now could sit wherever they chose on the buses in Montgomery. One of them, an elderly black woman, walking back home in the midst of the boycott as the sun set, was asked, “Aren’t you tired”? Her reply became famous: “Yes, my feet is tired. But my soul is rested.”⁸

In Atlanta, in 1957 and 1958, my students began venturing off the campus. They had always gone into town to buy food and clothes, but this time they were shopping for freedom. They kept asking for books at the Atlanta public library, which was reserved for whites. The librarians became embarrassed in refusing the requests of black students for books like John Locke’s *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, and John Stuart Mill’s *On Liberty*. They worried about the public unveiling all this in an impending lawsuit against them. So, the Carnegie library of Atlanta one day quietly opened its membership to blacks.

This was prologue. In the spring of 1960, all over the South, black students walked off their campuses to sit-in at downtown lunch counters and restaurants, and would not move until served. “We don’t serve niggers,” was the standard statement of refusal. And the classic reply became: “That’s not what I want. I want a sandwich.” Black laughter became a weapon in the struggles that followed along with hymns of freedom and acts of sheer courage.

And so, my students at Spelman did the same. By the hundreds, they broke the ancient pact, went into town, sat in, refused to move, were arrested and went to jail. Some of us on the faculty joined them in their sit-ins, their demonstrations.

When our students came back from jail they were different; they would never be the same again. Neither would Spelman College. Neither would the South. Once their academic freedom had been just that—academic. Now it would have at least a measure of reality, because they had crossed the barrier of the academy and joined the struggle in the world outside.

When I moved north, and began teaching at Boston University in 1964, I learned that the pact to limit academic freedom, to keep it behind barbed wire whether actually or symbolically, was not confined to Southern colleges. I knew that, from the beginning of the United States, there was a partnership between business and government on behalf of a wealthy elite, and that the power of this elite depended on a compliant population, trained in the primary and secondary schools to become the underpaid work force of an immensely rich country.⁹ What I began to see was the role of the universities: to train the middle managers—the professionals, businessmen, administrators—who would become a useful buffer between upper and lower classes.

In short, the pact I had learned about in the South was only part of a larger, long-standing agreement in American higher education, in which the students collaborate to maintain the social structure as it is. In return they are given jobs in the middle and upper levels of that structure, as engineers, doctors, lawyers, professors, businessmen, scientists, selling their skills to those who run the society, for a price which gives comfort and security.

Sometimes the service given by the University is direct, immediate. When police went on strike in Boston in 1919, they were replaced by students from Harvard University. In wartime, college students who have been trained in the Reserve Officers Training Corps, are sent off to the front, and patriotism pervades the campus. In the great Widener Library at Harvard there is a mural of a Harvard student off to fight in the first World War, with the inscription: “Happy is he who in one embrace clasps death and victory.”

When the bugles of war sound, the so-called independent and humane centers of learning in every country open wide the school doors to march their students down from the hilltops of higher learning into the valleys of death.

When the United States sent more than a half-million troops into Vietnam, and carried out massive aerial bombardments of towns, villages, and countryside, dropping more bombs than had been dropped in all theaters of World War II, the front line troops came out of the primary and secondary schools, where children are raised in an atmosphere of salutes to the flag, pledges of allegiance, and reverence for military heroes. The colleges and universities played their part. Michigan State University trained police officers for the Saigon government, which the United States had installed in power in

1954. Campus units of the ROTC expanded to train junior officers to serve in Vietnam. The Massachusetts Institute of Technology and other prestigious universities housed research units that were involved in the development of weapons for the war. From the faculties of Harvard and other leading institutions came the presidential advisers, the consultants and planners for the war.¹⁰ Vietnam became the modern version of a historic African experience—wars of so-called civilized nations against so-called primitive people—in this case, the civilization of napalm against the primitive idea of self-determination.

The pact that I have been describing in American education—submission to the state in return for the promise of success—was broken in the 1960s, by students on campuses all over the United States. In the great universities, in the small community colleges, students decided, en masse, that the war against the people of Vietnam was an abomination, that the government of the United States was not to be obeyed in the carrying out of crimes. And so, they demonstrated, occupied buildings, marched, picketed, held giant rallies and teachins, burned their draft cards, refused to be inducted into the military, and found themselves soon part of a national movement of protest against the war.

They were joined by priests and nuns, by middle-class Americans, by artists and writers, by millions of people all over the country, and ultimately by the soldiers in the field, who wore black armbands of protest, refused to go out on patrol, and put out newspapers on army bases denouncing the war.¹¹ A situation was created where the government finally decided it did not have the support at home to carry on a war against the determined revolutionists and nationalists of Vietnam.¹²

At Boston University, there were all-night teachins pointing out the facts of the war. Faculty and students lay down on stairways and corridors to bar the way of men from the Dow Chemical Company, manufacturers of napalm, who were recruiting students for their business. There were blockades of buildings where recruiting officers for the U.S. Marines had been invited by the university administration to sign up students.

It was a magnificent movement, remarkably nonviolent, refusing to do harm to any person, but determined to stop the war, to break the law if need be, to go to jail. And tens of thousands went to jail: on one day alone in Washington, DC, 14,000 antiwar protesters were arrested. It was an era when many of us got a small taste of what prison is like. I did not think I could talk about politics and history in the classroom, deal with war and peace, discuss the question of obligation to the state versus obligation to one's brothers and sisters throughout the world, unless I demonstrated by my actions that these were not academic questions to be decided by scholarly disputation, but real ones to be decided in

social struggle.

Can we in the universities fulfill our obligation to society, to the principles of justice and equality, unless we renounce those pacts with the devil? Can we accept a measure of wealth, privilege, and status in return for quiescence and obedience—in short, for the surrender of freedom? Can we accept unquestioning subservience to the state when the state, nowhere in the world, represents its people, in their variety, in their fullness? It is the essence of modern democratic theory that governments, to be considered legitimate, must rest on the consent of all the people, and on the principle that all human beings, of whatever sex or color, are equal in their right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, that governments which are destructive of these rights are not legitimate.

I am paraphrasing, as you probably know, the American Declaration of Independence, but the ideas are universal. The United States today, recklessly squandering the nation's wealth—over a thousand billion dollars allocated for the next five years—to build superfluous weapons of mutual annihilation, while children, old people, sick people are in need, while the arts fade for lack of funds, while ten million are out of work and the cities are in decay—is violating the spirit of its own Declaration of Independence. The Soviet Union today, by its deprivation of basic liberties, by its ironic imitation of capitalist America in militarism and waste, is betraying the philosophy of Karl Marx, who, in his critique of Hegel's writings on the state, emphasized freedom as the goal of Communism, and supported the principle of popular sovereignty.¹³ Because that principle is being violated everywhere in the world today, we require a vast effort of cooperation among peoples everywhere, in defense of all our lives and liberties.

With all that I have said about governments, however, I must point out that there is a form of control operating in the university which is more insidious than governmental control. I am speaking of self-censorship, self-control, where the interests of the state, of the great corporations, are internalized by the academy itself: its administration, its students, its faculty. That is the most effective form of control, because it takes on the appearance of freedom, even self-determination.

Everyone collaborates in this control, simply by pursuing, day-to-day, their traditional roles. No external restraints are needed to insure this, only the invisible coercion exercised by a system rich enough to offer job security, promotions, social standing, and comfortable incomes, and powerful enough to withhold these rewards from the unorthodox. External control is then replaced by a whispering in the inner ear, with the single message: play it safe. In this way, behind a facade of academic freedom, the university, with the cooperation

of the faculty, will turn out able and docile students, who will dutifully, efficiently ply their trades to keep the wheels of the economic system turning, and who will obey the state when it summons them to service, especially to war.

Thus, without extraordinary measures, in the natural course of its operation, the academy weeds out undesirable faculty, students, courses, by a panoply of political devices masquerading as lofty academic standards. Through a process of almost natural selection, a structure of quiet coercion is created, within which a prudent professor then works. The rule of safety then dictates the substance of scholarship and teaching. Probably all here can illustrate this from their own experience. I will point to a few examples from my own fields: history and political science.

Note, first, that these are two separate departments, to avoid contamination. Why spoil political theory with a dose of historical reality? Why test Locke's notion, of an original contract pleasantly agreed to by all the members of the society, with the actual history of the American Constitution, which speaks for 'We the people ...' in the very first words of its preamble, but which, in fact, was drawn up by fifty-five wealthy slaveowners, merchants, bondholders, in such a way as to assure protection of the interests of their class?¹⁴

Also, political science is not to be joined to economics—that would be equivalent to interracial marriage. A study of textbooks on international relations used in American universities has shown that virtually no attention was paid in these texts to the influence of corporations on U.S. foreign policy, despite voluminous evidence attesting to such influence. The average student of international affairs will not learn that International Telephone and Telegraph helped to plan the overthrow of the Allende government in Chile, or that United Fruit participated in and profited from the CIA's program of armed overthrow of the Arbenz government in Guatemala, or that the three reasons given most frequently by the National Security Council for U.S. involvement in Vietnam, in its secret memoranda of the 1950s, were "tin, rubber, and oil."¹⁵

You will find in the American study of politics an enormous attention to voting, and an obsession with all the details of legislation and parliamentary government. This is presumed to simply describe reality. However, in all complex situations, there is a choice of what to describe. There is no such thing as a mere description, because each choice has different consequences. To describe is, therefore, to prescribe. It is true that Americans have been voting every few years for Congressmen and Presidents. But it is also true that the most important social changes in the history of the United States—independence from England, black emancipation, the organization of labor, gains in sexual equality, the outlawing of racial segregation, the withdrawal of the United States from

Vietnam—have come about not through the ballot box but through the direct action of social struggle, through the organization of popular movements using a variety of extra-legal and illegal tactics. The standard teaching of political science does not describe this reality.

Nor does the teaching of history, which in the main emphasizes the laws passed by Congress, the decisions made by Presidents, the rulings of the Supreme Court, and relegates the work of social movements to minor notice.¹⁶ The identification of political action with voting, attributing social change to the beneficence of authorities, has a distinct effect: it teaches young people that if they want to bring about change, the ballot box is the way. But what if students were taught about another reality: the history of strikes, boycotts, demonstrations, refusals of military service, the development of mass movements? Is it a matter of chance that the choice of what to describe in the process of social change is the choice safest for the existing social system, which then uses punishments and rewards to make it also safest for teachers and for students. The choices made have an air of neutrality, but can one be neutral in a world that is already moving in a certain direction?

What if one overcomes all these restraints, from outside and inside, and proceeds to teach, to write unstintingly, on behalf of radical solutions, to present sophisticated radical analyses, to become bold theoreticians of social change? What if one seizes the territory of theory, and remains there, with enough provisions—that is, books, documents, bibliographies—for a thousand years, never venturing outside, except for scholarly meetings? I am sure we all know the jet-set Marxists, the mandarins of revolutionary theory, who, whenever there is a call to walk on a picket line, are en-route to an international conference on the withering away of the state. I am suggesting, I suppose, that the theorist of radical change who does not act in the real world of social combat is teaching, by example, the most sophisticated technique of safety.

I have been talking as if to students of history or politics. But you may be engineers, scientists, artists, physicians. For you, the internalized control, the once-conditioned, now automatic reflex action for prudence is based on an even simpler maxim: stick to your last, stay in your field, leave politics—problems of war and peace, racial oppression, class exploitation, sexual equality—to someone else. A neat formula for the continuation of things as they are: just as people are artificially divided into races and nationalities to keep them apart, and preferably in conflict with one another, divide them also into specialties. Let word spread through the culture that one who ventures out of one's assigned field is not a true "professional."

I think of J. Robert Oppenheimer, who supervised the development of the

atomic bomb in the United States, and then, as part of a scientific panel advising on the question of what to do with it, affirmed the political decision to drop it on the city of Hiroshima. He said later that he didn't really know what was going on politically, and thought it best to let the political leaders decide.

In contrast with Oppenheimer, there was Albert Einstein, also brilliantly gifted in his field, who insisted, throughout his life, in speaking his mind on questions of war and peace, armament and disarmament. Refuse to fight, he said bluntly, to the young people of all countries. Refuse to make the weapons of war, he said to the populations of countries preparing for war. And when these ideas become widespread enough, Einstein said, wars must end.¹⁷

Today, in the United States, the doctors, most conscientious of specialists, said always to be ready to send a person with an earache on to someone else who specializes in left ears rather than right ears, have begun to speak up loudly on the question of nuclear war. Organized into one of the fastest-growing groups of citizens in the United States, the Physicians for Social Responsibility, they have initiated a national campaign to alert the nation to the dangers of nuclear war and the necessity for disarmament. Other specialists have been stimulated to organize similarly: artists, businessmen, social scientists, teachers, writers. Because of this, it was possible last month to assemble in New York the largest antiwar demonstration in the history of the United States—three-quarters of a million people calling for a halt to the arms race. Einstein, I think, would be pleased.

I have wanted, as you can see, to go beyond the more crude interferences of the state, to suggest that the most important limits on our freedom are our own. If enough of us broke through our own restraints, no outside force could suffice to deny our freedom. Modern systems of control still depend on force, in emergencies, but for day-to-day discipline they depend on the compliance of vast numbers of people. When that compliance is withdrawn, en masse, even force is inadequate to hold back the impulse for justice.

Please understand that I am addressing myself while I am addressing you, admonishing myself, reminding myself, trying to keep my own spirit of resistance intact even while I speak to you of yours. And what I am asking of you, what I am asking of myself, is not simply to help someone else to achieve justice. I believe that the time is past for philanthropy, for missionary work, for good Samaritans and kindly advisers. We are all in it together. History has come to that point. We have run out of time and space and boundary lines. We are all crowded together on a planet which must find universal brotherhood and sisterhood, across lines of class, of race, of religion, of nationality—or we will all go down, whether in nuclear holocaust or endless civil war.

What we do now, therefore, we do for us all. If enough people begin to recognize that, I believe, your extinguished torch of freedom will be again, as will a thousand more in other parts of the world.

NOTES

- [1.](#) Donald Woods, *Biko*. Paddington Press, New York & London, 1978.
- [2.](#) Another instance is the execution of Black Panther leader Fred Hampton, in a raid by Chicago police on his apartment, in December, 1969. It turned out later that the FBI was also involved in the planning of the raid. See Book III, *Final Report of the Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations With Respect to Intelligence Activities*. U.S. Senate, 94: 2, p 223.
- [3.](#) E Neame, *The History of Apartheid*. London House & Maxwell, New York, 1963.
- [4.](#) Donald Woods, *op cit*.
- [5.](#) This is from the novel by Albert Camus, *The Plague*.
- [6.](#) I discuss my experiences at Spelman College, and other issues of race, in my book *The Southern Mystique*. Alfred Knopf, New York, 1964.
- [7.](#) The history of that reconciliation goes back to the politics of the year 1877, which is analyzed in C Vann Woodward, *Reunion and Reaction: The Compromise of 1877 and the End of Reconstruction*. Little Brown, Boston, 1966.
- [8.](#) The quotation is the title of a book which is a marvelous oral history of the civil rights movement, told by its participants, in Howell Raines, *My Soul Is Rested*. Bantam, New York, 1977.
- [9.](#) For an analysis of the role of schools in perpetuating the capitalist system in the United States, see Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis, *Schooling in Capitalist America*. Basic Books, New York, 1976.
- [10.](#) The role of intellectuals in the Vietnam war is described in David Halberstam, *The Best and the Brightest*. Random House, New York, 1972. This role is subjected to a devastating criticism in the essay by Noam Chomsky, "The Responsibility of the Intellectuals" in his book *American Power and the New Mandarins*. Pantheon, New York, 1969. For current data on the connections between the American university and the militarization of the country, see the report of the Committee for NonViolent Research, *Going for Broke: The University and the Military-Industrial Complex*, 1401 S State Street, Ann Arbor, Michigan, 1982.

[11.](#) A personal account by a soldier, badly wounded in the war, who joined the antiwar movement, is Ron Kovic, *Born on the Fourth of July*, McGraw-Hill, New York, 1976.

[12.](#) The evidence for the impact of the antiwar movement on President Lyndon Johnson's decision in early 1968 to begin deescalation of the war can be found in the top-secret history of the Vietnam war, released to the press by Daniel Ellsberg, and published in *The Pentagon Papers*. Vol. IV, Beacon Press, Boston, 1971.

[13.](#) See Karl Marx, *Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Law*, in *Collected Works*. Vol. 3, International Publishers, New York, 1975.

[14.](#) See Charles Beard, *An Economic Interpretation of the Constitution of the United States*. Macmillan, New York, 1935.

[15.](#) See *The Pentagon Papers*. Vol. I, Beacon Press, Boston, 1971.

[16.](#) I have tried to see the history of the United States in a different way in my book, *A People's History of the United States*. Harper & Row, New York, 1970.

[17.](#) One can read about this in the biography by Ronald Clark, *Einstein: The Life and Times*, World Publishing Company, New York, 1971.

No Human Being is Illegal (2006)

In this July 2006 article for The Progressive, Howard Zinn provides a context for today's immigration reform debate by tracing the history of how we've treated foreign-born people in this country since the Revolutionary War: from anti-Irish and anti-Chinese sentiment in the mid-and late-nineteenth century to the deportation of Russians from the U. S. just after the Bolshevik Revolution, from the McCarthy Era to the ironically titled Patriot Act. Howard portrays the Bush Administration's decision to build a wall at the southern border of California and Arizona as a tired example of our politicians and our government surrendering to fear while forgetting the equal rights that all humans share. — Eds.

Vigilantes sit at the border, guns on their laps, looking for those who might cross over. President Bush promises to send 6,000 National Guardsmen there and to build a wall. Archconservatives threaten to make felons out of the undocumented and those who help them. But immigrants from south of the border, along with their supporters, have been demonstrating, by the hundreds of thousands, for the rights of foreign-born people, whether here legally or illegally. There is a persistent sign: “No Human Being Is Illegal.”

Discrimination against the foreign born has a long history, going back to the beginning of the nation.

Ironically, having just gone through its own revolution, the United States was fearful of having revolutionaries in its midst. France had recently overthrown its monarchy. Irish rebels were protesting against British rule, and the new U.S. government was conscious of “dangerous foreigners”—Irish and French—in the country. In 1798, Congress passed legislation lengthening the residence requirement for becoming a citizen from five to fourteen years. It also authorized the President to deport any alien he regarded as dangerous to the public safety.

There was virulent anti-Irish sentiment in the 1840s and '50s, especially after the failure of the potato crop in Ireland, which killed a million people and drove millions abroad, most of them to the United States. “No Irish Need Apply” symbolized this prejudice. It was part of that long train of irrational fear in which

one generation of immigrants, now partly assimilated, reacts with hatred to the next. Take Irish-born Dennis Kearney, who became a spokesman for anti-Chinese prejudice. His political ambitions led him and the California Workingmen's Party to adopt the slogan "The Chinese Must Go."

The Chinese had been welcome in the 1860s as cheap labor for the building of the transcontinental railroad, but now they were seen, especially after the economic crisis of 1873, as taking away jobs from the native born. This sentiment was turned into law with the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, which, for the first time in the nation's history, created the category of "illegal" immigrants. Before this, there was no border control. Now Chinese, desperate to change their lives, tried to evade the act by crossing over from Mexico. Some learned to say "Yo soy Mexicano." But violence against them continued, as whites, seeing their jobs go to ill-paid Chinese, reacted with fury. In Rock Springs, Wyoming, in the summer of 1885, whites attacked 500 Chinese miners, massacring twenty-eight of them in cold blood.

In the East, Europeans were needed to work in the garment factories, the mines, the textile mills, or as laborers, stonecutters, ditch diggers. The immigrants poured in from Southern and Eastern Europe, from Italy, Greece, Poland, Russia, and the Balkans. There were five million immigrants in the 1880s, four million in the 1890s. From 1900 to 1910, eight million more arrived.

These newcomers faced vicious hostility. A typical comment in the Baltimore Sun: "The Italian immigrant would be no more objectionable than some others were it not for his singularly bloodthirsty disposition, and frightful temper and vindictiveness." New York City's Police Commissioner Theodore Bingham insisted that "half of the criminals" in New York City in 1908 were Jews.

Woodrow Wilson's decision to bring the United States into the First World War brought widespread opposition. To suppress this, the government adopted legislation—the Espionage Act, the Sedition Act—which led to the imprisonment of almost a thousand people. Their crime was to protest, by speech or writing, U.S. entrance into the war. Another law provided for the deportation of aliens who opposed organized government or advocated the destruction of property.

After the war, the lingering super-patriotic atmosphere led to more hysteria against the foreign born, intensified by the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917. In 1919, after the explosion of a bomb in front of the house of Attorney General A. Mitchell Palmer, a series of raids were carried out against immigrants. Palmer's agents picked up 249 noncitizens of Russian birth, many of whom had lived in this country a long time, put them on a transport, and deported them to Soviet Russia. Among them were the anarchists Emma Goldman and Alexander

Berkman. J. Edgar Hoover, at that time a young agent of the Department of Justice, personally supervised the deportations.

Shortly after, in January 1920, 4,000 persons in thirty-three cities were rounded up and held in seclusion for long periods of time. They were brought into secret hearings, and more than 500 of them were deported. In Boston, Department of Justice agents, aided by local police, arrested 600 people by raiding meeting halls or by invading their homes in the early morning. They were handcuffed, chained together, and marched through the city streets. It was in this atmosphere of jingoism and anti-foreign hysteria that the Italian immigrants Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti were put on trial after a robbery and murder at a Massachusetts shoe factory, found guilty by an Anglo-Saxon judge and jury, and sentenced to death.

With the increased nationalist and anti-foreign sentiment, Congress in 1924 passed a National Origins Quota Act. This set quotas that encouraged immigration from England, Germany, and Scandinavia but strictly limited immigration from Eastern and Southern Europe.

Following World War II, the Cold War atmosphere of anti-communist hysteria brought about the McCarran-Walter Act of 1952, which set quotas of 100 immigrants for each country in Asia. Immigrants from the United Kingdom, Ireland, and Germany could take up 70 percent of the annual immigration quota. The act also revived, in a virulent way, the anti-alien legislation of 1798, creating ideological grounds for the exclusion of immigrants and the treatment of all foreign-born residents, who could be deported for any “activities prejudicial to the public interest” or “subversive to national security.” Noncitizens suspected of radical ideas were rounded up and deported.

The great social movements of the Sixties led to a number of legislative reforms: voting rights for African Americans, health care for senior citizens and for the poor, and a law abolishing the National Origins Quota system and allowing 20,000 immigrants from every country.

But the respite did not last.

In 1995, the federal building in Oklahoma City was bombed, with the deaths of 168 people. Although the two men convicted of the crime were native-born Americans, the following year President Bill Clinton signed into law the Antiterrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act, which contained especially harsh provisions for foreign-born people. For immigrants as well as for citizens, the act reintroduced the McCarthy-era principle of guilt by association. That is, people could be put in jail—or, if foreign born, deported—not for what they actually did, but for giving support to any group designated as “terrorist” by the Secretary of State. The government could deny visas to people wanting to enter the United

States if they were members of any such group, even if the actions of the group supported by the individual were perfectly legal. Under the new law, a person marked for deportation had no rights of due process, and could be deported on the basis of secret evidence.

Clinton's signing of this act reaffirmed that the targeting of immigrants and depriving them of constitutional rights were not policies simply of the Republican Party but also of the Democratic Party, which in the military atmosphere of World War I and the Cold War had joined a bipartisan attack on the rights of both native and foreign born.

In the wake of the destruction of the Twin Towers in New York on September 11, 2001, President George Bush declared a "war on terrorism." A climate of fear spread across the nation, in which many foreign-born persons became objects of suspicion. The government was now armed with new legal powers by the so-called Patriot Act of 2001, which gave the Attorney General the power to imprison any foreign-born person he declared a "suspected terrorist." He need not show proof; it all depends on his say-so. And such detained persons may be held indefinitely, with no burden of proof on the government and no hearing required. The act was passed with overwhelming Democratic and Republican support. In the Senate, only one person, Russ Feingold of Wisconsin, voted against it.

In the excited atmosphere created by the "war on terrorism," it was predictable that there would follow violence against foreign-born people. For instance, just four days after the 9/11 events, a forty-nine-year-old Sikh American who was doing landscaping work outside his gas station in Mesa, Arizona, was shot and killed by a man shouting, "I stand for America all the way." In February 2003, a group of teenagers in Orange County, California, attacked Rashid Alam, an eighteen-year-old Lebanese-American, with bats and golf clubs. He suffered a broken jaw, stab wounds, and head injuries.

Shortly after 9/11, as documented by the Center for Constitutional Rights and Human Rights Watch, Muslims from various countries were picked up, held for various periods of time in tiny, windowless cells, often beaten and abused. As *The New York Times* reported, "Hundreds of noncitizens were swept up on visa violations in the weeks after 9/11, held for months in a much-criticized federal detention center in Brooklyn as 'persons of interest' to terror investigators, and then deported."

Muslims became a special target of surveillance and arrest. Thousands were detained. *New York Times* columnist Anthony Lewis told of one man, who, even before September 11, was arrested on secret evidence. When a federal judge found there was no reason to conclude the man was a threat to national security,

the man was released. However, after September 11, the Department of Justice, ignoring the judge's finding, imprisoned him again, holding him in solitary confinement twenty-three hours a day, not allowing his family to see him.

As I write this, Republicans and Democrats are trying to work out a compromise on the rights of immigrants. But in none of these proposals is there a recognition that immigrants deserve the same rights as everyone else. Forgetting, or rather, ignoring the indignation of liberty-loving people at the building of the Berlin Wall, and the exultation that greeted its fall, there will be a wall built at the southern borders of California and Arizona. I doubt that any national political figure will point out that this wall is intended to keep Mexicans out of the land that was violently taken from Mexico in the War of 1846-1848.

Only the demonstrators in cities across the country are reminding us of the words on the Statue of Liberty in New York harbor: "Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free, the wretched refuse of your teeming shore. Send these, the homeless, tempest-tossed, to me. I lift my lamp beside the golden door." In the wave of anger against government action in the Sixties, cartoons were drawn showing the Statue of Liberty blindfolded. The blindfolds remain, if only symbolically, until we begin to act, yes, as if "No Human Being Is Illegal."

Zinn Speaks (2008)

Amid his work on the documentary film adaptation of A People's History of the United States entitled The People Speak!, and after nearly a month of back and forth emails and missed opportunities, Professor Zinn agreed to an interview with me in April 2008. Here, the esteemed historian and controversial rabble rouser reflects on his historic and memorable time at Spelman College in the '60s, his thoughts on the Democratic Party, his philosophy of dissent as democracy, and his hope for America's future. This interview was later adapted and reposted on Huffingtonpost.com as well as counterpunch.com. —Wajahat Ali

wa: Your experiences and acts of civil disobedience at Spelman College are, by now, thoroughly well known. However, in the twenty-first century, one could look at the student body at many liberal college campuses and see that fiery protest and consciousness replaced by apathy and materialism. Where has that fighting spirit gone? You spoke against “discouragement” at the 2005 Spelman College commencement speech—what of it now?

hz: What you describe as the difference between the 60s and today on campuses is true, but I would not go too far with that. There are campus groups all over the country working against the war, but they are small so far. Remember, the scale of involvement in Vietnam was greater—500,000 troops vs. 130,000 troops in Iraq. After five years in Vietnam, there were 30,000 U.S. dead vs. today we have 4,000 dead. The draft was threatening young people then, but not now. Greater establishment control of the media today, which is not reporting the horrors inflicted on the people of Iraq as the media began in the U.S. to report on U.S. atrocities like the My Lai Massacre. In the case of the movement against the Vietnam War, there was the immediate radicalizing experience of the Civil Rights Movement for racial equality, whose energy and indignation carried over into the student movement against the Vietnam War. No comparable carryover exists today. And yes, there is more materialism, more economic insecurity for young people going to college—huge tuition costs putting pressure on students to concentrate on studies and do well in school.

^{wa}: You were heavily involved in the Civil Rights Movement that dealt not only with racial empowerment and equality, but also re-examination of U.S. foreign policy and withdrawal from the brutal Vietnam War. Here we are now in 2008 with a seemingly unending, and many say illegal, occupation of Iraq. “Racism” has emerged as a contentious topic due to Obama running for President and his Reverend’s controversial comments. Yet, most say he and other candidates talk “pretty” but are unwilling to fundamentally confront and change the problems of race and foreign policy. As one who has observed this sociopolitical climate from the grassroots since the 1960s, what has changed if anything in regards to racial enlightenment and the humanizing of non-American, “foreign others?”

^{hz}: The Civil Rights Movement was an educational experience for many Americans. The result was more opportunities for a small percentage of black people, perhaps 10 percent or 20 percent, so more black youth going to college and going into the professions. A greater consciousness among white people—not all, but many—of racism. For most black people, however, there is still poverty and desperation. The ghettos still exist, and the proportion of blacks in prison is still much greater than whites. Today, there is less overt racism, but the economic injustices create an “institutional racism” which exists even while more blacks are in high places, such as Condoleeza Rice in Bush’s Administration and Obama running for President.

Unfortunately, the greater consciousness among whites about black equality has not carried over to the new victims of racism—Muslims and immigrants. There is no racial enlightenment for these groups, which are huge. Millions of Muslims and an equal number of immigrants, who whether legal or illegal, face discrimination both legally from the government and extra-legally from white Americans—and sometimes black and Hispanic Americans. The Democratic Presidential candidates are avoiding these issues in order to cultivate support among white Americans.

This is shameful, especially for Obama, who should use his experience as a black man to educate the public about discrimination and racism. He is cautious about making strong statements about these issues and about foreign policy. So, in keeping with the tradition of caution and timidity of the Democratic Party, he takes positions slightly to the left of the Republicans, but short of what an enlightened policy would be.

^{wa}: You said the democratic spirit of the American people is best represented when people are picketing and voicing their opinion outside the White House. How does this nature of dissent and protest serve as the crux of a democracy and

a healthy, functioning civic society? Many would argue this is divisive, no?

hz: Yes, dissent and protest are divisive, but in a good way, because they represent accurately the real divisions in society. Those divisions exist—the rich, the poor—whether there is dissent or not, but when there is no dissent, there is no change. The dissent has the possibility not of ending the division in society, but of changing the reality of the division. Changing the balance of power on behalf of the poor and the oppressed.

wa: *A People's History of the United States* is now considered a seminal work taught in high schools and universities across the country. Why do you think the work has had such lasting, influential impact?

hz: Because it fills a need, because there is a huge emptiness of truth in the traditional history texts. And because people who gain some understanding on their own that there are things wrong in society, they look for their new consciousness; their new feelings to be represented by a more honest history.

wa: Minority voters, like Hispanic Catholics, voted solidly for Bush in 2004, and some sons of immigrants have virulent anger and disdain against “illegal” immigrants. It seems many marginalized voices have forgotten their history and now side with those actively intent on keeping them either on the sidelines or in some form “oppressed.” How do we explain this discrepancy?

hz: It is to the interest of the people in power to divide the rest of the population in order to rule them. To set poor against middle class, white against black, native born against immigrants, Christians against other religions. It serves the interest of the establishment to keep people ignorant of their own history.

wa: Most say that corporations now own American media. What is the proper outlet for democratic discourse and dissemination of information if indeed there is a biased monopoly over media?

hz: Because of the control of the media by corporate wealth, the discovery of truth depends on an alternative media, such as small radio stations, networks like Pacifica Radio, programs like Amy Goodman's *Democracy Now*. Also, alternative newspapers, which exist all over the country. Also, cable TV programs, which are not dependent on commercial advertising. Also, the internet, which can reach millions of people bypassing the conventional media.

wa: Will anything change in regards to U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East, specifically on Palestine and Israel, if the Democratic Party wins in 2008?

hz: The Democratic candidates, Clinton and Obama, have not shown any sign of a fundamental change in the policy of support of Israel. They have not shown sympathy for the plight of the Palestinian people. Obama has occasionally referred to the situation of the Palestinians but as the campaign has gone on, he seems reluctant to bring this up, and instead emphasizes his support of Israel. So, a change in policy will require more pressure from other countries and more education of the American people, who at this point know very little about what has been happening to the Palestinian people. The American people are naturally sympathetic to those they see as oppressed, but they get very little information from political leaders or the media, which would give them a realistic picture of the suffering of Palestinians under the Occupation.

wa: How can “the left” reconcile their assumed indifference to religion with the growing “religious” sector of society siding with the “conservative” parties? Can there be a peace between these two or is this a permanent schism? I’ve noticed bigotry on both sides, between “secularists” and “religionists.”

hz: The Left needs to more clearly make a distinction between the bigotry of fundamentalism and the progressive tradition in religion. In Latin America, there is “liberation theology.” In the U.S., there were the priests and nuns who supported black people in the South and who protested against the Vietnam War. So, it’s not a matter of being for or against religion, but of deciding whether religion can play a role for justice and peace rather than for violence and bigotry.

wa: Most don’t know that you were a bombardier during WWII. Did this experience bring about the “anagnorisis” and epiphany catalyzing fundamental changes in your ideology?

hz: I did not know much history when I became a bombardier in the U.S. Air Force in World War II. Only after the War did I see that we, like the Nazis, had committed atrocities ... Hiroshima, Nagasaki, Dresden, my own bombing missions. And when I studied history after the War, I learned from reading on my own, not from my university classes, about the history of U.S. expansion and imperialism.

wa: You’re now a man in his golden years, and you look back at your many

accomplishments. You've done amazing things. Any regrets? And also, if you could choose something that would embody your legacy—what would it be?

hz: I have no regrets about my political activity, only that I sometimes got carried away with it and didn't find the right balance between obligations to my family and my need to be involved in social movements. As for a work of mine that embodies my "legacy," probably it is not one book, but rather the combination of being a writer and an activist, being a public intellectual, by using my scholarship for social change.

wa: Many look to the future horizons with bleak, cynical eyes foreshadowing disastrous scenarios resulting from our hubris and excess. Recession. War. Deficit. Extremism. Global Anti-Americanism. Insincere partisan politics. Will we implode? Can we move forward? Do you have hope for the future of America?

hz: The present situation for the U.S. looks grim, but I am hopeful, as I see the American people waking up and being overwhelmingly opposed to this war and to the Bush regime, as I reflect on movements in history and how they arose surprisingly when they seemed defeated. I believe the American people have the capacity to create a new movement, which would change the direction of our nation from being a military power to being a peaceful nation, using our enormous wealth for human needs, here and abroad.

Suggestions for Further Reading

Some suggestions for further reading on race. I am not giving a formal listing of publishers, dates, and places because public libraries can easily locate books by title and/or author.

I believe the most useful things to read on what Cornel West calls “race matters” (while making the point that race *matters*) are the writings of African-Americans themselves. My own first experience as a teenager, was with Richard Wright’s *Native Son*, a startling introduction to the connection between two kinds of crime: those committed by black people out of desperation and those committed by a system of racial and class injustice. Years later, I read Richard Wright’s *Black Boy*. That belongs to a group of books that takes you inside the growing-up experiences of black people, revealed in their autobiographical writings. You can go back to slave experiences, as in *The Autobiography of Frederick Douglass*, and then on to this century: W. E. B. Du Bois’s *Souls of Black Folk*; Zora Neale Hurston’s *Dust Tracks on a Road*; Alice Walker’s essays, *In Search of Our Mothers’ Gardens*; Langston Hughes’s *The Big Sea* and *I Wonder as I Wander*, and Malcolm X’s *Autobiography*. Bringing it into the civil rights era, James Farmer’s *Lay Bare the Heart*. African-American poetry should be read, not only that by Langston Hughes, but by Countee Cullen, Alice Walker, and others (Arna Bontemps’s collection, *American Negro Poetry*, is excellent). There are the novels of Toni Morrison and Octavia Butler, the extraordinary stories and novels of Toni Cade Bambara, the plays of Leroi Jones and August Wilson.

There are many histories of the civil rights movement. I would recommend the oral histories collected by Henry Hampton and Steve Fayer (of the great television series *Eyes on the Prize*), *Voices of Freedom*, as well as those in Howell Raines’ *My Soul is Rested*. Also, the interviews of their parents and grandparents done by Mississippi schoolchildren, *Minds Stayed on Freedom*. There is a wonderful photographic memoir by Danny Lyon, *Memories of the Southern Civil Rights Movement*.

Two splendid biographies stand out: David Levering Lewis’s *W. E. B. Du Bois* (though it only goes up to 1919), and Martin Duberman’s *Paul Robeson*.

And a collection of documents ranging through American history, Gerda Lerner's *Black Women in White America*.

For a general history of African-Americans, there is an indispensable reference work: the three volumes of Herbert Aptheker's *A Documentary History of the Negro People in the U.S.* John Hope Franklin's *From Slavery to Freedom* is a classic.

For the history of Latino people, I would recommend the remarkable dual-language book, photos and text by Elizabeth Martinez, *500 Years of Chicano History*. And Ronald Takaki's multicultural history, *A Different Mirror*.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

HOWARD ZINN grew up in the immigrant slums of Brooklyn where he worked in shipyards in his late teens. He saw combat duty as an air force bombardier in World War II, and afterward received his doctorate in history from Columbia University and was a postdoctoral Fellow in East Asian Studies at Harvard University. His first book, *LaGuardia in Congress*, was an Albert Beveridge Prize winner. In 1956, he moved with his wife and children to Atlanta to become chairman of the history department of Spelman College. His experiences there led to his second book, *The Southern Mystique*. As a participant-observer in the founding activities of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, he spent time in Georgia, Alabama, and Mississippi, and wrote *SNCC: The New Abolitionists*. As part of the American Heritage series, he edited *New Deal Thought*, an anthology. His fifth and six books, *Vietnam: The Logic of Withdrawal*, and *Disobedience and Democracy*, were written in the midst of his participation in intense antiwar activity. In 1968, he flew to Hanoi with Father Daniel Berrigan to receive the first three American fliers released by North Vietnam. Two years later came *The Politics of History*. In 1972, he edited, with Noam Chomsky, *The Pentagon Papers: Critical Essays*. In 1973 appeared *Postwar America*. In 1974, he edited *Justice in Everyday Life*. In 1980 came his epic masterpiece, *A People's History of the United States*, “a brilliant and moving history of the American people from the point of view of those who have been exploited politically and economically and whose plight has been largely omitted from most histories” (*Library Journal*). Through the 1980s and '90s, Zinn continued to write books—including *Declarations of Independence: Cross-Examining American Ideology*, *Failure to Quit: Reflections of an Optimistic Historian*, and *You Can't Be Neutral on a Moving Train: A Personal History of Our Times*—and in this period also wrote three plays: *Emma*, *Daughter of Venus*, and *Marx in Soho*. As the lasting impact of *A People's History* set in, the monumental work inspired publication for many different audiences: *La otra historia de los Estados Unidos* brought Zinn's words to Spanish-speaking audiences in 2001; a companion book of primary sources edited with Anthony Arnove, *Voices of a People's History of the United States*, was published in 2004; and in 2007 young adults were exposed to the historian's ideas through the two-volume *A Young People's History of the United States*, adapted with Rebecca Stefoff (with a single-volume edition released in 2009). An audio CD, *Readings from Voices of a People's History of the United States*,

and a documentary film, *The People Speak*, have brought the historic words of Zinn's subjects to multimedia audiences. Other recent Zinn books include *Howard Zinn on History*, *Howard Zinn on War, Terrorism and War* with Anthony Arnove, *The Unraveling of the Bush Presidency* and *A Power Governments Cannot Suppress*. Professor emeritus of political science at Boston University, Howard Zinn died on January 27, 2010. He shall be missed.

Best known for his classic *Race Matters*, *Democracy Matters*, and his new memoir, *Brother West: Living and Loving Out Loud*, CORNEL WEST is the Class of 1943 University Professor at Princeton University.

ALSO BY HOWARD ZINN

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Howard Zinn on History (Seven Stories, 2001, 2011)

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HOWARD ZINN

Introduction by CORNEL WEST

*"What can I say that will in any way convey the love, respect, and admiration
I feel for this amazing hero who was my teacher and mentor ...?"*
— ALICE WALKER

on

race

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