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BLACK, WHITE, AND SOUTHERN

Race Relations and Southern Culture

1940 to the Present

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VI / The Crusade Against Segregation, 1960-1964

The shrines of southern history had a heroic quality about them: a mansion, a monument, a capitol, a battleground. These artifacts commemorated great deeds and great men. The physical symbolism of a rewritten southern history emerging in the 1950s and sixties was more pedestrian: a yellow bus, a spartan courtroom, a dormitory, a lunch counter, and a voting booth. Future generations would make few pilgrimages to these new regional shrines, but perhaps they should. For what happened in these modest places helped southerners—black and white—to redefine themselves and their region, much as an earlier era and its symbols defined another South.

"Gonna Sit at the Welcome Table": The Sit-Ins

The four freshmen sitting in a dormitory room at all-black North Carolina A&T College in Greensboro on a cool, clear January evening could not have known that they were about to launch a moral revolution that was both American and southern. Much as the embattled colonists harked back to a constitutional regime they had enjoyed prior to 1763, and much as the Confederates depicted themselves as the true heirs of 1787, these teenagers were preservationists: they sought to extend the law of the land to themselves and their region. In doing so, their objective was to educate the white southerner, to reveal to him the liberating side of his culture. Though northerners found it difficult to grasp, these students and their colleagues loved their region, had settled there for generations, and had suffered along with it not alongside their white neighbors, their roots lay in the red clay of Carolina or the black loam of Mississippi, and their ancestors called to them from unmarked graves near the rivers and streams. The events that followed the late-night discussion among Franklin McCain, Ezell Blair, Jr., David Richmond, and Joseph McNeill would be distinctively southern in their character.

Earlier that day, January 31, Joseph McNeill had been denied counter service at the Greyhound bus terminal in Greensboro. The rebuff was

typical in the South of that era, but McNeill, looking for sympathy and support, took up the issue with his friends that evening. As Franklin McCain recalled, the discussion eventually centered around the question of "at what point does the moral man act against injustice?" Once they agreed that they had reached that point, the question became what to do about it. In fixing on a sit-in at the Woolworth lunch counter in downtown Greensboro the next day, the students would stress the justice of their cause in an orderly, prayerful manner. As McNeill noted, "the most powerful and potent weapon that people have historically no defense for is love [and] kindness." Theis would be a "non-violent" and a "Christian" action. The students had read Gandhi and knew about King and Montgomery, but this was mostly a spontaneous act emanating more from their religious backgrounds and how their existence in the South contradicted Christian tenets. They were unaware that CORE had employed the tactic of the sit-in in Chicago twenty years earlier and that as recently as 1958 and 1959 students had successfully desegregated some lunch counters in Tulsa and Miami.

The lunch counter was an obvious target because it highlighted the preposterous and humiliating nature of segregation. Blacks could purchase toothpaste and underwear at Woolworth's, but not a soft drink. In the elaborate etiquette that defined southern culture, eating with someone held particular connotations. As one white southerner informed Gunnar Myrdal, "in the South, the table . . . possesses the sanctity of an intimate social institution." To break bread together implied a rough equality. Slaves and later servants, regardless of their length of service or extent of their intimacy with white family members during childhood, never ate at the same place as whites. Southerners were appalled, for example, when President Theodore Roosevelt invited Booker T. Washington to join him for dinner at the White House, and stunned when Jim Folsom and black congressman Adam Clayton Powell, Jr., had drinks together in Montgomery.

But the students recognized that it was precisely this etiquette that must be attacked; it was a barrier inhibiting their visibility and ultimately their equality. They entered Woolworth's the following day, sat down with their school books, and ordered. The waitress refused to serve them. The students remained seated. Soon a policeman entered the store. He had been trained to react to violence and overt illegal action. Here, nothing was happening, it was a still life. He paced up and down the aisle, nervously slapping his nightstick into the palm of his hand. Some whites approached the four students who were setting

into their reading material. A few condemned their behavior, others, surprisingly, offered encouragement. Forty-five minutes after they had sat down, the students left. As McNeill recalled, "we were scared as hell."

Yet they returned the next day, Tuesday, accompanied by twenty-three additional students, and on Wednesday with sixty-six, occupying almost all of the places at the lunch counter. By Thursday, the group had grown to over one hundred, including, for the first time, some white students from the North Carolina Women's College in Greensboro (now the University of North Carolina at Greensboro). Also by Thursday, white youths began to heckle the demonstrators, one setting fire to a black student's coat. On Friday, the sit-in spilled over into the streets of downtown Greensboro, as one thousand students demanded an end to segregated eating facilities. Within two weeks the sit-in spread to fifteen other southern cities. By April, demonstrations were occurring in fifty-four cities in nine southern states. By the end of the year, seventy thousand students had sat in at lunch counters in one hundred southern cities.

Unlike the bus boycott and school desegregation suits, the results of the sit-ins were immediate. By July, the Woolworth lunch counter in Greensboro accommodated blacks. Lunch counters in twenty-eight other cities were also integrated. In a few cities, other downtown facilities such as theaters and restaurants opened to blacks. The color line was at last beginning to fade. True, subsequent victories over segregation in public accommodations would not come so swiftly nor unaccompanied by violence, especially in the Deep South. It took federal legislation—the 1964 Civil Rights Act—to demolish public segregation completely. Nevertheless, the initial victories attained by the sit-in demonstrations were sufficient to convince the protesters that civil war was not a prerequisite for civil rights, that the quality of tactics and the demonstrators themselves were effective weapons in attacking an important element of white supremacy. They had proceeded in an orderly, almost ritualistic manner; they were polite and observed the manners of the region up to a point; and they were well-dressed and well-groomed, reflecting their middle-class backgrounds and aspirations. The contrast between their actions and the look and tone of white hecklers was significant enough for massive resister James J. Kilpatrick to comment in the *Richmond News-Leader*: "Here were the colored students, in coats, white shirts, ties, and one of them was reading Goethe and one was taking notes from a biology text. And here,

on the sidewalk outside, was a gang of white boys come to heckle, a ragtag rabble, slack-jawed, black-jacketed, grinning fit to kill. . . . Eibel! It gives one pause."

Since southerners attached a great deal of importance to public behavior and appearance, such distinctions were important in impressing white opinion. Indeed, for the first time since the early days of the *Brown* decision, journalists, citizens, and even political leaders ventured out to support the demonstrations. The *Greensboro Daily News* editorialized, "there are many white people in the South who recognize the injustice of the lunch counter system. It is based on circumstances which may have made sense 100 years ago; today it has a touch of medievalism. It smacks of Indian 'untouchables' or Hitlerian Germany's Master Race Theories." Florida governor LeRoy Collins focused on the illogic of the situation that the demonstrators had illuminated so well: "I don't mind saying that if a man has a department store and he invites the public generally to come. . . I think then it is unfair and morally wrong for him to single out one department. . . and say he does not want or will not allow Negroes to patronize that one department."

Both Collins and the Greensboro editor pointed to another significant aspect of sit-in demeanor. In using words such as "injustice" and "morally wrong" to describe the lunch counter system, the governor and the editor indicated that a moral issue was involved. White southerners, once they recognized it as such, must either reconcile their deep religious faith to a new social order or live with and explain away the increasingly glaring contradiction between faith and reality. The sit-ins' great contribution to the region was in forcing this confrontation. As theologian James Sellers noted in 1961, the sit-in demonstrations provided a swift "updating into reality" for many white southerners. Buried in the courts or on buses that whites rarely patronized, civil rights could remain an abstract concept. Whites could be indifferent to such protests. But with the sit-ins some moral squirming had to occur. When Fisk University student and Nashville sit-in leader Diane Nash confronted Mayor Ben West with the question, "Do you feel it's wrong to discriminate against a person solely on the basis of race or color?" the moral absurdity of the proposition forced West from behind the barrier of tradition: "I couldn't agree it was morally right to sell them merchandise and refuse them service. . . . It was a moral question." Three weeks after West's confession on the steps of city hall, downtown lunch counters were serving blacks. It was difficult to

dismiss these earnest young people (black and white) with their appeals to the regional conscience. James McBride Dabbs called the sit-in "the great creative moment of Southern culture," because of its moral dimension and its intrusion into white consciousness.

The sit-ins scored other breakthroughs to white consciousness. White southerners came into contact with blacks almost exclusively in subservient, menial positions, so the blacks encountered by most whites merely reinforced the latter's conception of an inferior race as well as the justice and wisdom of segregation. But the sit-in demonstrators, with their books, polished manners and shoes, and business attire, presented an unaccustomed picture. They presented the white southerner with another anomaly: the preconceived notion of what blacks ought to look and behave like, and the reality of the demonstrators. In addition, the sit-ins blasted the notion that blacks were content with the system of segregation. James A. Rogers, editor of the *Florence (S.C.) Morning News*, considered himself a moderate, even a liberal on racial issues in the late 1950s and early sixties. He supported segregation, as he explained, not "because I was against the black, but because I was for him . . . ; not because I wished to keep him in his place, but because I wished for him to have every opportunity that I had to make a place for himself." That place was behind the color line where, Rogers believed, there existed "no social tension" that would retard the blacks' development. The sit-ins taught Rogers otherwise: that segregation generated considerable tension by perpetuating a permanent second-class citizenship.

In other words, the sit-ins initiated the process of lifting the veil of anonymity from blacks. By stepping out of stereotype and appealing to southern culture, they had achieved notice. The demonstrators jarred the preconceptions of southern whites, and even if such jarring provoked rage, blacks had scored an important point. As Leslie Dunbar of the SRC observed in 1961, "at least Negroes are not regarded as instruments and tools, but as antagonists. That, in itself, is a higher status."

Blacks rejoiced in their sudden materialization. As invisibles and subservients, their self-respect and confidence suffered. Franklin McCain recalled his feeling after the initial sit-in: "I probably felt better that day than I've ever felt in my life. I felt as though I had gained my manhood, so to speak, and not only gained it, but had developed quite a lot of respect for it." Southern blacks had assumed a new character, had dropped the old role and demanded a greater part in regional life. Their actions not only forced a moral conflict on whites, but altered blacks'

self-perceptions as well. Discussing the impact of the sit-ins on blacks, *Ebony* magazine analyzed the transformation: "The Negro has lost some of his former virtues and a good many illusions. Gone is his celebrated patience, his childlike obedience, and his colossal fear. He has waited ninety-eight years. . . . The day he stopped being a good old Negro was the day he became a man."

But *Ebony* was premature in heralding the regeneration of the southern black psyche. The demonstrators hardly represented a cross-section of the black community and, in fact, their initial efforts received little support and even some antagonism from traditional black leaders. These were youngsters mainly, who faced few of the economic burdens of their elders. A few days in jail or a name or picture in the newspaper did not spell financial ruin. They usually had no families to support. Because they could accept the consequences of their actions, they could act boldly even in a nonviolent framework. During the next few years, students would increasingly supply the shock troops for the army of redemption.

In the meantime, the sit-in demonstrators helped to form a new civil rights organization that would engage and represent this constituency. Ella Baker, an SCLC founder, felt that neither her group nor the NAACP could effectively harness the militant and potentially volatile power of the youthful, urbanized sit-in demonstrators. She gathered about two hundred youth leaders from across the South at a Youth Leadership meeting in Raleigh in April, 1960, just as the sit-ins were gathering momentum. Baker's keynote address, "More Than a Hamburger," stressed the importance of going beyond the lunch counter to strike down every vestige of segregation in the South. Martin Luther King, Jr., special guest at the meeting, then took the platform. In the years since Montgomery, King had largely failed to shake "the apathy and complacency of adults in the Negro community." He recommended to the gathering "some type of continuing organization" to coordinate student protest in a nonviolent manner. His emphasis on nonviolence chafed some of the delegates who believed that it was an expendable tactic and had in mind a more confrontational organization. One month later in Atlanta, Baker met with the more strident faction to form the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) with Nashville's Marion Barry (now mayor of Washington, D.C.) as chairman. The bow to nonviolence, evident in the new organization's name, did not signify a commitment to passive resistance. Even King recognized that white supremacy was inherently violent

and that once it drew blacks into its vortex, the fine line separating nonviolent confrontation from violent encounter would become less clear.

Bound for Glory: The Freedom Rides

Ironically, the first example of how fine this line was occurred not as a result of a SNCC-sponsored action but from the resurrection of an old tactic by James Farmer's Chicago-based CORE. In 1947, CORE had engineered the Journey of Reconciliation, a successful experiment in integrated bus travel through more than two dozen cities of the Upper South. The Journey was ahead of its time, however. The Interstate Commerce Commission (ICC) declined to issue an order forcing the bus companies to abide by the 1946 Supreme Court decision *Morgan v. Virginia*, which banned segregated seating on interstate bus routes. The matter rested there until 1961. Encouraged by the success of the sit-ins as well as by renewed evidence of white support, Farmer felt the time was right for an action encompassing the entire region rather than the separate, local demonstrations that characterized the sit-ins. In addition, in December, 1960, the U.S. Supreme Court had extended its *Morgan* ruling to include segregated terminal facilities (*Boytton v. Virginia*). Farmer believed that the only way to convince the federal government to enforce that decision was to test terminal facilities all over the South, hoping to provoke a reaction in the form of arrests or even violence. As Farmer recalled the strategy, "we were counting on the bigots in the South to do our work for us."

The strategy entailed considerable danger. The Deep South, especially Alabama and Mississippi, remained a proud fortress of segregation. Both states were in the vise of political reaction, and support for the White Citizens' Councils and the Ku Klux Klan ran high. But, Farmer reasoned, if the bus riders provoked a violent response, the federal government would be certain to intervene; if the authorities in either or both states acquiesced in integration, that would be a victory in segregation's heartland.

On May 4, 1961, seven blacks and six whites—youthful sit-in demonstrators and veterans who had participated in the Journey of Reconciliation—divided into two interracial groups and boarded a Greyhound and a Trailways bus respectively, heading south from Washington, D.C. The previous evening, the thirteen riders had enjoyed a farewell Chinese dinner in the city. John Lewis, one of the

young riders (now a congressman from Atlanta), called it "The Last Supper."

Yes, we are the Freedom Riders
And we ride a long Greyhound,
White or black, we know no difference,
Lord, for we are Glory bound.

The road to Glory turned out to be uneventful as the buses crossed Virginia and entered the Carolinas. The welcome mat had, in fact, been set out in the Old Dominion and in North Carolina as officials from both bus companies removed the "For Colored" and "For Whites" signs from terminal facilities. The first violence occurred at a stop in Rock Hill, South Carolina, just over the state line from North Carolina. John Lewis attempted to enter the white waiting room and several white youths forcibly intervened to prevent his passage. Police rescued Lewis and a colleague and hustled them back on the bus. There were no further incidents in South Carolina, nor in Georgia. The two teams arrived safely in Atlanta on May 13. They were heartened by their reception thus far, but the most difficult part of the journey lay ahead—through Alabama to their destination at Jackson, Mississippi.

Leaving Atlanta, the two buses split, the Greyhound heading for Anniston, Alabama, and the Trailways bus going on to Birmingham. Anniston was a small industrial city that benefited from defense contracts during the war and maintained a diverse industrial base afterward. The city's population included hundreds of new white arrivals from the surrounding poor hill country. As the Greyhound bus pulled into the Anniston terminal, a mob of whites surrounded it and smashed windows and slashed tires before the police arrived to quell the vandalism. The bus limped out of the city on its way to meet the Trailways group in Birmingham.

Six miles outside of Anniston, however, the tires went flat, and groups of whites who had stalked the stricken vehicle since it left the corporate limits resumed their attack on the bus. The riders huddled inside until a fire bomb broke through one of the windows and filled the bus with smoke. As the bus burst into flames the passengers exited quickly, only to run into a gauntlet of clubs and blackjacks. The timely arrival of a caravan from Birmingham led by a King aide, the Reverend Fred L. Shuttlesworth, who had been alerted about possible violence, managed to spirit the riders to safety.

In the meantime, the Trailways contingent made its way to Birmingham. By 1961, Birmingham had earned a reputation as one of the South's toughest cities, and its most segregated. It was a raw city, hewed out of the north Alabama woods in 1870, a creation of coal and iron and railroads, and untouched by the moonlight-and-magnolia mystique that softened other urban places in the region. Its white citizens seemed intent on proving their southernness in an environment without lineage. In this migrant town where black and white competed for jobs in the steel mills and coal mines, racial tensions frequently bubbled to the surface, and bombs, police brutality, and lynchings were common fare.

In 1956, after the Alabama legislature had outlawed the NAACP, Fred L. Shuttlesworth and several other black ministers formed the Alabama Christian Movement for Human Rights (ACMHR). Over the next five years, the Klan and the local police (membership overlapped) orchestrated a systematic campaign of terror against the group and its members. Ministers received death threats over the telephone and through the mail, and in December, 1956, Shuttlesworth's house was bombed, though he escaped serious injury. Police harassed visitors to his house, and the Klan abducted an ACMHR member, the Reverend Charles Billups, tied him to a tree, and beat him. Whites assaulted Shuttlesworth in 1957 as he attempted to enroll his children in an all-white school. John Bartlow Martin remarked that year, "Birmingham is the worst city for race relations in the South." This was a standard that white Birminghamians sought to maintain during the ensuing years.

The Trailways bus pulled into the eerie quiet of the Birmingham terminal on Mother's Day, May 14. Approximately forty whites, including a few newsmen, lined the terminal bay. There were no policemen in sight. The whites, mostly Klansmen, descended on the riders and beat them severely (only two of the nine passengers seriously injured were Freedom Riders). After twenty minutes, the police arrived and the mob retreated unmolested. When reporters later questioned Public Safety Commissioner Eugene "Bull" Connor as to why there were no policemen at the terminal, he replied that they were visiting their mothers.

At this point, the Kennedy administration began to take a greater interest in the proceedings. Burke Marshall, assistant attorney general for civil rights, had earlier advised the president that he lacked the constitutional authority to protect the Freedom Riders. Protection

was the responsibility of local law enforcement agencies. FBI agents formed the only federal connection with the Freedom Riders as they monitored their progress from state offices in the Deep South. The role of the FBI, however, was strictly informational. They shared material with the Justice Department and with the local police, who often passed along the information to colleagues in the Klan. But the incidents outside Anniston and in Birmingham made front-page headlines and caused international embarrassment. Privately, Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy moved to secure a pledge of cooperation from Alabama governor John Patterson. The governor replied that "we can't act as nusemards to agitators. . . . You can't guarantee the safety of fools." The attorney general, wary of a constitutional and political confrontation, did not press the matter. The Freedom Riders, though determined to continue their pilgrimage to Montgomery, could find no bus willing to take them, nor could they be certain of their own safety. The only realistic alternative was to abandon the protest and accept the Justice Department's offer of a flight to New Orleans from Birmingham.

The matter did not end there, however. Though CORE had reluctantly halted the Ride, SNCC was prepared to resume it regardless of the danger. SNCC hurriedly assembled twenty-one volunteers, and on May 20 the group set out from Birmingham for Montgomery. President Kennedy, hoping to avoid the debacle that occurred in Birmingham, sent several emissaries from the Justice Department, including two high-ranking officials in the Civil Rights Division, John Doar and John Seigenthaler. The president believed that the federal presence would prompt state officials to initiate security measures. Seigenthaler succeeded in extracting a pledge from Colonel Floyd Mann, director of Alabama public safety, to protect the riders en route to Montgomery.

Initially, it appeared that the administration's strategy was working. An armada of buses, helicopters, and police cruisers escorted the riders for the two-hour journey to the state capital. When the bus neared the city, however, the escort vanished. A sickeningly familiar quiet descended as the bus made its way to the downtown terminal. It was Saturday, a day when residents from the surrounding towns and countryside came to Montgomery to shop or merely to loiter and socialize. People milled about the downtown, but the usual casualness was absent. There was an air of expectancy, as if the crowds had come to witness an event.

Virginia Durr had gone downtown to shop. When she arrived in the

area of the bus terminal, a noisy crowd was milling about. As she pressed closer she discovered the cause for the commotion. A mob had surrounded the riders as they departed from the bus and begun to pummel them. The sight appalled her, not so much the violence but the onlookers' faces contorted with hate. Many were familiar to her. Neighbors were holding up their children to "see the niggers run." These were people with whom she had attended church, shared meals, and visited in times of joy and sorrow. "These were my people," she recalled. "These were the people I was living among and they were really crazy."

John Doar, from his vantage point across the street from the bus terminal, hurriedly placed a long-distance call to the attorney general to describe the scene: "A bunch of men led by a guy with a bleeding face are beating them [the passengers]. There are no cops. It's terrible. There's not a cop in sight. People are yelling, 'Get 'em, get 'em.' It's awful." Doar's colleague John Seigenthaler had gone out into the street to assist two women knocked to the ground by the mob. As he tried to help them to his car, a group of whites grabbed him and beat him into unconsciousness. He lay on the pavement for twenty-five minutes before an ambulance arrived. Montgomery commissioner of public safety Lester B. Sullivan explained the delay in coming to Seigenthaler's aid: "Every white ambulance in town reported their vehicles had broken down."

The nation was shocked. The *Atlanta Constitution*, which had previously criticized the Freedom Riders, led a chorus of southern journals condemning the violence in Alabama: "If the police, representing the people, refuse to intervene when a man—any man—is being beaten to the pavement of an American city, then this is not a noble land at all. It is a jungle." The Kennedy administration no longer placed faith in phone calls and monitors to secure the peace, and the attorney general dispatched four hundred U.S. marshals to Montgomery to ensure the safety of the Freedom Riders as they began the final leg of their troubled journey to Jackson, Mississippi. Six Alabama National Guardsmen with fixed bayonets accompanied the riders; police cars and helicopters provided an additional escort. At the Mississippi state line, National Guardsmen flanked the road, their guns pointing into the woods. As the bus approached Jackson a woman broke into an impromptu song, and soon the other riders joined her in a collective release of tension: "Hallelujah, I'm a-travelin', Hallelujah, ain't it fine, Hallelujah, I'm a-travelin' down freedom's main line." When the group

arrived in Jackson, police arrested them, but there was no violence—part of an arrangement between the attorney general and Senator Eastland. The Freedom Ride was over.

Four months later, the ICC issued an order integrating interstate carriers and terminal facilities. The Freedom Riders had achieved their goal. But just as the sit-ins held implications beyond the immediate objective, the journey through the Deep South changed perceptions and responses as well. The rides had demonstrated to a national audience that beneath the gentility of southern society lay the raw edge of violence. The rides captured national attention and by doing so drew the Kennedy administration into a more active participation in the civil rights struggle.

It was a reluctant entrance, to be sure. President Kennedy had won a narrow victory the previous November. Without an electoral mandate, he faced a Congress more likely to be independent, and he needed the assistance of powerful southerners who controlled key committees. He relied heavily, for example, on the advice of Senate Judiciary Committee head Eastland for appointment recommendations to the federal judiciary. The result was a series of disastrous nominations early in the administration that clogged the civil rights process at the district court level for at least the next half decade. One such appointment, W. Harold Cox of Mississippi's Southern District, referred to black litigants as "niggers" or "chimpanzees." Another Mississippi judicial appointee, Ben Cameron, offered this rationale: "It is the universal conviction of the people . . . that the judges who function in this circuit should render justice in individual cases against a background of, and as interpreters of, the ethos of the people whose servants they are." But as the political fallout from the violence in Alabama descended on the White House, the administration's economic and foreign policy initiatives suddenly diminished in importance and with them the courting of key southern legislators. Though the administration would not assume the activist role that civil rights leaders hoped for, it would use its prestige and weight more often on behalf of their cause over the next two years.

The Freedom Rides had internal as well as external consequences for the growing civil rights movement. Specifically, it thrust SNCC into the forefront of the civil rights organizations operating in the South. The doctrines of love and nonviolence seemed less relevant alongside the pictures of violence and terror that accompanied the Freedom Rides. Though the stoicism and courage of the victims

heightened national revulsion, some of SNCC's members questioned the wisdom of continuing to turn the other cheek. A confrontation was brewing between the younger and more militant members of SNCC, and the SCLC, CORE, and the NAACP.

Finally, because the Freedom Rides were a region-wide protest, they touched more white southerners than did previous demonstrations. The extensive national news coverage and the actions of the White House seemed to place the South under a magnifying glass. The view was not an attractive one and etched itself in the minds of some white leaders as blacks in their own communities began to press for more than token integration. For other whites, the rides conjured up the specter of outside invaders in a way that the sit-ins did not. For those southerners, the invasion was a new call to battle.

Mind over Matter: The Albany Movement

With growing support from Washington, the increasing willingness of whites to speak out on the more egregious examples of white supremacy, and the growing confidence of blacks, Martin Luther King believed it was important to expand the objectives of the demonstrations. With this in mind, he accepted an invitation from a coalition of black organizations in Albany, Georgia, in November, 1961. Albany was becoming an important commercial center for southern Georgia, and its population had grown 15 percent during the previous decade to 56,000. Prosperity had not softened the rigid segregation that characterized race relations in the community, however. Local officials, for example, had defied an ICC order to desegregate all train stations and bus terminals and the station had arrested black students who tested that resolve. The arrests mobilized the black community. SNCC, which had been in the area conducting voter registration drives since the summer, organized students for additional protests. Eventually adults joined their demonstrations and helped to form the Albany Movement. It was at this point that King arrived.

But Albany was ready for King. Police Chief Laurie Pritchett had studied King's philosophy and had learned about the national impact of violence from the Freedom Rides. He was determined to avoid such a spectacle in Albany. As Pritchett put it, Albany "can't tolerate the NAACP or any other 'nigger' organization to take over this town with mass demonstrations." To this end, he intended to respond to King's pressure by not responding at all, or by responding in such a way as to deflate any impact of that pressure beyond the borders of the city.

Pritchett contacted county officials within a one-hundred-mile radius of Albany and secured their cooperation in using their jails to house the thousands of protesters that the demonstrations would draw. In addition, he insisted on fair treatment for the prisoners and promised to send deputies along to ensure their safety. In this way, Pritchett could resort to mass arrests without fear of overextending his facilities, and the polite handling of the demonstrators would defuse adverse publicity. As a final precaution, the chief gave a course on nonviolence for his officers.

The strategy worked. Demonstrators went to prison by the thousands and suffered lost time, expense, and occasionally loss of employment. Pritchett was careful to charge them with breach of the peace and unlawful assembly rather than with violation of the city's segregation ordinances, which could have invited litigation. Black and white informants kept the police chief aware of protest plans, and political leaders gave him free rein to command the situation. The demonstrations lasted from November, 1961, to the summer of 1963 and accomplished nothing while the city sat in jail, "We thought we could fill up the jails," SNCC worker Bill Hansen explained in a post-mortem. "We ran out of people before [Chief Pritchett] ran out of jails."

In the meantime, Pritchett had attained the status of a celebrity. The attorney general wired him congratulations for maintaining the peace (and thus, incidentally, enabling the administration to avoid intervention). An Atlanta newspaper declared that Albany's police chief was now "widely known—not only in the South, but throughout the world—as a stalwart exponent of the nonviolent method of quelling integrationist uprisings." And Pritchett became a sought-after consultant to police departments in other southern cities. But SCLC official Wyatt Tee Walker had a different appraisal of Pritchett's conduct: "Pritchett was non-brutal, not non-violent. . . segregation is not non-violent." Underneath his calm, disciplined exterior, Chief Pritchett was as staunch a defender of white supremacy as the most violent Klansman. As he stated matter-of-factly to SNCC leader Charles Sherrod, "It's just a matter of mind over matter. I don't mind, and you don't matter."

King's failure in Albany resulted from a number of factors. The city was located in a predominantly rural area of Georgia little influenced by the currents of black protest, and white residents were not inclined to negotiate. They saw the fact that King brought numerous protesters

Just a partial accommodation to black demands. The cities of the Deep South, however, remained unbroken. In these locations, white leaders and local institutions such as churches and the press created an environment that precluded white initiatives for integration. If the war for southern reconception was to be won, a region half-bound and half-free would not do. But these were all good societies, girded against intrusion (as the Freedom Riders demonstrated), and successful in maintaining the solidarity of will, opinion and action. Robert Zellner, a white civil rights worker from Mobile who was expelled from college in Montgomery because of his views, put it this way: "they gave no white southerner any choice. If you bucked the system, at all you had two choices: you either capitulated absolutely and completely, or you became a rebel, a complete outlaw." It was unlikely that segregation would fall from within.

The Battle for Birmingham

"We've got to have a crisis to bargain with," SCLC official Wyatt Tee Walker advised Martin Luther King, Jr., late in 1962. The Albany experience had weakened the SCLC as well as King's credibility as a leader. King was wrestling with another bout of uncertainty, and when the Reverend Fred L. Shuttlesworth asked him to come to Birmingham, he hesitated. If Albany would not yield, could Birmingham be broken? Shuttlesworth persisted, and King relented, half-joking with colleague Andy Young, "You better let me know what kind of eulogy you want." He understood, as did everyone else in the SCLC, that Birmingham's Public Safety commissioner Eugene "Bull" Connor was not likely to effect the intellectual approach to black demonstrators adopted by Laurie Pritchett.

But Connor's intransigence could also provide an opportunity for the SCLC. If he reprised his Freedom Ride role and created a national spectacle, Birmingham's blacks would have a national audience for their moral drama. Appropriately, the SCLC called its Birmingham campaign "Project C" (*C* for *Confrontation*). King planned a series of demonstrations for the city beginning in early April to coincide with the Easter shopping season. The objectives were not only to integrate all public facilities in Birmingham, but also to guarantee employment opportunities for blacks in downtown businesses, desegregate the schools, improve the quality and level of services in black neighborhoods, and provide low-income housing. The wide-ranging goals were calculated to elicit a sharp response from the South's most impenetrable fortress of segregation.

The climate in Birmingham had changed since the Freedom Rides of May, 1961, however. The violence of that episode and the ensuing national embarrassment had roused the business leadership to action. In order to generate interracial dialogue and prevent further violence, businessmen formed the biracial Committee of 100 in the fall of 1961 and discussed a modest plan for school desegregation as well as the integration of city parks. When the businessmen presented the latter proposal to the city commission (the main governing body in Birmingham consisting of three elected commissioners), the commissioners angrily rejected it and in January, 1962, closed the parks. Business leaders felt that their only remaining option in settling black demands without disrupting economic development objectives was to elect more conciliatory public officials. To this end, they succeeded in putting a referendum on the ballot to change the city's form of government to a mayor-council system. The referendum won by a narrow margin, and an election to choose a new government was set for the end of March, 1963. In that election, Albert Boutwell, a racial moderate, won out over Eugene "Bull" Connor for mayor. A new political era seemed imminent in Birmingham.

The election board scarcely had time to certify the results when King launched his demonstrations on April 3. Black and white leaders in the community, as well as the Kennedy administration, had urged the SCLC to postpone its campaign, at least until the new government was installed on April 15. Guided by the feeling that no time was a "good time" for these protests, King proceeded. In the meantime, the former city government challenged the legality of the election and refused to vacate its offices. So Birmingham had two city governments, two mayors, and massive civil rights demonstrations as the Easter shopping season approached. Connor remained in charge of the police and fire departments until the government tangle could be resolved. The business leaders, fearing a public backlash that would dash their political plans, were not in a position to reach an agreement with King. On April 11, the city secured an injunction against further demonstrations. King ignored the court order and was arrested on Good Friday, April 12. Just as in Montgomery, local politics was playing a significant role in deciding the nature and the outcome of an unfolding civil rights drama.

King's arrest was not particularly noteworthy; it had happened many times before. While in prison over that Easter weekend, however, King found the time to respond to an open letter from Birmingham's white clergy that chided and criticized him for the demon-

strations. The clergymen had charged that King was an outsider who had no business in the city. In addition, his demonstrations were untimely, demanding too much too soon. The clergymen were also concerned that King was encouraging the breaking of laws and that his so-called nonviolent tactics would lead to considerable violence. Accordingly, they felt that King was an extremist who was disrupting the orderly evolution of race relations in the city.

Writing with a stubby pencil along the margins of the New York *Times* page on which the letter appeared, King's reply was a remarkable document that encapsulated the essence of his nonviolent philosophy. To the charge of being an "outside agitator," he wrote, "I am in Birmingham because injustice is here. Just as the prophets of the eighth century B. C. left their villages and carried their 'thus saith the Lord' far beyond the boundaries of their home towns, . . . so am I compelled to carry the gospel of freedom beyond my own home town." When the clergymen counseled patience, King replied:

We have waited for more than 340 years for our constitutional and God-given rights. . . . Perhaps it is easy for those who have never felt the stinging darts of segregation to say, "Wait." But when you have seen vicious mobs lynch your mothers and fathers at will and drown your sisters and brothers at whim, when you have seen hate-filled policemen curse, kick, and even kill your black brothers and sisters; when you see the vast majority of your twenty million Negro brothers smothering in an airtight cage of poverty in the midst of an affluent society; when you suddenly find your tongue twisted and your speech stammering as you seek to explain to your six-year-old daughter why she can't go to the public amusement park . . . and see tears welling up in her eyes. . . . when you take a cross-country drive and find it necessary to sleep night after night in the uncomfortable corners of your automobile because no motel will accept you; . . . when your first name becomes "nigger," your middle name becomes "boy" . . . and your last name becomes "John," and your wife and mother are never given the respected title "Mrs.," . . . when you are forever fighting a degenerating sense of "nobodiness"—then you will understand why we find it difficult to wait.

This catalogue of life under segregation was remarkable for both its articulation of that life and its sharp tone. King believed strongly in the educative function of his work, and his reply to the clergymen was a lecture in many respects. Though some younger blacks questioned King's intensity, he was never fearful of asserting his demands forcefully. Persistent pressure was a key principle of nonviolence.

In addressing the charge that he engaged in illegal actions, King made the distinction between just laws and unjust laws, and labeled

segregation an unjust law because it was sinful. He quoted theologian Paul Tillich that "sin was separation." King asked, "Is not segregation an existential expression of man's tragic separation, his awful estrangement, his terrible sinfulness?" As for the related question that his illegal demonstrations were directed at provoking violence, King again phrased his response with a question: "Isn't this like condemning Jesus because his unique God-consciousness and never-ceasing devotion to God's will precipitated the evil act of crucifixion?" By framing his replies within a Christian context, King hoped not only to convince the clergymen of the righteousness of his cause, but to demonstrate that their perspective was outside that context.

This latter objective was evident in King's response to the charge of extremism. First, he reminded the clergymen that he stood "in the middle of two opposing forces in the Negro community. One is a force of complacency. . . . The other force is one of bitterness and hatred, and it comes perilously close to advocating violence." King presented himself as the best alternative for peaceful change, but he did not shun the label "extremist" altogether. The question for King was not "whether we will be extremists, but what kind of extremists we will be. Will we be extremists for hate or for love?" He added that "Jesus Christ. . . was an extremist for love, truth, and goodness, and thereby rose above his environment. Perhaps the South, the nation, and the world are in dire need of creative extremists."

King expressed deep disappointment in the role of the white church in the South during the nine years since the *Brown* decision. The absence of the white church as a positive moral force during this difficult era had, of course, troubled some whites as well. The Reverend Carlyle Marney of Myers Park Baptist Church in Charlotte lamented that "there's a social revolution under way, and Baptists in God's white hand have had precious little to do with it except when run over from the rear." The problem was not, as novelist Walker Percy noted, one of "putting into practice the Judeo-Christian ethic [because] Christendom of a sort has already won." The problem was to expose the church and its congregants to a more expansive view of that ethic that did not "canonize the existing social and political structure." But who would make that exposure? "I have heard numerous southern religious leaders admonish their worshippers to comply with a de-segregation decision because it is the law," King wrote, "but I have longed to hear white ministers declare: 'Follow this decree because integration is morally right and because the Negro is your brother.'

In the midst of blatant injustices inflicted upon the Negro, I have watched white churchmen stand on the sideline and mouth pious irrelevancies and sanctimonious trivialities. In the midst of a mighty struggle to rid our nation of racial and economic injustice, I have heard many ministers say: "Those are social issues with which the gospel has no real concern." King warned that "if today's church does not recapture the sacrificial spirit of the early church, it will lose its authenticity, forfeit the loyalty of millions, and be dismissed as an irrelevant social club with no meaning for the twentieth century."

But even if the white church remained on the sidelines, King was optimistic that the objectives of his crusade would be fulfilled. He invited the clergymen to be a part of that future, to look beyond the confrontation of the moment to see the emergence of a new South. "One day," King concluded, "the South will know that when these disinherited children of God sat down at lunch counters, they were in reality standing up for what is best in the American dream and for the most sacred values in our Judeo-Christian heritage, thereby bringing our nation back to those great wells of democracy which were dug deep by the founding fathers in their formulation of the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence." If, as King implied, we need as a region and a nation to be reminded of our founding constitutional and religious principles, then the recognition of black civil rights would be the fulfillment of that reminder.

As King walked out of prison a week later on April 20, he understood the arduous task confronting him and his people. His "Letter from Birmingham Jail," eloquent as it was, would not open the restaurants, theaters, parks, playgrounds, and city hall for blacks. That victory had to be won in the streets. The demonstrations resumed, but city leaders remained unperturbed, and Birmingham disappeared as a major story in the national media. "Bull" Connor's police force was showing remarkable restraint—perhaps Albany's Laurie Pritchett had taught him something. If so, then another failure was in the offing, and King and black southerners could not afford that.

It would be necessary to lure the police into violence. For all of King's advocacy of nonviolence, he recognized the value and efficacy of a violent response of the type seen in Little Rock, New Orleans, and the Freedom Rides. Open conflict would bring in the federal government and thus ensure the fulfillment of the protest's objectives. Violence was also cleansing, a means to grace and hence to individual and regional redemption. As writer Flannery O'Connor noted in 1963, "I

have found that violence is strangely capable of returning my characters to reality and preparing them to accept their moment of grace. Their heads are so hard that almost nothing else will do the work." O'Connor considered this a "Christian view of the world," and, indeed, Jacob's night-long wrestling match in the Old Testament results in his reconciliation with God. King concurred in this view as well. "There can be no remission of sin," he wrote, "without the shedding of blood."

Violence was cleansing for blacks as well. As victims, they would be the redeemers. For those who understandably feared the consequences of violence, King admonished, "if a man hasn't found something to die for, he isn't fit to live." Although this seemed like small solace in the face of the reality of injury and even death, southern blacks were deeply religious and, as King reminded them,

We are gravely mistaken to think that religion protects us from the pain and agony of mortal existence. Life is not a euphoria of unalloyed comfort and untroubled ease. Christianity has always insisted that the cross we bear precedes the crown we wear. To be a Christian one must take up his cross, with all of its difficulties and agonizing and tension-packed content, and carry it until that very cross leaves its mark upon us and redeems us to that more excellent way which comes only through suffering.

Bearing the cross placed blacks and their cause on a high moral ground in the evangelical South. They were the army of God seeking to redeem a people and a region.

There was an earlier army of God that had sought redemption as well. The Confederates faced equally long odds as they entered battle. Charging twenty deep at Cold Harbor, they pinned their addresses on their backs so they could be identified after the Union artillery tore them to shreds. So it was a century later, only this time with black children entering the maelstrom in the battle of Birmingham and for the South. It was a calculated risk by King to use schoolchildren to capture the imagination of the nation and, hoping against hope, the wrath of "Bull" Connor. On Thursday, May 2, seven hundred black youngsters gathered at the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church preparing to march out to meet Connor's men. They exited the church as if on a holiday, singing freedom songs and chanting slogans. As they knelt to pray, Connor's men, obviously unsure of what was happening, gingerly waded in and arrested the marchers, who laughed and sang their way to the waiting patrol wagons.

Though the children's crusade was the lead story on the six o'clock

news and in newspapers across the country, King realized that the continued restraint shown by the police would eventually cause public interest to wane. The following day, another one thousand school-children gathered at the church and again marched out into the downtown area. This time, Connor was prepared with a strategy of his own. His men barred the exits from the church, trapping roughly one-half of the demonstrators inside. Another contingent of police pursued those who had left the church across the street to Kelly Ingram Park, where they loosed their German shepherd dogs on the children and beat demonstrators and onlookers alike. When adults in the park tried to ward off the attacking police with bricks and bottles, Connor ordered the firemen to turn their high-pressure hoses on the crowd. The sudden thrust of water knocked people to the ground, ripped off their clothes, and sent children skittering down the street. King had his spectacle.

Responding to an aroused public opinion, the Kennedy administration urged a negotiated settlement. Business leaders announced that they were prepared to compromise, but in fact the new, urgent negotiations went nowhere. On May 6, King took to the streets with his children again, and Connor obliged by repeating the scene of May 3. An even more extensive demonstration occurred the following day, completely disrupting downtown rush-hour traffic and business. Again, Connor turned loose his dogs and hoses. But blacks were no longer resisting passively. The Reverend James Bevel, a King aide, had to grab a police bullhorn to dissuade angered blacks from retaliating during one of Connor's assaults the previous week. By the 6th, Bevel could no longer contain black frustration, and sporadic fighting erupted throughout the downtown area between whites and blacks. Confronted with the possibility of race war on their doorstep, business leaders resumed negotiations on May 7 and reached an accord with the SCLC three days later. The settlement included the removal of segregation signs, the desegregation of lunch counters, promises to employ blacks in downtown stores, and a sixty-day moratorium on demonstrations.

But Connor and state political leaders denounced the agreement. Robert Shelton, Grand Dragon of the Ku Klux Klan, declared that the businessmen had no authority to reach an agreement. He warned that "Martin Luther King's epitaph is written here in Birmingham." A few hours later, two dynamite bombs severely damaged the home of King's brother, the Reverend A. D. King, though there were no injuries, and a bomb exploded at SCLC headquarters in the city. Blacks streamed into

the streets to attack police and firemen arriving at the scene. King hurriedly returned from Atlanta to ensure that order was restored. The accord held. Birmingham had fallen.

For southern blacks, the Birmingham victory was inspirational. They were no longer content with token gains; they went after segregation with a new resolve. Within three months of the Birmingham agreement, eight hundred boycotts, marches, and sit-ins occurred in two hundred cities and towns across the South. Within five months, fifty southern communities had desegregated their public accommodations. As historian Harvard Sitkoff observed, "more racial change came in these few months than had occurred in three-quarters of a century." In addition, Birmingham had enlarged the corps of black participants. Both King and the sit-in movement had appealed primarily to middle-class blacks. The brutality of Birmingham and the success there drew in the cynical or apolitical black underclass. This development both ensured fresh troops for the coming battles and threatened the concept of nonviolence as the foundation of black protest.

In the meantime, King sought to reap the benefits of his victory in Birmingham at the federal level. Recently released White House tapes indicate that President Kennedy took a more active role in local demonstrations after Birmingham. For example, in June, 1963, he telephoned the mayor of Jackson, Mississippi, to secure an agreement from the mayor to hire blacks for city jobs, including the police force. That same month, the president addressed a national television audience on the civil rights issue: "We are confronted primarily with a moral issue . . . as old as the scriptures and . . . as clear as the American Constitution." By using the rhetoric of the movement and by elevating the issue to more than a question of integration, Kennedy helped to set a national tone that would spur federal civil rights legislation. The president was convinced that his ad-hoc approach to dealing with civil rights was both time-consuming and fraught with political danger. Federal legislation mandating the integration of public accommodations in all southern cities would lighten his burden considerably.

Let Freedom Ring: The March on Washington

In order to hasten that legislation, King began to prepare for a massive march on Washington in August, 1963. King's objective was to stage a peaceful lobbying event that would capture the imagination of the

American people and their leaders by appealing to basic national ideals. The sporadic violence of blacks in Birmingham, though provoked, had concerned congressmen and whites outside the South—two groups whose support was essential for the passage of civil rights legislation. King took care to instruct southern blacks on proper behavior in the nation's capital—not to litter, not to be loud and boisterous, and to dress comfortably but properly. The SCLC leader also secured the participation of predominantly white labor unions to guarantee an interracial audience. He urged prospective speakers to soft-pedal economic grievances. The march would be a conservative demonstration for the application of constitutional rights to blacks.

The crowd that assembled in front of the Lincoln Memorial on August 28, 1963, exceeded the most optimistic hopes of the organizers. More than two hundred thousand people gathered in the sweltering summer heat of Washington to petition Congress to enact civil rights legislation. Even after several hours of listening to Peter, Paul, and Mary, Bob Dylan, and black gospel singer Mahalia Jackson, as well as to numerous speeches and introductions, the crowd remained good-natured, if increasingly less attentive. Then it was King's turn.

His brief (fifteen minutes) comments were drawn from speeches he had delivered earlier in his career but tailored for this event. He reviewed briefly and in general terms the second-class nature of black life in America. But he believed that in the near future, Americans in all regions and of all colors would recognize the justice of the black protest and that all citizens would live together in interracial harmony. In his deliberate southern preacher's cadence, he declared, "I have a dream today! I have a dream that one day down in Alabama—with its vicious racists . . . one day right there in Alabama, little black boys and black girls will be able to join hands with little white boys and white girls as sisters and brothers." And placing that theme in a familiar religious context: "I have a dream today! I have a dream that one day every valley shall be exalted and every hill and mountain shall be made low . . . and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together." He concluded with a stirring declaration: "And when we allow freedom to ring, when we let it ring from every village and every hamlet, from every state and every city, we will be able to speed up that day when all God's children, black men and white men, Jews and gentiles, Protestants and Catholics, will be able to join hands and sing in the words of the old Negro spiritual: 'Free at last. Free at last. Thank God Almighty, we are free at last.'"

The speech accomplished its purpose. It won the approbation of white America, including some southern whites. The rhetoric was not threatening, it mentioned only fleetingly specific instances of discrimination, and it conjured up symbols and ideals that white Americans liked to believe they cherished. But for some southern blacks with memories of Birmingham still fresh in their minds, or who were working in great personal danger in small towns throughout the Deep South, King's words were disappointing. March leaders had barely averted a split when A. Philip Randolph talked SNCC's John Lewis out of delivering a speech that condemned the proposed civil rights legislation as inadequate. Other young blacks who attended the Washington march were freer to express their frustration. "Fuck that dream, March," a young black man exclaimed, "Now goddamn, NOW!" Anne Moody, a young civil rights worker from Canton, Mississippi, sat on the grass listening to King and thought, "in Canton we never had time to sleep, much less dream."

Unmerited Suffering: A Reprise in Birmingham

The frustration of some younger blacks proved prophetic. Scarcely had the echoes of King's rhetorical dream quieted when another tragedy visited Birmingham. On Sunday, September 15, four junior-high-school girls—Cynthia Wesley, Denise McNair, Addie Mae Collins, and Carol Robertson—excitedly made their way to the basement restroom of the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church. The church had been the focal point for the Children's Crusade, but this morning such events were far from the girls' minds as they primped for the ten o'clock service. This was to be their first participation in an adult service at the church. Suddenly, an explosion ripped through the basement. Civil defense volunteers, police, and firemen converged on the church. Pastor John H. Cross was first on the scene, and he frantically cleared away the rubble, assisted by the adult worshippers. Denise McNair's grandfather uncovered a patent leather shoe. It belonged to his granddaughter. The awful reality dawned that the struggle for regional redemption had claimed four more lives.

That evening, Birmingham's white leaders, including the police chief, went on television to appeal for calm and express regret over the incident. At least one white citizen of Birmingham sensed the hypocrisy of the show. Attorney Chuck Morgan felt that the tone was less one of regret than of "Oh, God, why did it happen here? It will hurt the

community's image." The following day, Morgan spoke before the all-white Young Men's Business Club. Barely containing his anger and shame, he admonished the members not to waste their energy wondering who did it. That was the simple part. "The 'who,'" Morgan offered, "is every little individual who talks about the 'niggers' and spreads the seeds of his hate to his neighbor and his son. . . . The 'who' is every governor who ever shouted for lawlessness and became a law violator. . . . Who is really guilty? Each of us. Each citizen who has not consciously attempted to bring about peaceful compliance. . . . ; each citizen who has ever said, 'They ought to kill that nigger.' Every person in this community who has in any way contributed to the popularity of hatred is at least as guilty, or more so, as the demented fool who threw that bomb."

Federal legislation would not absolve such collective complicity in the tragedy of white supremacy, but at least it would remove the burden from both whites and blacks of having to maintain a degrading component of that system, segregation. In his eulogy for the four girls, King promised that "unmerited suffering is redemptive." He called on the mourners "not to lose faith in our white brothers. Somehow we must believe that even the most misguided among them can learn to respect the dignity and worth of all human personalities." To many blacks this seemed to be a one-sided appeal. The taking of victims, especially victims so young and in a church as well, was a test almost beyond endurance. Yet the peace held. And King used the forbearance and the church bombing to warn President Kennedy that unless legislation moved forward, "there is a danger we will face the worst race riot we've ever seen."

Segregation Falls: The South Lives On

Ironically, the assassination of Kennedy sped that legislation. His successor in the White House, Lyndon B. Johnson, had become one of the most influential senators during his years in that body. He knew the legislative process well and, as a southerner, he had a better chance of modifying the obstreperous behavior of powerful southern senators. In addition, Johnson sought to reassure the supporters of the martyred president that he would not abandon Kennedy's legislative agenda regardless of his own regional affiliation. Just five days after he took office, Johnson declared to the nation, "no memorial oration or eulogy could more eloquently honor President Kennedy's memory than the

earliest possible passage of the civil rights bill for which he fought. We have talked long enough in this country about equal rights. We have talked for 100 years or more. It is now time to write the next chapter—and to write it in the books of law."

The Senate responded and voted for the first time in its history to impose cloture—a procedure that cuts off debate on a measure before the body. With the southern filibuster thus ended, the Senate passed the 1964 Civil Rights Act, which the president signed into law on July 2. Johnson hoped that the measure would "close the springs of racial poison." The major features of the act prohibited segregation in public accommodations (hotels, restaurants, theaters, and parks, for example) and discriminatory application of voter-registration procedures. It created an Equal Employment Opportunity Commission to ensure equal treatment in hiring, and authorized the government to withdraw or withhold federal funds from public programs practicing discrimination. Critics of the act complained that it did not go far enough, that it did not require employers to redress racial imbalances in their firms, and that it would not change the attitudes of southern whites in any case.

Yet the law's impact on the South was remarkably swift. Overnight, segregated facilities opened to blacks. Andrew Young recalled returning to a St. Augustine motel five days after the act's passage. Just the previous week, a waitress had poured hot coffee over Young and his group, who were seeking service in the motel restaurant, and the manager had laced the swimming pool with hydrochloric acid just as Young prepared to wade in. "We went back to that same restaurant," Young related, "and those people were just wonderful. They were apologetic. They said, 'we were just afraid of losing our business. We didn't want to be the only ones to be integrated. But if everybody's got to do it, we've been ready for it a long time. We're so glad the president signed this law and now we can be through these troubles.'" While some may question whether this about-face represented a revelation or merely an attempt to avoid prison, the practice of integration was more important for the time being than the attitudes of southern whites. Segregation and the demeaning and inferior condition in which it placed blacks reinforced white perceptions of black inferiority. The removal of segregation—more positively, the practice of integration—undercut a major justification for that perception. Attitudes would follow. As Ralph McGill argued, "there was . . . a great prejudice against women being allowed to vote. . . . Legislation at last succeeded. The end of this discrimination saw the decline of the prejudice." By the

1960s, few thought twice about or commented on a woman entering a polling booth. Eventually, it would be that way with integration. Now, they would become habit, and habit would become the natural order of things.

What was significant in the short run was that in the weeks following July, 1964, compliance was widespread and defiance was minimal. To be sure, some restaurants closed and reopened as private clubs, and political leaders such as George Wallace condemned the federal intrusion. But for the most part, the fortress of segregation, that seeming easy transition, it is important to recognize that, however sturdy the edifice of segregation appeared to outsiders, the events of the early 1960s had weakened its foundation considerably. In a region where public behavior and appearance counted for a great deal, the importance of openly defending honor and principle transcended private reservations about those principles and even about the result of that defense. In 1961, Leslie Dunbar predicted that "once the fight is decisively lost, the typical white Southerner will shrug his shoulders, resume his stride and go on. . . . There is now one fewer fight which history requires of him. He has done his ancestral duty. He is free of part of his load, he can relax a bit more."

There was also some truth in the motel manager's remark to Andrew Young that "we've been ready for it a long time." When not mentally fleeing from reality or drugged by political rhetoric, the white southerner recognized the inevitability of an integrated society. A Gallup poll conducted in January, 1961, indicated that 76 percent of white southerners thought that desegregation of public facilities was inevitable. Already by that date communities, especially in the Upper South, were readying plans for school integration, the sit-ins the previous summer had opened up some facilities downtown, and urban businessmen, though cautious, were becoming more prominent as voices of reason. Finally, a younger generation of white southerners was in the midst of a rebellion of its own, setting its feelings about segregation to music.

Southern music has historically been a blend of black and white, but not until the 1950s was this mixture made so evident, especially by southern white performers. Country music star Hank Williams probably initiated this exposure in the 1940s and early 1950s with his raw blues style in songs such as "Cold, Cold Heart," "I Lovesick Blues," and "The Blues Come Around." Williams' battles with drugs and alcohol,

his gyrations on stage, and his hard-hitting lyrics and music exuded a "raw, sexual primitivism," as one critic put it. The style and the themes were black, a fact even more apparent by the mid-1950s with the emergence of Elvis Presley from Tupelo, Mississippi, and Buddy Holly from Lubbock, Texas. As Presley described his music to *Charlottesville Observer* columnist Kays Gary in 1956, "the Colored folks been singing it and playing it just like I'm doin' now. . . . for more years than I know. They played it like that in the shanties and in their juke joints, and nobody paid it no mind 'til I goose it up. I got it from them."

The success of Presley and Holly opened up white markets and airwaves to southern black performers. Chuck Berry, Pat Domino, and Richard Pennman (Little Richard) led the integration of southern music. Like Presley, they were openly defiant on stage; their movements, their attire (Little Richard favored zoot suits, white shoes, and a six-inch-high pompadour), and their music shocked white adults as they delighted white teenagers. It was not surprising that segregationist groups tried to ban such music from the radio and the concert stage, and cited the NAACP "as the evil force behind rock 'n' roll." The Alabama White Citizens' Councils went so far as to set up a committee "to do away with this vulgar, animalistic, nigger rock & roll bop." Needless to say, they received little cooperation from the state's white teenagers.

In addition, the excesses engendered by the Freedom Rides and the Birmingham demonstrations revulsed most white southerners, regardless of their feelings of the moment on the appropriateness of demonstrations. As Walker Percy observed, "after a while the ordinary citizen gets sick and tired of the climate of violence and of the odor of disgrace which hangs over his region." Most important, the rhetoric of black leaders, especially of Martin Luther King, and the actions of the black demonstrators not only forced whites to recognize the visibility of blacks, but touched their consciences as well. It brought to the surface feelings they may have harbored for quite some time. As Ralph McGill noted in 1961, "all Southerners, save the most obtuse and insensitive, have long carried a private weight of guilt about the inequities of segregation." The religious framework of the movement and its appeal to constitutional ideals pushed that private weight to the surface.

McGill was saying what King and his colleagues had been articulating since Montgomery: that the southern white was not inherently evil, but rather bound by a culture that had constrained his natural instincts for good. The civil rights demonstrations loosened those cul-

tural shackles by revealing that southernness—religious faith, place, past, and manners—was not identical with white supremacy or at least with segregation. Southern blacks used these cultural elements not cynically but because they were southerners, and they touched white souls as a result. Even if whites could not bring themselves to embrace integration mentally, their awareness and guilt over seeing a mirror image of themselves in the black protesters minimized resistance to the law. Eventually they would come to feel good about integration, not necessarily because they had participated in a heroic resistance, but because it was the right thing, the southern thing to do.

But even as the barriers of segregation were falling, blacks were dying in Mississippi and Alabama. The small towns and rural areas of those states remained beyond the redemptive touch of the movement. They would become the last great battlegrounds of the civil rights crusade.

VII / The Last Crusade: Voting Rights, 1962-1965

For years, blacks bravely climbed county courthouse steps to register to vote. The registrars, if they were there, would sometimes smile and say, "Who you work for, boy?" and the courage would be gone. On occasion, the voting official would go through the motions, administer a literacy test or inquire about character. But it would be a charade, a way to pass the time of day, material for amusing dinner-table conversation. Once in a while, when things were slow, a few courthouse regulars would teach the prospective voter an admirable lesson in racial etiquette. There were even a few times when a lucky applicant would be registered, though there was no guarantee that his poll tax receipt would not be lost before election day or that his name would not be purged from the voting rolls.

For white southerners, voting was an important part of the regional racial etiquette. Voting, like segregation, was a form of public behavior that reflected the status of both black and white. To admit blacks into the polling booth was to admit political equality, and the carefully tended myths of the Reconstruction era had taught whites that the electoral participation of blacks was an invitation to corruption, disorder, and oppression. It meant that whites could find themselves on the other side of the color line. White political leaders had a significant stake in maintaining this fiction. As New South prophet Henry W. Grady explained candidly in the 1880s, "let the whites divide, what happens? Here is this dangerous and alien influence that holds the balance of power. It cannot be won by argument, for it is without information, understanding, or traditions. It must be bought by race privileges," so the leaders disfranchised blacks, congratulated whites on their regained status, and continued to holler "nigger" at the appropriate times to maintain white solidarity.

White leaders also had long memories. The specter of a poor white and black political alliance, dangerously close in the 1890s, loomed large. Such a merger would not only upset the political balance but would lead to economic changes—tax reforms, educational and social service measures, and regulatory agencies—that would erode or