from Sharon Monteith, American Culture in the 1960s (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008)

Conclusion

The Sixties and its Cultural Legacy

The ideals and the failures of the 1960s echo powerfully. Nostalgia not only harks back to a lost past but suggests the future may be lost too because American culture is still marked by some of the problems new social movements set out to solve. This may be one reason why Todd Gitlin compares his need to find a romantic foothold in the sixties with 'the myth of the magnificent French resistance [which] turns out to have been rather punier than we imagined'.[1] The deification of an 'authentic' sixties risks a loss of intellectual scepticism; the idea that any facet of the decade's culture could be 'puny' or anodyne is anathema to those who lived 'at the barricades', and for whom the decade sustains its glories and glamour regardless of failures, as Gitlin's *Letters to a Young Activist* (2003) explores. A reason to return to the decade as an ideological touchstone is to reclaim the sense of social agency in civil rights and student politics, literature and art, comedy and music. In the historical moment in which individuals came to voice and the cultural was celebrated as experiential, the importance of the individual began to be worn away in the poststructuralist move toward decentring the subject. The problem of how to recall and reproduce the urgency with which contemporary issues resonated exercises those of us who return to the era to plumb its images.

It is especially difficult when the dominant popular representation of the civil rights era has been as an integrationist success story; movies and fictions function in self-congratulatory, wish-fulfilling ways involving the amelioration of racism and white-on-black violence. Even the most incisive of 1960s directors have been co-opted to this trend. John Frankenheimer made *The Manchurian Candidate* (1962) and *Seven Days in May* (1964) as pointed critiques. When he adapted Marshall Frady's biography of George Wallace in 1997, his black aide was elevated to a central character against which the audience might measure Wallace's shifting stance on race. Wallace did have two black attendants who cared for the invalid in his last years and Eddie Holcey, at Wallace's behest in 1979, pushed him down the aisle of Dexter Avenue Baptist Church so that he could apologise for his racial misdeeds to the congregation sitting in Dr King's former church: 'I have learned what suffering means in a way that was impossible before I was shot. I think I can understand something of the pain that black people have had to endure. I know that I contributed to that pain. I can only ask you all for forgiveness'.[2] His confession was followed by the singing of 'Amazing Grace' and expressions of compassion. It is this scene that closes Frady's study of the Alabama congressman who had come as close to fascism as his populism would allow by King's death in 1968. And it is this scene that is recalled in the documentary *Four Little Girls* (1997) when Wallace embarrasses Holcey by presenting him to director Spike Lee as his 'best friend'. African American characters are often messianic and morally reliable guides but while the black character is redeemer of the white, the white is usually foregrounded.[3]

The nation's turn toward confession accelerated in the 1990s, as personified by President Clinton, and has been criticised by public intellectual Patricia Williams and lampooned by comedian Dennis Leary. The 'cult of apology' is satirised in Adam Mansbach's novel *Angry Black White Boy* (2005). Macon Detournay grows up in Boston which saw some of the most violent racial clashes over bussing, the controversial method of ensuring the racial integration of schools. In 1998 a student at Columbia University in New York, incensed by the acquittal of police indicted for beating Rodney King and inspired by hip-hop, Macon starts a riot by burning a police car, the first in a series of criminal acts he believes will avenge the African Americans he idolises and fetishises. He becomes a notorious media anti-hero in a parody of 1960s-styled performances of dissent – a persona he fails to understand or transform except into robberies and hold-ups and a futile attempt to cast off his whiteness by 'crossing over' into blackness. When he organises a 'Day of Apology' for whites to make amends for the nation's racial sins, it descends into chaos.

Writing in 1988, intellectual historian Barbara Melosh feared a 'sanitized version' of civil rights had entered 'the canon of consensus history' and bemoaned novelists' silence on this issue, silence she feared resulted from a 'modernist and postmodernist divorce between fiction and history'.[4] While political agency is made more ambivalent in postmodern terms, the shibboleth of fluidity can be undone by texts which encode racist violence and conflict in the continuous present tense, like Mansbach's novel. Julius Lester's *And All Our Wounds Forgiven* (1994) and Anthony Grooms' *Bombingham* (2001) convey post-civil rights conflict and despair. Historian Vincent Harding has noted the 'bleeding ulcers, nervous breakdowns, mysterious ailments [that] took their toll on young lives' and former activists working for voter registration in the South, such as Lester's Robert Card and Alice Walker's Meridian, suffer debilitating versions of post-traumatic stress syndrome. Grooms' Vietnam combatant Walter in *Bombingham* suffers a deep psychological and physical toll that was rarely represented at the time. Junius Edwards' *If We Must Die* (1963) and John A. Williams' *Captain Blackman* (1972) are exceptions that prove the rule. Lester plumbs the depths of post-civil rights pain via Robert Card when he is abused in jail by a white sheriff who runs his knife over Card's penis until he is aroused against his will and forces two black men to perform oral sex on him. Death would make Card a martyr and the sheriff knows how to shake his faith in self and survival without risking such distinction. Later, Card acknowledges, 'I cannot think of anyone in this century who lived in constant relationship to death like those of us who sought to make America whole and broke ourselves into pieces instead'.[5] Novelists who write beyond the historical 'ending' of the decade enter discursive terrain in which characters are emotionally disabled precisely because of the continuity they feel with the 1960s.

The Persistence of History

The history of new social movements is so recent that personal re-enactments and commemorations are legion, reinforced as mythology as well as history. In 2000, President Clinton, Coretta Scott King and civil rights leaders retraced the Selma to Montgomery March that turned into 'Bloody Sunday' on 7 March 1965, when George Wallace's state troopers and Sheriff Jim Clark's deputies beat marchers. They marked the 35th anniversary on Edmund Pettus Bridge, a solid signifier of Movement past in popular memory. However, five years later veterans who had marched every year were beginning to get worried: 'Older folks keep marching but the younger people aren't getting into it'.[6] Whether the sacrifices of older generations will continue to be commemorated is a persistent worry and a vexing question that relates to *how* the violence of the era should be remembered.

Journalist Adam Nossiter covering the 1994 trial of Byron De La Beckwith for murdering Medgar Evers in 1963 felt that 'the courtroom seesawed disorientingly, from that early 1960s world to 1994 and back again, over and over'. The age of the case was visually striking as elderly witnesses, young in 1964, repeated their testimony. A photographer described the trial as 'better than anything that anyone could conjure up on television or even on the Court Channel because it was history'.[7] The spatio-temporal distance between 1963–4 and the 1990s is collapsed again in the 1996 movie *Ghosts of Mississippi* (released in Europe as *Ghosts of the Past*): the mimetic pull of the narrative celebrates closure on thirty years' struggle for justice. Racist murders make pressing demands on collective memory and on the nation's capacity to withstand the violent history that haunts race relations. In *Ghosts of Mississippi*, a character asks, 'When are these fellows gonna get it through their heads that the 1960s are over?' but is met with silence. Whether the emphasis is deferred justice – *Never Too Late* (to do the right thing) is the title of Mississippi prosecutor Bobby DeLaughter's 2001 memoir of the trial – or on failure to find closure, the 'long' 1960s is a touchstone in memory studies.

In George Bush's inaugural address of 1989 he declared: 'The final lesson of Vietnam is that no great nation can long afford to be sundered by a memory.' Alison Lurie's *The War Between the Tates* (1974) is set in 1969–70 and its final line – 'Mommy, will the war end now?' – resonates with the knowledge that the war would not 'end' for four more years and that its effects continue, while Tim O'Brien's novel *In the Lake of the Woods* (1994) exposes the My Lai massacre as much harder to put to rest or suppress than Bush's statement might suppose. 'Bringing the war home' was the summative anti-war slogan; it signified the importance of disrupting American culture at the levels of government, politics, business and media. Michael Herr's *Dispatches* (1977), for example, closes with the mantra, 'Vietnam, Vietnam, Vietnam. We've all been there', to acknowledge the prosthetic memory of those who were never there but for whom the place, made synonymous with war in American cultural production, forms part of the consciousness of the nation.

What they did in or about Vietnam is a marker in the campaign biography of each Presidential candidate in its aftermath. This was pronounced in 2004, as satirised by Christopher Buckley: 'Neither candidate shall mention the word "Vietnam". In the event that either candidate utters said word in the course of a debate, the debate shall be concluded immediately and declared forfeit to the third-party candidate'.[8] George W. Bush was recipient of five deferments of his draft notice between 1963 and 1967 which allowed him to serve in the Texas National Guard. In Mort Sahl's blistering stand-up in 2004, the question 'What did *you* do in the war, daddy?' related to the war in Iraq and Bush's answer was deemed to be 'I started it'.[9] Former US Navy Lieutenant in Vietnam and a Vietnam Veteran Against the War, Senator John Kerry's campaign for Democratic nomination hinged on those two biographical facts and endeared him to his generation whether they fought or protested. His navy career recalled Kennedy's and his critique of Vietnam was the basis for a parallel critique of incumbent Bush's foreign policies. Joe Klein went so far as to argue in the documentary *Going Upriver: The Long War of John Kerry* (2004) that Kerry brought the Vietnam War to its real end because, thanks to his careful approach to the PoW-MIA hearings of the 1990s, he and his senate committee reported it was highly unlikely that any men missing in action remained prisoners. This pronouncement allowed Clinton to finally drop the trade embargo and resume diplomatic relations with Vietnam in 1994. However, Kerry failed to win out against Bush and a factor in that defeat was the creation of the group Swiftboat Veterans for Truth which tried to cast aspersions on Kerry's war record, securing Bush a comfortable margin over his opponent for the first time since Kerry had won the nomination. The shadow of Vietnam continues to fall over American politics.

Paul Connerton allows that how societies remember is inextricable from what they are encouraged or instructed to remember. Susan Sontag argued that collective memory could not exist but that ideologically substantiated discourse dictates precisely how a society should feel about its past. Collective memory is a mesh that connects people via institutions, traditions and conventions but there is also evidence of a powerfully personal imperative to connect individual and family history to the public sphere in the form of events and 'official' histories. Joseph Lelyveld subtitles his sixties memoir *Omaha Blues* (2005) 'A Memory Loop' and tries to distinguish 'a particular circuit of memories that I feel driven to retrace and connect, where possible, to something like an objective record or the memories of someone else, in hopes of glimpsing what was once real'.[10] Todd Gitlin opens his history of SDS with, 'I was not living in history, but in biography'.[11] Coming of age in the era involved an apocalyptic sense of doom, of waiting for 'the summer rain' made iconic in The Doors' mournful 'The End'. The omnipresent threat of nuclear disaster was drilled into schoolchildren alerted to take cover under their desks. As a child James Carroll likened himself to 'mad mascot' Alfred E. Neuman whose ironic slogan was 'What, me worry?' and Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice who was eight when Sixteenth

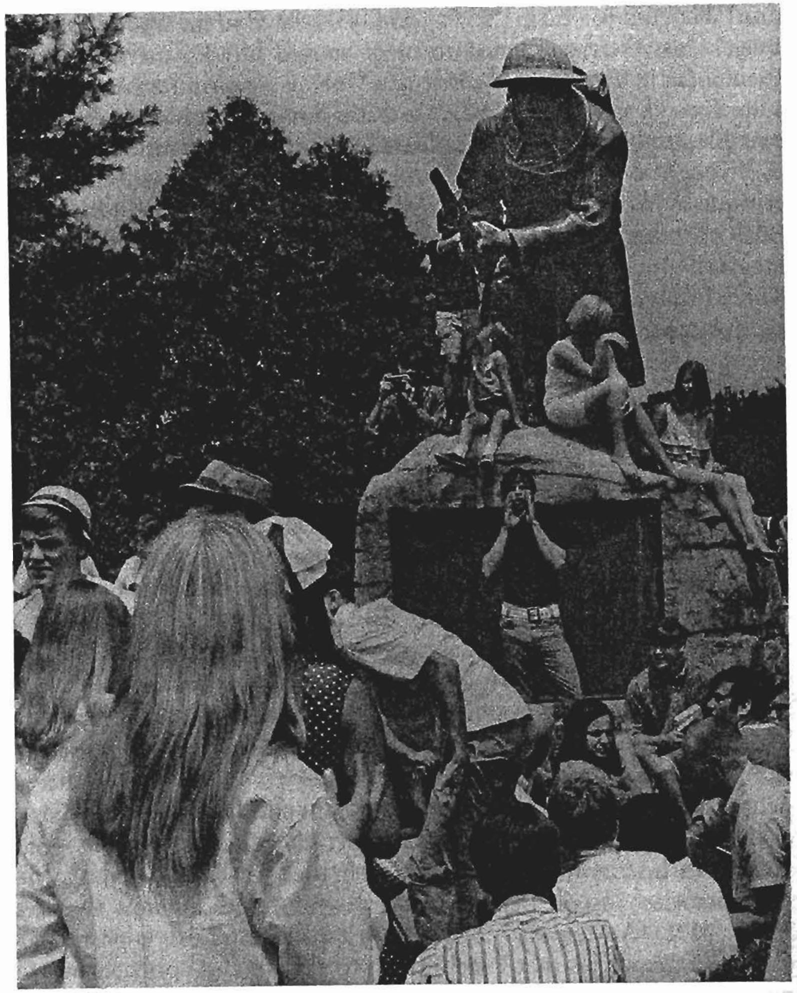


Figure C.1 The Doughboy Statue, Overton Park, Memphis, 10 July 1967, *Memphis Commercial Appeal*. Photographer unspecified. Mississippi Valley Collection.

Street Church was bombed allows: 'I remember more than anything, the coffins . . . The small coffins. And the sense that Birmingham wasn't a very safe place'.[12] The omnipresence of death and violence characterises sixties memoir. Jack Hoffman, brother of Abbie, drafted into the army in 1961, remembers that travelling to South East Asia as an army medic 'sounded attractive' until 'the hard heaviness of those body bags, unyielding of meaning, was my introduction to the Vietnam War'.[13]

In James Conaway's memoir *Memphis Afternoons* (1993), he recalls ordering peyote by mail, boiling the cacti into a nauseating green liquid and lying in Memphis's Overton Park waiting for something to happen but 'when the landscape turned sinister, where I most wanted to be was home'. At home is his father who, having opened his son's mail, wants to know the meaning of 'this peyote business'; while the father wants to ensure the son will not persist with drugs, the son is concerned his privacy has been violated. Their exchange is limited: 'We never discussed the peyote or the opened letter, just as we never discussed anything important that held the promise of conflict, as most things did by now, from integration to the draft'. Importantly, what remains unexpressed is the cultural shift from 'the last, lingering moment of the Adult in America, the monarch whose omnipotence comes by virtue of age and masculinity and not much else, a false entitlement shared by Dad's entire generation that would be swept away in an angry social tide I can't claim to have foreseen or taken a significant role in'.[14] What is especially revealing about Conaway's memoir is his refusal to place his youthful self at the centre of the era, as in so many memory texts by Boomers. Instead, he allows that he and his friends were insecure and apprehensive of 'the opportunities and dangers inherent in the next social order'. Dividing the generations risks losing the complexities Conaway admits into his memoir: '[T]he perspectives that made us contemptuous of the contradictions in our fathers' world would also make us suspicious of the revolutionary certitudes and pieties of the new age. We were in a sense the nowhere generation'.[15]

Conaway's southern geography contributes to his sense of not being at the centre of things yet the South of the 1960s is scrutinised time and again in ensuing decades for its symbolism as the nation's hope for racial peace. Many southern writers – farmer and environmentalist Wendell Berry (*The Hidden Wound*), novelist Ellen Douglas (*Truth: Four Stories I Am Old Enough To Tell*) and historian Tim Tyson (*Blood Done Sign My Name*) – have focused on memory as a moral resource. Tony Kushner, who grew up in Lake Charles, Louisiana returned home with the Broadway musical *Caroline, or Change* (2004), in which he conveyed how 'incredibly tiny things become metaphoric for enormous things'. When black maid Caroline (Tonya Pinkins) is instructed to keep any change her white charge Noah leaves in his pockets to teach him the value of money, a small lesson escalates into a culture clash amidst the racial wars of 1963.

Kushner has said: 'I'm interested in moments in history where a lot seems to be changing and people are either struggling to not change with the times or struggling to change'.[16]

Finding regions or cities culpable of the events that occurred in them was a media pastime in the 1960s. Chicago journalist Mike Royko, for example, made San Francisco guilty of failing to quash the hippie movement. When hippies requested a permit to demonstrate in 1968, he was ironic: permission should be granted so Chicago might teach them the lesson that San Francisco had failed to teach because Chicago is 'not as easily capitulated by fads, excited by goofs, or shocked.'[17] Chicago had its own image problems, however, not least because of high-profile violence, like that which followed Dr King's symbolic reiteration of Martin Luther when he nailed his measures for improvement in the city's race relations to the door of Chicago's City Hall, or the clashes with police that accompanied the 1968 Democratic Convention. Prior to the Convention, plywood walls were erected so that delegates staying in hotels on the Loop would not see Chicago's slums on their way to the Convention centre.[18]

The southern city provides a revealing case study of the effort it can take to change with the times. Southern cities and states were made symbolic of the national failure of liberal democracy. Inevitably, Dallas was judged and found wanting after President Kennedy's assassination: 'Dallas had claimed the ignominious reputation as a city of fanatics' and 'its name might never recover from this double infamy'.[19] A *Life* exposé dubbed Dallas 'smug' for dismissing the murder as a communist plot. Reporters pointed to the city's glittering skyscrapers 'shadowing ramshackle Negro homes' and 'signs of shame' such as a billboard urging 'Save our Republic' defaced by salacious graffiti and a sign urging the government to 'Impeach Earl Warren'.[20] After Dr King's murder, Memphis raised around $4 million to sell itself to a disapproving world with Mayor Loeb, whose intransigence in the face of black sanitation workers had brought King to the city, travelling to New York to lure business to Memphis. However, when a commissioned study of the city's social and economic health suggested its problems were 'old and intractable, related to a legacy of political bossism and resistance to change', the report was suppressed 'by tacit agreement among Chamber of Commerce members, politicians and the press'.[21] Much later, in 1991, the National Civil Rights Museum was conceived as a project to conserve the Lorraine Motel and to turn a site renowned only for the murder committed there into an institute for commemoration and social change. Birmingham would follow suit enshrining and changing Kelly Ingram Park.

But for Birmingham . . .

The Rev. Fred L. Shuttlesworth, Birmingham's longest-serving and most assiduous fighter for civil rights, recalled that while Kennedy was a gradualist in terms of legislation, it was Birmingham that turned the tide for the President: 'But for Birmingham, we would not be here today'. The phrase summarised the extent to which Alabama's most industrial city has been the epicentre of efforts to measure the impact of protests to secure racial justice and federal legislation. In 1961 CBS made a television documentary *Who Speaks for Birmingham?* and Lyndon Johnson selected the city as the target for federal enforcement of the Voting Rights Act in 1965; in 1969 Operation New Birmingham succeeded in bringing together civic and industry power elites in an effort to remake the city renowned for police brutality; and in 1990, tragically, the city 'set new records for violent deaths'.[22] Images of Birmingham have been dominated by violence. In 2004 Warhol's 'Mustard Race Riot', inspired by *Life* magazine photographs of the attacks on children in Kelly Ingram Park, achieved a record sum. Today, the city is a renowned medical research centre, its Downtown dominated by University of Alabama at Birmingham; it is a banking hub and headquarters for at least two Fortune 500 companies. In 2002 the legend 'Heart of Dixie' that had been a fixture on the state's car licence plates since the early 1950s was replaced by 'Stars Fell on Alabama', a telling shift from Confederate pride to a romantic reference to an 1833 meteor shower and the popular jazz song. In 2006, Birmingham was renamed 'The Diverse City', its traditional 'Magic City' having been dismissed as too generic. A series of advertisements emphasise cultural attractions including world-class entertainment, conference facilities, fine dining – and civil rights history: 'Remember the courage of the past to appreciate the triumphs of today in Birmingham's Civil Rights District'.[23] In 1963, however, 'culture' had retreated, as one resident bemoaned in *Look* magazine: 'the city has a civic symphony, civic-theater groups, an art museum, a botanical garden and a zoo. But the Broadway road shows are not coming to Birmingham. And our Music Club season almost failed this year because of ticket cancellations. Many people in Birmingham are afraid to go out after dark'.[24]

Birmingham was the largest segregated city in the US in the 1960s and it functioned as a barometer for the racial health or sickness of the nation. In 1963 the city was even declared ‘dead’. Eulogies were typified by lawyer and resident Charles Morgan Jr’s plea for a national effort to help resuscitate the city: ‘the community’s life has been snuffed out by fear and violence. What has happened here is a timely warning of what can happen anywhere if men and women who say they believe in American ideals – the good people – will not stand up for their convictions . . . In Birmingham, fear and cowardice have in effect suspended the First Amendment’.[25] In the mid-1960s, Birmingham was the nation’s racial crucible from which Dr King would write his ‘Letter from Birmingham Jail’. Violence against Freedom Riders in 1961 had already ensured that Birmingham hit the headlines and in January 1963 SCLC launched ‘Project C’ for Confrontation in the city King described as having the ugliest record of brutality in the South, hoping for a notable civil rights victory after the strategic indecision of the Albany campaign.

In 1963 it was the black children of Birmingham who forced President Kennedy to act in the name of civil rights and Birmingham city officials to finally agree to desegregation policies that had already been before the council. Almost a thousand black children were jailed, some as young as five or six, in the city’s fairgrounds because the jails were full. The children were moral witnesses apparently fearless in the face of Eugene ‘Bull’ Connor, ironically Chief Commissioner for Public Safety, who in that role allowed his men to unleash police dogs and fire water cannons on the children demonstrating in Kelly Ingram Park. The Birmingham campaign harnessed the media as no other campaign; photographs and footage of children lashed by water were dramatic and the national media mistakenly recorded a much larger group of protesters than had actually marched.

Controversy over an iconic picture reflects contradictions in the media’s representation of Birmingham’s complex racial history. Fifteen-year-old Walter Gadsen, captured (see Figure C.2) by the camera Bill Hudson hid in his jacket, denied in interview with *Jet* magazine that he had been involved in the demonstration. He was, he said, an observer caught up in history when he crossed the street. He was also a member of a black middle-class family who disagreed with the form the protests took. Officer Dick Middleton, it has since been argued, was actually trying to control the German Shepherd snapping at the boy’s torso. Birmingham journalist Diane McWhorter used the image to argue in 2001 that the ‘Big Truth’ about segregation was never black and white, though neither participant wished to add his thoughts to her study.[26] However, interviewed for a British documentary in 1988 Gadsen had stated, ‘I’m glad I went to the park that day because Hudson was lucky enough to catch me with his camera’ and the two shook hands for the television cameras.[27] Whatever the story behind this photograph may be, despite reluctance on President Kennedy’s part to intervene, and despite criticism of putting children on the movement’s front lines, such images are memorable. As historians David Garrow and Peter Ling point out, the press was ready to leave Birmingham when it was decided that the ‘Children’s Crusade’ should go ahead and, although King vacillated over the safety of allowing children to become involved, they were willing to act. Lifted into the air by the force of water cannons, bitten, bruised and jailed, the sight of American police assaulting schoolchildren was the image of brutal resistance the movement needed. The images were a turning point; they recalled Sharpeville, the 1960 anti-apartheid demonstration in South Africa when police killed sixty-nine, and they lent something of the same moral strength to the Birmingham campaign.

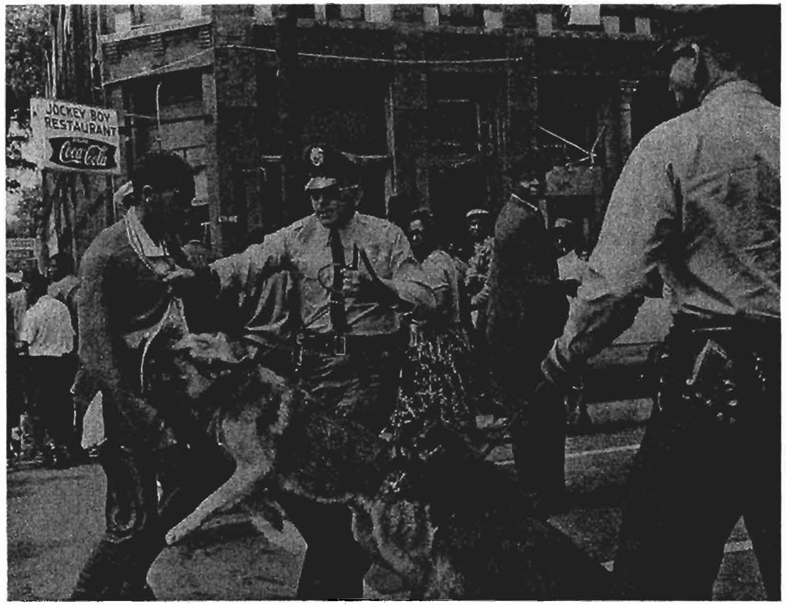


Figure C.2 Birmingham Protest, Walter Gadsen and police dog. Photograph by Bill Hudson, 3 May 1963. AP Photos. Courtesy PA Photos.

Remembering Birmingham in 1963 or Memphis in 1968 is to return to segregationist intransigence and in Birmingham’s case to the Klan violence that made the city a citadel of race hatred known as 'Bombingham'. Despite the success of the May demonstrations, Sixteenth Street Baptist church was bombed on Sunday, 15 September 1963. It was the fourth bombing in a month and one of more than twenty over the previous eight years, including one that destroyed Rev. Fred Shuttlesworth's home. It had been preceded by the first urban breakdown of social order in the 1960s, on 10 May 1963. When A. G. Gaston's motel and Dr King's brother's home were bombed following a Klan rally, the city exploded too. The murder of Denise McNair, Cynthia Wesley, Carole Robertson, and Addie Mae Collins was the final offence in a series of Klan retaliations to the success of the Birmingham campaign. The city's efforts to do the right thing by prosecuting the bombers were blocked when FBI's J. Edgar Hoover, no supporter of civil rights, officially closed the investigation in 1968, despite having the names of four men strongly believed to have been involved. The dogged determination of Bill Baxley who pursued the case on coming to office as Alabama Attorney General in 1971 was crucial in ensuring it was re-opened. Slowly over subsequent decades the city would rebuild its image by facing its past and prosecuting the bombers. Bill Hudson's picture of Walter Gadsen epitomises the city's overarching project to address violence as an image which has haunted Birmingham as well as a factor of its civil rights history. It is reproduced as one of the bronze statues that forms part of James Drake's installation of a 'Freedom Walk' through Kelly Ingram Park. The inscription reads: '"This sculpture is dedicated to the foot soldiers of the Birmingham Civil Rights Movement. With gallantry, courage and great bravery, they faced the violence of attack dogs, high powered water hoses and bombings. They were the fodder in the advance against injustice, warriors of a just cause. They represent humanity unshaken in their firm belief in their nation's commitment to liberty and justice for all. We salute these men and women who were the soldiers of the great cause" Richard Arrington Jr, Mayor of Birmingham, May 1993'.

In 2001 Diane McWhorter returned to memories of her childhood in a panoramic account of Birmingham's white elite which follows many 'returns' in various cultural forms, such as sportswriter Paul Hemphill who in *Leaving Birmingham* (1993) recalls his blue-collar childhood and tries to understand the climate in which racial violence could receive public approbation. Birmingham is the setting for Vicki Covington's novel *The Last Hotel for Women* (1996), its backdrop the violence against Freedom Riders in 1961, and for Sena Jeter Naslund's

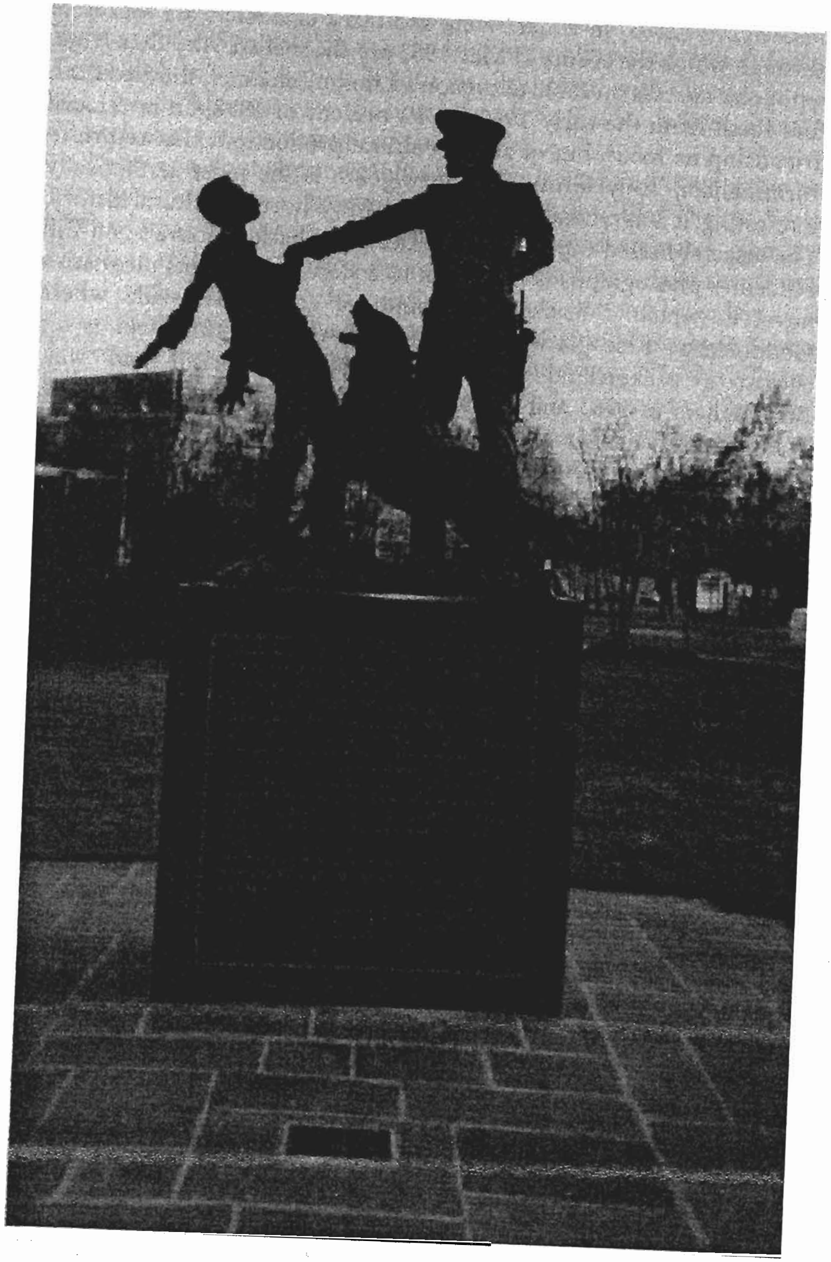


Figure C.3 James Drake's memorial sculpture. © Sharon Monteith.

Four Spirits (2003) in which white and black characters are focalisers through which the events of May 1963 are channelled. *Any Day Now*, a popular success on cable television's Lifetime channel, shuttled back and forth from the early 1960s to its present of 1998, an interracial friendship its focus, but of all the cultural productions that return to Birmingham, Tony Grooms' *Bombingham* is the most aesthetically interesting; it is as critically diagnostic as McWhorter's cultural history. The visceral hatred captured graphically in Charles Moore's and Bill Hudson's photographs is held back to a slow burn in this meditative novel in which a black child comes of age in Titusville where Condoleezza Rice grew up, and in Vietnam. *Bombingham* is set against a background of domestic racial terrorism and war: Birmingham in 1963 and Vietnam in the 1970s are both war zones. Walter Burke's name may be a composite of Walter Gadsen and Burke Marshall, Assistant Attorney General for civil rights and the White House's representative who was almost permanently stationed in Birmingham during 1963.

Interracial tension is palpable in Grooms' novel; rather than enumerating what King in 'Letter from Birmingham Jail' called the 'stinging darts of segregation', its focus is spiralling violence. When Walter's friend Haywood dies beside him in Vietnam, the trauma triggers his memory of losing his best friend in a racist killing on 15 September 1963. In this way, Grooms commemorates the boy generally referred to as one of 'two other black children' shot on the same day as the church bombing. Grooms' Lamar Burrell is a fictional version of Virgil Lamar Ware, described in the African American-owned *Birmingham World* as a seventh-grader and 'a very quiet and Christian little boy', shot by two sixteen-year-old white boys discovered to be 'Eagle Scouts' as he rode on a bicycle.[28] Richard Rorty has argued that novelists are primarily 'redescriptors' of the past, but while Grooms represents social breakdown by funnelling it through the story of a family breaking apart, he refuses to dilute the terror by emphasising the individual at the expense of broader historical forces: family gatherings always return to stories of lynchings and bombings. Grooms ensures that imagined characters and historical figures originate out of the same unruly and violent conditions. The subject is decentred to precise effect. Walter is made permeable, seeing his sister, Lamar and Haywood as extensions of himself, and Birmingham 1963 remains a current event in this 2001 novel. Walter Benjamin argued that history can only break down images, not stories, but *Bombingham* is a representational struggle in which Grooms integrates images of Vietnam with civil rights iconography with a striking a sense of contemporaneity that the US and UK's war in Iraq has only served to reinforce. *Bombingham*'s publication in 2001 also coincided with the conviction of a former Klansman for the bombing of the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church thirty-eight years previously.[29]

There is a contemporary obsession with claiming connection to memories 'we' do not have. It is an obsession that Walter Benn Michaels has argued is peculiarly American and animates memory studies in their focus on 'prosthetic' memories.[30] The claim that 'I was there' in the vanguard, participating in events that are legendary, is a natural phenomenon. The National Voting Rights Museum in Selma, Alabama, for example, includes a wall with the slogan 'We Were There' followed by messages and memories written by marchers. However, the same tendency adds a disturbing footnote to this case study of Birmingham. A federal district judge James Ware repeatedly claimed that Virgil Ware was his brother and that he was riding the bicycle across Birmingham when Virgil, perched on the handlebars, was shot dead. In fact, Virgil Ware's brother James still lived in Birmingham when the fabrication came to light and is quoted as saying: 'I am hopeful my brother's memory and place in history has not been harmed by the discovery of these unfortunate events'.[31] False memories or memories of events in which a participant embellishes their role can appear in many forms and have begun to be explored in popular cultural productions as well as by psychologists. In an episode of television series *The Education of Max Bickford* entitled 'Revisionism' (2001), an African American professor represents herself in speaking engagements as a former Freedom Rider threatened in Birmingham who protested alongside Dr King. Her 'memories' are proved false and the kudos she has earned is dissipated by her calculated betrayal of the past. Bickford (Richard Dreyfuss) asks whether it matters very much if she inspires students to think about the past since the events she described did happen. His African American university principal (Regina Taylor) quickly educates him: 'People died. You can't take ownership of that. It disrespects their memory'.[32]

From the Boomers to the Y Generation: 'Won't Get Fooled Again'

When Bill Clinton entered the White House, Toni Morrison praised him as America's first 'black' President, 'blacker than any actual black person who could ever be elected in our children's lifetime', and when

from Theories of Memory: A Reader eds. Michael
Rossington and Anne Whitehead (Edinburgh:
Edinburgh University Press, 2007)

4.1

MAURICE HALBWACHS: *FROM* THE COLLECTIVE MEMORY

The Ultimate Opposition Between Collective Memory and History

The collective memory is not the same as formal history, and 'historical memory' is a rather unfortunate expression because it connects two terms opposed in more than one aspect. [. . .] Undoubtedly, history is a collection of the most notable facts in the memory of man. But past events read about in books and taught and learned in schools are selected, combined, and evaluated in accord with necessities and rules not imposed on the groups that had through time guarded them as a living trust. General history starts only when tradition ends and the social memory is fading or breaking up. So long as a remembrance continues to exist, it is useless to set it down in writing or otherwise fix it in memory. Likewise the need to write the history of a period, a society, or even a person is only aroused when the subject is already too distant in the past to allow for the testimony of those who preserve some remembrance of it. The memory of a sequence of events may no longer have the support of a group: the memory of involvement in the events or of enduring their consequences, of participating in them or receiving a firsthand account from participants and witnesses, may become scattered among various individuals, lost amid new groups for whom these facts no longer have interest because the events are definitely external to them. When this occurs, the only means of preserving such remembrances is to write them down in a coherent narrative, for the writings

---

Source: Maurice Halbwachs, *The Collective Memory* [1950], trans. Francis J. Ditter, Jr and Vida Yazdi Ditter, intro. Mary Douglas (New York: Harper Colophon Books, 1980), pp. 78–84.

remain even though the thought and the spoken word die. If a memory exists only when the remembering subject, individual or group, feels that it goes back to its remembrances in a continuous movement, how could history ever be a memory, since there is a break in continuity between the society reading this history and the group in the past who acted in or witnessed the events?

Of course, one purpose of history might just be to bridge the gap between past and present, restoring this ruptured continuity. But how can currents of collective thought whose impetus lies in the past be re-created, when we can grasp only the present? Through detailed study historians can recover and bring to light facts of varying importance believed to be definitely lost, especially if they have the good fortune to discover unpublished memoirs. Nevertheless, when the *Mémoires de Saint-Simon*, for example, were published at the beginning of the nineteenth century, could it be said that French society of 1830 regained contact, a living and direct contact, with the end of the seventeenth century and the time of the Regency? What passed from these memoirs into the basic histories, which have a readership sufficiently widespread to really influence collective opinions? The only effect of such publications is to make us understand how distant we are from those who are doing the writing and being described. The barriers separating us from such a period are not overcome by scattered individuals merely devoting much time and effort to such reading. The study of history in this sense is reserved only for a few specialists. Even were there a group devoted to reading the *Mémoires de Saint-Simon*, it would be much too small to affect public opinion.

History wanting to keep very close to factual details must become erudite, and erudition is the affair of only a very small minority. By contrast, if history is restricted to preserving the image of the past still having a place in the contemporary collective memory, then it retains only what remains of interest to present-day society – that is, very little.

Collective memory differs from history in at least two respects. It is a current of continuous thought whose continuity is not at all artificial, for it retains from the past only what still lives or is capable of living in the consciousness of the groups keeping the memory alive. By definition it does not exceed the boundaries of this group. When a given period ceases to interest the subsequent period, the same group has not forgotten a part of its past, because, in reality, there are two successive groups, one following the other. History divides the sequence of centuries into periods, just as the content of a tragedy is divided into several acts. But in a play the same plot is carried from one act to another and the same characters remain true to form to the end, their feelings and emotions developing in an unbroken movement. History, however, gives the impression that everything – the interplay of interests, general orientations, modes of studying men and events, traditions, and perspectives on the future – is transformed from one period to another. The apparent persistence of the same groups merely reflects the persistence of external distinctions resulting from places, names, and the general character of societies. But the men composing the same group in two successive periods are like two tree stumps that touch at their extremities but do not form one plant because they are not otherwise connected.

Of course, reason sufficient to partition the succession of generations at any given moment is not immediately evident, because the number of births hardly varies from year to year. Society is like a thread that is made from a series of animal or vegetable fibers intertwined at regular intervals; or, rather, it resembles the cloth made from weaving these threads together. The sections of a cotton or silk fabric correspond to the end of a motif or design. Is it the same for the sequence of generations?

Situated external to and above groups, history readily introduces into the stream of facts simple demarcations fixed once and for all. In doing so, history not merely obeys a didactic need for schematization. Each period is apparently considered a whole, independent for the most part of those preceding and following, and having some task – good, bad, or indifferent – to accomplish. Young and old, regardless of age, are encompassed within the same perspective so long as this task has not yet been completed, so long as certain national, political, or religious situations have not yet realized their full implications. As soon as this task is finished and a new one proposed or imposed, ensuing generations start down a new slope, so to speak. Some people were left behind on the opposite side of the mountain, having never made it up. But the young, who hurry as if fearful of missing the boat, sweep along a portion of the older adults. By contrast, those who are located at the beginning of either slope down, even if they are very near the crest, do not see each other any better and they remain as ignorant of one another as they would be were they further down on their respective slope. The farther they are located down their respective slope, the farther they are placed into the past or what is no longer the past; or, alternatively, the more distant they are from one another on the sinuous line of time.

Some parts of this portrait are accurate. Viewed as a whole from afar and, especially, viewed from without by the spectator who never belonged to the groups he observes, the facts may allow such an arrangement into successive and distinct configurations, each period having a beginning, middle, and end. But just as history is interested in differences and contrasts, and highlights the diverse features of a group by concentrating them in an individual, it similarly attributes to an interval of a few years changes that in reality took much longer. Another period of society might conceivably begin on the day after an event had disrupted, partially destroyed, and transformed its structure. But only later, when the new society had already engendered new resources and pushed on to other goals, would this fact be noticed. The historian cannot take these demarcations seriously. He cannot imagine them to have been noted by those who lived during the years so demarcated, in the manner of the character in the farce who exclaims, 'Today the Hundred Years War begins!' A war or revolution may create a great chasm between two generations, as if an intermediate generation had just disappeared. In such a case, who can be sure that, on the day after, the youth of society will not be primarily concerned, as the old will be, with erasing any traces of that rupture, reconciling separated generations and maintaining, in spite of everything, continuity of social evolution? Society must live. Even when institutions are radically transformed, and especially then, the best means of making them take root is to buttress them with everything transferable from tradition. Then, on the day after the crisis, everyone affirms that they must begin again at the point of interruption, that they must pick up the pieces and carry on. Sometimes nothing is considered changed, for the thread of continuity has been retied. Although soon rejected, such an illusion allows transition to the new phase without any feeling that the collective memory has been interrupted.

In reality, the continuous development of the collective memory is marked not, as is history, by clearly etched demarcations but only by irregular and uncertain boundaries. The present (understood as extending over a certain duration that is of interest to contemporary society) is not contrasted to the past in the way two neighboring historical periods are distinguished. Rather, the past no longer exists, whereas, for the historian, the two periods have equivalent reality. The memory of a society extends as far as the memory of the groups composing it. Neither ill will nor indifference causes it to forget so many past events and personages. Instead, the groups keeping these remembrances fade away. Were the duration of human life doubled or tripled, the scope of the collective memory as measured in units of time would be more extensive. Nevertheless, such an enlarged memory might well lack richer content if so much tradition were to hinder its evolution. Similarly, were human life shorter, a collective memory covering a lesser duration might never grow impoverished because change might accelerate a society 'unburdened' in this way. In any case, since social memory erodes at the edges as individual members, especially older ones, become isolated or die, it is constantly transformed along with the group itself. Stating when a collective remembrance has disappeared and whether it has definitely left group consciousness is difficult, especially since its recovery only requires its preservation in some limited portion of the social body.

History, Record of Events; Collective Memory, Depository of Tradition

In effect, there are several collective memories. This is the second characteristic distinguishing the collective memory from history. History is unitary, and it can be said that there is only one history. Let me explain what I mean. Of course, we can distinguish the history of France, Germany, Italy, the history of a certain period, region, or city, and even that of an individual. Sometimes historical work is even reproached for its excessive specialization and fanatic desire for detailed study that neglects the whole and in some manner takes the part for the whole. But let us consider this matter more closely. The historian justifies these detailed studies by believing that detail added to detail will form a whole that can in turn be added to other wholes; in the total record resulting from all these successive summations, no fact will be subordinated to any other fact, since every fact is as interesting as any other and merits as much to be brought forth and recorded. Now the historian can make such judgments because he is not located within the viewpoint of any genuine and living groups of past or present. In contrast to the historian, these groups are far from affording equal significance to events, places, and periods that have not affected them equally. But the historian certainly means to be objective and impartial. Even when writing the history of his own country, he tries to synthesize a set of facts comparable with some other set, such as the history of another country, so as to avoid any break in continuity. Thus, in the total record of European history, the comparison of the various national viewpoints on the facts is never found; what is found, rather, is the sequence and totality of the facts such as they are, not for a certain country or a certain group but independent of any group judgment. The very divisions that separate countries are historical facts of the same value as any others in such a record. All, then, is on the same level. The historical world is like an ocean fed by the many partial histories. Not surprisingly, many historians in every period since the beginning of historical writing have considered writing universal histories. Such is the natural orientation of the historical mind. Such is the fatal course along which every historian would be swept were he not restricted to the framework of more limited works by either modesty or short-windedness.

Of course, the muse of history is Clio. History can be represented as the universal memory of the human species. But there is no universal memory. Every collective memory requires the support of a group delimited in space and time. The totality of past events can be put together in a single record only by separating them from the memory of the groups who preserved them and by severing the bonds that held them close to the psychological life of the social milieus where they occurred, while retaining only the group's chronological and spatial outline of them. This procedure no longer entails restoring them to lifelike reality, but requires relocating them within the frameworks with which history organizes events. These frameworks are external to these groups and define them by mutual contrast. That is, history is interested primarily in differences and disregards the resemblances without which there would have been no memory, since the only facts remembered are those having the common trait of belonging to the same consciousness. Despite the variety of times and places, history reduces events to seemingly comparable terms, allowing their interrelation as variations on one or several themes. Only in this way does it manage to give us a summary vision of the past, gathering into a moment and symbolizing in a few abrupt changes or in certain stages undergone by a people or individual, a slow collective evolution. In this way it presents us a unique and total image of the past.

4.2

PIERRE NORA: *FROM* BETWEEN MEMORY AND HISTORY: *LES LIEUX DE MÉMOIRE*

The acceleration of history: let us try to gauge the significance, beyond metaphor, of this phrase. An increasingly rapid slippage of the present into a historical past that is gone for good, a general perception that anything and everything may disappear – these indicate a rupture of equilibrium. The remnants of experience still lived in the warmth of tradition, in the silence of custom, in the repetition of the ancestral, have been displaced under the pressure of a fundamentally historical sensibility. Self-consciousness emerges under the sign of that which has already happened, as the fulfillment of something always already begun. We speak so much of memory because there is so little of it left.

Our interest in *lieux de mémoire* where memory crystallizes and secretes itself has occurred at a particular historical moment, a turning point where consciousness of a break with the past is bound up with the sense that memory has been torn – but torn in such a way as to pose the problem of the embodiment of memory in certain sites where a sense of historical continuity persists. There are *lieux de mémoire*, sites of memory, because there are no longer *milieux de mémoire*, real environments of memory.

Consider, for example, the irrevocable break marked by the disappearance of peasant culture, that quintessential repository of collective memory whose recent vogue as an object of historical study coincided with the apogee of industrial growth. Such a fundamental collapse of memory is but one familiar

example of a movement toward democratization and mass culture on a global scale. Among the new nations, independence has swept into history societies newly awakened from their ethnological slumbers by colonial violation. Similarly, a process of interior decolonization has affected ethnic minorities, families, and groups that until now have possessed reserves of memory but little or no historical capital. We have seen the end of societies that had long assured the transmission and conservation of collectively remembered values, whether through churches or schools, the family or the state; the end too of ideologies that prepared a smooth passage from the past to the future or that had indicated what the future should keep from the past – whether for reaction, progress, or even revolution. Indeed, we have seen the tremendous dilation of our very mode of historical perception, which, with the help of the media, has substituted for a memory entwined in the intimacy of a collective heritage the ephemeral film of current events.

The 'acceleration of history,' then, confronts us with the brutal realization of the difference between real memory – social and unviolated, exemplified in but also retained as the secret of so-called primitive or archaic societies – and history, which is how our hopelessly forgetful modern societies, propelled by change, organize the past. On the one hand, we find an integrated, dictatorial memory – unself-conscious, commanding, all-powerful, spontaneously actualizing, a memory without a past that ceaselessly reinvents tradition, linking the history of its ancestors to the undifferentiated time of heroes, origins, and myth – and on the other hand, our memory, nothing more in fact than sifted and sorted historical traces. The gulf between the two has deepened in modern times with the growing belief in a right, a capacity, and even a duty to change. Today, this distance has been stretched to its convulsive limit.

This conquest and eradication of memory by history has had the effect of a revelation, as if an ancient bond of identity had been broken and something had ended that we had experienced as self-evident – the equation of memory and history. The fact that only one word exists in French to designate both lived history and the intellectual operation that renders it intelligible (distinguished in German by *Geschichte and Historie*) is a weakness of the language that has often been remarked; still, it delivers a profound truth: the process that is carrying us forward and our representation of that process are of the same kind. If we were able to live within memory, we would not have needed to consecrate *lieux de mémoire* in its name. Each gesture, down to the most everyday, would be experienced as the ritual repetition of a timeless practice in a primordial identification of act and meaning. With the appearance of the trace, of mediation, of distance, we are not in the realm of true memory but of history. We can think, for an example, of the Jews of the diaspora, bound in daily devotion to the rituals of tradition, who as 'peoples of memory' found little use for historians until their forced exposure to the modern world.

Memory and history, far from being synonymous, appear now to be in fundamental opposition. Memory is life, borne by living societies founded in its

---

Source: Pierre Nora, 'Between Memory and History: *Les Lieux de Mémoire*', trans. Marc Roudebush, in *Representations*, No. 26, Special Issue: Memory and Counter-Memory (Spring 1989), pp. 7–12.

name. It remains in permanent evolution, open to the dialectic of remembering and forgetting, unconscious of its successive deformations, vulnerable to manipulation and appropriation, susceptible to being long dormant and periodically revived. History, on the other hand, is the reconstruction, always problematic and incomplete, of what is no longer. Memory is a perpetually actual phenomenon, a bond tying us to the eternal present; history is a representation of the past. Memory, insofar as it is affective and magical, only accommodates those facts that suit it; it nourishes recollections that may be out of focus or telescopic, global or detached, particular or symbolic – responsive to each avenue of conveyance or phenomenal screen, to every censorship or projection. History, because it is an intellectual and secular production, calls for analysis and criticism. Memory installs remembrance within the sacred; history, always prosaic, releases it again. Memory is blind to all but the group it binds – which is to say, as Maurice Halbwachs has said, that there are as many memories as there are groups, that memory is by nature multiple and yet specific; collective, plural, and yet individual. History, on the other hand, belongs to everyone and to no one, whence its claim to universal authority. Memory takes root in the concrete, in spaces, gestures, images, and objects; history binds itself strictly to temporal continuities, to progressions and to relations between things. Memory is absolute, while history can only conceive the relative.

At the heart of history is a critical discourse that is antithetical to spontaneous memory. History is perpetually suspicious of memory, and its true mission is to suppress and destroy it. At the horizon of historical societies, at the limits of the completely historicized world, there would occur a permanent secularization. History's goal and ambition is not to exalt but to annihilate what has in reality taken place. A generalized critical history would no doubt preserve some museums, some medallions and monuments – that is to say, the materials necessary for its work – but it would empty them of what, to us, would make them *lieux de mémoire*. In the end, a society living wholly under the sign of history could not, any more than could a traditional society, conceive such sites for anchoring its memory.

Perhaps the most tangible sign of the split between history and memory has been the emergence of a history of history, the awakening, quite recent in France, of a historiographical consciousness. History, especially the history of national development, has constituted the oldest of our collective traditions: our quintessential *milieu de mémoire*. From the chroniclers of the Middle Ages to today's practitioners of 'total' history, the entire tradition has developed as the controlled exercise and automatic deepening of memory, the reconstitution of a past without lacunae or faults. No doubt, none of the great historians, since Froissart, had the sense that he was representing only a particular memory. Commynes did not think he was fashioning a merely dynastic memory, La Popelinière merely a French memory, Bossuet a Christian and monarchical memory, Voltaire the

memory of the progress of humankind, Michelet exclusively the 'people's' memory, and Lavisse solely the memory of the nation. On the contrary, each historian was convinced that his task consisted in establishing a more positive, all-encompassing, and explicative memory. History's procurement, in the last century, of scientific methodology has only intensified the effort to establish critically a 'true' memory. Every great historical revision has sought to enlarge the basis for collective memory.

In a country such as France the history of history cannot be an innocent operation; it amounts to the internal subversion of memory-history by critical history. Every history is by nature critical, and all historians have sought to denounce the hypocritical mythologies of their predecessors. But something fundamentally unsettling happens when history begins to write its own history. A historiographical anxiety arises when history assigns itself the task of tracing alien impulses within itself and discovers that it is the victim of memories which it has sought to master. Where history has not taken on the strong formative and didactic role that it has assumed in France, the history of history is less laden with polemical content. In the United States, for example, a country of plural memories and diverse traditions, historiography is more pragmatic. Different interpretations of the Revolution or of the Civil War do not threaten the American tradition because, in some sense, no such thing exists – or if it does, it is not primarily a historical construction. In France, on the other hand, historiography is iconoclastic and irreverent. It seizes upon the most clearly defined objections of tradition – a key battle, like Bouvines; a canonical manual, like the *Petit Lavisse* – in order to dismantle their mechanisms and analyze the conditions of their development. It operates primarily by introducing doubt, by running a knife between the tree of memory and the bark of history. That we study the historiography of the French Revolution, that we reconstitute its myths and interpretations, implies that we no longer unquestioningly identify with its heritage. To interrogate a tradition, venerable though it may be, is no longer to pass it on intact. Moreover, the history of history does not restrict itself to addressing the most sacred objects of our national tradition. By questioning its own traditional structure, its own conceptual and material resources, its operating procedures and social means of distribution, the entire discipline of history has entered its historiographical age, consummating its dissociation from memory – which in turn has become a possible object of history.

It once seemed as though a tradition of memory, through the concepts of history and the nation, had crystallized in the synthesis of the Third Republic. Adopting a broad chronology, between Augustin Thierry's *Lettres sur l'histoire de France* (1827) and Charles Seignobos's *Histoire sincère de la nation française* (1933), the relationships between history, memory, and the nation were characterized as more than natural currency: they were shown to involve a reciprocal circularity, a symbiosis at every level – scientific and pedagogical, theoretical and practical. This national definition of the present imperiously demanded justification through the illumination of the past. It was, however, a present that had been weakened by revolutionary trauma and the call for a general reevaluation of the monarchical past, and it was weakened further by the defeat of 1870, which rendered only more urgent, in the belated competition with German science and pedagogy – the real victors at Sadowa – the development of a severe documentary erudition for the scholarly transmission of memory. The tone of national responsibility assigned to the historian – half preacher, half soldier – is unequalled, for example, in the first editorial of the *Revue historique* (1876) in which Gabriel Monod foresaw a 'slow scientific, methodical, and collective investigation' conducted in a 'secret and secure manner for the greatness of the fatherland as well as for mankind.' Reading this text, and a hundred others like it, one wonders how the notion that positivist history was not cumulative could ever have gained credibility. On the contrary, in the teleological perspective of the nation the political, the military, the biographical, and the diplomatic all were to be considered pillars of continuity. The defeat of Agincourt, the dagger of Ravaillac, the day of the Dupes, the additional clauses of the treaty of Westphalia – each required scrupulous accounting. The most incisive erudition thus served to add or take away some detail from the monumental edifice that was the nation. The nation's memory was held to be powerfully unified; no more discontinuity existed between our Greco-Roman cradle and the colonies of the Third Republic than between the high erudition that annexed new territories to the nation's heritage and the schoolbooks that professed its dogma. The holy nation thus acquired a holy history; through the nation our memory continued to rest upon a sacred foundation.

To see how this particular synthesis came apart under the pressure of a new secularizing force would be to show how, during the crisis of the 1930s in France, the coupling of state and nation was gradually replaced by the coupling of state and society – and how, at the same time and for the same reasons, history was transformed, spectacularly, from the tradition of memory it had become into the self-knowledge of society. As such, history was able to highlight many kinds of memory, even turn itself into a laboratory of past mentalities; but in disclaiming its national identity, it also abandoned its claim to bearing coherent meaning and consequently lost its pedagogical authority to transmit values. The definition of the nation was no longer the issue, and peace, prosperity, and the reduction of its power have since accomplished the rest. With the advent of society in place of the nation, legitimation by the past and therefore by history yields to legitimation by the future. One can only acknowledge and venerate the past and serve the nation; the future, however, can be prepared for: thus the three terms regain their autonomy. No longer a cause, the nation has become a given; history is now a social science, memory a purely private phenomenon. The memory-nation was thus the last incarnation of the unification of memory and history.

The study of *lieux de mémoires*, then, lies at the intersection of two developments that in France today give it meaning: one a purely historiographical movement, the reflexive turning of history upon itself, the other a movement that is, properly speaking, historical: the end of a tradition of memory. The moment of *lieux de mémoire* occurs at the same time that an immense and intimate fund of memory disappears, surviving only as a reconstituted object beneath the gaze of critical history. This period sees, on the one hand, the decisive deepening of historical study and, on the other hand, a heritage consolidated. The critical principle follows an internal dynamic: our intellectual, political, historical frameworks are exhausted but remain powerful enough not to leave us indifferent; whatever vitality they retain impresses us only in their most spectacular symbols. Combined, these two movements send us at once to history's most elementary tools and to the most symbolic objects of our memory: to the archives as well as to the tricolor; to the libraries, dictionaries, and museums as well as to commemorations, celebrations, the Pantheon, and the Arc de Triomphe; to the *Dictionnaire Larousse* as well as to the Wall of the Fédérés where the last defenders of the Paris commune were massacred in 1870.

These *lieux de mémoire* are fundamentally remains, the ultimate embodiments of a memorial consciousness that has barely survived in a historical age that calls out for memory because it has abandoned it. They make their appearance by virtue of the deritualization of our world – producing, manifesting, establishing, constructing, decreeing, and maintaining by artifice and by will a society deeply absorbed in its own transformation and renewal, one that inherently values the new over the ancient, the young over the old, the future over the past. Museums, archives, cemeteries, festivals, anniversaries, treaties, depositions, monuments, sanctuaries, fraternal orders – these are the boundary stones of another age, illusions of eternity. It is the nostalgic dimension of these devotional institutions that makes them seem beleaguered and cold – they mark the rituals of a society without ritual; integral particularities in a society that levels particularity; signs of distinction and of group membership in a society that tends to recognize individuals only as identical and equal.

Lieux de mémoire originate with the sense that there is no spontaneous memory, that we must deliberately create archives, maintain anniversaries, organize celebrations, pronounce eulogies, and notarize bills because such activities no longer occur naturally. The defense, by certain minorities, of a privileged memory that has retreated to jealously protected enclaves in this sense intensely illuminates the truth of *lieux de mémoire* – that without commemorative vigilance, history would soon sweep them away. We buttress our identities upon such bastions, but if what they defended were not threatened, there would be no need to build them. Conversely, if the memories that they enclosed were to be set free they would be useless; if history did not besiege memory, deforming and transforming it, penetrating and petrifying it, there would be no *lieux de mémoire*. Indeed, it is this very push and pull that produces *lieux de mémoire* – moments of history torn away from the movement of history, then returned; no longer quite life, not yet death, like shells on the shore when the sea of living memory has receded.

from The Unfinished Agenda of the
Selma - Montgomery Voting Rights March
ed. + commentary Tavis Smiley eds. Black
Issues in Higher Education
(New Jersey: John Wiley, 2005).

2

THE CRUCIBLE

How Bloody Sunday at the Edmund Pettus Bridge Changed Everything

CLAYBORNE CARSON

The legacy of the modern African American freedom struggle is not only ideas about political strategies and racial destiny but also about ways of organizing communities. The most successful black organizers of the 1960s established a model of community mobilization that emphasized the nurturing of grassroots leaders and organizations. The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC, pronounced "snick") was founded by the southern black college students who had initiated the lunch counter sit-in movement of 1960. SNCC became a community for a small but growing number of idealistic activists, whites as well as blacks, nonstudents and students, northerners and southerners. SNCC activists gradually moved beyond the narrow bounds of permissible dissent of the cold war era. Willing to provoke perilous confrontations with southern segregationists, they had little sympathy for liberal leaders who refused to take political risks on behalf of civil rights reform. Most SNCC activists were less committed than King to Christian-Gandhian precepts, but nonviolent direct action remained SNCC's most effective stimulus for mass struggles. SNCC's innovative use of nonviolent tactics contributed to its élan and effectiveness, which in turn inspired black southerners who had little power and few material resources.

Creative use of direct action tactics initially shaped SNCC's reputation, but its community organizing techniques are an even more distinctive part of its legacy. As SNCC field secretaries moved beyond episodic protests to launch long-term projects, they established a model of community mobilization that emphasized the nurturing of grassroots leaders and organizations. The most successful SNCC projects unleashed the power of communities whose residents became confident of their collective ability to overcome oppression. SNCC's democratic idealism reflected the influence of Ella Baker, who experienced elitism and sexism as a staff member of the NAACP and as executive director of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC). Rejecting King's charismatic leadership style, Baker advised SNCC organizers to promote "group-centered leaders" rather than "leader-centered groups." Known for their generalized distrust of institutional leaders, the best SNCC organizers exercised an unconventional kind of guidance. Insisting that their job was to work themselves out of a job, they self-consciously avoided replacing old hierarchies with new ones. SNCC's decentralized structure made it responsive to local needs and encouraged leaders to emerge from groups that were traditionally excluded—because of gender, poverty, background, educational deficiencies, and age—from participating in political decision making. During its years of dynamic growth, SNCC became a catalyst for sustained local movements and a seedbed of ideas about overcoming oppression.

Students affiliated with SNCC were initially divided over whether to become involved in voter registration work. They recognized that this was an important activity, since the paucity of black voters, especially in the Deep South, prevented blacks from acquiring the political power necessary to achieve civil rights goals. Nonetheless, many student activists were reluctant to abandon the direct action tactics that had placed them at the forefront of the black struggle. They felt that such tactics, though well suited for assaults on segregated facilities, were probably not sufficient to register millions of black adults. Despite these concerns, a growing number of black activists saw voter registration as a natural outgrowth of their movement. They began to see it as an opportunity to transform small-scale, nonviolent protest activities into a massive political struggle for racial advancement.

Violence Escalates the Selma Voting Rights Campaign

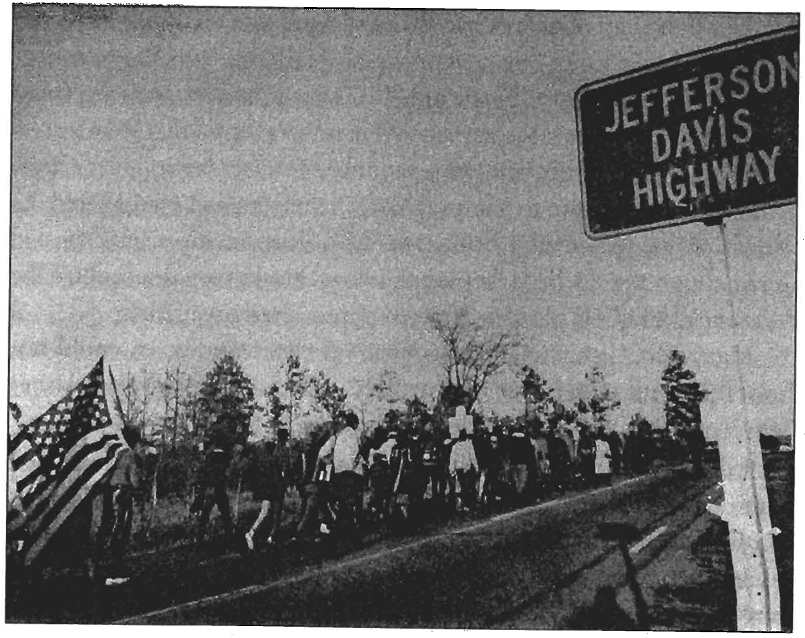
At the beginning of 1965 few SNCC workers would have surmised that Alabama would become the focus of their activities. Compared to projects in Mississippi and Georgia, SNCC activities in Alabama garnered little publicity. In the fall of 1964 there were only three full-time workers in SNCC's headquarters in Selma. Former Nashville student protest leader and freedom rider Bernard Lafayette and his wife, Colia, a Tougaloo student activist, had launched the project in February 1963. After the Lafayettes returned to college, the Selma project continued under the direction of Worth Long, John Love, and finally, in the spring of 1965, Silas Norman, a graduate of Paine College in Augusta, Georgia.

Martin Luther King's announcement of a major voting rights campaign in Selma early in 1965 was met with ambivalence among SNCC's Alabama staff. They knew that King's effort would aid their own voter registration work by attracting national publicity and perhaps prompting federal intervention against white Alabama authorities. With the exception of Mississippi, Alabama had the lowest proportion of blacks on the registration rolls. Only 2 percent of eligible black residents had been registered in Dallas County, the site of SNCC's headquarters, and even fewer in the surrounding rural areas. Yet staff members feared that King's presence would undermine their long-standing efforts to develop black leadership. They agreed not to hamper SCLC's campaign and even offered the use of their equipment and facilities to SCLC representatives, but expected to remain on the sidelines, hoping that local blacks would recognize the deficiencies of SCLC's leader-centered approach to organizing.

Many SNCC staff members outside the state, however, could not resist the temptation to become involved, especially after violent clashes between police and local residents. The jailing of King during a February 1 demonstration at the Selma courthouse sparked marches that led to the arrest of more than one thousand protesters, including hundreds of black schoolchildren. The escalating protests prompted President Johnson to announce to the nation that he intended to see that the right to vote was "secured for all of our citizens."

The first fatality of the campaign occurred in Marion, a town near

Selma. Jimmy Lee Jackson, a twenty-six-year-old black protester, was killed by a state policeman as he attempted to aid his mother, who had been clubbed by police. Jackson's death stimulated renewed mass protests, and in early March SCLC leaders announced plans for a march from Selma to the Alabama capitol in Montgomery to dramatize the plight of Alabama blacks. Still faced with the difficult choice regarding official involvement in the civil rights campaign, SNCC representatives met with SCLC leaders on March 5, two days before the planned march, to discuss their differences. Despite their opposition to the march, the Alabama SNCC staff agreed that, in view of their personal commitment to local residents, they should continue to provide promised assistance. Meeting in Atlanta later that day and the next, some members of SNCC's executive committee argued that SNCC should join the march in order to counteract SCLC influence. The meeting ended with the decision that SNCC remain officially uncommitted. Recognizing, however, that a few SNCC workers, including its chairman John Lewis, were already involved, the executive committee voted to allow SNCC workers to participate as individuals. The committee also agreed to draft a letter to King describing SNCC's position and requesting a meeting with SCLC leaders.[1]



Marchers along U.S. Highway 80, named in honor of the president of the Confederacy, as they make their way toward Montgomery, the state capital, 1965, Alabama.

The Effect of Bloody Sunday

To the surprise of SNCC workers, King did not join the two thousand marchers who began their trek from Selma to Montgomery on the afternoon of Sunday, March 7, but returned to Atlanta to deliver a sermon instead. His absence left leadership of the march in the hands of Hosea Williams of SCLC and John Lewis and Robert Mants of SNCC. At the Pettus Bridge on the outskirts of Selma, the marchers encountered a combined force of deputies and state troopers commanded by Sheriff Jim Clark and Major John Cloud. Cloud ordered them to disperse within two minutes, and when the marchers refused they were attacked by police using billy clubs. "We passed the word back for everybody to bow down in a prayerful manner," Lewis recalled. "Then the troopers came back at us again, this time with tear gas as well." Lewis's skull was fractured in one of the attacks, but he managed to regroup the marchers and lead them back to a church. Before leaving for a hospital, he angrily remarked, "I don't see how President Johnson can send troops to Vietnam [and] the Congo . . . and can't send troops to Selma, Alabama. Next time we march, we may have to keep going when we get to Montgomery. We may have to go on to Washington."[2]

The brutal assault on marchers at the Pettus Bridge dispelled the previous reservations of many SNCC workers. Four carloads of Mississippi staff members suddenly left a Council of Federated Organizations meeting in Jackson in cars assigned to the Mississippi projects to drive to Selma. Another group attending the executive committee meeting in Atlanta decided to charter a plane rather than make the five-hour drive to Selma. This response revealed the deeply ingrained desire for militant action even among hardliners who believed that protests were counterproductive.

"We were angry," recalled Cleveland Sellers, SNCC's program secretary. "And we wanted to show Governor [George] Wallace, the Alabama State Highway Patrol, Sheriff Clark, Selma's whites, the federal government, and poor southern blacks in other Selmas that we didn't intend to take anymore shit. We would ram the march down the throat of anyone who tried to stop us."[3] Concern for those who had been attacked and an understanding of the value of protest activity as a training ground for those who would sustain the struggle prompted the SNCC workers' reaction, but it also indicated an absence of staff discipline and the tendency of SNCC's decision-making process to break down in a crisis.

Once in Selma, SNCC workers openly criticized SCLC tactics. Forman and other SNCC militants condemned Federal Judge Frank Johnson's request for postponement of the march as a condition of hearing SCLC's demand for an injunction against state officials. King initially agreed to march despite federal warnings but decided against a confrontation with police after discussions with Attorney General Nicholas Katzenbach and other government officials. King did not inform SNCC workers of his intentions, however, when on March 10 he joined a group of more than one thousand protesters confronting a police barricade outside Selma. The SCLC leader led the group in prayer and then told marchers to turn around and go back. King's action angered many SNCC workers and local residents. The open road to Montgomery, an obvious police challenge, heightened the marchers' anger. "With an irony that must have graven itself into the minds of the SNCC students," wrote King biographer David Lewis, "the three thousand demonstrators headed back to the church, many of them singing 'Ain't Gonna Let Nobody Turn Me 'Round.'"[4]

Shortly after the abortive march, local whites attacked three white ministers who had joined the demonstrations. One of the ministers, the Reverend James Reeb, died a few days later. In sharp contrast to the earlier death of Jimmy Lee Jackson, the killing of Reeb brought an immediate national response. Civil rights supporters from across the nation arrived in Selma for a memorial service. Thousands of demonstrators demanded federal intervention during sympathy protests in many northern cities. On March 15 President Johnson, who had sent a plane to transport Reeb's widow back to her home in Boston, used the Selma crisis as an opportunity for a nationally televised address proposing new voting rights legislation.

Many SNCC workers heard Johnson's speech while leading demonstrations near the Alabama capitol in Montgomery. Conceding SCLC's dominance in Selma, SNCC organizers had mobilized black students at Tuskegee Institute and at colleges in the Montgomery area in order to keep pressure on state officials.

Although Executive Secretary Jim Forman would later be criticized for unilaterally spending about five thousand dollars of SNCC's scarce funds to support the Alabama demonstrations, he could not resist the opportunity to "radicalize the students," and the Montgomery demonstrations of mid-March succeeded beyond expectations. Along with organizers Bill Hall, Bill Ware, and Willie Ricks, Forman encouraged the students to continue their demonstrations near the capitol and tried to counteract the influence of moderate black ministers and SCLC officials. "I saw the demonstrations as a vital learning experience and as a basis for commitment," he later wrote. "The only way to get the students involved, it seemed to me, was to get them in motion, try to make them militant, explain—for example—what the ministers were doing." On Monday, March 15, violent clashes took place between demonstrators and police, and the following night about six hundred marchers, including Forman, clashed with mounted police with billy clubs and electric prods. Moderate black leaders and administration officials tried to restrain the student protesters, but SNCC workers retained the support of a hard core of several hundred students. At a rally called on March 16 by SCLC officials hoping to assert their control over the demonstrations, Forman revealed the escalating verbal militancy that accompanied the protests when he told an audience that included many newsmen and ministers, "If we can't sit at the table of democracy, then we'll knock the fucking legs off." Although he immediately regretted using such strong language, he later wrote that "the charge by the posse earlier that day . . . was still in my mind. It was difficult not to speak out in anger."[5]

When the march from Selma to Montgomery finally occurred it was anticlimactic in contrast to the tumultuous demonstrations of previous weeks. About 25,000 people marched peacefully to the state capitol, where a mass rally was held on March 25. King delivered a rousing address while the subdued governor George Wallace sat in his nearby office. Southern white resistance remained fierce, however. After the rally, Mrs. Viola Liuzzo, a white housewife from Detroit, was shot to death while driving back to Montgomery after transporting protesters to Selma.

Victory and Disillusionment

In retrospect, the Selma campaign was a victory for King's protest strategy. If his presence interfered with SNCC's long-range efforts to develop self-sufficient local black leadership, it also provided the spark for a crucial confrontation between Alabama blacks and obstinate state officials, which in turn contributed to a favorable climate of public opinion outside the South and to subsequent passage of Johnson's voting rights proposals. Despite this decisive victory, the Alabama campaign contributed to the further disillusionment of SNCC workers. Even activists who still believed in the power of nonviolent direct action had begun to doubt whether the resulting reforms were worth the sacrifices.

"We're only flesh," remarked Lewis. "I could understand people not wanting to be beaten anymore. . . . Black capacity to believe [that a white person] would really open his heart, open his life to nonviolent appeal was running out."[6]

Other SNCC workers who had long since decided that appeals to the national conscience were useless saw the Selma and Montgomery protests as a confirmation of their attitudes. The bitterness verging on spite felt by many staff members was expressed in Stokely Carmichael's complaint that the march to Montgomery, which began as a protest of the death of a black man, Jimmy Lee Jackson, attracted major national attention only after the death of Reverend Reeb.

"Now, I'm not saying we shouldn't pay tribute to Rev. Reeb," Carmichael explained. "What I'm saying is that if we're going to pay tribute to one, we should also pay tribute to the other. And I think we have to analyze why [Johnson] sent flowers to Mrs. Reeb, and not to Mrs. Jackson."[7]

The Unfinished Agenda

SNCC's most important contribution to the modern African American freedom struggle was to develop a style of organizing that encouraged the development of grassroots movements and leaders. Although SNCC organizers were not equally effective, the most successful ones understood the need to engage in sustained community organizing so that local leaders could be identified and allowed to gain confidence in their ability to carry on after the organizer left—thus, SNCC's slogan was "our job is to work ourselves out of a job." SNCC's legacy can be found in the many parts of the South where individuals inspired by SNCC are still providing leadership for social justice struggles.

Effective grassroots organizing still occurs, but unfortunately many students have chosen to work for social change in ways that increase rather than decrease reliance on top-down leadership styles and decision making (usually by professionals, such as lawyers). I would hope that students today can learn from SNCC's organizing efforts in Selma and elsewhere to acquire a better understanding of how oppressed people with limited resources can free themselves and make the world better.

◆

That democratic fervor is found in the beacon calls for imaginative self-creation in Ralph Waldo Emerson, in the dark warnings of imminent self-destruction in Herman Melville, in the impassioned odes to democratic possibility in Walt Whitman. It is found most urgently and poignantly in the prophetic and powerful voices of the long black freedom struggle—from the democratic eloquence of Frederick Douglass to the soaring civic sermons of Martin Luther King Jr., in the wrenching artistic honesty of James Baldwin and Toni Morrison, and in the expressive force and improvisatory genius of the blues/jazz tradition, all forged in the night side of America and defying the demeaning strictures of white supremacy. The greatest intellectual, moral, political, and spiritual resources in America that may renew the soul and preserve the future of American democracy reside in this multiracial, rich democratic heritage.

—Cornel West, author, commentator, and professor
of religion at Princeton University

◆

It has taken forty years and more to put in place a framework of civil rights enforcement, a framework now threatened on several fronts. Organizations dedicated to overturning the gains of the civil rights movement now dictate public policy. Their very names are fraudulent and their aims are rightening. They've stolen our vocabulary and now they want to steal the ust spoils of our righteous war. Sophisticated and well funded, over the ast decade they've already won several victories in the plot to dismantle stice and fair play. So the stakes are high, higher than ever in recent nemory, the consequences of loss almost too dire to bear. African Amercans are our nation's largest racial minority and will remain so in the future. heir centrality to victory can't be overlooked and it can't be left to last ninute afterthoughts or early November drive-by politics. If we want to ount on these voters we have to ensure them that their votes will count.

—JULIAN BOND, CHAIRMAN OF THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF COLORED PEOPLE (NAACP)

THE ARITHMETIC OF POWER

Is the Glass Half Empty or Half Full?

After the victory of the Voting Rights Act of 1965, it was tempting for people to think that there was going to be a direct link between voting rights and racial advancement. The publisher Bill Cox, then a young activist, reflects that optimistic view. Pragmatists like the attorney J. L. Chestnut knew otherwise, but admitted that once the federal registrars arrived in Selma, "in six short weeks the number of black registered voters rose from less than seventy to ten thousand."

The political analyst Ronald Walters suggests the victory was greater than the inevitable disillusionment. He discusses how, over time, the election of blacks to powerful positions helped to integrate the South and paved the way for Jesse Jackson's historic Democratic presidential campaigns. Professor Carol Swain takes the position, however, that race-based voting rights strategies may be backfiring by improving the electability of black candidates, but reducing the influence of black voters overall. Kenny Whitby frames the legal and social dilemma succinctly, proving that race still matters in elections today.

—TAVIS SMILEY

from John Lewis with Michael D'Orso, Walking with the Wind: A Memoir of the Movement (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1998)

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

Bloody Sunday

I'VE BEEN BACK to Selma many times since that fateful Sunday afternoon. Normally I'm with a large crowd, gathered for one anniversary or another of that '65 march. The town is alive with noise and excitement on such days, but the rest of the time it remains today what it was back then: a sleepy, dying little Southern community. Many of the storefronts along its downtown Broad Street are boarded up, with handwritten FOR LEASE signs taped on the windows. The businesses that are left—Rexall Drugs, the El Ranchero cafe, Walter Craig Sportsman's Headquarters ("TONS OF GUNS" is its slogan)—point more to the past than they do to the future.

The Dallas County Courthouse is still there, its steps that same pale green, though the building itself has now been painted the color of cream. Brown's Chapel, of course, still stands as well, with the same arched whitewashed ceiling inside, the same rows of folding, theater-style seats up in its U-shaped balcony.

There's a monument in front of the church, a bust of Dr. King, which, on my most recent visit there, was coated with a thin dusting of snow. The unlikely snowfall had brought out children by the dozen in the dirt yards of the Carver projects, across the street from the church. They were hooting and hollering, trying valiantly to make snowmen out of the sprinkling of powder that lay on the ground. A couple of them were having a snowball fight, hiding from one another behind the streetside markers that commemorate the history that was written here in 1965.

None of those children were alive back then, but most of them know better than any historian the details of what happened on March 7 of that year. They've heard the story so many times, from parents and grandparents, from neighbors and friends—from the people who were there.

How could anyone ever forget a day like that?

It was brisk and breezy, a few puffs of purplish clouds scattered across the clear blue sky. By the time I arrived at Brown's Chapel, about half past noon, there were already close to five hundred marchers gathered on the ballfield and basketball courts beside and beyond the church. Some of the SCLC staffers were holding impromptu training sessions, teaching the people how to kneel and protect their bodies if attacked.

Hosea and Bevel were off to the side, huddled with Andy Young, the three of them talking animatedly, as if something was wrong. And there was something wrong. Dr. King, it turned out, had decided late the day before to postpone the march until Monday. He'd missed too many preaching commitments at his church in Atlanta, he explained. He needed to deliver his sermon that weekend. The march from Selma, he decided, would have to wait a day. That was the message Andy Young had been sent to deliver.

Hosea was clearly upset. So was Bevel. The people were here, and they were ready. There was no way to turn them back home now.

This was the first I'd heard of this news. Later I would learn that there were other factors that had affected Dr. King's decision, the most serious being a death threat, of which there had been several during the previous two months. Dr. King was initially leaning toward still coming, but his staff talked him out of it.

Or so the story goes. There is still disagreement and speculation today among many people about King's decision not to march that day. There is still resentment among a lot of people, especially SNCC members, who saw this as nothing but abandonment, a cop-out.

I don't feel that way. First of all, I can't imagine anyone questioning the courage of Martin Luther King Jr. Beyond that, in terms of the specific circumstances of that Sunday, no one in SNCC was in any position to criticize Dr. King. As far as I was concerned, they had lost the right to pass judgment of any kind on this march the moment they decided not to take part in it.

After seeing that the march could not be stopped, Andy Young went inside the church and called Dr. King in Atlanta. They talked over the situation, and King instructed Andy to choose one among them—Andy, Hosea or Bevel—to join me as co-leader of the march. The other two would remain behind to take care of things in case there was trouble.

Andy returned with that news, and the three of them proceeded to flip coins to see who would join me. The odd man would march; the other two would stay.

The odd man turned out to be Hosea, and so that little slice of history was settled—by the flip of a quarter.

It was mid-afternoon now, and time to assemble. A team of doctors and nurses from a group called the Medical Committee for Human Rights had arrived the day before on a flight from New York and set up a makeshift clinic in the small parsonage beside the church. We expected a confrontation. We knew Sheriff Clark had issued yet another call the evening before for even more deputies. Mass arrests would probably be made. There might be injuries. Most likely, we would be stopped at the edge of the city limits, arrested and maybe roughed up a little bit. We did not expect anything worse than that.

And we did *not* expect to march all the way to Montgomery. No one knew for sure, until the last minute, if the march would even take place. There had been a measure of planning, but nowhere near the preparations and logistics necessary to move that many people in an orderly manner down fifty-four miles of highway, a distance that would take about five days for a group that size to cover.

Many of the men and women gathered on that ballfield had come straight from church. They were still wearing their Sunday outfits. Some of the women had on high heels. I had on a suit and tie, a light tan raincoat, dress shoes and my backpack. I was no more ready to hike half a hundred miles than anyone else. Like everyone around me, I was basically playing it by ear. None of us had thought much further ahead than that afternoon. Anything that happened beyond that—if we were allowed to go on, if this march did indeed go all the way to Montgomery—we figured we would take care of as we went along. The main thing was that we *do* it, that we march.

It was close to 4 P.M. when Andy, Hosea, Bevel and I gathered the marchers around us. A dozen or so reporters were there as well. I read a short statement aloud for the benefit of the press, explaining why we were marching today. Then we all knelt to one knee and bowed our heads as Andy delivered a prayer.

And then we set out, nearly six hundred of us, including a white SCLC staffer named Al Lingo—the same name as the commander of Alabama's state troopers.

We walked two abreast, in a pair of lines that stretched for several blocks. Hosea and I led the way. Albert Turner, an SCLC leader in Perry County, and Bob Mants were right behind us—Bob insisted on marching because I was marching; he told me he wanted to be there to "protect" me in case something happened.

Marie Foster and Amelia Boynton were next in line, and behind them, stretching as far as I could see, walked an army of teenagers, teachers, undertakers, beauticians—many of the same Selma people who had stood for weeks, months, *years,* in front of that courthouse.

At the far end, bringing up the rear, rolled four slow-moving ambulances.

I can't count the number of marches I have participated in in my lifetime, but there was something peculiar about this one. It was more than disciplined. It was somber and subdued, almost like a funeral procession. No one was jostling or pushing to get to the front, as often happened with these things. I don't know if there was a feeling that something was going to happen, or if the people simply sensed that this was a special procession, a "leaderless" march. There were no big names up front, no celebrities. This was just plain folks moving through the streets of Selma.

There was a little bit of a crowd looking on as we set out down the red sand of Sylvan Street, through the black section of town. There was some cheering and singing from those onlookers and from a few of the marchers, but then, as we turned right along Water Street, out of the black neighborhood now, the mood changed. There was no singing, no shouting—just the sound of scuffling feet. There was something holy about it, as if we were walking down a sacred path. It reminded me of Gandhi's march to the sea. Dr. King used to say there is nothing more powerful than the rhythm of marching feet, and that was what this was, the marching feet of a determined people. That was the only sound you could hear.

Down Water Street we went, turning right and walking along the river until we reached the base of the bridge, the Edmund Pettus Bridge.

There was a small posse of armed white men there, gathered in front of the *Selma Times-Journal* building. They had hard hats on their heads and clubs in their hands. Some of them were smirking. Not one said a word. I didn't think too much of them as we walked past. I'd seen men like that so many times.

As we turned onto the bridge, we were careful to stay on the narrow sidewalk. The road had been closed to traffic, but we still stayed on the walkway, which was barely wide enough for two people.

I noticed how steep it was as we climbed toward the steel canopy at the top of the arched bridge. It was too steep to see the other side. I looked down at the river and saw how still it was, still and brown. The surface of the water was stirred just a bit by the late-afternoon breeze. I noticed my trench coat was riffling a little from that same small wind.

When we reached the crest of the bridge, I stopped dead still.

So did Hosea.

There, facing us at the bottom of the other side, stood a sea of blue-helmeted, blue-uniformed Alabama state troopers, line after line of them, dozens of battle-ready lawmen stretched from one side of U.S. Highway 80 to the other.

Behind them were several dozen more armed men—Sheriff Clark's posse—some on horseback, all wearing khaki clothing, many carrying clubs the size of baseball bats.

On one side of the road I could see a crowd of about a hundred whites, laughing and hollering, waving Confederate flags. Beyond them, at a safe distance, stood a small, silent group of black people.

I could see a crowd of newsmen and reporters gathered in the parking lot of a Pontiac dealership. And I could see a line of parked police and state trooper vehicles. I didn't know it at the time, but Clark and Lingo were in one of those cars.

It was a drop of one hundred feet from the top of that bridge to the river below. Hosea glanced down at the muddy water and said, "Can you swim?"

"No," I answered.

"Well," he said, with a tiny half smile, "neither can I.

"But," he added, lifting his head and looking straight ahead, "we might have to."

Then we moved forward. The only sounds were our footsteps on the bridge and the snorting of a horse ahead of us.

I noticed several troopers slipping gas masks over their faces as we approached.

At the bottom of the bridge, while we were still about fifty feet from the troopers, the officer in charge, a Major John Cloud, stepped forward, holding a small bullhorn up to his mouth.

Hosea and I stopped, which brought the others to a standstill.

"This is an unlawful assembly," Cloud pronounced. *"Your march is not conducive to the public safety. You are ordered to disperse and go back to your church or to your homes."*

"May we have a word with the major?" asked Hosea.

"There is no word to be had," answered Cloud.

Hosea asked the same question again, and got the same response.

Then Cloud issued a warning: *"You have two minutes to turn around and go back to your church."*

I wasn't about to turn around. We were there. We were not going to run. We couldn't turn and go back even if we wanted to. There were too many people.

We could have gone forward, marching right into the teeth of those troopers. But that would have been too aggressive, I thought, too provocative. God knew what might have happened if we had done that. These people were ready to be arrested, but I didn't want anyone to get hurt.

We couldn't go forward. We couldn't go back. There was only one option left that I could see.

"We should kneel and pray," I said to Hosea.

He nodded.

We turned and passed the word back to begin bowing down in a prayerful manner.

But that word didn't get far. It didn't have time. One minute after he had issued his warning—I know this because I was careful to check my watch—Major Cloud issued an order to his troopers.

"Troopers," he barked. *"Advance!"*

And then all hell broke loose.

The troopers and possemen swept forward as one, like a human wave, a blur of blue shirts and billy clubs and bullwhips. We had no chance to turn and retreat. There were six hundred people behind us, bridge railings to either side and the river below.

I remember how vivid the sounds were as the troopers rushed toward us—the clunk of the troopers' heavy boots, the whoops of rebel yells from the white onlookers, the clip-clop of horses' hooves hitting the hard asphalt of the highway, the voice of a woman shouting, "Get 'em! *Get* the niggers!"

And then they were upon us. The first of the troopers came over me, a large, husky man. Without a word, he swung his club against the left side of my head. I didn't feel any pain, just the thud of the blow, and my legs giving way. I raised an arm—a reflex motion—as I curled up in the "prayer for protection" position. And then the same trooper hit me again. And everything started to spin.

I heard something that sounded like gunshots. And then a cloud of smoke rose all around us.

Tear gas.

I'd never experienced tear gas before. This, I would learn later, was a particularly toxic form called C-4, made to induce nausea.

I began choking, coughing. I couldn't get air into my lungs. I felt as if I was taking my last breath. If there was ever a time in my life for me to panic, it should have been then. But I didn't. I remember how strangely calm I felt as I thought, This is it. People are going to die here. *I'm* going to die here.

I really felt that I saw death at that moment, that I looked it right in its face. And it felt strangely soothing. I had a feeling that it would be so easy to just lie down there, just lie down and let it take me away.

That was the way those first few seconds looked from where I stood—and lay. Here is how Roy Reed, a reporter for *The New York Times,* described what he saw:

> The troopers rushed forward, their blue uniforms and white helmets blurring into a flying wedge as they moved.
>
> The wedge moved with such force that it seemed almost to pass over the waiting column instead of through it.
>
> The first 10 or 20 Negroes were swept to the ground screaming, arms and legs flying, and packs and bags went skittering across the grassy divider strip and on to the pavement on both sides.
>
> Those still on their feet retreated.
>
> The troopers continued pushing, using both the force of their bodies and the prodding of their nightsticks.
>
> A cheer went up from the white spectators lining the south side of the highway.
>
> The mounted possemen spurred their horses and rode at a run into the retreating mass. The Negroes cried out as they crowded together for protection, and the whites on the sidelines whooped and cheered.
>
> The Negroes paused in their retreat for perhaps a minute, still screaming and huddling together.
>
> Suddenly there was a report like a gunshot and a grey cloud spewed over the troopers and the Negroes.
>
> "Tear gas!" someone yelled.
>
> The cloud began covering the highway. Newsmen, who were confined by four troopers to a corner 100 yards away, began to lose sight of the action.
>
> But before the cloud finally hid it all, there were several seconds of unobstructed view. Fifteen or twenty nightsticks could be seen through the gas, flailing at the heads of the marchers.
>
> The Negroes broke and ran. Scores of them streamed across the parking lot of the Selma Tractor Company. Troopers and possemen, mounted and unmounted, went after them.

I was bleeding badly. My head was now exploding with pain. That brief, sweet sense of just wanting to lie there was gone. I needed to get up. I'd faded out for I don't know how long, but now I was tuned back in.

There was mayhem all around me. I could see a young kid—a teenaged boy—sitting on the ground with a gaping cut in his head, the blood just gushing out. Several women, including Mrs. Boynton, were lying on the pavement and the grass median. People were weeping. Some were vomiting from the tear gas. Men on horses were moving in all directions, purposely riding over the top of fallen people, bringing their animals' hooves down on shoulders, stomachs and legs.

The mob of white onlookers had joined in now, jumping cameramen and reporters. One man filming the action was knocked down and his camera was taken away. The man turned out to be an FBI agent, and the three men who attacked him were later arrested. One of them was Jimmie George Robinson, the man who had attacked Dr. King at the Hotel Albert.

I was up now and moving, back across the bridge, with troopers and possemen and other retreating marchers all around me. At the other end of the bridge, we had to push through the possemen we'd passed outside the *Selma Times-Journal* building.

"Please, *no,"* I could hear one woman scream.

"God, we're being *killed!"* cried another.

With nightsticks and whips—one posseman had a rubber hose wrapped with barbed wire—Sheriff Clark's "deputies" chased us all the way back into the Carver project and up to the front of Brown's Chapel, where we tried getting as many people as we could inside the church to safety. I don't even recall how I made it that far, how I got from the bridge to the church, but I did.

A United Press International reporter gave this account of that segment of the attack:

> The troopers and possemen, under Gov. George C. Wallace's orders to stop the Negroes' "Walk for Freedom" from Selma to Montgomery, chased the screaming, bleeding marchers nearly a mile back to their church, clubbing them as they ran.
>
> Ambulances screamed in relays between Good Samaritan Hospital and Brown's Chapel Church, carrying hysterical men, women and children suffering head wounds and tear gas burns.

Even then, the possemen and troopers, 150 of them, including Clark himself, kept attacking, beating anyone who remained on the street. Some of the marchers fought back now, with men and boys emerging from the Carver homes with bottles and bricks in their hands, heaving them at the troopers, then retreating for more. It was a scene that's been replayed so many times in so many places—in Belfast, in Jerusalem, in Beijing. Angry, desperate people hurling whatever they can at the symbols of authority, their hopeless fury much more powerful than the futile bottles and bricks in their hands.

I was inside the church, which was awash with sounds of groaning and weeping. And singing and crying. Mothers shouting out for their children. Children screaming for their mothers and brothers and sisters. So much confusion and fear and anger all erupting at the same time.

Further up Sylvan Street, the troopers chased other marchers who had fled into the First Baptist Church. A teenaged boy, struggling with the possemen, was thrown through a church window there.

Finally Wilson Baker arrived and persuaded Clark and his men to back off to a block away, where they remained, breathing heavily and awaiting further orders.

A crowd of Selma's black men and women had collected in front of the church by now, with SNCC and SCLC staff members moving through and trying to keep them calm. Some men in the crowd spoke of going home to get guns. Our people tried talking them down, getting them calm. Kids and teenagers continued throwing rocks and bricks.

The parsonage next to the church looked like a MASH unit, with doctors and nurses tending to dozens of weeping, wounded people. There were cuts and bumps and bruises, and a lot of tear gas burns, which were treated by rinsing the eyes with a boric acid solution.

Relays of ambulances sent by black funeral homes carried the more seriously wounded to Good Samaritan Hospital, Selma's largest black health-care facility, run by white Catholics and staffed mostly by black doctors and nurses. One of those ambulance drivers made ten trips back and forth from the church to the hospital and to nearby Burwell Infirmary, a smaller clinic. More than ninety men and women were treated at both facilities, for injuries ranging from head gashes and fractured ribs and wrists and arms and legs to broken jaws and teeth. There was one fractured skull—mine, although I didn't know it yet.

I didn't consider leaving for the hospital, though several people tried to persuade me to go. I wanted to do what I could to help with all this chaos. I was so much in the moment, I didn't have much time to think about what had happened, nor about what was yet to come.

By nightfall, things had calmed down a bit. Hosea and I and the others had decided to call a mass meeting there in the church, and more than six hundred people, many bandaged from the wounds of that day, arrived. Clark's possemen had been ordered away, but the state troopers were still outside, keeping a vigil.

Hosea Williams spoke to the crowd first, trying to say something to calm them. Then I got up to say a few words. My head was throbbing. My hair was matted with blood clotting from an open gash. My trench coat was stained with dirt and blood.

I looked out on the room, crammed wall to wall and floor to ceiling with people. There was not a spot for one more body. I had no speech prepared. I had not had the time or opportunity to give much thought to what I would say. The words just came.

"I don't know how President Johnson can send troops to Vietnam," I said. "I don't see how he can send troops to the Congo. I don't see how he can send troops to *Africa,* and he can't send troops to Selma, Alabama."

There was clapping, and some shouts of "Yes!" and "Amen!"

"Next time we march," I continued, "we may have to keep going when we get to Montgomery. We may have to go on to *Washington.*"

When those words were printed in *The New York Times* the next morning, the Justice Department announced it was sending FBI agents to Selma to investigate whether "unnecessary force was used by law officers and others." For two months we'd been facing "unnecessary force," but that apparently had not been enough. This, finally, was enough.

Now, after speaking, it was time for me to have my own injuries examined. I went next door to the parsonage, where the doctors took one look at my head and immediately sent me over to Good Samaritan. What I remember most about arriving there was the smell in the waiting room. The chairs were jammed with people from the march—victims and their families—and their clothing reeked of tear gas. The bitter, acrid smell filled the room.

The nurses and nuns were very busy. Priests roamed the room, comforting and calming people. When one of the nurses saw my head, I was immediately taken through and X-rayed. My head wound was cleaned and dressed, then I was admitted. By ten that night, exhausted and groggy from painkillers, I finally fell asleep.

It was not until the next day that I learned what else had happened that evening, that just past 9:30 P.M., ABC Television cut into its Sunday night movie—a premiere broadcast of Stanley Kramer's *Judgment at Nuremberg,* a film about Nazi racism—with a special bulletin. News anchor Frank Reynolds came on-screen to tell viewers of a brutal clash that afternoon between state troopers and black protest marchers in Selma, Alabama. They then showed fifteen minutes of film footage of the attack.

The images were stunning—scene after scene of policemen on foot and on horseback beating defenseless American citizens. Many viewers thought this was somehow part of the movie. It seemed too strange, too ugly to be real. It *couldn't* be real.

But it was. At one point in the film clip, Jim Clark's voice could be heard clearly in the background: "Get those goddamned niggers!" he yelled. "And get those goddamned *white* niggers."

The American public had already seen so much of this sort of thing, countless images of beatings and dogs and cursing and hoses. But something about that day in Selma touched a nerve deeper than anything that had come before. Maybe it was the concentrated focus of the scene, the mass movement of those troopers on foot and riders on horseback rolling into and over two long lines of stoic, silent, unarmed people. This wasn't like Birmingham, where chanting and cheering and singing preceded a wild stampede and scattering. This was a face-off in the most vivid terms between a dignified, composed, completely nonviolent multitude of silent protestors and the truly malevolent force of a heavily armed, hateful battalion of troopers. The sight of them rolling over us like human tanks was something that had never been seen before.

People just couldn't believe this was happening, not in America. Women and children being attacked by armed men on horseback—it was impossible to believe.

But it had happened. And the response from across the nation to what would go down in history as Bloody Sunday was immediate. By midnight that evening,

June Brindel

THE ROAD FROM SELMA

The road from Selma stretches in the rain
white as a shroud, rimmed with stiff troopers.

The marchers stand bowed, hands joined, swaying gently
their soft strong song stilled.

Then up from a Birmingham bed
rises a gentle Boston man, Jim Reeb,
steps softly back to Selma
and moves among the stilled marchers.

The troopers stir, link arms,
close ranks across the road
stretching from Selma in the rain
white as a shroud.

The Boston man, Jim Reeb, walks toward the troopers
and they straighten and stand guard tight as death.
But someone moves behind them, waves his hand.
"That you, Jackson?" Jim Reeb peers ahead.

"That's right, Reverend. Come on through."

The troopers tighten guard, straight as death
But Jim Reeb doesn't stop.

He goes on through,
right through the stiff ranked troopers
white as a shroud
rimming the road from Selma.

And Jimmie Lee Jackson takes him by the arm
and they march down the road to the courthouse.

Over in Mississippi Medgar Evers stands,
three young men rise up from a dam in Neshoba County
and they all go down the road
and walk right through the tight stiff trooper line
and down the road from Selma.

And from all over there's a stirring sound.
Emmett Till jumps up and runs laughing like any boy
through the stiff white rim.
Four small girls skip out of a church in Birmingham
and the tall old man in Springfield gets up
and goes to Selma.

And down from every lynching tree
and up from every hidden grave
come men, women, children, heads carried high,
passing a moment among the bowed, stilled troopers
and down the white road from Selma.

Until the age long road is packed
black with marchers streaming to the courthouse.

And the bowed stilled group in Selma
raise their heads, hands joined,
swaying gently, in soft strong song
that goes right through the stiff ranked troopers
white as a shroud
barring the road from Selma.

Copyright © 1965 June Brindel.

http://docsouth.unc.edu/cgi-bin/sohp/search_form.py

from Leïla Sebbar The Seine Was Red, Paris, October 1961
A Novel (trans. Mildred Mortimer)
Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008

First published in French in 1999.

October 1961
Papon's Harki

Outside, daytime

I was in the countryside. I was helping my uncle sell his wares at the market. He gave me vegetables and fruit for my family. I barely knew my father. He too had crossed the sea to earn a living. When I was born, he was in France. He sent money back to his brother for my mother. The first few years, he did, but then nothing more. We didn't know if he was sick or in the hospital, or dead, or if he had married a French woman . . . To this day I know nothing more. My uncle contributed to the FLN on our behalf; that worked out fine. French soldiers occupied the village. The SAS^7 officers would come to talk to us, coming into our courtyards. They would say, "In France you will have work, a salary, not like here . . . You are young; you will have a future there . . ." They would give us examples of Algerians who were like us, young, out of work. Over there, they had made it. "In France, there is no war, your life will be peaceful." My mother hesitated; she spoke with my uncle and with the French officer. She told me to take the chance. I left.

At Fort Noisy-le-Sec, near Romainville, I met up with Algerians from the countryside like myself. They had nothing to lose. We were promised the salary of a French police officer, with bonuses . . . We weren't going to say no . . . I knew how to read and write. They taught us to use weapons, handle an interrogation. The officer at Noisy found that I learned quickly and well. It's true that I liked it. I had a French policeman's uniform and a blue army cap. The officer looked at me the first day: "We don't recognize you, you're not the same guy, you are made for this uniform; you are great . . . You'll have all the women, that's for sure." It's true I wasn't sure I was still me. From that day on, everything changed. I aimed at perfection. They were happy with me. I was promoted. I got to know the Paris *medina* by heart. As for the FLN networks, I helped destroy more than one. I live in a hotel on Rue Château-des-Rentier, in the thirteenth arrondissement in Paris. I have cousins, *harkis* like myself, on Boulevard de la Gare and in hotels in the Goutte d'Or quarter. We meet in the Barbès cafés. We "make the cellars sing" as the Parisians say. As for the *méchoui*, our roasted lamb feasts, we had the best. I was picked with some others for surveillance in the Nanterre shantytowns and for night raids on FLN supporters. We would break everything in their shacks. On October 17, 1961, we blocked the Neuilly bridge, and on the 18th, we surrounded the Nanterre shantytowns; they were caught like rats.

We fired on demonstrators.

We threw demonstrators into the Seine.

The Mother

"My mother knew. Me, I thought we were going on a family walk. In the summer it was so hot in the shacks that my father—he used to buy the lamb for *Aïd*[10] at a farm in Normandy that belonged to a friend of his from the factory . . . Even today, our *Aïd* lamb is Norman—My father would say to us: 'We're going to the farm. Henri is coming to get us. Get ready. You have to be well-dressed and well-behaved.' Twice a year, until my father's friend passed away, we would go to the farm, in the truck; we kids were seated in the back, on the wooden benches. We loved Normandy, the meadows, the trees. There were no trees in the shantytown. There was just one lone tree that a peasant had planted. He was a Kabyle who wanted a tree for himself, in the mud of Nanterre. When the shantytown was being destroyed, he was there, to defend his tree. It wasn't cut down. It remained standing. At 7 Rue de la Fontaine, everyone was crying. We didn't want to be there, among the planks and the tin roofs. My father told us: 'If you wish, you can go to live with a family in the country. I know several and so does Henri. They take in foster children. They can ask for you.' We said no, and I hid in the flowered pleats of my mother's skirt.

That day, I think it was a Tuesday, I saw my mother searching through the suitcases. She put the linens in the suitcases, as if we were going on a trip. The suitcases were always full. We had two rooms with neither an armoire nor a closet; I never saw the old family trunk. My mother spoke about it every time she had to dress us up in our Sunday clothes. The tub was ready for the children's bath. Between the planks that served as an inner courtyard, my mother washed us, me first, because I was the youngest, then my brothers. We dressed up in our best clothes. My father said to me: 'You are always the prettiest, my daughter.' I was proud. He would take me by the hand and we would walk in the city. He told my mother: 'You go with the little one, and I'll take the boys. You're not in any danger. You know that . . .' I didn't understand why we were going separately and why we might be afraid. He added: 'it's peaceful'; several times he repeated 'peaceful.' I didn't know why he used that word, and said it three times. On the blue part of the world map I had read: PACIFIC.[11] I didn't ask any questions. My father was in a serious mood, preoccupied. We were not going to take our usual walk at the end of the day; it was weird. My brothers didn't say anything. They held each other's hands, staying close to my father. His moustache seemed darker and thicker, I thought. He had put on a tie, a lovely shirt, a velvet jacket. I said to him: 'Why don't you always dress like this?' He didn't answer. Maybe he didn't hear me.

We took the bus. My mother held my hand tightly. The neighbors weren't chatting the way they usually did. We were all together. We were silent. Défense, Étoile. The bus driver stopped. That's when I got scared. Police officers made men get off the bus, but not all of them, only those who looked Algerian. I saw men standing with their hands in the air, next to the bus. The police had billy clubs. I looked at my mother. She smiled at me. Her hand was warm. I didn't cry. I had never seen Paris. Here was Paris, and I saw nothing of it. Only men who looked like my father, with their hands on their heads. The French police and the other policemen wearing blue caps were stopping people coming out of the metro. They made them get into busses. Some were hitting those who weren't moving quickly enough. My mother's hand was warm, and a little clammy. She didn't speak. The other women didn't either. They got off the bus, we did too, and they said to the bus driver and the police: 'We're going home with our children.' This wasn't true. I heard my mother say to her neighbor: 'République.' Why République? In school, I learned about 'la république'—the republic—in history class. But here it was a password . . . That's what I thought.

Later, my mother told my father and her French friend, the woman doctor who used to come to the shantytown, she became a friend, you know; it was Flora, your mother. She said that from her seat in the bus, that evening, she saw, at a distance—the police weren't paying any attention to them—a man, a Frenchman, tall and thin, who was holding a young Algerian by the arm, as if he knew him; he walked a ways with him, far enough to make sure he wouldn't be picked up by the cops. My mother said she was sure the Frenchman had wanted to save the young Algerian. Perhaps she was right . . ."

Silence. The statue of Marianne on the Place de la République and the Tati department stores appear.

Once again the face of Amel's mother appears: "I forgot to say it was raining that evening."

October 1961
The Algerian Rescued from the Water

Outside, nighttime

It was October 17, 1961. It was raining.

I thought I was going to die. I was swallowing water from the Seine. I felt heavy, very heavy. I prayed. I had forgotten about praying. With work, you don't have time, you go to the café, drink a little; when rounds are served, it makes you drink. I didn't drink too much, but I did drink, and that's forbidden for us Muslims. I drank and the prayer . . . That night, the rain, the beatings, the cold water. The Seine smelled bad. The prayer came back to me. I prayed; I prayed . . . and I was saved. Otherwise, I would have drowned like the others. Their bodies were found carried away by the Seine. Surely, the Seine was red that day; at night you couldn't tell. When Algerians were pulled from the water, their hands and feet were tied. It took time to do that. I don't understand. They were dragged away, tied up, and after several blows to the head, tossed into the Seine? Or were there three bullets?

The Seine spit them back out. Even the Seine didn't want Algerians. How many? Maybe someday we'll know. And it seems that some were found strung up in the woods near Paris . . . And what about those killed during the peaceful demonstration? I know it was peaceful. No knives, no sticks, no weapons; those were the orders of the French Federation of the FLN.[12] I know. They marched with their families—wives and children, even elderly women—and they shouted and chanted the national anthem. They were clapping. The men did not defend themselves, they did not respond with violence. They obeyed the orders of the FLN.

And me, I found myself alone, I don't know how, with two cops and a "blue cap." They had nightsticks and billy clubs. I fainted from the blows. The cold water revived me. I don't know how to swim. I'm from the mountains. I came here as a child, but even so, I don't like the sea; I don't like water. I prayed so hard I didn't see my compatriots coming towards the Seine for me. They saved me. A Frenchman brought me to the hospital. I told my story. I don't know if the doctor believed me. I would like to have him testify, if some day . . .

I was dressed up that day. I wore a tie and everything.

October 1961

The Owner of the Goutte d'Or Café. Barbès

Interior, daytime

He was a good guy. I always called him: "Ali," I think his name was Ali, like many of my clients, I would always mix them up, all these years in the same bistro, first as a client, and now as the boss . . . I worked hard to get here. Nobody to boss me around . . . not even them, they don't boss me. They don't scare me, neither do the "blue caps." They don't trust me, I know, but they pay well for the evenings and the Algerian dancers. They come here for them. What they do with the girls after the café closes . . . I don't want to know. I do as I please, and the FLN orders don't scare me. Here, I'm the one who decides. They know it. They know who I am; they respect me. I have known the French police for a long time, long before the revolutionaries were born. I was born in this neighborhood. . . . forty-five years ago. They aren't going to teach me anything. My mother, my poor mother raised me the best she could, half of my childhood; she died young, and a girlfriend, also a prostitute, took care of me, out of pity. She taught me the profession, she taught me everything and today I'm in business for myself. I never knew my father, but from the only photo my mother left—it was in a large bag where she put everything she owned, taking it from hotel to hotel—he was an Algerian infantryman. I don't know Algeria. I'll never go there. My life is here. They don't like women over there, and not women like me . . . Women in the profession, I know all of them in this neighborhood. They come to my place, to rest, I give them drinks, they pay for them. There are no parasites, no unpaid bills in my bistro. I'm the one who collects the contributions, and there is never a cent missing, the "Brothers" can be sure of that. I'm the one who threatens the girls who don't want to chip in; even so, once a beating was called for, and it was a "Brother" who roughed up the "Rebel." That's what he called her and she never rebelled again. If I want to close up tonight, I will. If I don't want to, I won't. But I will close, because I won't have anybody. I may go to République, if it doesn't rain . . . Oops, I lost the thread of the conversation . . . I was speaking about the rug merchant, Ali. I was telling him: "Ali, why do you always wear a grey jacket? Do you want folks to think you are a schoolteacher?" He laughed. "I don't know how to read, I don't know how to write . . . I sell rugs, I don't want to get dirty." "Are they dirty? Didn't you say they are new? And your *chechia*?[16] You're the only Arab in the neighborhood with that thing on your head." "I'm fine like that." "People can tell right away that you're an Arab. In times like this, that's dangerous . . . " Clients at the counter would joke with Ali: "Is that a flying carpet or a stolen carpet?" "Buy my carpet, you'll go to paradise with the *houris* . . ."[17] I don't know who bought his rugs, I never knew. He paid his drinks, I never asked him anything, and he never told the story of his life.

I don't run an Arab café. I run a café-cabaret. The curfew from 8:30 PM to 5:30 AM didn't affect me. The police never threatened me, even though I had Arab clients and Arab whores. The police knew it, of course, but I had no trouble. Ali, the poor guy. He would come by, calmly. He wasn't suspicious enough of the cops. Three cops arrested him that day, October 17, 1961. They hit him, he was holding his stomach, they took him away, I never saw him again. If what happened to him was what happened to some others, from what I heard, they dumped him in the Seine.

Bonne Nouvelle. Amel and Omer

They leave the Bonne Nouvelle station, cross the boulevard, enter the corner café.

They order coffee at the counter of the Gymnase café, a double expresso for Omer, an espresso with a bit of cream for Amel. Omar leafs through *Le Parisien,* the stock newspaper of café counters in Paris. He is looking for Algeria. Everything is going well. No news. Today, no terrorists killed by the Ninjas[18] either in the Algerian countryside or in the cities, no villagers massacred. All clear. He stops at the page of Horoscope and Games. He reads out loud: "'Aries: Use your energy for useful activities and leave the rest aside. Someone is worrying about you. Don't be so withdrawn.'" He says: "That's my sign . . ." "And you believe that? You do?" "I don't believe it, but in this case, it's the truth. At least, in part. What's your sign? Sagittarius. Let me read it, it's important. You don't believe me? Good, let me read it: 'You can't be described as someone with a calm and peaceful nature. Right now, you are moving in all directions and don't know which way to turn.' So, is this true or not?" "It's somewhat true," Amel says, not knowing if Omer is joking or not. Leaving the metro at Strasbourg Saint-Denis, Amel took a card given to her by an African. She gives it to Omer; "If you believe in it, you will know everything, look: 'Mr. Kaba, great medium, great clairvoyant . . . authentic African *marabout* . . . Protection against your enemies . . . Don't hesitate to contact Mr. Kaba's office.' If you want his address, it is in the 18th arrondissement, Rue des Poissonniers. We are on Rue du Faubourg-Poissonnière, we're under the sign of the fish today. The fish is a lovely symbol; did you know that? On the radio, you can listen to the special programs devoted to clairvoyance. You'll have no more bad surprises . . ." Omer interrupts Amel: "In Algeria, fortune tellers are called witches; they are being persecuted by Islamic militants; several have had their throats slit. Islamists forbid alcohol, tobacco, gambling, music, newspapers, and fortune telling. For them, and for others as well, God is the sole master of the destiny of men, his creatures. Every individual who pretends to read the future must be punished. No freedom. Everything is predetermined. No choices in one's life. Maybe it's easier."

The café owner is a bosomy blond. She is about sixty-five years old. She handles the cash register, serves at the bar, chats with the clients. Amel asks her: "Were you already here thirty-five years ago? In 1961?" The café owner bursts out laughing: "Well . . . I was far, far away at that time, and I didn't think I'd have a bistro some day. We don't always do what we want to in life, you know . . . Me, I believe in fate. I came to France, to Marseille. I had nothing. In 1962, you must know, the Algerians chased us out. They sent us packing, taking everything, the villa, the business . . . we received compensation in tiny doses. I was young. I had no children.

My husband was a courageous man, thank God. He never took part in the dirty war. He managed to pull through, and we picked up a small business in Marseille, and then one in Paris. We weren't doing great, but it was OK. We bought the Gymnase Bistro ten years ago. My husband died; he was killed in a car accident three years ago. I didn't want to take on a manager. I prefer to be on the job . . . But, why are you asking me this question? 1961. What happened then? We were packing our bags over there. We knew we couldn't stay on. They didn't like us, and we didn't like them either. Of course, in a café, all clients are served and in Marseille, the Porte d'Aix neighborhood, where there were only Arabs, we served them. They never meant us any harm; after all, they weren't at home here either. Me, I've been French forever, but I had never been to France. My family was Maltese and Spanish. For me, France was far away. Now, I get along really well with Arabs. My cook is Arab. Isn't that true, Mourad?" An Algerian walks past the counter; he is a tall, thin, handsome man wearing a white jacket and apron; his hair is curly, salt and pepper. He dries his hands on his apron, goes towards the cash register, smiles at his boss. "Mourad, tell them we get along well, you, an Arab, me, a French woman. I pay you what I would pay a Frenchman. You eat at my table. You're a good worker . . . Maybe you were a waiter in 1961? You would have been very young at the time, of course. How old were you then? Sixteen? Seventeen? You weren't a waiter; you weren't of legal age. Were you in Paris in 1961?" The cook looks at his boss, then at Omer and Amel to whom he asks: "Were you the one asking about 1961?" "Yes, I wanted to know about October 17, 1961 and what happened on the boulevards, Bonne Nouvelle, Poissonnière, and on the sidewalk in front in the Rex cinema . . . You can see the Rex from here, and next to it the Quick fast food restaurant, and across the street, MacDonald's . . ." "Oh my . . . None of them existed in 1961. The Rex, yes, and the Gymnase, too, with the Gymnase Theater next to it. All of that was there, but the rest . . . I was young. I think I was 16 years old at the time. And I saw it all, well, everything . . . from where I was. I haven't forgotten any of it." He doesn't look at the café owner as he tells his story:

"I was with my uncle that day. He wasn't a militant but he wanted to take part in the march in Paris with the Algerians demanding an end to the curfew. He had witnessed the settling of old scores between the MNA and the FLN in his neighborhood. It had made him sick, and so that's when he decided that politics for him . . . instead of coming together, they kill one another . . . Well, it's the same today between the FFS[19] and the RCD.[20] Wouldn't you think they could come together so Algeria might change? The military, the police, they get stronger and stronger, so democracy in our homeland . . . We came in from Argenteuil, with others who worked in construction like us, a group of workers with their families. My uncle was a bachelor at the time. We had barely gotten out of the metro at Bonne Nouvelle when the cops—Papon's French and Arab police—stopped us. I learned later that the head of the Paris police was Papon, the same civil servant who signed the deportation order for the Jews arrested in the Gironde region, the same one sent on a special mission to Constantine during the Algerian war . . . I've read lots of books about the war. I was too young at the time, and I wanted to find out about it. I went to a library in my neighborhood. The director was married to an Algerian; she gave me books to read. Today, I'm a cook working for Madame Yvonne, but I could have worked in a library . . . I'm not going to tell you my life story . . . We left the metro to join the demonstration, and there were cops everywhere. I don't know why it went bad. None of us provoked anything. I'm a witness to that, no one. The men tried to protect the women and children. They took the blows; there was an indescribable melée. I lost track of my uncle. I ran to the Gymnase to protect myself, like others. I ran into the Rue du Faubourg-Poissonière. The police were in front of the Gymnase theater, the café, and the Rex cinema. I heard the cops say: 'They're like rats, they keep coming out . . . They are vermin. We have to destroy these rats. They think they're at home here. Just let them see if they can do what they want . . . And those sluts, those French women, what are they doing here with them? . . . Those sluts, they want to get laid by Arabs. I tell you, they are all sluts . . .' They were hitting the Arabs while insulting them. They were full of hatred. They thought their co-workers had been wounded; that's what the radio wanted them to believe. Lies. When I came back towards the boulevards, I didn't see any wounded cops either in the street or on the sidewalk. I saw my compatriots, several bodies stretched out in front of the Gymnase and the Rex. Algerians had bullet wounds, not just injuries from the beatings. And the folks looking down from the balcony of an apartment building were taking pictures. That was clear. I saw them at number 6, Poissonnière Boulevard. Journalists were there too. They can testify as well. There were hats, scarves, shoes scattered on the concrete. All of that was lost, abandoned in the panic. I wanted to testify, but there was never an occasion, and now, here I am at this bar talking about it to you, for the first time in thirty-five years. Over the years, I forgot. You have to work, and when you work, you forget. It was the Papon Affair that brought it all back. I didn't even speak about it with Madame Yvonne." The café owner listened to the cook until the end, without interrupting him. Clients were left waiting to be served. They stayed at the bar, attentive to Mourad's story. The café owner said: "And we folks, over there, we heard nothing about any of this. That's strange. How could that be?" Mourad murmurs: "Did you take an interest in the Algerians living in Paris, you, *pieds noirs?*"[21] "No, you're right. We didn't give a damn about Algerians in Paris. We already had enough Arabs to deal with. Those guys over there, they scared us, that's for sure." Mourad hands Amel a piece of paper: "Go see my uncle; here is his address. He still lives in Argenteuil. He is married; he has children your age . . . They will know about it too." The café owner says: "My goodness . . . I never heard about this. In any case, it's past history. You can't cry about it now . . . Hey, let me offer you whatever you'd like. What would you like?"

Amel drinks a Coke.

Omer has a pint of Leffe on tap.

October 30, 1961
The French Student

Inside, daytime

I was at the Solferino station that day, October 17, 1961. The French had not been invited to participate in the Paris demonstration by the Algerian organizers of the French Federation of the FLN. Out of solidarity, some would have been there. One of the directives of the resistance network was to observe, witness, but not participate directly. Photographer friends risked their lives, taking photos at Concorde, Solferino, the Neuilly bridge, Nanterre. One of them, a friend of my parents, Elie Kagan, went across Paris on his Vespa scooter to Nanterre where he knew Algerians had been killed. I saw very few photos of that tragic day. On the whole, journalists didn't do their job.

At Jean-Baptiste-Say high school, my friends and I in our senior class organized a strike protesting the Algerian war. We were not suspended. Our fathers were not workers at the Renault plant in Boulogne-Billancourt. They were engineers, production heads, business executives. The principal didn't dare punish us. I had a Kabyle friend. He came with me, one July 14th—Bastille Day—to distribute pages of the banned book *The Question* that Jerome Lindon had published with Éditions de Minuit. These kinds of tracts had been published, "good tracts," as they were called in the publishing world, to expose the fact that the military was practicing torture in Algeria. Henri Alleg dared write the book. I believe he was living in Algeria. This was in 1958 or 1959. I have already forgotten the dates . . . My memory is weak.

I knew about the demonstration scheduled for October 17, 1961. I had read the tracts put out by the FLN. My father had brought some home. I said that I would either go to Place de l'Étoile or Place de la République. My mother tried to dissuade me. Violence scares her, maybe because of the successive exodus of Ukrainian Jews . . . Her family left the Ukraine at the beginning of the century, to settle in France, like many Russians, Jews and non-Jews. My father said the march would be peaceful and familial.

When I arrived at Solferino, the station was deserted. A man was seated all alone on a bench. He had been wounded in the head. Blood was flowing from the wound. He was disoriented. I helped him. I took the metro with him. He didn't want to go to the hospital. He said it wasn't serious. I accompanied him to Argenteuil. He had worn his Sunday clothes, a tie, a vest under his suit jacket. His white shirt was spattered with blood.

At home, I turned on the radio. Everything was calm in Paris. It was as if nothing had happened. They were announcing Ray Charles's concert scheduled for October 20 at the Palais des Sports, in Paris. I listened to Ray Charles and I read *The Deserter* by Maurienne that I had bought at "Maspero's bookstore," that's what we called "La Joie de lire," the book

shop on Rue Saint-Séverin owned by publisher François Maspéro. Like *The Question,* it was published by Éditions de Minuit. I don't know the name of the author who had deserted. I'll find out some day. The book tells the story of a young French conscript who refuses to fight the Algerian revolutionaries. He deserts.

95

October 17, 1961
The Bookseller of Rue Saint-Séverin

Outside, nighttime

Friends had warned us. They knew that Algerians would be demonstrating with their families today in Paris. They said it was important, after everything that had happened recently: arrests in the shantytowns of the suburbs, raids in the Arab cafés, arbitrary arrests, detentions in camps, mobilization of the Paris police, CRS, mobile squads, "blue caps." A police chief who had sent Jews to their death . . . We also knew that the settling of scores by rival political factions was taking place in Algerian neighborhoods. François Maspéro did not want to close the bookstore—his bookstore, "La Joie de lire," on Rue Saint-Séverin—where militant revolutionaries, neighborhood students, intellectuals involved in political struggles, those supporting liberation wars, all came by. His clients call it "Maspéro's bookstore." It's like a literary and political salon. Everyone knows what's going on and everything that is important; that day, people thought Algerians were right to call for an end to the curfew. Books that couldn't be found in other bookstores, particularly banned books, those condemning the Algerian war, the massacres, the torture, those books were not on the shelves, but they were available to anyone who asked for them.

We told each other that because of the rain, the demonstration would not be successful. The organizers were anticipating thousands of Algerians from the suburbs coming with their wives and children. The cops cordoned off the neighborhood as if they were expecting a riot. Police vans were stationed around the Saint-Michel fountain, and in the neighboring streets. We heard the cops. They were speaking loudly: "What do those lousy Arabs think . . . They are not at home here. They come here looking for trouble. The street doesn't belong to them; neither does the city. France is not Algeria. They come with their *Fatma*s and their whole clan. They call for security forces of order. Security forces, that's us . . . We didn't get rid of enough of them, those *Fellouzes*[26] . . . If anyone had listened to me, there wouldn't be many more FLN left . . . Yeah, we'll see. We could have won Indochina, and we lost. We're not going to lose Algeria . . ."

I saw it, and I am not the only witness. There were my colleagues, and Maspéro as well. We all saw the unleashing of hatred and violence, the cruelty of some of the cops. They were using rifle butts, billy clubs, whips. They were hitting men, women, they didn't even spare the women. They were hitting old people. They beat up an old man. His turban was no protection. He was in the gutter, covered with blood. Some Algerians ran to the riverbank. The Seine is not far, just behind us. Some people threw themselves into the river; others fell over the side of the bridge . . . Panic. Surely at the Saint-Michel Bridge, the Seine was red. I didn't see the color. Along with Maspéro, we tended to the wounded in the bookstore,

and accompanied Algerians to the pharmacy. I don't know what happened in other parts of the city: République, Opéra, Étoile . . . the Grands Boulevards . . . We'll know tomorrow. It will be in the papers. But I saw bodies around the fountain, the wounded, and lost children crying . . . The owner of the Oriental cabaret, the Djezaïr, on Rue de la Huchette, helped us along with other Algerians and French people from the neighborhood. The police arrested hundreds of Algerians. They took them away in busses, but where did they go?

October 1961
The Cop at Clichy

Outside, daytime

I am not the only one who witnessed it. Several of us did, not many, that's for sure, but some of us. On that day, October 17, 1961, the Algerians had not come to Paris to create havoc; it was a peaceful demonstration. They did not fire on us; they were not armed; maybe the security forces . . . Nothing was found on them when they were searched and their pockets emptied. I don't particularly like Arabs. In fact, I don't know much about them. I haven't been in Paris for very long. Before then, I was in Poitiers where you don't see Arabs. My youngest brother, the one who was supposed to work on the farm, was sent to Algeria. He writes letters home. He doesn't mention Arabs. He says everything is fine. He doesn't want to worry the old folks. So, we don't know much. I have been in Paris for two years now. I never worked with the "blue caps." It seems those guys are the worst; they're fierce. I have heard they work in the cellars, and they're not gentle, even though their prisoners are Muslims like themselves. They use what they call the "Méchoui method." I have never seen it, but my colleagues have told me about it. They attach the prisoner by his hands and feet to a stick, like a deer or a lamb. They spin him around hitting him with a whip or a billy club . . .

I never saw that, but I did see—I was there, I didn't dream this up, and there are other witnesses—I saw cops shoot Algerians and toss them over the bridge into the Seine. I saw this; there were several of them. I couldn't intervene. I was too far away, and it happened too quickly. Some cops have blood on their hands, that's for sure, and it's Algerian blood. I'm clear about that. I saw blood on the bridge parapet . . . It wasn't pig's blood . . . It was Arab's blood. At that spot, the Seine was red, I'm sure. Even though the visibility was poor and it was dark and rainy. I'm going to testify. I know I'm risking my job, and if I am demoted, I'll be sent back to Poitiers; so much the better. I'm prepared to testify as needed. I'm sure that these colleagues of mine served in Indochina or somewhere similar . . . In my opinion, that day, they disgraced the reputation of the Paris police. That's what I think and I'm not alone. The newspapers are going to report it, if they are honest.

October 17, 1961, is a dark day for the Paris police. We can call it Black October . . . because the River Patrol recovered Algerian bodies, and not only in Paris. How many? We'll know someday. Not just three or four, several dozen, I'm sure. We'll know. No other possibility. We'll know. In a few years, maybe ten, twenty, thirty . . . we'll know. Word always gets out.

Louis

Louis calls Flora. He doesn't talk about Amel. He says: "I'm leaving for Egypt. I'm taking the plane tomorrow morning. I don't know how long I'll stay there. I am going to see Dad. I know where he works. He went back to the place he brought me to fifteen years ago. I'll find it. I'm taking the novels about Alexandria, 'the quartet' . . . I know they are yours, and that you are attached to them. I'll be careful. Bye." He hangs up. Flora didn't have the chance to speak.

plane

The Mother

"My father wasn't at home. My brothers were. They had eluded the police thanks to my father's friends, French people who were not in the march but were on the sidewalk, observing. Flora will tell you about that. My mother waited all night. The next day, she went to see the organizers. Many people had been arrested. They told her that she would probably find her husband in one of the detention centers where the police were holding the Algerians they had arrested, more than ten thousand of them . . . They mentioned the Palais des Sports, the Sports Arena. I was at Flora's. I wanted to be with my mother, but she said no. I knew about the Palais des Sports. She spoke about it to Flora when I was there. I heard it all. Hundreds of men were jammed in, confined. They were beaten, bruised, clubbed . . . They had to empty their pockets in one place. There were billfolds, cigarette packs, matchboxes, combs, watches, handkerchiefs, metro tickets, bus tickets, chewing tobacco tins . . . There was a stack three feet high. No bathrooms . . . They stayed there until they were deported. My father was one of those deported.

They were taken to Orly. They couldn't contact anyone, neither relatives nor friends. On October 19, 1961 a load of Algerians considered 'undesirable on French soil' boarded two Air France planes, under the surveillance of the CRS. They went back to 'their home villages,' which were detention centers. My mother learned several days later, via Flora's friends, that my father was being held in a camp near Médéa, on a farm. He stayed there until the ceasefire. Meanwhile, the Palais des Sports was evacuated, and cleaned up for the Ray Charles concert scheduled for October 20, 1961. The concert took place.

On October 20, with Flora, my mother decided to participate in the Algerian women's rally, called by the French Federation of the FLN. Their slogans were 'Freedom for our husbands and children,' 'End the racist curfew,' 'Full independence for Algeria.' I was with them in Paris. We marched to Sainte-Anne Hospital. I didn't know it was a psychiatric hospital or why women and children were meeting there. Maybe because it was not far from La Santé prison where Algerian men were locked up . . . You will have to ask Flora or my mother about that. There were several hundred women and children. The police were armed. Nurses helped us. We escaped through the back door. This time I wasn't scared.

We learned later that Algerians had been killed. It was already known in Nanterre; there, we didn't have to wait for the official report. The River Patrol had brought up dozens of bodies. The exact number was never known.

We waited for my father. I didn't want to go back to school. I didn't want to leave my mother. We watched for the mailman. When my mother received the first letter, she said to me: 'Your father is well. He sends you hugs and kisses. He says that you must be good. He will be back soon.' I understood. The next day I went back to school."